

**Beyond the ladder, the social space of inequalities
A multivariate quantitative approach to social stratification in Spain**

Carlos Ruiz Ramos

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Beyond the ladder, the social space of inequalities

A multivariate quantitative approach to social stratification in Spain

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Author: Carlos Ruiz Ramos

Director: PhD Andrés Felipe Castro Torres

Tutor: PhD Albert Esteve

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Abstract

Over the past four decades, Spain has undergone profound economic liberalisation and experienced one of Europe's largest migratory influxes, resulting in a fundamental restructuring of its social stratification system. Traditional measures of social standing—relying on markers such as occupation or income—increasingly struggle to capture the interacting forms of inequality that define contemporary social positions. This thesis addresses this complexity by adopting an inductive, multidimensional perspective, moving beyond the concept of a "social ladder" toward a "social space" of inequalities. Utilizing Geometric Data Analysis (GDA)—specifically Multiple Correspondence Analysis (MCA) and Cluster Analysis—the research maps the Spanish social structure to reveal how material living conditions, migration status, and age-related life stages intersect to shape social privilege and disadvantage.

The dissertation is structured into five chapters: Chapter 1 establishes the general framework by reviewing the socioeconomic and demographic transformations in Spain since the 1980s, alongside a critical assessment of theoretical debates regarding the conceptualisation of social class and social stratification. Chapter 2 operationalises the social space to map the Spanish stratification structure in 2021. By integrating the interaction between age and region of birth, it identifies distinct patterns of segmented assimilation and the specific social cleavages affecting migrant cohorts across life stages. Chapter 3 focuses on Catalonia, a primary destination for international migration within Spain. It identifies a concentration of migrant populations within the most disadvantaged strata and suggests a relative "upward" and "downward" displacement of the native working class driven by recent sociodemographic shifts. Chapter 4 examines the association between social strata and life trajectories. Using retrospective data, it reconstructs family and employment trajectories to assess how children's exposure to changes in family structure and parental employment is stratified across social groups. Chapter 5 synthesises the key findings, reflecting on the study's limitations and the implications for future research, particularly regarding the growing centrality of housing and wealth in the reproduction of inequality.

The findings demonstrate that the Spanish stratification system is structured around three primary dimensions: education/occupation/income, family background, and housing/wealth. Notably, the growth of asset prices has outpaced wages, making wealth accumulation and housing tenure critical axes of social differentiation that have partially displaced traditional occupational categories. Furthermore, the results highlight a "nativity divide," where migrant populations experience the converge of social disadvantages in multiple life domains. This research underscores that social stratification is a multidimensional reality, where the interaction of ascribed and achieved characteristics determines individuals' resources, opportunities, and ultimate life outcomes in a rapidly changing society.

Key words: Social stratification, inequality, migration, life course

Resum

Durant les darreres quatre dècades, Espanya ha experimentat una profunda liberalització econòmica i un dels fluxos migratoris més grans d'Europa, la qual cosa ha donat lloc a una reestructuració del seu sistema d'estratificació social. Les mesures tradicionals de la posició social—basades en indicadors com l'ocupació o els ingressos—tenen cada cop més dificultats per captar la interrelació entre formes de desigualtat que defineixen les posicions socials contemporànies. Aquesta tesi aborda aquesta complexitat adoptant una perspectiva inductiva i multidimensional, anant més enllà del concepte d'“escala social” cap a un “espai social” de desigualtats. Mitjançant l'Anàlisi Geomètrica de Dades—específicament l'Anàlisi de Correspondències Múltiples (ACM) i l'Anàlisi de Clústers—, la recerca analitza l'estructura social espanyola per revelar com les condicions materials de vida, l'estatus migratori i les etapes del cicle vital s'entrecreuen configurant diferents combinacions de privilegis i el desavantatge socials.

La tesi s'estructura en cinc capítols: El capítol 1 estableix el marc general mitjançant la revisió de les transformacions socioeconòmiques i demogràfiques a Espanya des de la dècada de 1980, juntament amb una avaluació crítica dels debats teòrics sobre la conceptualització de la classe i l'estratificació social. El capítol 2 operativitza l'espai social per analitzar l'estructura d'estratificació espanyola l'any 2021. Integrant la interacció entre edat i regió de naixement, s'identifiquen patrons diferenciats d'assimilació segmentada i fractures socials específiques que afecten diferents grups de població al llarg de la vida. El capítol 3 se centra a Catalunya, una de les principals destinacions de la migració internacional cap a Espanya. Identifica una concentració de poblacions migrants en els estrats més desfavorits i suggereix un desplaçament relatiu «ascendent» i «descendent» de la classe treballadora autòctona impulsat pels canvis sociodemogràfics recents. El capítol 4 examina l'associació entre els estrats socials i les trajectòries vitals. Mitjançant dades retrospectives, reconstrueix trajectòries familiars i laborals per avaluar com l'exposició de la infància als canvis en l'estructura familiar i l'ocupació parental es troba estratificada entre els diferents grups socials. El capítol 5 sintetitza els principals resultats, reflexionant sobre les limitacions de l'estudi i les implicacions per a futura recerca, especialment pel que fa a la creixent centralitat de l'habitatge i la riquesa en la reproducció de la desigualtat.

Els resultats demostren que el sistema d'estratificació espanyol s'estructura al voltant de tres dimensions primàries: educació/ocupació/ingressos, origen familiar i habitatge/riquesa. Cal destacar que el creixement dels preus dels actius ha superat el dels salaris reals, convertint l'acumulació de riquesa i la tinença de l'habitatge en eixos crítics de diferenciació social que han desplaçat parcialment les categories ocupacionals tradicionals. A més, els resultats subratllen una «bretxa de nativitat», per la qual les poblacions migrants experimenten una convergència de desavantatges socials en múltiples àmbits de la vida. Aquesta recerca subratlla que l'estratificació social és una realitat multidimensional, on la interacció de les característiques adscrites i adquirides determina els recursos, les oportunitats i els resultats vitals de les persones en una societat en ràpid procés de transformació.

Paraules clau: Estratificació social, desigualtat, migració, cicle de vida.

Resumen

Durante las últimas cuatro décadas, España ha experimentado una profunda liberalización económica y uno de los flujos migratorios más importantes de Europa, lo que ha derivado en una reestructuración de su sistema de estratificación social. Las medidas tradicionales de posición social—basadas en indicadores como la ocupación o los ingresos—encuentran cada vez más dificultades para captar la interrelación entre formas de desigualdad que definen las posiciones sociales contemporáneas. Esta tesis aborda dicha complejidad adoptando una perspectiva inductiva y multidimensional, transitando del concepto de «escala social» hacia el de un «espacio social» de desigualdades. Mediante el uso del Análisis Geométrico de Datos—específicamente el Análisis de Correspondencias Múltiples (ACM) y el Análisis de Conglomerados (Cluster)—, la investigación analiza la estructura social española para revelar cómo las condiciones materiales de vida, el estatus migratorio y las etapas del ciclo vital se entrelazan configurando diferentes combinaciones de privilegios y las desventajas sociales.

La tesis se estructura en cinco capítulos: El capítulo 1 establece el marco general mediante la revisión de las transformaciones socioeconómicas y demográficas en España desde la década de 1980, junto con una evaluación crítica de los debates sobre la conceptualización de la clase y la estratificación social. El capítulo 2 operativiza el espacio social para analizar la estructura de estratificación española en 2021. Incorporando la interacción entre edad y lugar de nacimiento, se identifican patrones de asimilación segmentada y fracturas sociales específicas que afectan a diferentes grupos de población a lo largo de la vida. El capítulo 3 se centra en Cataluña, uno de los principales destinos de la migración internacional hacia España. Identifica una concentración de poblaciones migrantes en los estratos más desfavorecidos y sugiere un desplazamiento relativo «ascendente» y «descendente» de la clase trabajadora autóctona, impulsado por los recientes cambios sociodemográficos. El capítulo 4 examina la asociación entre estratos sociales y trayectorias vitales. Utilizando datos retrospectivos, reconstruye trayectorias familiares y laborales para evaluar cómo la exposición de la infancia a los cambios en la estructura familiar y el empleo parental está estratificada entre distintos grupos sociales. El capítulo 5 sintetiza los principales hallazgos, reflexionando sobre las limitaciones del estudio y las implicaciones para futuras investigaciones, especialmente en lo que respecta a la creciente centralidad de la vivienda y la riqueza en la reproducción de la desigualdad.

Los hallazgos demuestran que el sistema de estratificación español se estructura en torno a tres dimensiones primarias: educación/ocupación/ingresos, origen familiar y vivienda/riqueza. El crecimiento del precio de los activos ha superado al de los salarios, convirtiendo la acumulación de riqueza y la tenencia de vivienda en ejes centrales de diferenciación social que han desplazado parcialmente a las categorías ocupacionales tradicionales. Además, los resultados subrayan una «brecha de natividad», por la que poblaciones migrantes experimentan una convergencia de desventajas sociales en múltiples dominios de la vida. Esta investigación subraya que la estratificación social es una realidad multidimensional, donde la interacción entre características adscritas y adquiridas determina los recursos, las oportunidades y los resultados vitales de los individuos en una sociedad en rápido proceso de transformación.

Palabras clave: Estratificación social, desigualdad, migración, curso de vida.

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~ Chapter 1 ~

Introduction

Over the past four decades, Spain has undergone profound economic liberalisation alongside one of the largest migration influxes in Europe. These trends have contributed to the emergence of new axes of social differentiation and to the reshaping of the country's social stratification system. During the 1980s, the country initiated structural economic reforms to integrate the domestic economy into its new role within the European Economic Community (EEC) (Malo de Molina, 2001). This restructuring involved labour-market deregulation, privatisation of state-owned enterprises, increased international trade openness, and flexibilisation of the housing market. Crucially, labour-market reforms fostered dualisation, segregating the workforce into secure, well-paid positions and precarious, unstable employment (Barbieri & Cutuli, 2016). Growing employment precarity disproportionately affected cohorts entering the labour market during this transition, specifically younger generations, women, and migrants (Adam & Canziani, 1998).

As the state reduced its economic role, the privatisation of state-owned companies and the opening to international trade shifted the economic structure. The country experienced deindustrialisation, while tourism, construction, and advanced service industries grew in terms of both GDP and employment (Rachedi, 2020). This polarisation between high- and low-productivity sectors reinforced the labour market dualization facilitated by new employment regulations. Furthermore, while macroeconomic policy prioritised inflation targeting, the flexibilisation of financial and housing markets caused a divergence between stagnant real labour incomes and the rapidly appreciating value of housing and financial assets (Adkins et al., 2020). This process generated a widening divide between those capable of wealth accumulation and those excluded from it.

Alongside the economic restructuring, Spain experienced one of the most remarkable migratory processes in Europe. Between 1998 and 2008, the country became Europe's second-largest

recipient of migrants, attracting five million people. The creation of eight million jobs between 1996 and 2007 (Moreno & Bruquetas, 2012) generated wage and opportunity differentials between Spain and other regions of the world. While educational expansion among native younger cohorts facilitated their entry into highly qualified occupations, migrant populations were largely concentrated in labour-intensive, low-productivity and precarious sectors (De Haas & Fransen, 2018).

The confluence of these two processes—economic restructuring and migration flows—has reconfigured the Spanish social stratification structure. Debates on social stratification have been ongoing for the last 60 years (Blau & Duncan, 1967). Multiple schools of thought have contributed to the theoretical conceptualisation of social stratification, proposing different measurements of the underlying factors driving stratification—such as material, cultural or symbolic aspects—and developing diverse methods to measure it (Barone et al., 2022). However, the growing complexity of contemporary societies challenges traditional approaches to social stratification. Measures relying exclusively on occupation, income, or education often fail to capture the interacting forms of inequality that define individuals' position in the stratification system. Consequently, a growing body of literature emphasises the importance of moving beyond single markers of social position to consider the confluence of multiple axes of inequality (Fasang & Aisenbrey, 2021; Hale et al., 2023; Hill Collins & Bilge, 2016). The intersection of ascribed and achieved characteristics—embedded in overarching social structures—influences individuals' position within the social stratification structure: their resources, opportunities, life trajectories, outcomes, and the intergenerational transmission of inequalities.

As in many European countries, population growth in Spain is driven solely by positive net international migration. When migrants arrive in a destination country, they do not only incorporate into a pre-existing stratification system; they also contribute to its reshaping. Understanding the social stratification structure, the main axes of social differentiation, the barriers that limit social mobility, and how migrants incorporate into and influence the overall social fabric is essential for understanding the current context and for anticipating future trends in inequalities.

In this thesis, I aim to contribute to current debates on migration and social stratification by providing an inductive and multidimensional perspective on stratification. I describe the stratification structure across diverse social settings and analyse the association between

position in the stratification structure and the life trajectories of adults and their descendants. Specifically, I examine how migration and age shape distinct configurations of social privilege and disadvantage. Interacting dimensions of inequality constitute a social space wherein individuals are located based on the confluence of their characteristics and material living conditions. Drawing on the concept of social space, I analyse the composition of the main axes of social differentiation using longitudinal and cross-sectional data. Specifically, I use methods within the framework of Geometric Data Analysis (GDA), such as Multiple Correspondence Analysis (MCA) and Class Specific MCA (CSA). Cluster analysis allows me to identify the social strata where specific configurations of (dis)advantages converge, thereby mapping the Spanish contemporary social stratification structure.

In the following sections, I develop the general framework presented in this introduction. First, I explain the most relevant socioeconomic and demographic transformations that took place in Spain in the last decades. Second, I review some of the most relevant debates on the conceptualisation and operationalisation of social class and social stratification. Third, I describe the methodological approach and conclude this introduction with a general outline of the three analytical chapters of the thesis and the conclusions.

1.1. Socioeconomic transformations

1.1.1. Economic structure and the labour market

Spain's transition towards a post-Fordist economy occurred significantly later than in other European countries. By the late 1970s, about 20% of employment was still in the agricultural sector (Bernardi & Garrido, 2008a). The rapid deindustrialisation of the 1980s accelerated the shift toward a service-based economy following the end of the Franco dictatorship and the subsequent liberalisation of international trade. However, the Spanish industrial sector struggled to compete with neighbouring economies; the convergence of the oil crises and trade liberalisation led to the collapse of strategic industries that were unable to improve productivity within a highly inflationary context (González-Díez & Moral-Benito, 2019; Molina & López-Roldán, 2015). Hence, Spain entered the 1980s with an unprecedented unemployment rate of 20%—a structural feature that has since characterised the Spanish economy.

In line with European trend, the political response to rampant unemployment was the implementation of labour market flexibilisation reforms (Adam & Canziani, 1998). The 1984, labour market deregulation reform introduced fixed-term contracts. This kind of atypical

contract was first adopted in low-skill occupations of the service sector, but it soon expanded to the overall economy (Molina & López-Roldán, 2015). This shift established Spain as the country with the highest proportion of temporary contracts in Europe (CCOO, 2021). Deregulation did not affect previously existing permanent contracts. As a result, fixed-term and atypical contracts mainly affected already vulnerable groups, including the long-term unemployed, and population groups that were progressively incorporating into the labour market, meaning women, youth, and migrants (Adam & Canziani, 1998; Vives et al., 2011). This dualization process segregated the labour market between a stable and protected group, predominantly composed of men over the age of 35 (Miguelez & Prieto, 2009), and a diverse group employed in precarious, low-wage sectors (Barbieri & Cutuli, 2016; Gioachin et al., 2023; Vandecasteele, 2015).

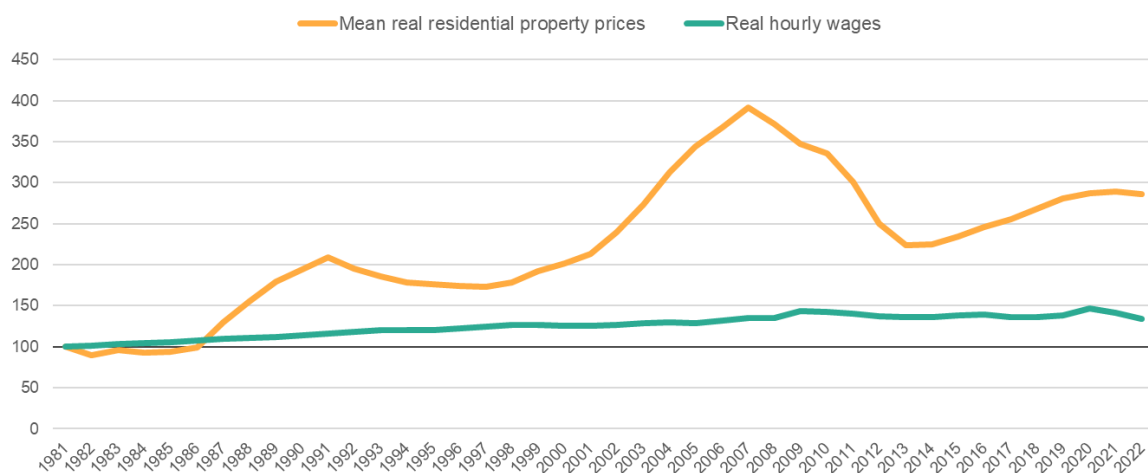
During the 1980s, deindustrialisation and educational expansion stimulated the demand for high-skilled jobs in the service industries, reinforcing the convergence of the Spanish economy towards the occupational structure of other Western economies (Rachedi, 2020). Yet, since the mid-1990s, the economic development of the Spanish economy was characterised by a polarisation process, whereby labour demand expanded at both the highest and the lowest ends of the occupational structure (Bernardi & Garrido, 2008a; Molina & López-Roldán, 2015). As discussed in the following sections, this trend was further reinforced by the arrival of migrants from the Global South.

Flexibility combined with lower labour costs relative to technology resulted in what Adam and Canziani (1998) term a “low-skill equilibrium”. Meaning that, deindustrialisation and labour market flexibilisation restructured the Spanish economy towards low-productivity and labour-intensive sectors such as tourism, low-value-added services, and construction. Such flexibility incentivises employers to respond to shocks via employment adjustment, rather than technological and/or organisational change, thereby generating employment instability for particular population groups, and limiting long-term productivity growth (Molina & López-Roldán, 2015). Additionally, for those population in precarious segments of the labour market, temporary and low-paid employment did not become a stepping stone towards more stable positions; rather, research indicates that spells of temporary employment frequently lead to unemployment or other temporary positions, rather than permanent ones (Cebrián, 2008; Toharia et al., 2001).

1.1.2. Housing market

Parallel to the restructuring of the economy and the polarisation of the Spanish society, the housing market has also emerged as a critical dimension of social stratification. Since the 1970s, international financial institutions and central banks across the Global North have prioritised inflation targeting as a primary macroeconomic objective. Nonetheless, while economic policies successfully stabilised consumer prices, financial liberalisation facilitated the growth of asset prices, such as equities and real estate (Adkins et al., 2020). Therefore, the growth of asset prices outpaced that of salaries, partially displacing labour from its centrality in the stratification structure. Indeed, social position is now more dependent on the capacity for wealth accumulation rather than on wage levels. In this regard, a growing body of literature finds that the global rise in economic inequality is mainly driven by wealth concentration (Killewald et al., 2017; Piketty & Goldhammer, 2014).

Figure 1.1 Mean real residential prices and real wages 1981-2022 in Spain. Base 100 = 1981



Source: Bank for International Settlements (BIS) and Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development, International Monetary Fund (IMF)

The centrality of housing within this broader trend of growing wealth inequality is especially salient in Spain. Between the mid-1990s and the Great Recession, the country experienced one of the most significant housing bubbles in Europe (European Central Bank., 2019). Figure 1.1 illustrates the diverging trajectories of real wages and housing prices in Spain from 1981 to 2022. While the outstanding escalation in housing prices is often attributed to demographic and credit factors (see Alves & Urtasun, 2019; Aspachs-Bracons & Rabanal, 2010; Esteban & Altuzarra, 2008 for a detailed explanation), the widening gap between earnings and residential real estate values also coincides with the main legislative reforms of the housing market

regulation—i.e. Ley Boyer (Real Decreto-ley 2/1985); Ley del Suelo (Ley 6/1998); LAU reform (Real Decreto-ley 21/2013).

These diverging trends have generated a growing social divide. On the one hand, early entrants into homeownership, those who inherited real estate, and those with enough saving capacity to acquire property have experienced a continuous increase in the net value of their wealth due to increasing housing prices. Conversely, “latecomers” to the housing market, such as younger cohorts and migrant population, face higher rents that limit their saving capacity, alongside higher real estate prices relative to their real income (Delclós, 2023; Martínez del Olmo, 2024).

1.1.3. Migration

Migration to Spain and its socioeconomic role

As noted above, international migration has been one of the main drivers of change for the Spanish social stratification structure. Between 1998 and 2025, the number of foreign-born residents rose from 1.1 million (2.9%) to 9.3 million (19.3%). This rapid increase constitutes one of the largest migratory flows in contemporary Europe, accounting for one-third of the migrant population within the European Union (Cebrián, 2009). This phenomenon was driven by a confluence of robust economic growth, the educational expansion, and the economic restructuring (Esteban Apreda et al., 2011). Together, these three processes created a structural mismatch between the native labour supply and the increasing demand for low-skilled labour (Bernardi & Garrido, 2008a; Reher et al., 2011). Employment opportunities and wage differentials attracted population primarily from former colonies and Eastern Europe. Migration-led population growth has had a remarkable economic impact, as since the beginning of the 21st century, international migration has been responsible for one-fifth of the total GDP per capita expansion (Cuadrado & Regil, 2025).

The migrant population is unevenly distributed across the country, with concentrations in the Canary and the Balearic Islands, Madrid, and the Mediterranean corridor (Reher et al., 2011). Within this context, Catalonia is the principal destination of international migration. Since the early 2000s, the foreign-born population in the region has increased nearly fivefold (4.9), reaching 1.9 million—23,8% of the total population—by 2023. Migration flows to Catalonia can be categorised into three distinct stages that correspond to different stages of the economic cycle: economic expansion (1996–2008), the Great Recession (2009–2014), and economic recovery (2015–2025). Following the initial migratory boom, the financial crisis triggered

record-high unemployment rates. This adverse socioeconomic context contributed to reducing the inflow of new population and to increasing return and re-emigration flows, briefly resulting in negative net migration (Domingo & Blanes, 2015; Prieto et al., 2018). Subsequent economic recovery reversed these declines, restoring migration rates to positive levels (Bayona-i-Carrasco & Domingo, 2024b).

The intersection of migration dynamics and rapid educational change has reinforced the polarisation of the occupational structure (Alonso & Furio, 2007). Sustained demand for low-skilled labour has attracted migrant groups with lower education levels compared to other OECD countries (Arslan et al., 2015). Conversely, the expansion of higher education among natives has met the demand for high-skilled professionals. This “nativity divide” has effectively segregated migrant workers into precarious, low-wage sectors, reinforcing a dual labour market segmented by origin and gender (Domingo & Bayona-i-Carrasco, 2024; Molina & López-Roldán, 2015; Moreno & Bruquetas, 2012).

The economic vulnerability of immigrant workers was clearly visible during the Great Recession. Between 2008 and 2013, migrant workers were disproportionately affected by employment loss. The crisis intensified structural inequalities in the Spanish labour market, leading to higher unemployment rates and a greater reliance on fixed-term and part-time contracts among the foreign-born. Furthermore, precarity and occupational segregation significantly restrict social mobility (Fernández-Macías et al., 2015). The use of flexible and atypical contracts does not act as a springboard towards better employment conditions. Unskilled service jobs in Spain are typically not transitional roles that lead to career advancement (Bernardi & Garrido, 2008a). Instead, these positions tend to act as “precarity traps” hindering long-term social mobility and incorporation processes (Gastón-Guiu et al., 2021, 2024).

Migration profiles

The country’s colonial past and the cultural and linguistic ties between Latin America and the Iberian Peninsula have generated strong migration flows from Latin American countries. Indeed, more than 40% of the foreign-born population residing in Spain is of Latin American origin. This pattern differs from those observed in other European countries: in Italy, migration originates predominantly from Africa (25%); in Sweden, 43% of migrants were born in Asia; and in Germany, more than half of the foreign-born population comes from other European countries (Cuadrado & Regil, 2025).

Shifts in migration flows have unfolded in parallel with changes in migrants' origin and socioeconomic profiles following the Great Recession. Since 2014, the share of highly educated individuals arriving in Spain has increased, as has the mean age of newly arrived migrants and the number of individuals arriving from Colombia, Venezuela, Argentina, and Western European countries. Conversely, the 2008 economic crisis stimulated return migration and re-emigration among a significant share of the Bolivian, Ecuadorian and Romanian populations residing in Spain, producing a reconfiguration of the immigrant population's composition and its sociodemographic characteristics (Domingo & Bayona-i-Carrasco, 2024).

Drawing on the data sources used in this dissertation; mean characteristics of each origin groups reveal distinct socioeconomic profiles. African-born individuals residing in Spain exhibit lower education attainment relative to the Spanish-born population, experience higher rates of unemployment and employment in elementary occupations, low-income levels, a tendency to reside in rented housing, and overrepresentation in rural and intermediate areas. Asian-born migrants by contrast, display higher shares secondary and tertiary educational credentials, low-to-intermediate income levels, and greater access to homeownership. Latin American migrants are highly concentrated in urban areas, have high tenancy rates, and are disproportionately represented among the unemployed and those employed in elementary occupations, placing them in the lowest income brackets. Nonetheless, a meaningful proportion (approximately 10%) hold qualified occupations and higher income levels. European migrants exhibit a dual profile. On one segment comprises individuals with intermediate educational attainment employed in industrial and elementary occupations with low-to-intermediate income levels. The other is characterised by high educational credentials, qualified occupations, high-income levels, and access to homeownership. This duality reflects differences in countries of origin within the European group.

Despite these broad socioeconomic profiles, the core chapters of the thesis demonstrate that restricting the analysis to the group mean characteristics obscures a considerable within-group heterogeneity and the complexity of social stratification dynamics.

Assimilation, Integration and Incorporation

Throughout this dissertation I examine how migrant populations navigate and unfold their life trajectories within the Spanish and Catalan society. Migration scholars have long debated whether migrants' social, cultural, and economic outcomes converge towards those of receiving societies, giving rise to competing theoretical frameworks (Alba & Nee, 1997; Park & Burgess,

1921; Portes & Rumbaut, 2014; Zhou, 1997). Three concepts have guided these debates: assimilation, integration, and incorporation.

Assimilation theory emerged from the study of European migration to the United States in the first half of the twentieth century, positing that migrants progressively converge towards the characteristics of the dominant population in the host society (Park & Burgess, 1921; Powers, 2013). Assimilation theory has been extensively challenged by its one-directionality, meaning that it exclusively focuses on the adaptation process of migrants, while the host society is implicitly assumed to remain unaffected by migration. Another critique arises from its conceptualisation of a monolithic receiving society in which migrants assimilate towards a dominant group—embodied by the white Protestant middle-class in the US. This rigid perspective obscures the substantial internal diversity among ethnic and social groups that characterises contemporary Western societies.

Critics of assimilation theory have highlighted multiple mechanisms that constrain migrants' assimilation and upward mobility towards majority-population standards. Racism and labour market dualisation, for instance, limit migrants' opportunities and can generate downward mobility trajectories that relegate migrants to marginal social position (Hartmut Esser, 2010; Portes & Rumbaut, 2014). An alternative potential pathway is upward mobility facilitated through the resources and networks of the origin community at the destination country. These networks can build relatively closed and independent ethnic communities offering upward mobility to its members without the necessity of cultural assimilation at the host society (i.e. acculturation).

In response to the limitations of assimilation, integration has emerged as a broader concept that encompasses not only migrants' adaptations to the receiving society, but also the host society's responses to immigration, offering a more comprehensive understanding of the migration experience in the destination country (Oliver & Gidley, 2015; Powers, 2013). Integration thus extends beyond employment trajectories, and language and cultural acquisition to encompass housing, education, and health outcomes, security and stability, social bonds, and the rights and duties associated to legal recognition and citizenship (Ager & Strang, 2008). Despite its two-ways conceptualisation and its broader perspective scope, integration is frequently charged with and underlying assumption that migrants and their descendants will become progressively similar to the “core” dominant culture of the host society.

The concept of incorporation offers an alternative framework for describing how newcomers access and reshape the host society (McKowen & Borneman, 2020). Unlike assimilation and integration, incorporation does not presuppose a tendency towards conformity with the dominant social group in the host society, providing a more open-ended definition that includes a wider range of potential outcomes of the migration process beyond assimilation. In this dissertation I employ the concept of incorporation to assess how migrants join and become part of pre-existing social structures in the host society, analysing the resources and strategies they deploy as well as the constraints they encounter throughout the incorporation process.

1.2. Perspectives on social stratification

Against the backdrop of changing social, economic, and demographic dynamics, the growth of inequalities in the Global North has contributed to the reemergence in debates regarding social class and stratification (Goldthorpe, 2012; Grusky, 2001). Traditionally, research in this field has focused on work, measured by occupation, as the primary axis around which society is organised and resources allocated (Blau & Duncan, 1967). Position in the occupational structure subsumes a wide range of social relations affecting inequality and stratification (Connelly et al., 2016). Occupations are work activities that share similar tasks, responsibilities and location within the general division of labour (Abbott, 1993; Martin-Caughey, 2025). Hence, occupation is viewed as a good predictor of economic rewards and life-course earnings and is assumed to be a significant and stable proxy of prestige and social status (Torche, 2015).

While occupations categorise work activities based on tasks and responsibilities, the cornerstone of class analysis is the distribution of assets and power among social groups (Martin-Caughey, 2025; Torche, 2015). In summarising the requirements to access a social position (e.g. educational credentials, institutional arrangement) and the working conditions (e.g. income, non-pecuniary rewards), social classes capture broad social structures affecting individuals' life opportunities and outcomes in multiple domains (Connelly et al., 2016; Torche, 2015). Sustained occupancy of a specific social position is essential for the formation of shared experiences, trajectories, and identities that ultimately constitute a social class (Abbott, 1988; Bernardi & Garrido, 2008a; Goldthorpe, 1983).

Departing from different theoretical and philosophical perspectives, research on social class is not limited to the identification of between-groups inequalities—such as the uneven distribution of income. Instead, social class theory aims to identify the structural causes and the

fundamental processes that generate the unequal distribution of resources, powers and opportunities (Portes & Hoffman, 2003; Torche, 2015). In this regard, the Neo-Marxist approach identifies the concept of exploitation as the fundamental underlying social stratification and class formation processes. From a Neo-Marxist perspective, class relations arise from the unequal distribution of rights over productive resources. The exclusion of some social classes (exploited) from the means of production allows the owners (exploiters) to appropriate the value they generate. This unequal relation generates a material advantage for exploiters that causally depends upon the material deprivation of the exploited. The interdependence between classes creates antagonistic interests that inherently lead to a class conflict for the appropriation of the value generated in a society (Wright, 2005a).

Conversely, the Weberian framework situates class position within competitive markets. The resources individuals bring to the market influence their *Market situation* (income, employment stability, and potential professional development opportunities); and their *Work situation* (authority and autonomy) (Connelly et al., 2016). Consequently, individuals with similar working conditions and authority and control levels will share a class position. Class position is assumed to influence individuals' economic prospects and outcomes, as well as their life chances and social mobility patterns. Unlike the Neo-Marxist view, Weberian theory does not assume that classes are necessarily in an exploitative relationship or engaged in zero-sum conflict. Class conflict is assumed to be distributional, derived from market competition, rather than inherently exploitative (Breen, 2005).

A third perspective, proposed by scholars such as Grusky and Sørensen (Grusky & Sørensen, 1998) rejects the aggregate macro-categories of the Neo-Marxist and Neo-Weberian approaches. They argue that macro-level class schemes (e.g., EGP) suppress internal heterogeneity, and that meaningful class structuration occurs at the detailed occupational level. Internal homogeneity arises within occupations and is the result of institutionalisation “closure”, such as certification and licensing, self-selection of similar workers, shared specialised training and socialisation, and sustained internal interaction. These dynamics better predict micro-level behaviours like shared practices, life chances, and attitudes (Sørensen, 2005).

Occupation-based measures of social stratification and social class are robust indicators of social standing. The fact that most surveys and register data include information on occupation makes data largely available; while facing less self-reporting bias and non-response issues

compared to other indicators like income or wealth (Barone et al., 2022). However, in recent years, several criticisms to these kinds of approaches have been raised. First, the meaning and rewards of specific occupations are highly contextual and susceptible to technological and policy shifts. As put by Martin-Caughey (Martin-Caughey, 2025), social, technological, and economic transformations modify the meaning, the tasks, and the rewards of occupations over time, as do public policies and institutional arrangements. So, what a particular occupation “means” might vary across time and context. Second, the assumption that class and occupation are adequate predictors of long-term income and social standing has been contested. Growing labour market instability has fostered occupational mobility and inequality, posing some doubts about the predictive capacity of occupation for trajectories and future outcomes (Barone et al., 2022; Sakamoto & Wang, 2020). Finally, occupational profiles summarise individuals’ core responsibilities, required skills, and typical working conditions associated with a specific occupation. Yet, occupations are often internally heterogeneous; workers in the same category experience strong differences in earnings, tasks, and working conditions (Martin-Caughey, 2025; Sakamoto & Wang, 2020). This is particularly salient when considering differences between genders and ethnic groups within occupations (López-Roldán et al., 2011; Martin-Caughey, 2025). From a social class perspective, gender and ethnicity segregation might limit the formation of social classes among the emerging precarious sectors of the platform economy (Bernardi & Garrido, 2008a).

In recent years, growing data availability has shifted the focus of analysis in social stratification and social mobility research from occupation- to income-based measures (Barone et al., 2022). Income is a useful continuous measure of social standing and life opportunities that overcomes some of the previously mentioned limitations. Adjusting income to price level or using it as a rank allows time and context comparisons. Additionally, in a context of growing labour market instability, income is able to capture between- and within-group inequality dynamics that aggregated occupational categories would leave unnoticed (Barone et al., 2022; Sakamoto & Wang, 2020). Nonetheless, recall and reliability issues limit its use, as individuals may be reluctant to declare their income or might have difficulties recalling retrospective information on it. Income is also subject to time fluctuations and trajectories might also differ across social groups. Thus, the age at which earnings are measured can yield different estimates of future earnings (Torche, 2015). Sociologists further argue that income is solely focused on the monetary dimension of social stratification (Goldthorpe, 2012). The uneven distribution of income would merely be the superficial manifestation of deeper structural factors affecting

individuals' position in the social stratification structure, such as power and conflict dynamics, rent extraction, and closure (Connelly et al., 2016).

So far, the main approaches to social stratification remain limited to the productive sphere. Social class, occupation and income measures focus on social relations that take place within the labour market. However, there are many other domains of the social experience affecting individuals' available resources, opportunities, and life trajectories. Labour market-centred approaches also exclude a meaningful share of the population that does not work. Population groups whose earnings rely on returns from different types of wealth, as well as those excluded from the labour market, are not captured by standard measures, leaving poorly represented the top and bottom extremes of the social hierarchy (Grusky & Weeden, 2008; Torche, 2015).

Even within the labour market, polarisation and segmentation have increased the complexity of employment relations and decoupled the association between occupation, income and employment quality. In the Spanish case, Molina and López-Roldán (2015) show that since the early 2000s, precarity has expanded to all segments of the occupational scale. Thus, the link between high-skill occupations and high wages appears to be mediated by the quality of the contract. Accordingly, population groups exposed to atypical contracts (i.e. women, youth and migrants) have lower salaries and worse employment conditions, regardless of occupational status.

Changes in the economic structure and the labour market, migration processes, and the emergence of new axes of social differentiation—such as wealth and housing— like those I have discussed for Spain force us to move beyond univariate measures of social stratification and think about its multiple intersecting facets. Indicators solely focusing on positions in the labour market offer a partial view of individuals' actual standing in an increasingly complex social order. In this thesis, I demonstrate that individuals with similar income or occupation levels may occupy very different positions within the social structure due to the intersection of the multiple dimensions of inequality. By moving from linear hierarchies to a multidimensional “social space”, I capture the confluence of forces that constitute contemporary social stratification structure.

The social space approach allows us to identify social cleavages structuring differentiation processes and to consider not only the concentration of social advantages among the most privileged groups and disadvantages among the most disadvantaged, but also the confluence of both social privileges and disadvantages. This approach offers a more nuanced perspective on

social stratification and a useful framework to better understand the overarching structure in which social phenomena take place.

The concept of social space was extensively developed by Pierre Bourdieu (Bourdieu, 1984, 1987a, 2002, 2005). The Bourdieusian approach defines class not merely by economic relations but as a multidimensional social space shaped by the unequal distribution of capital in its various forms: economic, cultural, and social. The social world can be thus objectively reconstructed by identifying the main dimensions of social differentiation that organise the class structure in a particular social setting. This challenges the narrow focus on economic measures—such as income or occupation—by demonstrating that an individual’s class position is not defined by an isolated characteristic, but by the intersection of multiple factors associated with social advantages and disadvantages. Class positions are meaningful by themselves, but they are also relational, in the sense that proximity or distance between individuals in this space is informative of the class relations and social distances that constitute reality. Thus, the notion of social space offers a representation of reality as a continuous hierarchy of positions rather than a collection of discrete, predefined categories.

The social space is structured by three main continuous dimensions: the total volume of capital (the sum of all forms of capital held), the capital composition (the relative weight of economic versus cultural capital, which differentiates class fractions horizontally), and social trajectory (reflecting both socioeconomic background and the path taken toward a current position). Each unique configuration of these three dimensions generates specific living conditions that, in turn, influence individuals’ practices and dispositions—their *habitus*. It is these shared conditions that ultimately foster common lifestyles and collective identities (Bourdieu, 1984).

The Bourdieusian approach has been implemented across diverse contexts. In the United Kingdom, Savage et al. (2013) proposed a seven-class structure based on the BBC’s Great British Class Survey Experiment; in Norway, Hansen and colleagues (2009) developed the Oslo Register Data Classification (ORDC) class scheme. Similar empirical efforts have been undertaken in the United States (Atkinson, 2022), South Africa, Germany (Atkinson & Schmitz, 2024), Spain and Argentina (Fachelli & López-Roldán, 2022), as well as other European countries (Hugrée et al., 2022). Bourdieu himself demonstrated the versatility of this approach by applying it to non-capitalist societies, such as the former GDR, to identify the primary axes of differentiation in alternative social settings (Bourdieu et al., 1991).

However, some of these implementations have faced criticism. The use of cross-sectional data and indicators of cultural consumption has raised concerns regarding the role of age and the life cycle in determining class position. Critics argue that the age gradient inherent in many cultural habits may result in the identification of cohort differences rather than class patterns (Mills, 2014). Similarly, measuring economic resources at a single point in time necessarily captures a specific stage of life, potentially misrepresenting life-course mobility (Lambert & Griffiths, 2013). The use of cultural consumption has also been contested, as individuals could theoretically move from one social class to another by changing their cultural tastes (Mills, 2014), or, more generally, shifts in broad cultural patterns could redraw the entire class structure (Peterson & Kern, 1996).

In this dissertation, I utilise the methodological and theoretical contributions of the Bourdieusian school to offer a refined understanding of the stratification dynamics in contemporary Spain and Catalonia. This multivariate perspective treats the social structure as a continuous space where categorical positions are not predefined. Instead, social groups are inductively identified through the confluence of advantages and disadvantages. It is the interaction of these intersecting facets that determines individuals' resources, opportunities, trajectories, and ultimate life outcomes.

1.3. Methodology

The concept of social space is central to this dissertation. From a methodological perspective, the social space is operationalised using Multiple Correspondence Analysis (MCA) (Blasius et al., 2019a; Greenacre & Blasius, 2006; Le Roux & Rouanet, 2010)—a dimensionality reduction technique for categorical data originally developed by Jean-Paul Benzécri (1979). The method was extensively used by Bourdieu (Bourdieu, 1984, 2002) due to its capacity to detect underlying patterns in complex data. These patterns are found by identifying the main “components” of the data, that is, linear combinations of the original variables that reveal the most relevant structures in the data (Boelaert & Ollion, 2025). Each of these linear combinations is a continuous numerical variable that constitutes a dimension (axis) of the social space.

The new dimensions are derived as follows: starting with a dataset comprised of m observations and n categorical variables, a binary Burt table with one row per observation and one column for each category of the original variables is constructed. The method reduces the

dimensionality by applying Singular Value Decomposition to the correspondence matrix of the Burt table. Each of the resulting orthogonal projections combines the original variables. These linear combinations identify the main associations between the variables and capture part of the overall variance (inertia) within the data (Ferguson, 2022; Toft, 2018). The linear combination that captures the highest share of inertia becomes the first axis of the new social space. This way, each observation (individual) is assigned coordinates in the new social space based on its responses in the original data. Similarly, categories of the original data can also be projected in the social space by computing the weighted mean of the coordinates of the observations in a particular category. This allows for the simultaneous representation of a "cloud of individuals" (observations) and a "cloud of categories" (Le Roux & Rouanet, 2010).

MCA allows moving from an n -dimensional space, where n is the number of the original variables, to a lower-dimensional space in which each axis is a linear combination of the original data. Accordingly, individuals' coordinates in the social space are the result of the characteristics captured by the original data. It is thus possible to identify relevant response patterns, for individuals with similar characteristics will be located close to each other, while those with differing characteristics will obtain distant coordinates. This relational aspect is crucial. Individuals' and categories' position is informative both in absolute terms—representing a unique convergence of characteristics—and in relative terms, reflecting their position vis-à-vis the rest of the population. Rather than assuming a predefined distribution, MCA adopts an inductive approach, allowing social patterns to emerge from the data (Blasius et al., 2019a; Ferguson, 2022).

One of the most salient features of the MCA is the use of supplementary variables. Supplementary variables do not influence the construction of the social space itself, but they can be projected onto it. It is then possible to capture the association between active and supplementary categories in the model (Pardo, 2020). For instance, in the first analytical chapter of this thesis, I employ the interaction between age and origin as a supplementary variable to analyse how configurations of social advantage and disadvantage converge on different groups across the life course.

In this spatial representation of the social structure, individuals are distributed along the main dimensions of social differentiation. To identify discrete groups with similar characteristics, chances, and living conditions, I apply cluster analysis to the coordinates obtained via MCA. Clusters are derived by calculating the individuals' Euclidean distance matrix in the social

space, which serves as the input for Ward's hierarchical clustering method. This method minimises the within-cluster variance to produce solutions of relatively uniform size. The optimal number of clusters is determined using the Within-Cluster Sum of Squares (WSS) and the Gap Statistic, with results consolidated through k-means clustering (Hartigan & Wong, 1979). The resulting clusters distributed across the social space are the strata that constitute the social stratification structure.

This methodological procedure matches the theoretical perspective of the dissertation. The multidimensional approach offers a more nuanced perspective on social stratification, as individuals' living circumstances are the result of the intersection of the multiple axes of inequality that converge on them (Hill Collins & Bilge, 2016; Johnson-Hanks et al., 2011). I use the clusters to represent the Spanish and Catalan societies and to examine how foreign-born, second-generation, and native-born adults fare within the Spanish stratification system and how social stratification influences their life trajectories. The use MCA and cluster analysis is justified over other classification methods by the fact that the main goal of the dissertation is not only to group individuals according to their material living conditions, but also to identify the main social cleavages structuring contemporary Spanish society.

1.4. Outline

Throughout this introduction, I have provided an overview of the most salient socioeconomic transformations and migratory dynamics that have reshaped Spain over the past four decades. Given profound impact of these transformations on the social stratification system, I have also reviewed the primary theoretical and methodological to measuring social class and social stratification. In this final section, I introduce the structure of the rest of the dissertation, including a brief outline of the three analytical chapters and the concluding synthesis.

In the first paper of the thesis, Chapter 2, I operationalise the concept of social space to map the position of diverse social groups within the Spanish social stratification structure in 2021. By integrating the interaction between age and region of birth as a supplementary variable, I examine the specific social cleavages affecting migrant cohorts at different stages of the life course. The results reveal distinct patterns of segmented assimilation across multiple domains, offering a nuanced perspective on how intersecting social categories influence the incorporation experiences of migrants within Spanish society

The second analytical chapter, Chapter 3, focuses on Catalonia, one of the primary destinations of international migration to Spain. The paper contributes to debates on social stratification dynamics, by proposing a framework to analyse how the social determinants shaping stratification structures vary among population groups. I identify a concentration process of a meaningful share of the migrant population within the most socially disadvantaged strata. Furthermore, findings suggest a relative “upward” and “downward” displacement of specific substrata of the native working-class driven by recent socioeconomic and demographic transformations.

Building upon these findings, Chapter 4 examines the association between the overarching social stratification structure and individuals’ life trajectories. The analysis proceeds in two steps: first, I map the social strata that comprise the Spanish social stratification structure; second, using retrospective data, I reconstruct parents’ family and employment trajectories to assess children’s exposure to contextual changes across social strata. The results indicate marked stratified differences in children’s exposure to changes in family structure and parental employment. These findings suggest that traditional univariate approaches might have underestimated the stratified exposure of children to family and parental employment changes.

Chapter 5 concludes the thesis by summarising the general findings and the connections across the three empirical chapters. It reflects on the implications of the results, acknowledges the study’s limitations, and identifies potential avenues for future research.

~ Chapter 2 ~

Migration and social stratification in Spain. A multivariate quantitative approach

Carlos Ruiz-Ramos

Andrés Felipe Castro Torres

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Abstract

Analysing the incorporation patterns of immigrants into host countries is essential for understanding social inequalities in con-temporary societies. This study examines the living conditions of immigrants in Spain, moving beyond univariate approaches to social stratification by assessing the interaction among multiple categories of social privilege and disadvantage. As the sec-ond-largest recipient of immigrants in Europe, Spain offers valuable insights into the relationship between migration and social inequality. Using Geometric Data Analysis and clustering methods, we provide a structural and multidimensional perspective on social cleavages, revealing segmented assimilation patterns related to housing, employment, and education, influenced by age, origin, and family background. Our findings show heterogeneous configurations of immigrant incorporation also affecting the second-generation, which speaks to the persistence of social stratification forces in Spanish society. This comprehensive analysis offers a nuanced understanding of how various social categories shape the integration of immigrants, shedding light on the complex interplay of factors that influence their experiences in Spain and potentially other European countries with similar immigration trends in recent decades.

2.1. Introduction

Understanding how immigrants integrate into host societies is essential for examining contemporary social inequality (Domingo, 2015; Portes & Zhou, 1993). Integration is conceptualised as full participation in societal institutions, recognition of rights and duties, and the enjoyment of economic and social benefits stemming from development (Fraser, 1998). In the context of European societies, the integration of immigrants entails access to healthcare and education systems, participation in the labour market, housing availability, and freedom of movement. Immigrant communities around the world exhibit diverse patterns across these

domains, falling short of what might be considered optimal integration (Castles et al., 2014). As the demographic and economic significance of migration continues to grow for both receiving and sending countries, suboptimal integration will persist in driving social inequalities (Canales Cerón, 2021; Therborn, 2012).

Macroeconomic dynamics and unequal relations among countries are strong drivers of international mobility and factor into between-nations and within-country social inequalities (Canales Cerón, 2021; Piore, 1979). In the case of Spain, the growing expenditure capacity among the middle classes and the rise of income and wealth inequalities in origin countries of the recent decades are both part and parcel of increasing immigration (Domingo & Singh-Garha, 2022; Prieto et al., 2018). At the same time, these dynamics factor into segmented assimilation patterns, particularly regarding immigrants from former Spanish colonies in Latin America and geographically close African nations (Bueno & Vidal-Coso, 2019; Gastón-Guiu et al., 2021).

In Spain, the foreign-born individuals make up a moderate share of the population, with social and economic profiles that differ significantly from those of immigrant populations in other wealthy countries (Castles et al., 2014). At least 1.5 of every ten people residing in Spain is foreign-born and this fraction can rise to two in certain metropolitan areas, occupations, or among young age groups (Domingo & Bayona-i-Carrasco, 2024).

Migration to Spain is very diverse ranging from highly privileged groups, such as high-tech nomads, to socially disadvantaged ones such as food-delivery or domestic service workers (Bueno & Vidal-Coso, 2019; Herrera, 2013). This variety is often obscured in migration studies under broad labels such as “immigrants,” or national and regional origins (e.g., Latin Americans, Eastern European, EU-citizens, Africans, etc.) (de Haas, 2014). Masking heterogeneity under broad categories is not unique to migration studies; it is also common in labour and social stratification research. For example, categories such as “unemployed” or “homeowner” fail to capture the vast socioeconomic differences within these groups. This becomes evident when comparing the living conditions of high-tech immigrants to those of immigrants working in the food delivery sector—two groups with drastically different socioeconomic realities. Likewise, the consequences of unemployment for these groups are not comparable, underscoring the need for a more nuanced analysis that recognizes such disparities rather than assuming homogeneity within broad labels. More generally, a configurational approach to social stratifications departs from the premise that the living circumstances of

individuals lay at the intersection of multiple categories; in conjunctures or configurations (Johnson-Hanks et al., 2011).

The socially privileged immigrants often hold positions such as expatriates or highly skilled/specialised workers, enjoy access to formal, secured and well-paid employment, and have little if any issue for access housing. The socially disadvantaged immigrants, on the contrary, typically provide essential services such as personal care, cleaning, and domestic work often under informal conditions which in turn limit their rights, income, and access to housing (Herrera, 2013). This diversity depends on and likely reinforces existing social inequalities.

Against this background, our work aims to measure the distinct configurations of privilege and disadvantage among native- and foreign-born adults in contemporary Spain through clustering variables and individuals using nationally representative quantitative data of the adult Spanish population. We use these clusters to characterise contemporary Spanish society and to examine how foreign-born, second-migrant-generation, and native adults integrate and fare within the Spanish stratification system. Our work draws inspiration from the Bourdieusian tradition, which emphasizes analysing social phenomena as practices embedded within social spaces (Blasius et al., 2019a).

More specifically, we utilise data from the 2021 Spanish Survey of Essential Living Conditions and Housing (ECEPOV) to map immigrants' positions within the Spanish social space at different stages of their life. These positions, and their relationships relative to the native-born population, highlight the structural dimensions of immigrants' incorporation into Spanish society. We measure the social space by combining information on educational attainment, occupation, income, housing access, multiple real estate properties, geographical location, and parental educational background. We correlate this social space with the age and country and region of birth of individuals to understand how life course and migration dynamics relate to stratification.

We then employ clustering methods to identify clusters of material living conditions among working-age adults, grouped by ten-year age groups: 20s, 30s, 40s, 50s, and 60 to 65 (60s hereafter). These clusters range from highly privileged configurations, where economic, social, and familial advantages coincide, to highly disadvantaged configurations, where most or all socially disadvantaged categories and outcomes converge. Finally, we measure the proportion

of immigrants, categorised by region of origin, and the proportion of native-born according to the parental place of birth, within each of these clusters.

Our results serve to argue that unidimensional analyses of the incorporation of immigrants overlook critical features for understanding the social and economic consequences of migration. Our structural and multidimensional approach reveals not only the confluence of multiple social disadvantages among most immigrant population, but also the often-overlooked disadvantages and deprivations among certain native-born segments, and the privilege and comfort that some foreign-born groups experience, which is even less frequently acknowledged.

2.2. Context

The relevance of international migration for societies has to do with the potential multiplicative nature of migration in a context of enhanced physical mobility and connectivity (Canales Cerón, 2021). Immigrants today do not leave their life behind, or at least they have the possibility not to do so. When they move, immigrants carry their culture and traditions along with their social and economic resources. In addition, increased mobility creates a connection between origins and destinations, a connection with economic, social, and political implications.

2.2.1. Emigration and immigration in contemporary Spain

In recent decades, Spanish society has undergone profound social, economic, and demographic transformations (Esping-Andersen et al., 2013; Harrison & Corkill, 2016; Martín-García, 2013). During the 20th century, Spain transitioned from being a “country of emigrants” to becoming the second-largest recipient of immigrants in Europe (Van Mol & de Valk, 2016). In the early 1900s, the underdeveloped economy of Spain was unable to absorb the country’s growing population, prompting about 5.5 million Spaniards towards the Americas. Similarly, the 1960s were characterised by the emigration of 1.5 million people from rural areas to the industrialised economies of Central and Northern Europe, mainly France, Germany and Switzerland. This wave of emigration was halted by the oil crisis of the mid-1970s (Alonso & Furio, 2007).

However, the colonial history of the country and its robust economic growth during the 1990s and early 2000s triggered one of the largest migratory processes in contemporary Europe (Cebrián, 2009). Between 1998 and 2008, Spain attracted over 5 million immigrants, raising

the proportion of the foreign-born population from 1.1% to 11.0%. After the 2008-2013 economic crisis, which temporarily undermined immigration rates, immigration continued to increase, reaching 7.5 million immigrants by 2024, accounting for 18.2% of the total population according to the Spanish National Bureau of Statistics (Instituto Nacional de Estadística). As a result, Spain absorbed one-third of the immigrant population within the European Union during the last 25 years, primarily drawing individuals from Latin America, the Caribbean, Northern Africa, and Eastern Europe.

The arrival of people to Spain has not been stable throughout the two first decades of the century. We find three clear stages that mirror the economic cycle of Spain. The economic expansion of the period 1996-2008 led to rapid increases of international immigration, peaking at 958,266 arrivals in 2007. The Great Recession reversed this trend, reducing the inflow of immigrants, and fostering the emergence of returning and re-emigration processes, and, to a lesser extent, the emigration of natives to countries less affected by the economic crisis (Domingo & Blanes, 2015; Prieto et al., 2018). The last stage corresponds to the recovery of the Spanish economy. From 2015 to 2020 Spain experienced a new immigration boom that peaked in 2019 with a net inflow of half million immigrants, before the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic (Domingo & Bayona-i-Carrasco, 2024).

Two of the main drivers of migration processes are the development differentials and the economic cycle, emphasizing the role of social inequalities both within and between countries (Arango, 2003; Cebrián, 2009). Inequalities between countries arise from long standing economic dependencies between Western (former coloniser) countries and non-Western nations, which have contributed to the underdevelopment of the latter (Hickel et al., 2024). These unequal relationships continue to persist, creating a set of migration and non-migration drivers that align with macroeconomic cycles (Carling, 2002; de Haas, 2014). For instance, during periods of economic expansion in wealthier countries, labour demand tends to increase, particularly in sectors that no longer attract domestic workers, such as construction and domestic care (Moya, 2007). As a result, labour demand intensifies, and between-countries wage disparities become more prominent as pull factors for migrants (Piore, 1979).

Migration-related costs exclude by default the poorest people in sending countries, making migration flows relatively selective with respect to the economic resources and educational background of migrants (Fussell, 2010). Similarly, within-country inequalities in Spain are linked the urban-rural divide. Economic transformations such as tertiarization have favoured

urban settings, leaving the rural population in a relatively disadvantaged position. Consequently, as migration evolves in tandem with persisting social inequalities in the host country, receiving areas become more diverse in terms of national and sub-national origins, and the labour market tends to become segmented, reflecting and reproducing social inequalities (Alonso & Furio, 2007).

2.2.2. Immigrants in the Spanish social space

The integration of Spain into the European Economic Community (EEC) and the adoption of the Euro brought about significant economic shifts. Research by Moreno and Bruquetas (2012) reveals that Spain created nearly 8 million jobs between 1996 and 2007. During this period, the country reoriented its economic structure towards low-productivity and low-value-added sectors such as tourism and construction, while experiencing a process of deindustrialization. The growth of low-skilled labour demand coincided with a rapid rise in the education level among Spanish younger generations (Alonso & Furio, 2007). As a result, the increasing labour opportunities in elementary occupations, coupled with wage differentials between Spain and the Global South countries, attracting immigrants with lower average educational levels compared to other OECD countries (Arslan et al., 2015). Immigrants in Spain primarily found employment in sectors with high labour demand, such as domestic work, agriculture, and construction—jobs that were often avoided by native workers. Consequently, foreign-born populations were largely confined to precarious jobs, leading to a dual labour market segregated by origin and gender (Domingo & Bayona-i-Carrasco, 2024; Moreno & Bruquetas, 2012).

The concentration of immigrants in vulnerable sectors made them particularly susceptible to job losses during the Great Recession. Between 2008 and 2013, foreign-born workers were disproportionately affected by the destruction of 2.9 million jobs. In fact, one third of foreign-born workers lost their job in this period. Thus, the economic crisis exacerbated the structural inequalities that characterise the Spanish labour market, consolidating immigrants' higher unemployment rates and greater prevalence of fixed-term and part-time contracts. In this regard, research has shown that structural inequalities between natives and immigrants in the Spanish labour market cannot be fully explained by education level, sector or occupation, suggesting that ethnic discrimination plays a central role in driving foreign-born modes of incorporation into the Spanish economy (Gastón-Guiu et al., 2021; Mooi-Reci & Muñoz-Comet, 2016).

The occupational segregation of migrant workers and their ethnic discrimination limit their horizontal (i.e. between sectors) and vertical (i.e. between occupations) mobility (Fernández-Macías et al., 2015), exposing them to greater social vulnerability. This “sticky floor” effect challenges the narrative of a progressive incorporation into the receiving society, as immigrant workers encounter significant barriers to gradually improve their socioeconomic status (Gastón-Guiu et al., 2021, 2024). Additionally, the concentration of different national groups in specific economic sectors reinforces the pattern of segmented assimilation among immigrant populations (Portes & Zhou, 1993).

2.2.3. The “second generation”

The relatively recent nature of immigration to Spain poses some challenges for studying the descendants of immigrants, often referred to as the “second generation.” Only recently, data availability has allowed scholars to analyse their educational and labour outcomes in comparison to both immigrants and natives (Aparicio & Portes, 2014; Bayona-i-Carrasco et al., 2020; González Ferrer & Cebolla-Boado, 2018; Portes et al., 2018; Rodríguez et al., 2021).

Literature on the second generation has found differing outcomes with respect to natives, but also to immigrants from the country of birth of the parents. While second-generation migrants tend to perform better educationally and in the labour market than first-generation immigrants, they still face significant gaps compared to native Spaniards. The second generation shows higher rates of academic failure and unemployment, as well as lower levels of tertiary education (Bayona-i-Carrasco & Domingo, 2024a). Portes and colleagues (2018) attribute these challenges to the low socioeconomic status of their parents, but also to persistent discriminatory practices within Spanish society.

A social space perspective into the incorporation of immigrants brings together both contextual factors such as macroeconomic conditions and inequalities, and individual-level conditions such as immigrant’s demographic, socioeconomic and occupational profiles. These macro and micro-level factors shape contemporary societies in manners that escape single-variable analysis such as looking at differences in educational attainment or labour market outcomes separately. In the following section we describe the data and methods we used to operationalize this perspective and produce empirical evidence for Spain.

2.3. Data and methods

With over 300,000 individual records, the 2021 Spanish “Encuesta de Características Esenciales de la Población y Viviendas - ECEPOV” (Survey of Essential Characteristics of the Population and Housing) is the largest nationally representative survey of sociodemographic and economic conditions (Instituto Nacional de Estadística 2021). This large sample size allows for the study of immigrant groups from different origins, and the comprehensive questionnaire makes it a unique source for the investigation of demographic, and socioeconomic dynamics within Spain.

We focus on individuals aged 20 to 64 ($n = 223,568$). The population within this age range provides a good representation of those contributing to the Spanish economy. We explore differences across 10-year age groups and across individuals’ regions of birth. Among Spanish-born individuals, we distinguish between those with foreign-born parents (Second generation hereafter) and those born to two Spanish-born individuals. The region of birth groups comprises the following categories: Africa; Asia and Europe (excluding European Union countries); European Union (EU); Latin America and the Caribbean (LaCar); Spain; and Spain second generation (Spain-SG).

Table 2.1 displays the percentage distribution of the analytical sample by age group across the seven social space variables: Educational attainment, Tenure status, Household income, Occupation, Urbanization, Parental educational attainment, Multiple real estate holdings. We input these variables into a Multiple Correspondence Analysis (MCA) and retained the first three factorial axes for further analysis including the clustering. Factorial axes are numerical individual-level variables that summarize the main differences and disparities across socioeconomic and occupational profiles. All our analyses use sampling weights, and we pay particular attention when interpreting results for groups with small cell counts. When appropriate, we report standard error as a measure of the reliability of the estimates. The relative contribution of the categories to the variance of the first three axes is reported in Table A2.1 in the appendix.

Existing correlations among these seven variables are the basis for measuring typical living circumstances and strategies across groups of people. For example, typically, individuals from rich families have early access to homeownership due to inheritances or inter vivos gifts, high educational attainment, and well-paid occupations (León et al., 2024). The reverse is true about individuals from socially disadvantaged families. The particularities of the Spanish society with

respect to homeownership and employment have created groups of “insiders” and “outsiders” that have benefited from and suffered the consequences of the Spanish economic model, respectively (Blavier, 2023). Moreover, beyond cumulative categories of social privileges or disadvantages, we aim to detect complex interactions between the two, providing a nuanced perspective on contemporary structure of inequalities in Spain.

We rely on a global MCA on the seven above-mentioned variables to empirically measure the multivariate correlations among them via factorial axes (Le Roux & Rouanet, 2004; Lebaron, 2009). Given the MCA properties, the first three MCA-axes capture the main cleavages across educational, housing, income, wealth, occupational and intergenerational resources. The MCA is global as it includes all age groups. We implement MCA using the R-packages *ade4* and *FactoMineR*.

Our main assumption is that the experiences of individuals are shaped and constructed by the combination of these variables at different times during the life course, from early to late adulthood. For example, the population size of the municipality in which individuals reside captures geographical disparities in employment opportunities and historical development gaps between Spanish urban and rural areas, adding to the individual-level socioeconomic and occupational profile provided by the other variables. Adding variables that go beyond the individual-level characteristics, and collecting information at the geographic- and household-level allows us to better capture the available resources and the structure of opportunities of individuals and population groups.

Thus, divergent socioeconomic and occupational profiles among the young adult population underline the existence of current social inequalities, for example for accessing education, rapidly acquiring housing or employment. By the same token, divergent profiles among older adults reflect cumulative inequalities over the life course shaped by past opportunities among older generations. Together, the socioeconomic and occupational profiles of younger and older adults constitute the Spanish social space, i.e., metaphorically, the set of social positioning of individuals within the Spanish society (Bourdieu, 1984).

Next, we conduct six age-group-specific cluster analyses to identify individuals with similar characteristics and living conditions. We rely on 10-year age groups to favour comparability across individuals, and we set to six the number of clusters for all age groups. This predefined number of clusters favour comparability across age groups. The cluster analyses were conducted in two steps. First, we implement a hierarchical clustering via the Ward method,

followed by a cluster consolidation via the K-means algorithm using the hclust and WeightedCluster R-packages, respectively (Studer, 2013). We assess the robustness of the six-clusters solution implementing a Homogeneity test. Finally, following Bourdieu (2005), we call these clusters probable social classes.

In a society with marked socioeconomic patterns of family formation dynamics a configurational approach that relies jointly on individual-, household- and geographic-level variables to measure social stratification is likely to obscure the gender dimension of social inequalities. Our probable social classes are likely grouping men and women in uniform proportions (50/50) despite known and pervasive gender differences across several socioeconomic outcomes because of the shared resources implied in household- and geographic-level variables, and because of strong educational and socioeconomic homogamy. By no means this implies that gender differences are unimportant. We refer to how they can be observed in some of the probable social classes in the results section.

Table 2.1 Weighted sample distribution by age group

Variables and categories	Age groups					Total
	20 to 29	30 to 39	40 to 49	50 to 59	60 to 64	
Educational attainment						
Primary and below	3.6	5.5	6.2	9.7	18.2	7.7
Secondary low	19.5	25.1	25.9	33.3	34.1	27.3
Secondary medium	17.5	8.3	10.7	12.0	11.3	11.8
Secondary vocational	12.2	12.3	11.2	11.8	8.9	11.5
Tertiary vocational	14.9	12.3	12.1	8.5	5.2	11.0
Tertiary low	13.3	12.1	12.4	8.9	8.8	11.3
Tertiary medium	12.6	15.4	16.2	12.4	10.5	13.9
Tertiary upper	6.4	9.1	5.4	3.4	3.0	5.6
Tenure status						
Inherited	8.1	7.5	7.1	10.3	12.7	8.7
Owner <20%	15.8	22.2	26.9	16.9	8.7	19.6
Owner <35%	7.1	10.0	12.7	8.0	5.3	9.2
Owner >35%	4.3	3.9	5.9	5.0	3.9	4.8
Owner other	8.2	11.4	9.1	7.4	6.3	8.7
Owner paid	35.6	18.7	20.6	40.9	54.9	31.5
Tenant <20%	6.4	7.7	5.2	3.6	2.5	5.2
Tenant <35%	6.9	10.2	6.3	3.8	2.6	6.2
Tenant >35%	7.5	8.4	6.3	4.2	3.1	6.1
Household income						
<1000	14.7	14.5	13.2	14.8	17.7	14.6

1000-1500	19.7	19.9	19.0	19.6	20.0	19.6
1500-2000	17.8	18.1	18.0	17.3	17.3	17.7
2000-2500	14.5	15.6	15.1	14.7	14.1	14.9
2500-3000	11.4	12.5	12.9	11.9	10.3	12.0
3000-5000	15.7	15.2	17.0	15.6	14.9	15.8
>5000	6.3	4.3	4.8	6.2	5.6	5.4
Occupation						
Unemployed	18.0	16.1	14.1	15.4	14.8	15.6
Inactive	2.5	3.4	4.4	8.4	30.3	7.5
Students	0.8	1.4	0.3	0.1	0.0	5.9
Elementary	10.8	19.9	20.8	24.6	18.7	19.6
Housework	1.4	3.0	4.1	7.4	11.3	5.0
Service	8.8	12.0	10.5	8.2	6.3	9.5
Education, Arts and Humanities	6.7	10.0	9.3	8.8	5.7	8.5
Social Sciences	4.7	8.2	8.3	6.0	3.3	6.5
Business and Law	4.3	7.0	8.6	7.0	3.4	6.6
Sciences, Technology and Engineering	12.0	18.9	19.5	14.1	6.3	15.4
Urbanization						
Less than 50k	44.8	45.1	46.5	47.5	48.1	46.3
50 to 100k	13.5	13.5	13.5	12.9	12.8	13.3
100 to 500k	23.6	23.7	24.2	23.4	23.7	23.7
500k or more	18.1	17.7	15.7	16.2	15.4	16.6
Parental educational attainment						
Primary and below	16.7	34.9	51.6	66.2	73.1	47.9
Secondary low	33.1	28.8	22.7	15.6	12.2	22.9
Secondary medium	12.0	9.9	6.6	4.3	3.5	7.4
Secondary vocational	10.5	7.4	5.4	3.9	2.9	6.1
Tertiary vocational	6.6	4.1	2.6	1.9	1.6	3.3
Tertiary low	7.5	5.8	4.4	3.4	2.8	4.8
Tertiary upper	13.6	9.1	6.7	4.6	3.8	7.6
Multiple real estate properties						
No	84.1	91.1	89.2	82.7	76.4	85.7
Yes	15.9	8.9	10.8	17.3	23.6	14.3
Total	17.8	20.3	26.8	24.8	10.4	100.0

Note: The category “Asia and Europe” includes all Asian, Oceanic and non-EU countries.

Source: Own work based on the Encuesta de Características Esenciales de la Población y Viviendas – 2021.

To analyse the migration-stratification link, we use the interaction between age groups and region of birth as a supplementary variable within the MCA. When projected onto factorial axes, supplementary variables capture the multivariate influence of active variables on

supplementary categories (Pardo, 2020). The relative location of age and origin groups along the factorial axes indicate their differing modes of incorporation into the social space.

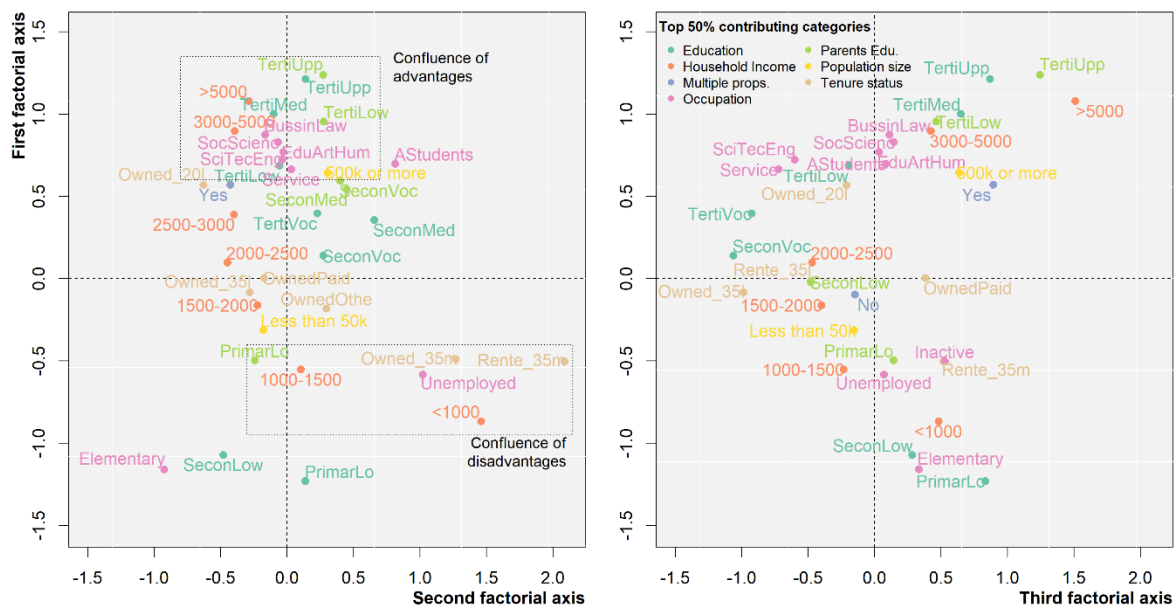
We contrast these results with a cross-tabulation of probable social classes and regions of origin to refine our understanding of how origin influences the incorporation of immigrants. This approach allows us to identify more nuanced forms of incorporation that go beyond what can be captured by single-variable analyses, highlighting the complex interplay between social stratification and origin in shaping immigrants' incorporation experiences, and ultimately, the Spanish social stratification structure.

2.4. Results

2.4.1. Social Cleavages and Patterns of Stratification in Contemporary Spain

Figure 2.1 displays the three-dimensional Spanish social space and the top contributing categories to the first and second axes (left panel) and to the first and third axes (right panel). Together, these three axes account for 64.1% of the total inertia.

Figure 2.1 Spanish social space. Distribution of top 50%-contributing categories across the first three factorial axes



Source: Own work based on the Encuesta de Características Esenciales de la Población y Viviendas – 2021.

Note: Table A2.1 in the appendix shows the relative contribution of the categories to the first three axes.

Each point in the social space represents the mean position of the individuals with a shared characteristic (e.g. unemployed), providing a visual representation of the variables' correlation

in Spanish society. For example, an individual located at the higher end of the plot will be characterised by the confluence of categories of social advantage like high education level (TertUpp), high parental education level (TertUpp), qualified occupation, and high income (3,000 to 5,000€ and >5,000€ per month). Likewise, there is virtually no unemployment or high financial burden due to rent or housing loans at the higher end of the social space.

Thus, according to Figure 2.1, the first factorial axis (vertical) places individuals on a socioeconomic gradient that increases from the bottom to the top. In the lowest part of axis 1, we find individuals with low educational attainment —primarily those with no formal education, primary schooling, or early stages of secondary education—, whose parents have also reached low education credentials. This group is further characterised by being employed in elementary occupations (or unemployed) and having low-income levels. As previously mentioned, towards the top of axis 1, markers of social privilege become more prominent. Here, we find individuals with higher levels of education and income, and employed in qualified occupations, coupled with the inheritance of cultural capital from their parents. Respondents who declare having more than one real estate property also tend to concentrate towards the higher end of the axis. This pattern aligns with findings from various national contexts, where the first factorial axis often represents the overall volume of capital (Atkinson & Schmitz, 2024; Branson et al., 2024).

Homeownership and household income are the two most contributing variables to the second factorial axis. This second factorial axis captures how individuals' access to housing and their dwelling conditions. On the right-hand side we find individuals facing high economic burdens to pay for housing, irrespective of their tenure status, i.e., renters and owners using more than 35% of their income to pay for housing. These include low-income groups and unemployed individuals, but also students, signalling the generational and migration divide hindering the access to the housing market in contemporary Spain (Delclós, 2023; Lebrusán Murillo, 2023). In contrast, on the left-hand side, we find homeowners whose higher incomes allow them to spend less than 35% of their earnings on housing.

The third axis introduces further distinctions among probable social classes. The upper-right and lower-right areas of the plot represent socially privileged and socially disadvantaged classes, respectively. The middle classes gravitate around the centre and centre-left areas. A detailed inspection of the cloud of categories reveals that individuals located at the centre and the upper-right quadrant, i.e. those with high and middle income and education levels with

educated parents, face lower financial burdens for accessing housing and are the so called “insiders”, a concept also associated with older age groups who accessed to the housing market before the start of the housing bubble (Arundel & Lennartz, 2020; Bentolila et al., 2012). At the centre left we find younger middle classes with intermediate education and income levels dealing with high housing prices and facing difficulties in becoming “insiders”.

Finally, the bottom-right quadrant comprises the “excluded” populations of the Spanish development model. Those with the highest unemployment rates, and the lowest income levels who use a high share of their income for accessing a dwelling.

To sum up, the Spanish social space exhibits an upper-right quadrant that clusters together younger age groups of highly educated individuals who typically have highly educated parents and reside in large urban areas. The proximity of students to the upper social classes indicates that young individuals still reside with their parents, while their position towards the right end of the second axis reflects their challenges in entering the housing market (Lebrusán Murillo, 2023). The upper-left quadrant is characterised by highly educated individuals employed in qualified occupations with high-income levels owning multiple housing properties. The bottom-left quadrant largely gathers those in older age groups with low education levels, living in small cities and rural areas with relatively easy access to housing. Lastly, the bottom-right quadrant predominantly includes low-income groups with low education levels, who are notably exposed to unemployment and face strong difficulties for accessing a dwelling.

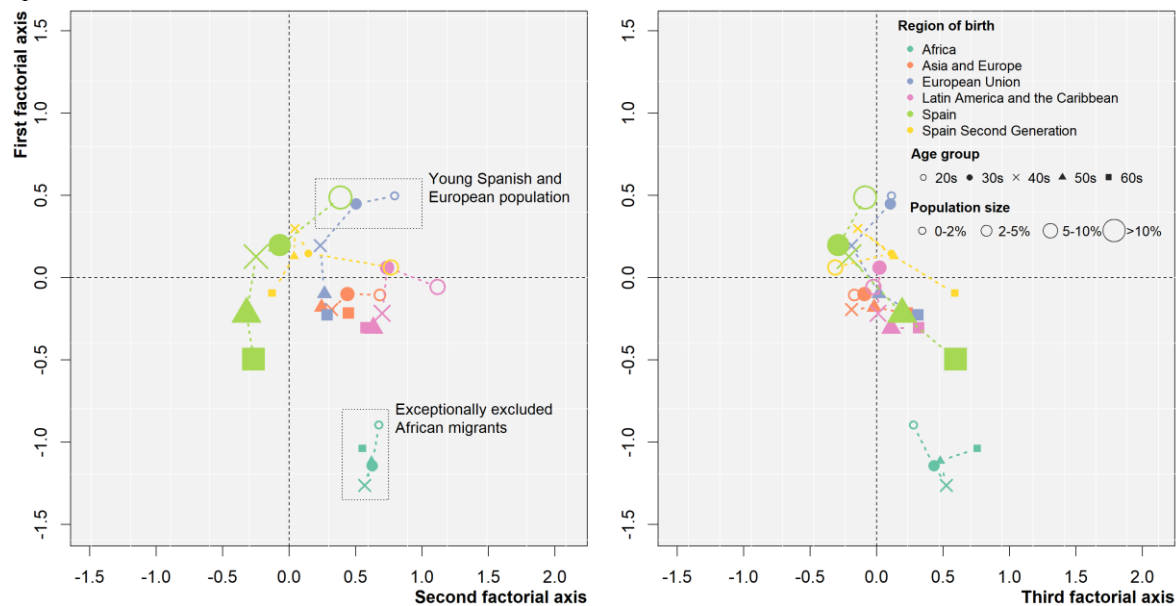
Additionally, these results underscore the connection between parental education and the position of respondents in the social space. The inheritance of cultural capital (i.e. parental educational attainment) is associated with respondents’ position in the social space, a finding that is in line with previous research showing the limited social mobility in contemporary Spanish society (Cervini-Plá, 2015; León et al., 2024).

2.4.2. Life Course and Regional Origin Differences in the Spanish Social Space

We now turn to the analysis of the supplementary variables to evaluate how age and region of birth interact with the different patterns of social inclusion/exclusion that we have identified in the Spanish social space. In other words, by interacting each origin subpopulation with age groups we show how natives and immigrants incorporate into and constitute the Spanish social space at different stages of life.

Figure 2.2 displays the mean location of each origin-age subgroup into the social space (i.e., average coordinate in factorial axes). As in Figure 2.1, the left panel shows the first and second factorial axes and the right panel the first and the third factorial axes. Colours represent the region of birth, markers' shapes indicate the age groups, and the size represents the population size of each origin with respect to the age group. Green points representing the Spanish population are the largest because Spaniards represent more than 2/3rds of the population in all age groups. Two immigrant minorities with divergent locations stand out: EU and African migrants; whereas Latin American and Caribbean immigrants represent sizable shares of the young adult and adult populations: 20s, 30s, and 40s.

Figure 2.2 Average location and relative sizes of origin and age groups within the Spanish social space



Source: Own work based on the Encuesta de Características Esenciales de la Población y Viviendas – 2021.

Note: Table A2.2 in the appendix highlights the population size estimated percentages for each country/region of origin.

In Figure 2.2, older cohorts hover around the bottom part of the socioeconomic axis (vertical), whereas those under 40 tend to be located at the top. Given that older cohorts experienced a context of limited access to higher education, they display larger percentages of individuals with low educational credentials and employed in elementary occupations, partially capturing a cohort effect.

Lower educational attainment levels and occupational profiles, together with lower mean income levels, place older age groups close to other socially disadvantaged groups. However, a close look at the data shows that this population group has been able to accumulate larger

amounts of wealth, especially in the form of real estate assets. The higher share of retired respondents among these age groups can also partially explain their lower income levels, especially because the only income sources available in the data were labour and pensions.

From a life course perspective, in line with economic theory on the life cycle (Nagatani, 1972), our results also show that individuals aged between 40 and 50 tend to be the top-income earners, a feature that is especially salient for natives, second-generation Spaniards and individuals from EU countries. In this regard, the proximity between younger age groups (i.e. those under 30) and high-income categories is caused by their shared higher education levels, but also by the protracted transition to leaving the parental home, a common trait in Southern European societies like Spain (Módenes et al., 2013).

The second factorial axis in Figure 2.2 (horizontal), instead, delineates an unambiguous hierarchy in terms of migration background, supporting the theory of a segmented incorporation into the Spanish social space (Muñoz-Comet & Arcarons, 2021; Prieto et al., 2018; Zhou, 1997). Given the composition of the axis, the hierarchization of migrant groups appears to be associated with patterns of residential exclusion. Native-born individuals on the left, exhibit higher ownership rates, lower financial burdens and higher income levels, whereas migrant populations located along the axis experience harsher dwelling conditions and are the most exposed to the current housing crisis (Amuedo-Dorantes & Mundra, 2013; Delclós, 2023). More specifically, more than 60% of the Latin American and African populations are tenants, and one-fourth pay above 35% of the household earnings for accessing housing. In this context, access to homeownership does not seem to be a possibility for these two origin groups. The position of the youngest age groups towards the right end of this second axis further highlights their difficulties in accessing the housing market.

The third axis reinforces the presence of generational differences in social status among the Spanish-born and the second generation by positioning older individuals more prominently in the bottom-right region of the plot. Only individuals of African origin share similar right-hand-side coordinates. Individuals over 60 years old from non-African and non-Spanish regions exhibit much smaller coordinates along the third axis, and those in other age groups from these regions cluster closely together in this dimension. This relative lack of differentiation may reflect the shared experiences of migration, which can obscure generational disparities observed among Spaniards. The distinct position of individuals of African origin represents an

extreme manifestation of this phenomenon, illustrating the distortion of generational social status disparities that may arise from the immigration experience.

Our methodological approach posits that in a given social space, two individuals with different living conditions will be located in distant positions with respect to each other by virtue of the different values in the variables used to define the model. Conversely, individuals with similar characteristics will be close to each other. When looking at the interaction between age and region of birth we find that within group age differences are much more salient for Spanish-born, EU and second-generation individuals than in the other groups. For instance, the distance in the first factorial axis between natives in their 20s and those in their 60s is 0.81 standard deviations (SD), while it is only 0.12 SD for immigrants from Africa, Asia and Other European countries. These results reveal that migrants share similar living conditions across age groups, while there are notable differences in the case of natives and EU migrants. In other words, age significantly influences the social positioning of natives but is less relevant for immigrants.

Focusing on the second generation, we find notable differences between descendants of immigrants and those of natives, even among the same age groups. Consistent with previous research (Bayona-i-Carrasco et al., 2020; Portes & Zhou, 1993), the second generation shows a higher prevalence of low education levels compared to natives-descendants. Moreover, their precarious access to housing pulls all age groups within the second generation towards the right end of the second axis. However, compared to immigrants, the second generation occupies a relatively more advantaged position in the Spanish social space. These findings suggest that the second generation also experiences segmented assimilation, hence pre- and post-distributive policies might not be completely successful in guaranteeing similar prospects to both immigrants- and natives-descendants.

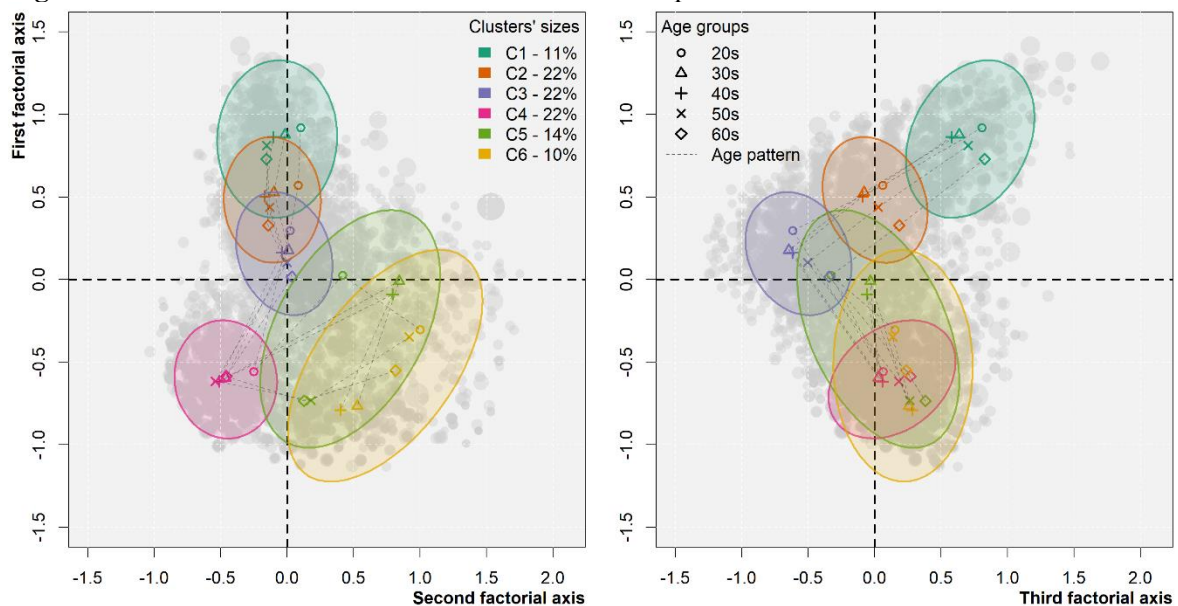
2.4.3. Is it all about age, migrant generation, and regions of origins?

Our bottom-up clustering approach assumes that the answer to this question is no. We posit that probable social classes would sharpen and enrich our understanding of stratification beyond the observed patterns by age and region of origin. This is because probable social classes are built upon shared material living conditions, regardless of the place of birth. In other words, we assume that multidimensionally defined social strata subsume differences by immigration status for certain origin groups.

To operationalize this idea, we implement a six-cluster solution for each age group. These solutions balance explanatory power with comparability across groups. Figure A2.1 in the Appendix shows descriptively the similarity of goodness of fit for six clusters solutions across age groups.

Figure 2.3 displays age-specific centres of the clusters along the first three factorial axes. Colours represent the clusters and the markers the age groups (20s, 30s, 40s, 50s, and 60s). Grey background points represent the study population. The centres of the clusters are computed as the weighted mean coordinate of individuals in each cluster. The ellipses represent the 75% confidence interval and follow the overall location of individuals within the social space.

Figure 2.3 Distribution of the clusters across the social space



Source: Own work based on the Encuesta de Características Esenciales de la Población y Viviendas – 2021.

The centres of the clusters are comparable to the mean location of age and region of origin groups in Figure 2.3. A visual comparison of Figures 2.2 and 2.3 gives a first insight on the relevance of probable social classes over demographic markers. The greater distance among clusters' centres compared to age and region-of-origin groups signal the strength of material configurations in constituting the Spanish stratification system beyond age and origin. Especially in top classes, markers for all age groups appear close to one another indicating shared privileged conditions across the life course of well-off individuals. At the other end of the spectrum, age markers are more dispersed indicating variegated forms of disadvantage across age groups in lower classes.

Clusters 1 to 3 are vertically located along the first axis signalling a clear socioeconomic gradient. Conversely, Clusters 4 to 6 are distributed along the second factorial axis. Therefore, differentiation among socially disadvantaged probable social classes is mostly determined by the urban-rural divide and by the differing modes of incorporation into the housing market.

The size of the ellipses in Figure 2.3 indicates the degree of concentration of individuals within the probable social classes. Clusters 1 to 4 concentrate most of their members in relatively small areas of the social space. Accordingly, individuals' profiles and living conditions are more homogeneous among these clusters. On the contrary, Clusters 5 and 6 partially capture manifold dynamics of inequality, leading to a more diverse composition that comprises a wider range of realities within each probable social class.

An examination of the composition of the probable social classes reveals that in all age groups, Cluster 1 predominantly consists of individuals with the highest levels of education, concentrated in skilled occupations, particularly in social sciences, business, and law. As a result, 70-80% of individuals in Cluster 1 belong to the two highest income brackets. This group lives in large metropolitan areas and has the highest rates of multiple property ownership and mortgage-free homes.

Clusters 2 and 3 exhibit declining educational attainment and parental education levels. In Cluster 2, more than 65% of individuals have tertiary education, while in Cluster 3, secondary education is the most common. The lower educational attainment in Cluster 3 also contributes to their lower income and higher unemployment rates, which can be twice as high as those in Cluster 2. The most significant difference between the two probable social classes lies in their spatial distribution: over half of the population in Cluster 3 resides in small towns and villages (fewer than 50,000 residents), compared to just 30-40% in Cluster 2. Both probable social classes show lower rates of property ownership compared to Cluster 1. Ownership of multiple properties is less common as well.

Cluster 4 has the highest proportion of individuals living in small towns and rural areas. In contrast to other probable social classes with similar socioeconomic characteristics, Cluster 4 has a higher percentage of individuals owning multiple real estate properties and inheriting or owning their dwelling without any remaining debt. Their relatively easy access to housing partially compensates their low levels of education and income and the predominance of elementary occupations. Clusters 5 and 6 represent the most disadvantaged segments. Despite having higher mean education levels than Cluster 4, these probable social classes face the

highest unemployment rates, and 80% of their members fall into the lowest income brackets. These factors severely limit their access to housing, resulting in the highest tenancy rates and the most pronounced economic struggles in securing housing, regardless of tenure status. A detailed description of the clusters can be found in Tables A2.3-A2.7.

The joint interpretation of Figures 2.2 and 2.3 suggest that clusters display non-random compositions according to region of origin. We confirm this visual intuition with the composition of the clusters by respondents' origin for all age groups combined in Table 2.2. Despite the overrepresentation of immigrants in the lower probable social classes, Spanish-born make up the majority of the socially excluded. More than 65% of individuals in Cluster 5 and 6 are Spanish-born, and at least 60% have Spanish-born parents. Second-generation individuals are present in similar shares across clusters with a slight overrepresentation in the last two clusters. Notably, SEs are relatively low for the shares of this group. In other words, social inequality affects native- and foreign-born populations distinctively, the former as a majority population with large shares among socially excluded groups, and the latter by concentrating their individuals into socially excluded groups.

At the other end of the spectrum, social inequality is reflected in the closeness of the upper probable social classes. The underrepresentation of African individuals in the first three clusters implies their virtual absence in this high-status social milieu for all age groups. Top classes are not accessible for African immigrants, more so when standard errors are considered.

Immigrants from European Union countries display a U-shaped pattern across clusters, meaning an overrepresentation in higher and lower classes potentially reflecting existing inequalities across EU nations (e.g., West-East divergent migration flows). The shares for immigrants from Latin American and Caribbean countries look like those of the second generation, with greater standard errors.

Top classes are partially open for immigrants from regions other than Africa. These various patterns demonstrate the connection between macro-level forms of inequality as well as within-country within-EU disparities as drivers of immigration. According to these results, it will be hard to understand immigration through univariate analysis and overarching categories such as immigrants, Africans, Latin American and even European migrants.

All in all, probable social classes allow us to empirically challenge simplistic narratives that view immigrants as a homogeneous group in constant need of social assistance. While

immigrants are overrepresented in socially disadvantaged *probable social classes*, some regions of origin are also present in the middle and upper social strata. Conversely, we find socially excluded populations among natives as well, making the case for the persisting role of class divisions from a macro-level perspective. Although racism plays a key role in the exclusion of immigrants and non-white groups (Baker & O’Connell, 2022), there are other factors contributing to the experiences of inclusion and exclusion of natives and migrants; class is a fundamental one (Balibar & Wallerstein, 1991).

Table 2.2 Region of birth shares (%) by probable social classes for 20 to 64-year-old individuals in Spain

<i>Probable social classes (Clusters)</i>	Country / Region of birth						Total
	Africa	Asia and Europe	European Union	Latin America and the Caribbean	Spain	Spain - SG	
1	0.3 (0.1)	2.5 (0.2)	3.3 (0.5)	5.3 (0.9)	86.7 (1.5)	1.9 (0.2)	100
2	0.4 (0.0)	2.8 (0.3)	2.4 (0.2)	4.9 (0.7)	87.4 (1.2)	2.0 (0.1)	100
3	0.8 (0.1)	3.8 (0.2)	2.8 (0.2)	5.6 (0.7)	84.7 (0.9)	2.2 (0.1)	100
4	3.5 (0.2)	4.0 (0.5)	2.0 (0.1)	5.8 (1.3)	82.8 (1.8)	2.0 (0.1)	100
5	2.3 (0.3)	4.1 (0.5)	3.1 (0.3)	10.8 (2.7)	76.9 (3.6)	2.8 (0.2)	100
6	8.7 (0.7)	6.5 (0.4)	3.4 (0.2)	13.8 (2.6)	63.4 (2.6)	4.1 (0.4)	100
Total	2.3	3.8	2.7	7.0	81.9	2.4	100
SEs	(0.2)	(0.2)	(0.2)	(1.2)	(1.5)	(0.1)	

Source: Own work based on the Encuesta de Características Esenciales de la Población y Viviendas – 2021.

Note: Numbers in parentheses are the standard errors (SEs). Table A2.2 in the appendix displays age-group specific cross tabulations between probable social classes and region of origin.

Table A2.2 in the appendix replicates Table 2.2 for each of the five age groups. While the patterns shown in these tables align with our overall conclusions, they are provided for future research on age-specific trends. Of particular interest is how variations in cluster composition across age groups may reflect lifecourse dynamics, such as the transmission of inequality or specific aspects of the migration process itself.

2.5. Conclusions

Analysing the incorporation patterns of immigrants into host countries is crucial for understanding the growing complexity and the emerging inequality trends in contemporary societies (Domingo, 2015; Portes & Zhou, 1993). The Spanish case is particularly relevant as the country has become Europe's second-largest recipient of immigrants over the past two decades (Van Mol & de Valk, 2016).

Recent immigration flows to Spain are characterised by highly diverse profiles, spanning from privileged groups to those facing substantial disadvantages. As a result, the generalised concept of "immigration" often masks segmented assimilation processes fostered by the characteristics of the hosting society and the heterogeneous demographic, socioeconomic and cultural backgrounds of the newly arrived population.

In this paper we have provided a measure of the confluence and interaction between categories of social privilege and disadvantage constituting contemporary Spanish society in the form of social space. The placement of native- and foreign-born populations at different life stages in the social space offers a visual representation of their living conditions and of their modes of incorporation into Spanish society.

Educational expansion increased mean levels of education in the younger cohorts compared to older generations. However, their lower income levels and the greater economic efforts for accessing the housing market excludes them from fully integrating as independent adults in Spanish society. Authors like Módenes and colleagues (2013) have suggested that the delayed emancipation observed in Spain may be a strategy of young adults and a type of intergenerational support to face what is considered to be an adverse environment.

An overarching finding of this study is that age is an especially salient factor influencing the social status of Spaniards, Europeans and second-generation Spaniards, but its importance diminishes for immigrants from Latin America and the Caribbean, Asia and other European countries and Africa. The similar living conditions of immigrants from these regions across age groups can influence the actual and perceived structure of opportunities of young immigrants, potentially affecting their desires and expectations and hence their long-term socioeconomic outcomes (Feliciano & Rumbaut, 2005; Trinidad, 2019).

Consistent with the segmented assimilation theory (Portes et al., 2018; Zhou, 1997), we find evidence of stratified patterns of incorporation based on the region of birth. We conclude that

a meaningful share of immigrants from Africa, Latin America and the Caribbean, Asia, and non-EU countries experience social exclusion, and that their worse labour and economic outcomes cannot be fully explained by their socioeconomic characteristics. Additionally, the high cost of accessing housing emerges as a significant barrier to their full development and incorporation into the host society (Delclós, 2023).

Our research also confirms the results obtained by previous studies on second-generation immigrants in Spain (Bayona-i-Carrasco et al., 2020). While second-generation immigrants occupy a relatively advantaged social position compared to first-generation immigrants, their socioeconomic outcomes remain worse than those of native Spaniards. This suggests only partial assimilation and raises concerns about the effectiveness of existing redistribution policies (Vtyurina, 2020).

This research identifies overlapping categories of social privilege and disadvantage shared by both immigrants and natives. While immigrants are disproportionately represented among socially disadvantaged groups, they also hold significant representation in the middle and upper probable social classes. Furthermore, a substantial portion of the socially disadvantaged population consists of natives. A relevant contribution of our study is that, moving beyond dichotomic perspectives on social exclusion, we find interacting categories of both social privilege and disadvantage converging on social groups. Rather than viewing social groups as simply privileged or disadvantaged, our findings highlight the complex nature of inequality.

Our study has some limitations. First, we lack information on wealth and income sources, two elements that would provide insightful understanding of the configuration of the social space. Second, the sample size does not allow for a detailed analysis of the parental origins of the second-generation, limiting the analysis of their segmented incorporation into Spanish society. Additionally, given that immigration to Spain is a relatively recent phenomenon, our results on the second generation are especially relevant to younger cohorts, but their interpretation for older age groups should be approached with caution.

2.6. Appendix

Table A 2.1. Categories' contribution to the three first factorial axes

Variables and categories	Contribution to factorial axes		
	1st	2nd	3rd
Educational attainment			
Primary and below	4.82	0.10	3.67
Secondary low	12.97	4.24	1.49
Secondary medium	0.63	3.41	0.63
Secondary vocational	0.09	0.57	8.92
Tertiary vocational	0.72	0.38	6.49
Tertiary low	2.21	0.03	0.30
Tertiary medium	5.79	0.10	3.98
Tertiary upper	3.42	0.07	2.88
Tenure status			
Inherited	0.73	0.00	0.02
Owner <20%	2.64	5.21	0.60
Owner <35%	0.03	0.49	6.18
Owner >35%	0.47	5.17	0.01
Owner other	0.12	0.52	0.06
Owner paid	0.00	0.65	3.14
Tenant <20%	0.01	0.34	0.17
Tenant <35%	0.00	0.04	0.98
Tenant >35%	0.63	17.85	1.12
Household income			
<1000	4.53	20.92	2.32
1000-1500	2.46	0.14	0.74
1500-2000	0.19	0.59	1.95
2000-2500	0.06	2.02	2.29
2500-3000	0.76	1.30	0.55
3000-5000	5.30	1.67	1.94
>5000	2.61	0.31	8.43
Occupation			
Unemployed	2.19	10.89	0.05
Inactive	0.79	0.01	1.45
Students	1.20	2.62	0.03
Elementary	10.91	11.31	1.48
Housework	1.19	0.00	0.65
Service	1.75	0.01	3.43
Education, Arts and Humanities	2.10	0.00	0.01
Social Sciences	1.87	0.02	0.09
Business and Law	2.09	0.12	0.06
Sciences, Technology and Engineering	3.34	0.01	3.83
Urbanization			

Less than 50k	1.87	1.01	0.77
50 to 100k	0.00	0.11	0.03
100 to 500k	0.23	0.09	0.19
500k or more	2.88	1.04	4.60
Parental educational attainment			
Primary and below	4.87	1.91	0.64
Secondary low	0.00	0.04	3.63
Secondary medium	0.90	1.00	0.98
Secondary vocational	0.90	0.65	0.88
Tertiary vocational	0.76	0.36	0.38
Tertiary low	1.84	0.24	0.71
Tertiary upper	4.85	0.38	8.09
Multiple real estate properties			
No	0.32	0.29	1.31
Yes	1.94	1.76	7.84

Note: Bold numbers indicate contributions above the mean.

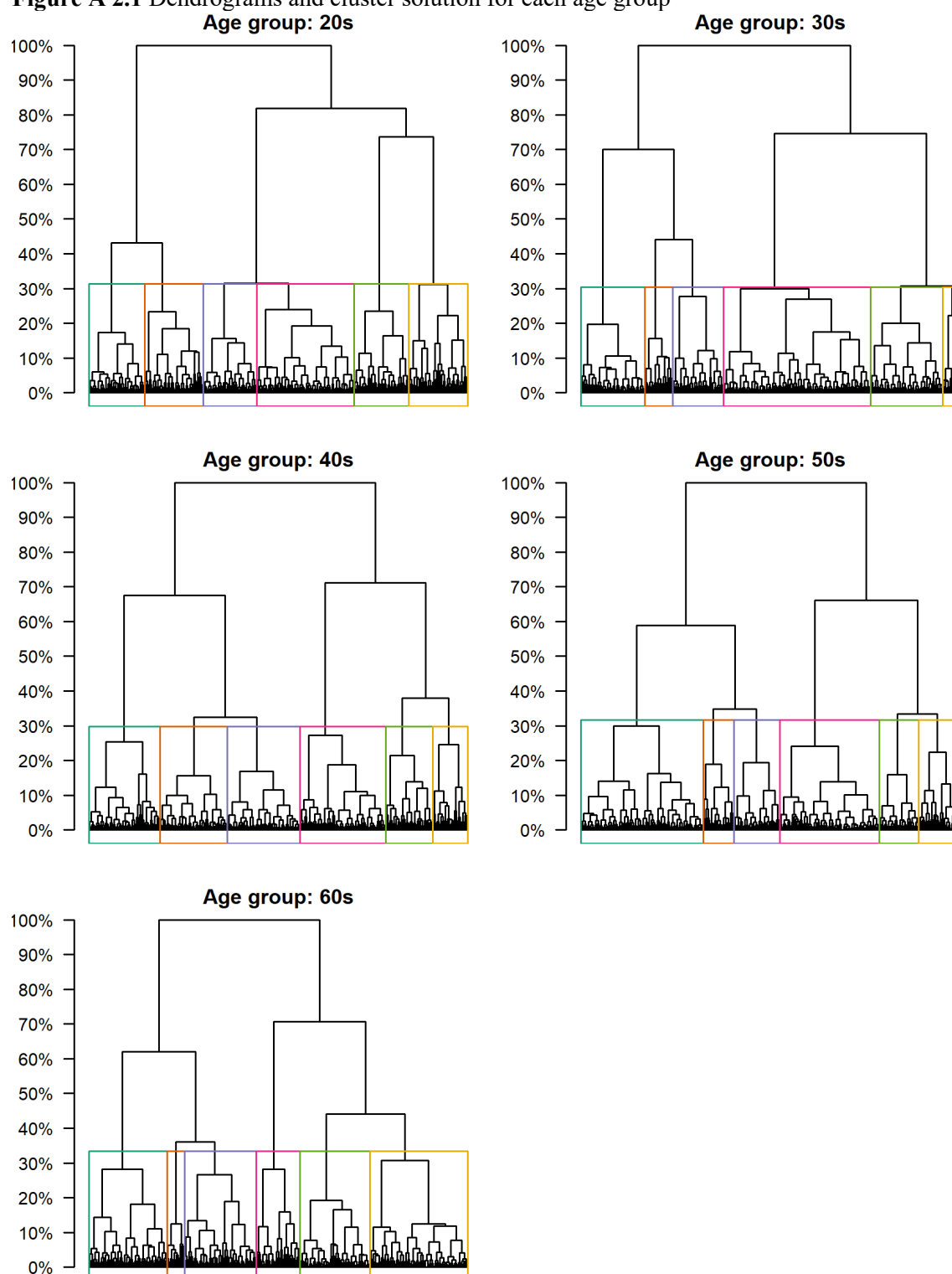
Source: Own work based on the Encuesta de Características Esenciales de la Población y Viviendas – 2021.

Table A 2.2. Row and column percentage for the crosstabulation of age groups and regions of origin

Age groups Cell content		Country / Region of birth						Total
		Africa	Asia and Europe	European Union	Latin America and the Caribbean	Spain	Spain - SG	
20 to 29	% row	1.7	2.4	1.6	6.4	79.1	8.7	100
	% column	13.7	11.4	10.6	16.3	17.2	65.1	
30 to 39	% row	3.3	5.1	2.7	9.7	77.3	1.9	100
	% column	29.4	27.4	20.6	28.2	19.1	16.0	
40 to 49	% row	3.0	4.3	3.1	8.0	80.9	0.8	100
	% column	34.9	30.5	30.7	30.6	26.5	8.8	
50 to 59	% row	1.6	3.6	3.2	5.3	85.6	0.7	100
	% column	17.7	23.3	29.7	18.9	25.9	6.9	
60 to 64	% row	0.9	2.7	2.2	4.0	89.4	0.7	100
	% column	4.3	7.4	8.4	6.0	11.3	3.2	

Source: Own work based on the Encuesta de Características Esenciales de la Población y Viviendas – 2021.

Figure A 2.1 Dendrograms and cluster solution for each age group



Source: Own work based on the Encuesta de Características Esenciales de la Población y Viviendas – 2021.

Table A 2.3 Age-group-specific clusters' composition. Ten years age group: 20s

Table A 2.5 Age-group-specific clusters' composition: Ten years age group: 20s							
Clusters	20s						Total
	1	2	3	4	5	6	
Educational attainment							
Primary and below	0.8	0.2	0.0	13.9	0.7	9.7	3.6
Secondary low	1.7	2.4	0.8	83.9	8.8	31.9	19.5
Secondary medium	20.1	21.1	13.0	0.3	28.9	22.1	17.5
Secondary vocational	1.1	5.6	30.7	0.3	20.7	10.1	12.2
Tertiary vocational	3.2	12.2	33.6	0.3	22.5	9.8	14.9
Tertiary low	14.7	21.7	17.3	0.8	11.7	7.3	13.3
Tertiary medium	39.3	23.8	3.6	0.4	4.6	5.4	12.6
Tertiary upper	19.2	13.0	1.0	0.1	2.2	3.8	6.4
Tenure status							
Inherited	4.5	6.6	7.4	10.9	12.8	5.9	8.1
Owner <20%	18.5	21.7	27.5	13.6	4.6	0.6	15.8
Owner <35%	1.7	3.4	18.3	7.2	7.6	0.7	7.1
Owner >35%	2.1	1.3	0.4	2.6	7.7	15.9	4.3
Owner other	3.2	6.7	6.9	8.6	13.1	10.9	8.2
Owner paid	57.3	47.2	24.4	29.5	37.3	15.5	35.6
Tenant <20%	6.0	6.5	5.9	13.1	3.7	2.6	6.4
Tenant <35%	2.1	5.6	9.1	11.3	8.7	2.2	6.9
Tenant >35%	4.6	0.9	0.0	3.3	4.5	45.7	7.5
Household income							
<1000	1.7	1.7	0.0	9.5	16.3	81.7	14.7
1000-1500	3.4	9.5	17.7	32.8	41.6	12.4	19.7
1500-2000	6.0	15.2	28.4	22.1	22.6	4.9	17.8
2000-2500	5.9	16.7	28.0	15.2	11.1	0.5	14.5
2500-3000	8.1	18.8	17.7	9.2	5.8	0.4	11.4
3000-5000	41.0	31.3	8.0	8.3	2.4	0.1	15.7
>5000	34.0	6.8	0.3	2.8	0.2	0.1	6.3
Occupation							
Unemployed	7.1	8.2	3.7	21.1	33.8	45.5	18.0
Inactive	1.5	1.1	0.8	6.9	1.9	3.7	2.5
Students	46.2	40.0	22.9	3.9	40.9	31.8	30.8
Elementary	0.6	0.0	0.0	62.4	0.0	6.5	10.8
Housework	0.1	0.2	0.3	5.3	0.5	2.9	1.4
Service	5.8	9.1	23.8	0.0	5.9	2.1	8.8
Education, Arts and Humanities	7.7	12.3	9.3	0.1	4.7	2.1	6.7
Social Sciences	9.3	7.5	5.7	0.1	3.1	1.4	4.7
Business and Law	9.1	7.0	5.6	0.1	2.1	1.0	4.3
Sciences, Technology and Engineering	12.7	14.6	28.0	0.0	7.1	3.0	12.0
Urbanization							
Less than 50k	19.7	38.1	57.3	56.2	52.5	37.4	44.8
50 to 100k	10.8	13.1	12.5	13.6	15.4	16.1	13.5
100 to 500k	21.8	26.5	23.9	18.6	23.4	25.6	23.6
500k or more	47.7	22.3	6.4	11.6	8.6	20.9	18.1

Parental educational attainment

Primary and below	2.0	9.1	12.4	37.0	16.4	26.8	16.7
Secondary low	3.4	22.3	44.6	46.9	41.3	35.9	33.1
Secondary medium	4.7	15.5	15.9	4.9	15.2	11.4	12.0
Secondary vocational	3.1	12.9	14.6	5.4	13.4	8.9	10.5
Tertiary vocational	3.2	10.0	8.7	2.1	7.9	3.7	6.6
Tertiary low	17.6	14.1	2.7	2.0	3.6	5.2	7.5
Tertiary upper	66.0	16.1	1.1	1.7	2.1	8.1	13.6

Multiple real estate properties

No	45.5	75.4	95.1	91.1	96.5	96.0	84.1
Yes	54.5	24.6	4.9	8.9	3.5	4.0	15.9

Total	16.2	22.0	16.1	17.6	13.1	15.1	100.0
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Source: Own work based on the Encuesta de Características Esenciales de la Población y Viviendas – 2021.

Table A 2.4 Age-group-specific clusters' composition. Ten years age group: 30s

Table A 2.4 Age-group-specific clusters' composition: Ten years age group: 30s							
Clusters	1	2	3	4	5	6	Total
Educational attainment							
Primary and below	0.4	0.0	0.1	13.0	0.5	26.9	5.5
Secondary low	0.9	0.9	1.3	85.4	3.2	66.8	25.1
Secondary medium	2.3	8.9	13.8	0.4	21.5	1.8	8.3
Secondary vocational	0.9	5.2	35.4	0.3	18.5	1.6	12.3
Tertiary vocational	1.9	10.9	31.1	0.2	16.6	0.6	12.3
Tertiary low	9.0	24.6	14.9	0.4	14.7	1.0	12.1
Tertiary medium	48.0	33.4	2.4	0.3	15.3	0.9	15.4
Tertiary upper	36.7	16.0	1.0	0.0	9.7	0.3	9.1
Tenure status							
Inherited	6.2	6.2	7.9	8.1	6.5	10.3	7.5
Owner <20%	26.0	34.9	24.8	24.9	0.7	1.0	22.2
Owner <35%	1.3	6.8	21.1	13.8	1.7	1.4	10.0
Owner >35%	0.7	0.9	1.8	1.6	14.5	12.5	3.9
Owner other	8.4	10.6	11.4	9.5	17.4	14.1	11.4
Owner paid	30.6	21.4	13.1	20.4	12.2	16.8	18.7
Tenant <20%	13.6	9.6	5.2	10.6	1.4	3.8	7.7
Tenant <35%	8.3	9.6	14.4	11.1	4.9	6.8	10.2
Tenant >35%	4.8	0.0	0.1	0.0	40.7	33.3	8.4
Household income							
<1000	2.2	0.4	1.4	3.9	58.4	65.6	14.5
1000-1500	4.3	8.9	24.3	28.9	25.7	26.9	19.9
1500-2000	6.4	16.0	28.8	25.5	8.4	5.0	18.1
2000-2500	7.6	18.1	25.3	19.3	3.2	1.0	15.6
2500-3000	10.5	22.0	14.7	11.4	2.8	0.6	12.5
3000-5000	44.2	31.0	5.4	8.1	1.2	0.5	15.2
>5000	24.8	3.7	0.0	2.9	0.4	0.3	4.3
Occupation							
Unemployed	7.1	6.0	12.0	8.0	38.6	50.5	16.1
Inactive	2.5	2.4	1.8	5.5	2.8	7.5	3.4
Students	2.9	1.5	0.9	0.2	3.7	0.8	1.4
Elementary	0.4	0.1	0.0	81.0	0.0	33.3	19.9
Housework	1.4	1.2	1.6	5.4	2.6	7.9	3.0
Service	10.8	15.4	24.7	0.0	11.2	0.0	12.0
Education, Arts and Humanities	17.3	20.7	8.9	0.0	10.9	0.0	10.0
Social Sciences	18.4	15.4	7.4	0.0	7.4	0.0	8.2
Business and Law	16.7	11.1	7.5	0.0	6.9	0.0	7.0
Sciences, Technology and Engineering	22.5	26.3	35.2	0.0	16.0	0.0	18.9
Urbanization							
Less than 50k	18.8	39.6	54.3	58.3	34.0	50.2	45.1
50 to 100k	10.1	13.4	13.6	13.2	15.1	16.5	13.5
100 to 500k	18.7	26.6	25.2	20.9	26.8	21.0	23.7
500k or more	52.4	20.4	6.9	7.7	24.0	12.3	17.7

Parental educational attainment

Primary and below	9.1	26.4	32.2	54.8	25.1	60.6	34.9
Secondary low	7.3	26.2	38.2	33.0	26.6	29.6	28.8
Secondary medium	6.1	13.1	13.5	5.0	14.1	3.5	9.9
Secondary vocational	5.5	9.8	9.1	3.0	12.1	3.3	7.4
Tertiary vocational	4.4	6.4	4.5	1.5	6.3	0.6	4.1
Tertiary low	16.8	9.6	2.2	1.2	7.3	1.2	5.8
Tertiary upper	50.8	8.6	0.5	1.5	8.5	1.2	9.1

Multiple real estate properties

No	70.9	87.4	97.7	92.4	96.6	96.9	91.1
Yes	29.1	12.6	2.3	7.6	3.4	3.1	8.9

Total	18.1	22.0	19.7	17.2	12.8	10.2	100.0
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Source: Own work based on the Encuesta de Características Esenciales de la Población y Viviendas – 2021.

Table A 2.5 Age-group-specific clusters' composition. Ten years age group: 40s

Table A 2.3 Age-group-specific clusters' composition: Ten years age group: 40s							
Clusters	40s						Total
	1	2	3	4	5	6	
Educational attainment							
Primary and below	0.4	0.1	0.0	13.3	0.5	30.0	6.2
Secondary low	0.4	0.4	0.9	84.4	4.0	66.2	25.9
Secondary medium	3.6	12.9	18.2	0.4	27.3	1.1	10.7
Secondary vocational	0.7	5.8	31.7	0.8	19.7	0.8	11.2
Tertiary vocational	2.0	11.9	30.9	0.4	17.4	0.3	12.1
Tertiary low	11.5	27.2	14.8	0.4	12.8	0.7	12.4
Tertiary medium	54.1	33.6	3.1	0.3	15.2	0.8	16.2
Tertiary upper	27.4	8.1	0.4	0.0	3.2	0.0	5.4
Tenure status							
Inherited	4.4	5.6	6.5	8.0	7.3	12.1	7.1
Owner <20%	40.5	44.1	27.2	25.9	1.1	2.2	26.9
Owner <35%	3.5	8.5	27.2	15.8	3.0	2.7	12.7
Owner >35%	2.3	1.1	2.7	2.1	25.2	15.5	5.9
Owner other	7.8	7.5	9.4	8.7	11.6	12.0	9.1
Owner paid	26.2	23.1	14.9	24.1	14.1	21.5	20.6
Tenant <20%	7.5	5.4	3.3	7.7	1.5	5.3	5.2
Tenant <35%	3.8	4.7	8.8	7.7	3.5	6.5	6.3
Tenant >35%	3.9	0.0	0.0	0.0	32.6	22.2	6.3
Household income							
<1000	1.1	0.2	0.6	1.4	54.1	64.1	13.2
1000-1500	3.0	7.2	23.1	28.8	26.9	25.1	19.0
1500-2000	4.6	13.3	29.1	26.2	11.8	7.3	18.0
2000-2500	4.2	17.4	25.5	19.6	3.0	1.5	15.1
2500-3000	10.5	20.8	16.5	13.1	2.2	0.9	12.9
3000-5000	47.5	37.3	5.2	8.4	1.4	0.6	17.0
>5000	29.2	3.8	0.0	2.5	0.6	0.5	4.8
Occupation							
Unemployed	4.1	3.9	9.0	5.9	43.6	45.0	14.1
Inactive	2.3	2.0	2.8	6.7	4.0	10.8	4.4
Students	0.5	0.2	0.2	0.0	1.1	0.3	0.3
Elementary	0.2	0.0	0.0	79.9	0.0	34.6	20.8
Housework	1.6	1.7	2.4	7.4	3.7	9.3	4.1
Service	11.4	13.1	22.1	0.0	10.5	0.0	10.5
Education, Arts and Humanities	16.0	19.5	8.9	0.0	9.6	0.0	9.3
Social Sciences	19.4	15.4	7.8	0.0	7.3	0.0	8.3
Business and Law	20.7	15.3	9.3	0.0	5.7	0.0	8.6
Sciences, Technology and Engineering	23.8	28.8	37.6	0.0	14.4	0.0	19.5
Urbanization							
Less than 50k	19.3	40.7	53.7	61.1	34.7	54.5	46.5
50 to 100k	11.7	13.8	14.0	12.6	15.2	13.7	13.5
100 to 500k	23.5	27.8	25.7	19.2	28.1	20.4	24.2
500k or more	45.5	17.8	6.6	7.0	22.0	11.4	15.7

Parental educational attainment

Primary and below	23.1	44.0	47.6	72.9	40.5	75.2	51.6
Secondary low	9.3	23.2	31.9	20.4	24.3	18.6	22.7
Secondary medium	6.2	9.1	8.1	2.8	10.6	1.9	6.6
Secondary vocational	5.8	7.9	6.8	1.5	7.9	1.6	5.4
Tertiary vocational	3.0	3.8	3.6	0.6	4.0	0.5	2.6
Tertiary low	13.7	6.9	1.7	0.9	5.8	1.0	4.4
Tertiary upper	38.9	5.1	0.4	1.1	6.9	1.1	6.7

Multiple real estate properties

No	66.2	84.5	97.3	90.4	95.7	96.3	89.2
Yes	33.8	15.5	2.7	9.6	4.3	3.7	10.8

Total	15.8	20.5	18.4	19.2	12.9	13.1	100.0
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Source: Own work based on the Encuesta de Características Esenciales de la Población y Viviendas – 2021.

Table A 2.6 Age-group-specific clusters' composition. Ten years age group: 50s

Table A 2.0 Age-group-specific clusters' composition: Ten years age group: 50s							
Clusters	50s						Total
	1	2	3	4	5	6	
Educational attainment							
Primary and below	0.1	0.0	0.0	16.1	29.0	12.5	9.7
Secondary low	1.4	0.8	1.3	82.8	62.9	18.2	33.3
Secondary medium	5.5	19.4	23.5	0.3	3.1	26.2	12.0
Secondary vocational	1.4	9.8	38.0	0.3	2.5	16.9	11.8
Tertiary vocational	1.7	11.5	24.5	0.0	0.8	9.8	8.5
Tertiary low	14.6	23.8	9.9	0.2	0.6	6.4	8.9
Tertiary medium	54.1	29.2	2.4	0.2	1.0	7.7	12.4
Tertiary upper	21.2	5.5	0.3	0.0	0.1	2.2	3.4
Tenure status							
Inherited	5.4	6.4	10.4	11.3	18.2	7.6	10.3
Owner <20%	25.0	25.9	19.0	18.0	3.3	0.8	16.9
Owner <35%	2.4	5.0	17.1	9.6	4.2	1.2	8.0
Owner >35%	2.8	2.1	4.1	0.9	9.3	22.0	5.0
Owner other	3.6	5.9	8.0	7.0	9.2	11.6	7.4
Owner paid	53.9	47.8	31.9	44.5	41.6	17.8	40.9
Tenant <20%	3.6	3.2	2.8	4.7	4.3	1.0	3.6
Tenant <35%	2.1	3.2	6.1	3.9	3.6	1.9	3.8
Tenant >35%	1.3	0.5	0.5	0.0	6.2	36.1	4.2
Household income							
<1000	1.9	1.4	2.7	0.5	48.3	78.0	14.8
1000-1500	2.6	7.3	23.1	26.3	32.1	16.2	19.6
1500-2000	3.3	13.0	28.1	25.0	10.7	3.8	17.3
2000-2500	4.3	16.5	24.3	20.1	3.8	0.9	14.7
2500-3000	7.6	20.3	15.6	13.0	2.5	0.7	11.9
3000-5000	41.3	35.2	6.1	11.3	1.6	0.4	15.6
>5000	39.0	6.3	0.1	3.8	1.0	0.0	6.2
Occupation							
Unemployed	4.1	5.6	10.9	1.7	42.4	58.7	15.4
Inactive	5.9	5.2	5.3	9.8	15.9	9.2	8.4
Students	0.1	0.1	0.2	0.0	0.0	0.5	0.1
Elementary	0.4	0.0	0.0	77.7	26.8	1.2	24.6
Housework	3.6	3.2	4.2	10.8	14.7	5.1	7.4
Service	10.5	12.0	21.2	0.0	0.0	5.0	8.2
Education, Arts and Humanities	19.3	21.9	9.5	0.0	0.0	6.7	8.8
Social Sciences	16.2	13.0	7.1	0.0	0.0	4.2	6.0
Business and Law	19.9	15.8	7.9	0.0	0.0	2.7	7.0
Sciences, Technology and Engineering	19.9	23.2	33.8	0.0	0.0	6.6	14.1
Urbanization							
Less than 50k	18.9	37.4	50.8	59.3	60.1	35.7	47.5
50 to 100k	12.2	13.7	13.5	11.6	12.2	16.4	12.9
100 to 500k	24.7	26.4	27.1	20.0	18.2	26.0	23.4
500k or more	44.2	22.5	8.5	9.1	9.5	21.8	16.2

Parental educational attainment

Primary and below	34.2	55.6	60.0	83.3	85.3	54.5	66.2
Secondary low	9.7	17.7	23.1	12.8	10.5	17.1	15.6
Secondary medium	5.1	6.9	6.2	1.3	1.2	8.0	4.3
Secondary vocational	5.3	5.8	6.0	1.0	1.0	7.3	3.9
Tertiary vocational	3.4	3.1	2.7	0.3	0.3	2.9	1.9
Tertiary low	12.9	5.7	1.7	0.8	0.6	5.2	3.4
Tertiary upper	29.5	5.1	0.3	0.5	1.1	5.2	4.6

Multiple real estate properties

No	43.2	75.1	95.3	83.5	92.9	94.2	82.7
Yes	56.8	24.9	4.7	16.5	7.1	5.8	17.3

Total	13.7	20.4	17.4	24.5	14.2	9.8	100.0
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Source: Own work based on the Encuesta de Características Esenciales de la Población y Viviendas – 2021.

Table A 2.7 Age-group-specific clusters' composition. Ten years age group: 60s

Table A 2.7 Age-group-specific clusters' composition: Ten years age group: 60s							
Clusters	60s						Total
	1	2	3	4	5	6	
Educational attainment							
Primary and below	1.2	0.3	0.1	23.5	48.1	26.4	18.2
Secondary low	2.3	1.6	3.1	74.3	47.9	25.4	34.1
Secondary medium	5.9	22.0	28.1	0.2	1.8	19.6	11.3
Secondary vocational	1.1	9.9	33.8	0.4	0.7	11.7	8.9
Tertiary vocational	1.1	7.9	18.0	0.1	0.4	6.8	5.2
Tertiary low	13.6	26.4	13.3	1.0	0.5	4.4	8.8
Tertiary medium	52.3	27.2	3.2	0.5	0.6	4.6	10.5
Tertiary upper	22.5	4.8	0.4	0.0	0.1	1.2	3.0
Tenure status							
Inherited	5.4	7.2	12.8	13.3	20.1	13.6	12.7
Owner <20%	14.6	13.8	9.2	10.0	1.9	1.0	8.7
Owner <35%	1.5	3.3	13.5	5.8	2.2	1.5	5.3
Owner >35%	2.2	1.5	4.6	0.5	5.5	17.4	3.9
Owner other	2.3	3.9	7.3	5.2	9.1	10.9	6.3
Owner paid	69.4	65.0	43.8	59.4	55.1	26.5	54.9
Tenant <20%	1.6	3.1	1.9	3.3	2.3	1.5	2.5
Tenant <35%	0.8	1.9	5.9	2.5	2.1	0.8	2.6
Tenant >35%	2.2	0.4	1.2	0.0	1.8	26.8	3.1
Household income							
<1000	2.4	1.9	3.8	0.4	49.2	85.3	17.7
1000-1500	1.5	7.5	24.2	26.5	31.1	10.4	20.0
1500-2000	4.0	14.0	26.2	26.2	10.9	2.8	17.3
2000-2500	5.0	15.9	24.4	20.2	3.4	0.7	14.1
2500-3000	7.1	17.6	14.7	12.8	1.8	0.2	10.3
3000-5000	40.4	37.3	6.3	11.4	2.1	0.5	14.9
>5000	39.7	5.8	0.4	2.6	1.4	0.1	5.6
Occupation							
Unemployed	2.8	5.3	14.1	2.3	27.8	62.3	14.8
Inactive	29.6	34.8	25.2	30.9	34.2	21.7	30.3
Students	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0
Elementary	0.4	0.0	0.2	50.8	17.8	2.1	18.7
Housework	4.2	5.2	5.8	16.0	20.2	7.1	11.3
Service	15.7	12.7	15.2	0.0	0.0	1.1	6.3
Education, Arts and Humanities	13.0	16.3	9.0	0.0	0.0	2.0	5.7
Social Sciences	11.9	7.6	4.6	0.0	0.0	1.4	3.3
Business and Law	11.0	7.0	6.5	0.0	0.0	1.0	3.4
Sciences, Technology and Engineering	11.4	11.0	19.4	0.0	0.0	1.1	6.3
Urbanization							
Less than 50k	17.2	36.5	47.4	59.2	58.7	43.6	48.1
50 to 100k	11.4	14.4	14.7	10.8	12.0	15.4	12.8
100 to 500k	22.5	28.4	27.5	21.1	18.3	28.2	23.7
500k or more	48.8	20.7	10.3	8.9	11.0	12.8	15.4

Parental educational attainment

Primary and below	38.3	60.6	61.1	87.9	91.5	67.8	73.1
Secondary low	8.4	14.4	20.8	9.8	6.5	15.1	12.2
Secondary medium	6.0	5.8	6.7	0.8	0.4	5.5	3.5
Secondary vocational	4.3	5.3	5.9	0.6	0.4	4.3	2.9
Tertiary vocational	3.7	3.0	2.8	0.2	0.2	2.2	1.6
Tertiary low	12.0	6.0	2.1	0.3	0.4	2.5	2.8
Tertiary upper	27.3	4.9	0.6	0.5	0.7	2.6	3.8

Multiple real estate properties

No	30.4	61.2	93.0	76.2	88.5	95.2	76.4
Yes	69.6	38.8	7.0	23.8	11.5	4.8	23.6

Total	13.6	18.9	16.6	26.2	15.9	8.7	100.0
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Source: Own work based on the Encuesta de Características Esenciales de la Población y Viviendas – 2021.

~ Chapter 3 ~

Migration and Social Stratification in Catalonia: Origin, Age and Social Position

Carlos Ruiz-Ramos

Andreu Domingo

Rocío Treviño

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Abstract

Catalonia has recently undergone profound economic and social transformations, becoming the primary destination for international migration to Spain. The convergence of these two processes has altered the demographic and social reproduction systems, thereby modifying the social stratification system. Departing from an intersectional perspective, our aim is to identify the characteristics of the social stratification system and to analyse the role of immigration within it. We draw on data from the ECV 2023 and apply Geometric Data Analysis. The interaction of multiple axes of inequality reveals the concentration of migrant population in the most socially disadvantaged strata, as well as the “upward” and “downward” displacement of different substrata of the native working-class.

3.1. From Demographic Reproduction to Social Reproduction

Between 2000 and 2023, coinciding with intensified economic globalisation, Catalonia became the primary destination for international migration to Spain. During this period, over three million immigrants arrived in the region in two major waves driven by the economic cycle: the first from 2000 to 2007, and the second from 2014 to the present. These migratory flows resulted in Catalonia’s population increasing from six to eight million in 25 years, raising the proportion of foreign-born residents from 2.9% to 25.1%. This positive net migration, coupled with negative natural growth—a result of very low fertility—has transformed Catalonia into a "Complex System of Demographic Reproduction," where net migration constitutes the only positive component of population growth.

This shift in demographic dynamics occurred alongside profound socio-economic transformations, such as deindustrialisation, the expansion of the service sector, the Great Recession, rising inequality, technological change, and population ageing—all of which have reshaped Catalonia's social structure. From the perspective of the host society, this singular migratory intensity stems primarily from two factors: 1) the dualisation of the labour market, which has spurred growth in low-value-added, labour-intensive sectors and low-skilled occupations such as construction, tourism, and intensive agriculture (De Haas & Fransen, 2018); and 2) the marketisation of reproductive labour within a context of accelerated population ageing and a relatively weak welfare state. Consequently, shifts in the demographic reproduction system due to massive migratory inflows have ultimately modified the social reproduction system, influencing the distribution of resources, opportunities, and inequalities.

This research pursues three objectives: first, to identify the characteristics of Catalonia's social stratification system and its primary axes of social differentiation; second, to analyse how the immigrant population is distributed within this structure according to origin; and third, given the significance of age and life-cycle stage in social stratification (Atkinson, 2024; Bourdieu, 1984), to focus on the main axes of inequality during the consolidation of adulthood (ages 30–39) as potential precursors of lifelong social differentiation processes. To this end, we adopt a multivariate perspective that considers the intersection of multiple factors beyond occupation and income. Specifically, we focus on two main axes: economic capital and cultural capital. Our approach incorporates both individual and household-level variables, as well as ascribed and achieved individual characteristics. This framework allows us to examine the material conditions under which individuals make decisions, accounting for: a) available resources defined by both individual and household means; and b) the opportunity structure within which individuals operate.

Based on this conceptual framework, we propose three hypotheses. The first (H1) posits that, beyond income, occupation, or educational level, it is the interaction of multiple factors that determines an individual's position within the stratification system; thus, we expect to find individuals with similar occupational levels in different social strata. The second hypothesis suggests that international migration has reshaped various social strata, yielding two specific outcomes: first (H2a), due to the segmented assimilation of immigrants into a highly dualised labour market, there is a concentration of immigrants

in low-skilled, low-value-added activities (Cachón Rodríguez, 2022), alongside other forms of social disadvantage such as barriers to housing access (Delclós, 2023) and wealth accumulation (Agius Vallejo & Keister, 2020; Cobb-Clark & Hildebrand, 2006). The second sub-hypothesis (H2b) contemplates a parallel process of displacement of segments of the native working class, leading to a substratum composed primarily of immigrants but also of native-born individuals excluded from the benefits of global economic transformations. Finally, the third hypothesis (H3) argues that the specific characteristics of the 30–39 age group and their life-cycle stage will cause the axes of social stratification to differ from those of the general population, reducing the relative importance of factors like education while accentuating the centrality of housing tenure.

This research aims to contribute to a better understanding of social stratification and the role of migration in social reproduction dynamics. While numerous studies address the vulnerability of immigrants, research examining their social position through the confluence of social (dis)advantages remains scarce. Furthermore, narrowing the analytical focus to the 30–39 age group allows us to shed light on stratification factors during the consolidation of adulthood and the primary mechanisms by which inequalities are reproduced across the life course.

We utilise the 2023 Living Conditions Survey (ECV), employing Geometric Data Analysis and Cluster Analysis to inductively model the Catalan social space of inequalities and identify social strata in it. We subsequently focus on the social subspace of individuals aged 30 to 39 to analyse population distribution across strata by origin.

3.2. Theoretical Framework

Theoretic production regarding social stratification and the concept of social class has been profoundly altered by economic globalisation driven by neoliberalism, the subsequent questioning of these models after the Great Recession, and by recent accelerated and diversified migratory flows. Between the mid-1990s and early 2000s, debate on the "death of class" gained prominence (Grusky, 2001; Wright, 2015). Authors such as Pakulski and Waters (1996) questioned the analytical relevance of the concept, arguing that the increasing complexity of contemporary Western societies has given rise to new social divisions and identities that class cannot capture.

However, the Great Recession and rising inequality (Goldthorpe, 2012) have sparked renewed interest in social stratification. In the most widely used class schemes—whether

neo-Marxist (Wright, 2005b) or neo-Weberian (Erikson & Goldthorpe, 1992)—occupation remains the fundamental structural axis, as it concentrates primary economic and symbolic resources. Yet, this focus excludes population groups not integrated into the labour market and privileges a unidimensional view of resources, often ignoring the sociodemographic heterogeneity of the populations studied (Bergman & Joye, 2005). At the turn of the century, Bergman and Joye (2001) highlighted the importance of considering large-scale social changes driven by migration and globalisation when operationalising social class. These processes have transformed the form, function, and centrality of work. Phenomena such as labour precarity, technological change, and the rise of the "asset economy"—particularly driven by housing inflation—have partially displaced labour as the primary determinant of social position (Adkins et al., 2020). All these elements constitute key factors that must be considered in theoretical and methodological debates on social class and social stratification.

The profound economic restructuring in Spain and Catalonia since the 1980s initiated a process of polarisation, resulting in the growth of both advanced economic sectors and labour-intensive, low-productivity sectors. This dualisation of labour demand was accompanied by successive labour reforms that segmented the labour market, distinguishing between more recent entrants—primarily women, young people, and migrants—exposed to greater precarity, and a primary labour segment with better protection and career prospects (Molina & López-Roldán, 2015). De Haas identifies these elements—polarisation and segmentation—as key determinants of migratory flows (De Haas et al., 2019; De Haas & Fransen, 2018). Building on Piore (1979), De Haas notes that in Global North economies, labour market dualisation, educational expansion, and population ageing create a structural demand for immigrant labour, which tends to be situated in the most disadvantaged occupational strata.

In response to these dynamics, Balibar and Wallerstein (1991) suggested that the categorisation of "the immigrant" could lead to the "disintegration of class consciousness," rearticulating stratification not only in economic terms but also through ethno-cultural differences that naturalise inequality. Similarly, regarding the emergence of a low-skilled service worker stratum in Spain, Bernardi and Garrido (2008) find difficulties in the articulation of class consciousness due to high heterogeneity and significantly different life trajectories among members of the same stratum.

This restructuring suggests that occupation-only approaches to stratification are inherently limited. A broader framework is required to illuminate the intersections of multiple axes of inequality (class, ethnicity, gender, and age). Such an approach better addresses the complexity of social divisions in contemporary societies (Anthias, 2001; Grusky, 2001).

In this regard, Pierre Bourdieu's (1987) theoretical framework provides powerful analytical tools to address social class from a multidimensional and intersectional perspective. This framework considers both achieved characteristics—such as educational credentials or wealth—and ascribed characteristics, such as sex, age, or origin. Bourdieu conceives the social world as a "multidimensional space" that can be empirically reconstructed by identifying the primary factors of differentiation. In this social space, individuals are positioned according to three fundamental axes: total volume of capital, the relative composition of capital types, and their social trajectory. Unlike unidimensional or occupational perspectives, solely based on a single characteristic, the Bourdieusian approach defines social position through the structure of relations between all relevant dimensions of the social space.

While occupational classification schemes such as EGP or ESeG (Meron et al., 2014) remain operationally valid and heuristically powerful (Marqués-Perales et al., 2024; Requena et al., 2011), Bourdieu's approach has been sparsely incorporated into the analysis of social structuring in Spain and Catalonia, with a few pioneering exceptions (Fachelli & López-Roldán, 2022; Subirats et al., 2012). This approach has seen greater implementation in countries like the UK (Savage et al., 2013a), Germany (Atkinson & Schmitz, 2024), the US (Atkinson, 2022), and Norway (Hansen et al., 2009; Toft, 2018), contributing significantly to debates on class conceptualisation and the main axes of social differentiation in contemporary societies.

Available literature highlights that migration, within the context of globalisation and the transition to a post-industrial economy, has intensified social polarisation and internal fragmentation of specific strata in destination countries (Bernardi & Garrido, 2008a; Stanek & Requena, 2019). Given this complexity, we anticipate that an approach transcending occupational hierarchy will enhance our understanding of contemporary societies (H1). Furthermore, labour segmentation (Cachón Rodríguez, 2003) and social/residential exclusion (Delclós, 2023) lead us to predict that the foreign-born population will concentrate in the most disadvantaged social strata (H2a). These trends—

educational expansion, shifts in the productive structure, and changes in labour and housing markets—have also affected the native population, shifting the position of certain segments into disadvantaged strata (H2b) (Tezanos, 2001). As these trends affect age groups differently (López-Andreu & Verd, 2016; Martínez del Olmo, 2024), we expect to find particularities in the social stratification of the 30–39 age group compared to the general population (H3).

3.3. Data and Methods

3.3.1. Data Sources

We use data from the 2023 Living Conditions Survey (Encuesta de Condiciones de Vida - ECV), which is part of the *EU Statistics on Income and Living Conditions* (EU-SILC). This survey provides information on living conditions, income, housing, and employment, allowing for the measurement of inequality and material deprivation at both individual and household levels. Since 2016, a collaboration between the INE and IDESCAT has provided a boosted sample for Catalonia, ensuring robust and representative results. Our analytical sample is restricted to individuals aged 25 and over, resulting in 10,665 observations. A specific request for INE microdata enabled us to obtain more detailed information regarding the individuals' country of birth.

3.3.2. Analytical Strategy

To identify the social stratification system in Catalonia, we propose a three-phase procedure:

Multiple Correspondence Analysis (MCA)

To incorporate a multidimensional and intersectional approach, we use MCA, a method popularised by Bourdieu (Le Roux & Rouanet, 2010). This method captures stratification dynamics by identifying the primary axes of social differentiation among population groups. MCA is frequently used in stratification studies (Blasius et al., 2019b; Branson et al., 2024; Hugrée et al., 2022) because it accounts for the interaction between multiple categories of advantage and disadvantage beyond single variables like education or income.

Similar to Principal Component Analysis, MCA is a dimensionality reduction method applied to categorical variables (Greenacre, 2007). It reduces the number of dimensions by creating linear combinations of the original variables that capture the maximum

variance. The combination that captures the highest percentage of the overall variances becomes the first factorial axis. The result is a multidimensional space where individuals are projected based on their responses.

We utilise seven categorical variables: degree of urbanisation, educational attainment, household income per consumption unit, housing tenure, housing conditions, position in the European Socio-economic Groups (ESeG) scheme (Meron et al., 2014), and accumulated wealth. Housing conditions are measured as a sum of privations (noise, pollution, insecurity, structural issues, and ability to maintain adequate temperature). Income is calculated as annual net household income divided by consumption units and distributed by quintiles. Wealth serves as a proxy for housing value (for owners) and total assets for others.

These variables capture characteristics at both the individual and household levels, a perspective adopted in previous research (Fachelli & López-Roldán, 2022) to capture resources and opportunity structures that individual-level variables might obscure. Collectively, these variables comprise 32 categories and 30,720 possible response combinations, allowing MCA to detect response patterns and group individuals in a factorial space. Those with similar profiles appear closer together, while those with differing characteristics are distant. An intersectional lens is achieved by introducing sex, age group, and origin as supplementary variables; these do not construct the factorial space but are projected onto it to observe their distribution and interaction.

Class-Specific Analysis (CSA)

Examining age and stratification simultaneously using cross-sectional data poses a conceptual challenge, as social position may reflect life-cycle stage rather than fixed status (Atkinson, 2024; Dowd, 1981). Focusing on a specific age group addresses this issue while allowing for comparison with the general population. We use CSA—an extension of MCA—to analyse the social subspace of individuals aged 30 to 39. This allows for the identification of social differentiation axes for a specific subgroup within a broader structure (Le Roux & Rouanet, 2004), detecting dynamics that may affect certain groups uniquely.

Cluster Analysis

Finally, we use Cluster Analysis to identify groups of individuals with similar characteristics and living conditions. We employ hierarchical clustering followed by K-

means refinement. The number of clusters is determined using the Within-Cluster Sum of Squares (WSS) and Gap Statistic (Tibshirani et al., 2001), with 95% confidence ellipses applied to ensure model robustness.

3.4. Results

Table 3.1 displays the distribution of individuals based on the variables defining the social space for both the general sample (≥ 25 years) and the 30–39 age group. Remarkable similarities exist in sex composition, spatial distribution (urban/rural), and exposure to housing precarity. However, the foreign-born population represents 15% of the general sample but 28% of the younger subgroup.

In the 30–39 group, over half of the individuals have reached tertiary education, compared to 38.0% in the broader sample. Conversely, the proportion with primary education or less is only 6.7%, compared to 17.0% in the general group. This highlights the process of educational expansion in Spain and Catalonia (Esteve & Cortina, 2010), which has also prompted a shift in the productive structure toward more high-skilled occupations.

Table 3.1 also shows life-cycle differences regarding income and assets. In the 30–39 group, the share in the top income quintile is lower than in the general group. This translates into lower asset levels and a significantly higher prevalence of renting.

Table 3.1 Frequencies distribution of the analytical samples

Variables	Aged 25 or more		Aged 30 to 39	
	N = 10.665	%	N = 1.382	%
Gender				
Man	5117	48.0	657	48.0
Woman	5548	52.0	725	52.0
Age group				
<30	510	4.8	-	-
30-39	1382	13.0	1382	100.0
40-49	2292	21.0	-	-
50-59	2391	22.0	-	-
60-69	1942	18.0	-	-
≥ 70	2148	20.0	-	-
Region of birth				
Spain	9089	85.0	997	72.0
Rest EU	297	2.8	61	4.4
Other Europe	109	1.0	26	1.9
Asia	102	1.0	32	2.3
Latin America	711	6.7	176	13.0

Africa	357	3.3	90	6.5
<i>Rural-Urban</i>				
Urban	5149	48.0	653	47.0
Intermediate	3685	35.0	478	35.0
Rural	1831	17.0	251	18.0
<i>Education level</i>				
Primary or less	1846	17.0	92	6.7
1 st stage secondary	2197	21.0	270	20.0
2 nd stage secondary	2589	24.0	293	21.0
Tertiary	4033	38.0	727	53.0
<i>Income per consumption unit (quintile)</i>				
1	1893	18.0	291	21.0
2	2071	19.0	277	20.0
3	2174	20.0	294	21.0
4	2228	21.0	278	20.0
5	2299	22.0	242	18.0
<i>Housing tenure</i>				
Owner w/ mortgage	3228	30.0	474	34.0
Owner w/out mortgage	4913	46.0	316	23.0
Other	552	5.2	111	8.0
Rent	1972	18.0	481	35.0
<i>Housing precarity</i>				
0	5510	52.0	678	49.0
1	3054	29.0	388	28.0
2	1348	13.0	212	15.0
+3	753	7.1	104	7.5
<i>ESeG</i>				
1_2 Manag/Professional	1614	15.0	314	23.0
3 Technicians	907	8.5	192	14.0
4 Small entrepreneurs	667	6.3	85	6.2
5 Clerks and skilled service	1033	9.7	175	13.0
6 Industrial skilled employees	877	8.2	157	11.0
7 Less skilled employees	978	9.2	199	14.0
8 Retired >= 65	3000	28.0	0	0.0
9 Unemployed < 65	1589	15.0	260	19.0
<i>Wealth (quartile)</i>				
1	2671	25.0	613	44.0
2	4747	45.0	493	36.0
3	2450	23.0	226	16.0
4	797	7.5	50	3.6

Source: Own work based on the ECV 2023.

We now analyse the social space resulting from the MCA and the social strata obtained via Cluster Analysis. Subsequently, we compare the stratification schemes of the general

population and the 30–39 group and discuss the position of the immigrant population within them.

3.4.1. The Social Stratification System in Catalonia

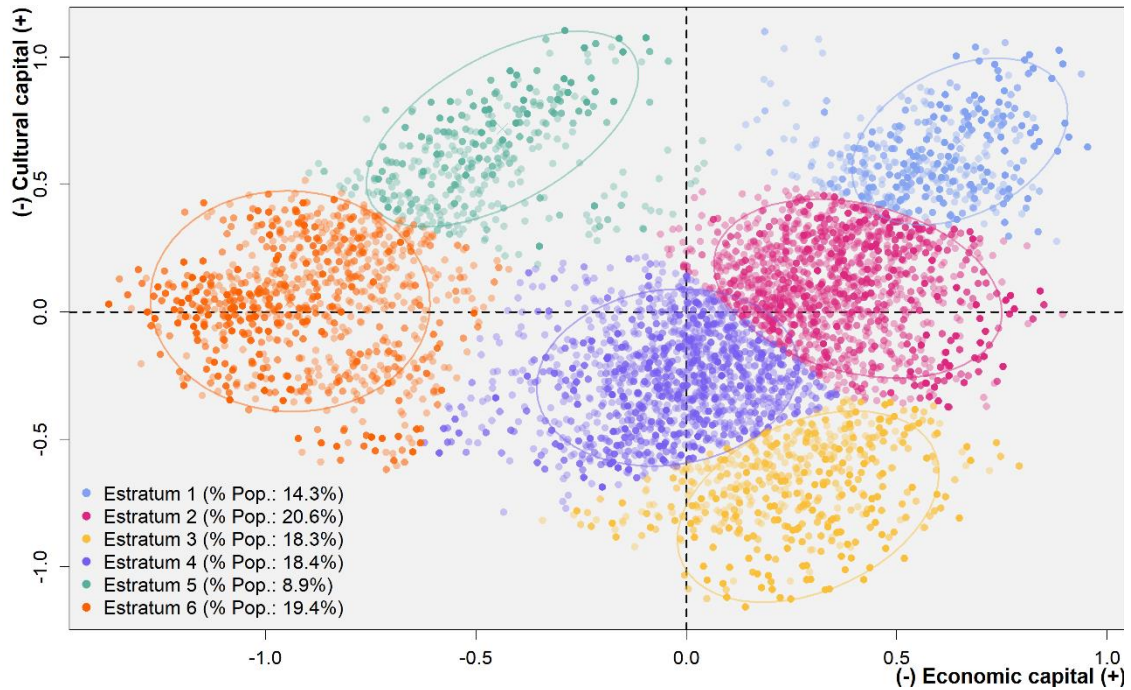
The MCA results describe a social space for the population aged 25 and over constituted by two primary axes capturing 86.8% of the model's total inertia (variance). We thus reduce the dimensions from seven to two while retaining substantial explanatory power. In this two-dimensional space, each individual is assigned coordinates based on their living conditions.

We distinguish between two axes: Economic and Cultural. The first is defined by assets, housing tenure, and income. The second is defined by ESeG position and educational level (see Table A3.1 in the Appendix).

The Economic Capital axis opposes low-income individuals, renters, and those with few assets (negative side) against those in the top income quintile with mortgaged or outright-owned property and medium-high asset levels (positive side). The Cultural Capital axis contrasts individuals with primary education or less in elementary occupations (lower part) against those with higher education and professional occupations (upper part).

Clustering this social space yields six strata, ordered by descending confluence of social advantages. The first stratum (Figure 3.1, pale blue) occupies the upper right, characterised by high levels of both economic and cultural capital. Representing 14.3% of the population, it consists of mostly urban residents with higher education. 87.8% are in the top income quintiles, and nearly all are homeowners (68.1% mortgaged, 31.7% outright). 85.0% fall within the top three ESeG categories.

Figure 3.1 Social space of individuals aged 25 and above



Source: Own work based on EU-SILC 2023.

The second stratum is the largest (20.6%). While most have higher education (60.4%), this is lower than the first stratum (95.7%). Proportions of high-income and high-asset individuals are also lower. Overrepresented occupations include technicians, small business owners, and skilled service personnel. The higher prevalence of outright homeownership (59.5%) is due to a higher mean age compared to the first stratum.

The third stratum (18%) consists almost entirely (92.3%) of retirees over 65. Reflecting the Catalan context of recent decades, they have lower educational levels but achieved economic stability through homeownership and asset accumulation.

The fourth stratum (18.4%) is distinguished by an overrepresentation of industrial workers (17.6%), elementary occupations (21.3%), and small employers (10.5%). High rates of unemployment and inactivity (33.8%) may relate to their concentration in intermediate and rural areas with limited job opportunities (Izcara & Andrade, 2012). Despite labour market difficulties, 96.3% are homeowners, often in precarious conditions.

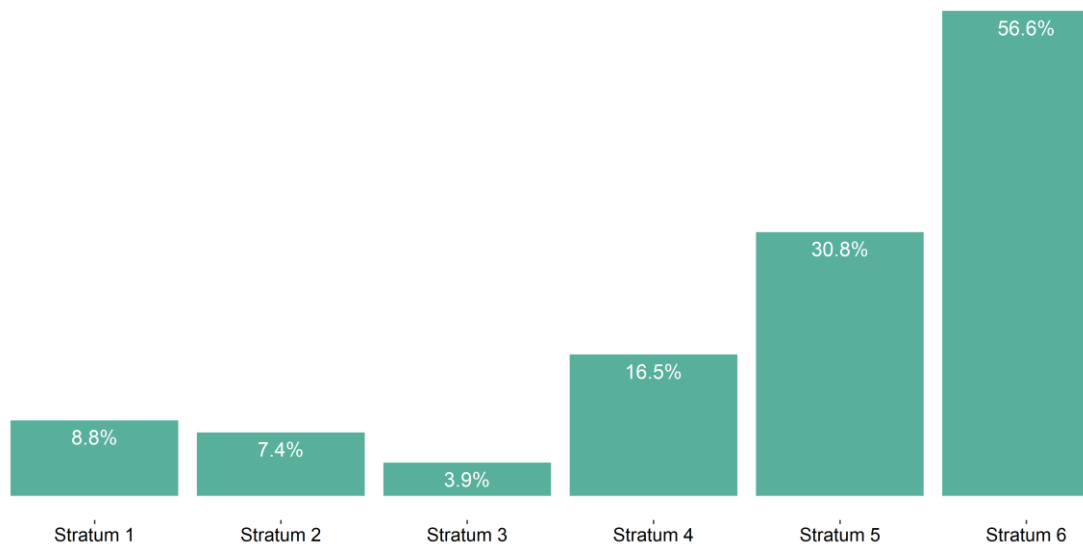
The fifth stratum (8.9%) shares characteristics with the first (urban, highly educated, skilled occupations, high income) but comprises younger individuals without access to homeownership.

Finally, the sixth stratum (19.4%) sociodemographically resembles the fourth regarding occupation and education. However, this group suffers from more social disadvantages: three out of four are in the lowest income quintiles, and homeownership is almost non-existent (2.4%). This results in higher exposure to housing precariousness (62.4%).

3.4.2. The Place of International Immigration in the Social Stratification System

Having analysed the axes of social differentiation and the social strata, we turn to the role of international immigration within the social stratification system. Figure 3.2 shows the percentage of foreign-born individuals within each stratum.

Figure 3.2 Percentage of foreign-born population by social stratum



Source: Own work based on EU-SILC 2023.

As shown in Figure 3.2, the distribution of the immigrant population is not homogeneous; rather, it is concentrated within the three strata facing the greatest difficulties in labour and housing market access. This is especially evident in the sixth stratum, where migrants constitute more than half of the members. As previously noted, while this stratum sociodemographically resembles the fourth, it suffers from a greater confluence of disadvantages associated with discriminatory dynamics affecting the migrant population, such as the limited recognition of cultural capital and labour market segmentation (Restifo et al., 2023; Veira et al., 2011).

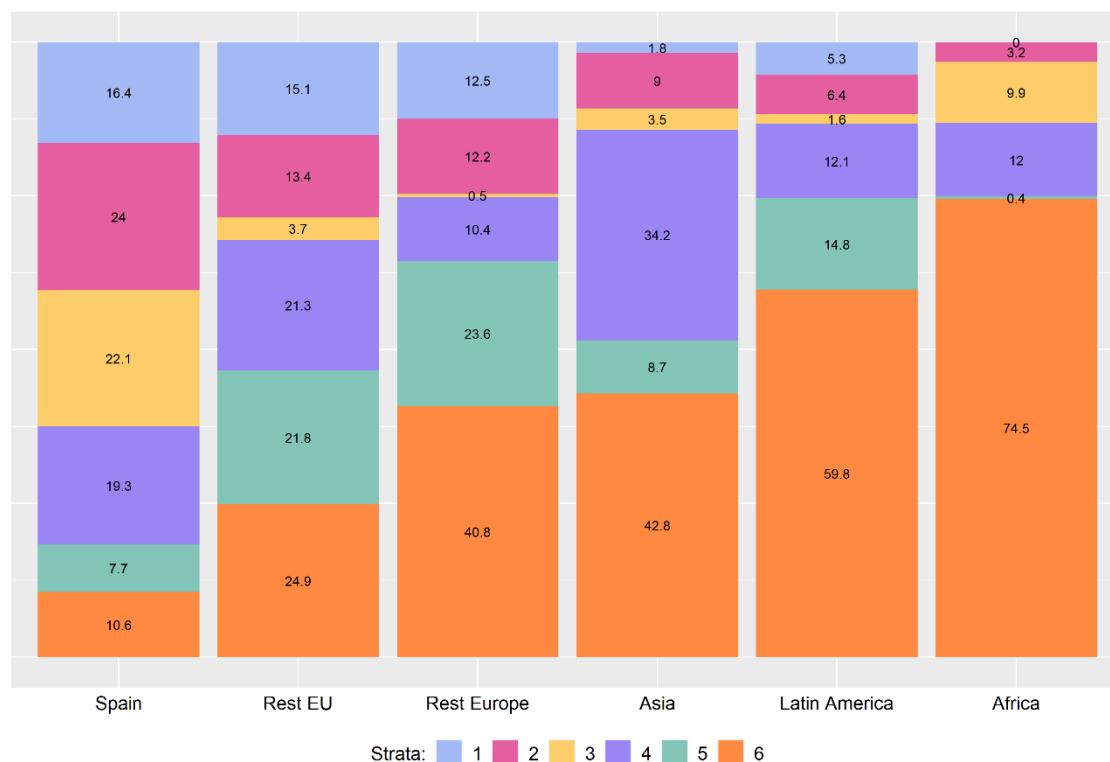
Conversely, significant percentages of the foreign-born population are also found in the top strata, suggesting that the region of birth subsumes the native-immigrant divide as an

axis of stratification. In the third stratum, the relatively recent nature of migratory dynamics in Catalonia means that the weight of the elderly immigrant population remains low compared to other European countries.

Figure 3.3 shows a clear gradient by origin within the most disadvantaged strata. While approximately one in ten Spanish-born individuals belongs to the sixth stratum, this proportion reaches 59.8% and 74.5% among those born in Latin America and Africa, respectively. This gradient is reversed in the most privileged strata: 40.4% of the Spanish-born population is situated within these two strata, far exceeding the figures for those from Asia (10.8%), Latin America (11.7%), and Africa (3.2%).

Among the group of young professionals (Stratum 5), we find a marked overrepresentation of individuals born in Europe and Latin America. In contrast, similar to Strata 1 and 2, the African-born population is largely excluded from this stratum characterised by high cultural capital. This highlights the substantial barriers this group faces in their incorporation into Catalan society, regarding economic and cultural capital as well as access to the labour and housing markets.

Figure 3.3 Population distribution by origin and social strata



Source: Own work based on EU-SILC 2023.

These dynamics demonstrate how the incorporation of migrants is heavily conditioned by structural factors such as national origin, the recognition of cultural capital, and segmentation within the labour and housing markets.

3.4.3. The Stratification System in the Consolidation of Adulthood (Ages 30 to 39)

Class Specific Analysis (CSA) allows us to relate the social space of the general adult population (aged 25+) to the subspace composed of individuals aged 30 to 39. This is particularly relevant as it is the age group with the highest proportion of foreign-born residents. From a life-course perspective, this age group represents the stage of consolidation of adulthood, coinciding with the average age of transition to parenthood, the peak period for household formation, and the stabilisation of professional trajectories (Gilsanz, 2014). This stage is thus characterised by the crystallisation of inequalities that will be reproduced throughout the lives of individuals and households. Analysing social stratification factors at this stage allows us to identify the primary mechanisms of inequality reproduction that accumulate over the life course.

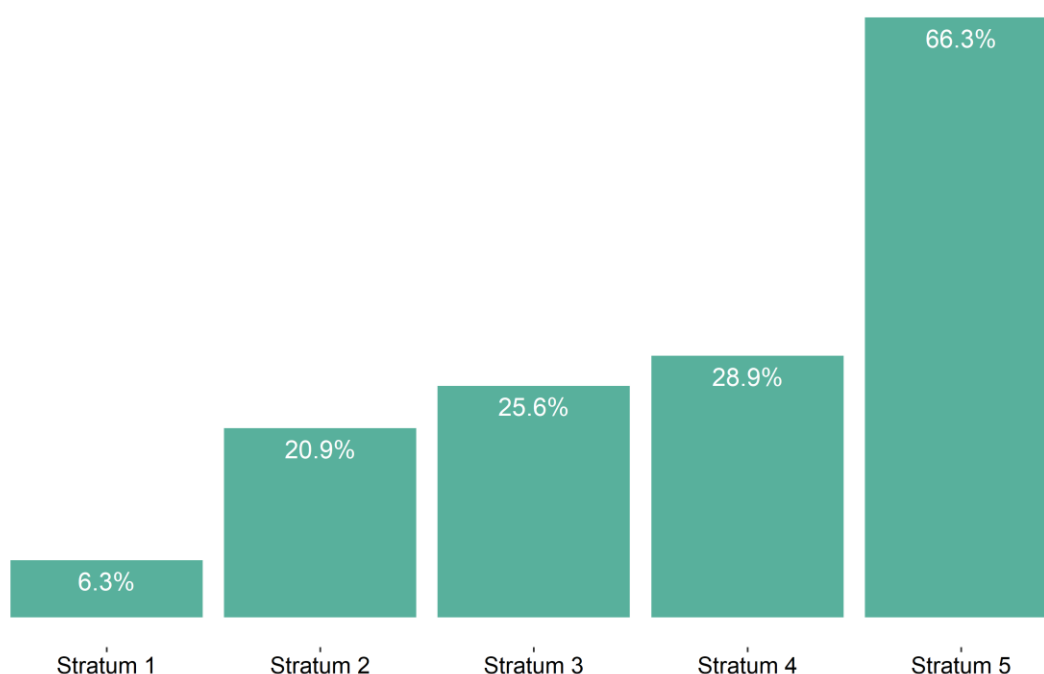
The CSA produces a social subspace with two axes that capture 73.3% of the inertia (variance). Comparing the composition of these axes with the general social space reveals how stratification operates within each. In the 30–39 age group, a more homogeneous distribution of educational levels reduces the significance of education as a factor of social differentiation. A similar trend is observed with income; the shorter work histories of the 30–39 subgroup compared to the general population result in lower income dispersion, meaning that income differences carry less weight in stratification. Conversely, higher occupational polarisation and varied modes of housing access mean these two variables gain prominence as stratification factors in the new social space.

Consequently, the first axis remains an axis of Economic Capital, though with less weight given to income and greater relevance to occupation, while the second axis is largely determined by housing tenure. Clustering the subspace identifies five strata, again ordered by descending confluence of social advantages. These strata are closely aligned with those of the general space, once the elderly population (Stratum 3 in the general space) is excluded.

The identified strata are as follows:

- Stratum 1 (18.2% of the total): Individuals with tertiary education, high income and asset levels, skilled occupations, and homeownership.
- Stratum 2 (21.3%): Homeowners with intermediate incomes and occupations.
- Stratum 3 (11.9%): Overrepresentation of residents in rural and intermediate areas, with low-to-medium educational and income levels, a high prevalence of unemployment and self-employment, and homeownership.
- Stratum 4 (16.8%): Similar to Stratum 1 but with lower income and assets and no access to homeownership.
- Stratum 5 (31.9%): Higher educational credentials than Stratum 3 and lower unemployment, but with lower average incomes and a lack of homeownership.

Figure 3.4 Percentage of foreign-born population by social stratum. Subspace 30 to 39



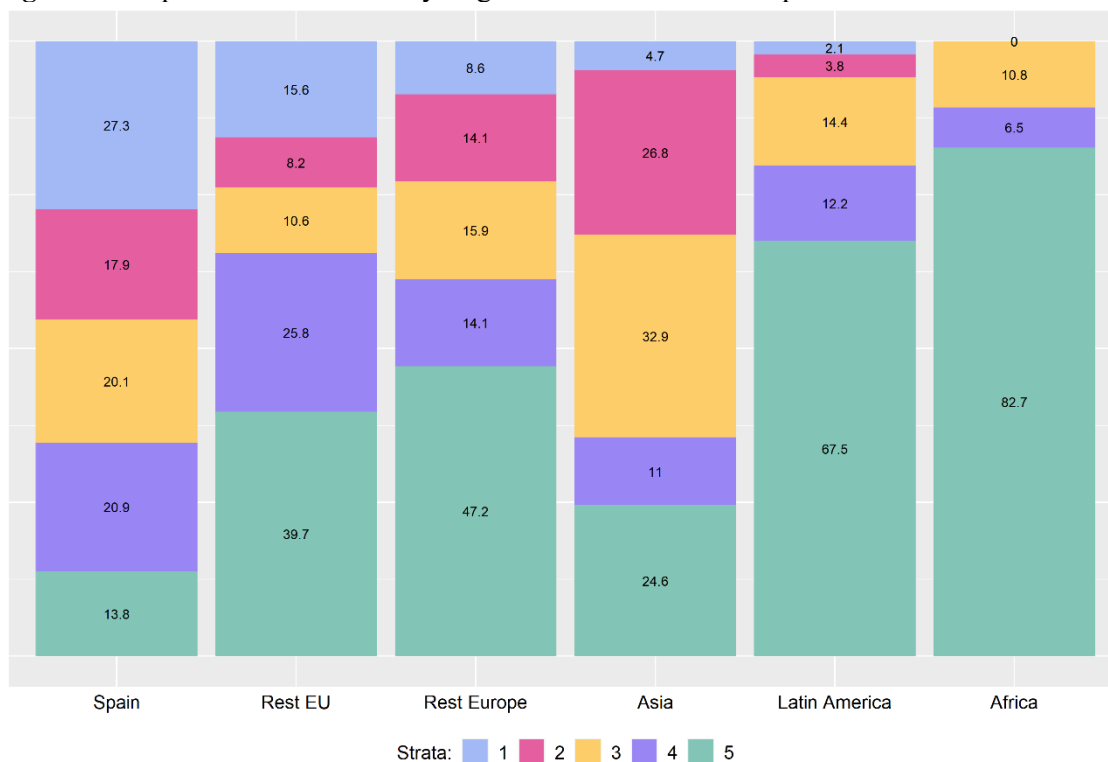
Source: Own work based on EU-SILC 2023.

The distribution of the foreign-born population in the 30–39 space follows a pattern similar to the general space, with a tendency for immigrants to concentrate in the most socially disadvantaged strata. However, significant differences emerge. First, the presence of foreign-born individuals in Stratum 2 reaches 20.9%, compared to 7.4% in the general space, indicating a greater presence of immigrants in relatively privileged positions among the younger cohort. Second, there is a higher concentration of this population in the fifth stratum (66.3% foreign-born vs. 56.3% in the general space), indicating a higher degree of polarisation by origin.

The distribution by origin in the 30–39 group (Figure 3.5) shows an even more pronounced gradient of immigrant concentration in disadvantaged strata. While only 13.8% of the Spanish-born population is in the fifth stratum, the proportion rises to 82.7% among those born in Africa. The case of the Asian-born population is noteworthy: while more than half were in the lower strata in the general social space, in the 30–39 subspace, the weight of Strata 5 and 6 is significantly reduced in favour of Stratum 2 (26.8%). This suggests a better relative position for the younger group, potentially due to a different migratory profile or successful upward mobility for those who migrated at earlier ages.

As in the general space, the gradient by region of birth is reversed in Stratum 1 (the most advantaged), ranging from 27.3% among the Spanish population to 2.1% for Latin Americans and 0.0% for those born in Africa. While the latter group remains excluded from the two most privileged strata, compared to the general space their presence increases in the young professional group (Stratum 4) reaching the 6.5%. This indicates a subgroup of young Africans who have accumulated cultural capital despite continuing to face difficulties in accessing the housing market.

Figure 3.5 Population distribution by origin and social strata. Subspace 30 to 39



Source: Own work based on EU-SILC 2023.

3.5. Conclusions: Age, Origin, and Class in the Social Stratification System

The growing importance of international migration in the demographic reproduction model, alongside the profound economic and social transformations in Catalonia over recent decades, have contributed to the reconfiguration of the social stratification system.

Our results confirm the first hypothesis (H1) by identifying two axes of social stratification defined by the accumulation of economic capital (first axis) and cultural capital (second axis). This demonstrates that the intersection of categories associated with social privilege and disadvantage determines an individual's position within the stratification system. This is reflected in the fact that our social strata do not perfectly coincide with ESeG or income categories; rather, individuals sharing similar values in these variables are found in different social strata due to the stratifying capacity of other dimensions, such as housing access and wealth.

We also observe a significant confluence of disadvantages among the foreign-born population. Consequently, immigrants are concentrated in the most disadvantaged strata (H2a). Despite often possessing higher educational levels than other groups, the migrant population experiences dynamics of segregation and segmented assimilation into the labour market, lower income levels, severe limitations in housing access, and difficulties in asset accumulation. These findings align with studies highlighting immigration as an accelerator of social polarisation, driven by the growth of professional and technical strata—largely reserved for natives and a minority of young immigrants—and the expansion of unskilled labour, primarily performed by immigrants (Requena et al., 2011).

A third result is the significant re-stratification of the population by region of birth. The African-born population serves as an extreme example of this dynamic, being virtually excluded from the most socially advantaged strata and those with the best prospects for incorporation (Gastón-Guiu et al., 2021, 2024). Although we cannot account for the institutional factors that determine life chances by country of origin, it is plausible that these differences stem from discriminatory dynamics in legal, social, and border control frameworks. These systemic barriers are seldom addressed in public policies aimed at tackling inequality.

We also identify a social stratum composed mainly of young people with high educational levels and skilled occupations who nevertheless face major barriers to homeownership.

This finding shed light on the declining fertility rates and delayed transitions to adulthood characteristic of European societies (van Wijk & Billari, 2024) and poses significant challenges regarding the role of intergenerational transfers in the reproduction of inequality (Leopold & Schneider, 2011).

The fifth finding confirms hypothesis H2b, identifying a social stratum (Stratum 4) comparable to the traditional working class that has been 'displaced upward' due to its relative privileges compared to new population cohorts and the emergence of housing as a new axis of social exclusion. Their previous position is now occupied by Stratum 6, dominated by the foreign-born population. Notably, despite the overrepresentation of immigrants, over 40.0% of individuals in this latter stratum are native-born, revealing a subgroup of the native population that shares social space with the most disadvantaged immigrants, having been excluded from the benefits of recent decades' transformations. This native sub-stratum is characterised by structural marginalisation, forming part of the 'excluded' (Tezanos, 2001).

Our results also point to the centrality of housing tenure as a social stratification axis. In the current context of the housing crisis (Sala, 2018), housing access takes on generational, origin-based, and class-based dimensions. The growing house-price-to-income ratio hinders access for increasing segments of the population, creating a widening divide between those who have achieved homeownership (and see their wealth increase) and those excluded from the residential market (Arundel & Lennartz, 2020). The transmission of assets, alongside unequal housing access, acts as a key mechanism in the reproduction of social hierarchies. This is especially visible in Spain, where housing functions not only as a utility but as the primary form of family savings and security, intensifying the fracture between those who can accumulate and transfer wealth and those excluded from inherited capital networks.

Finally, the results confirm hypothesis H3. Compared to a society heavily stratified by generation regarding education or professional trajectories, the greater homogeneity among individuals aged 30 to 39 reduces the significance of education, income, or wealth as stratification factors. Conversely, elements such as occupational level and housing tenure emerge as central markers of social stratification (Brun, 2024; Salas Rojo, 2024).

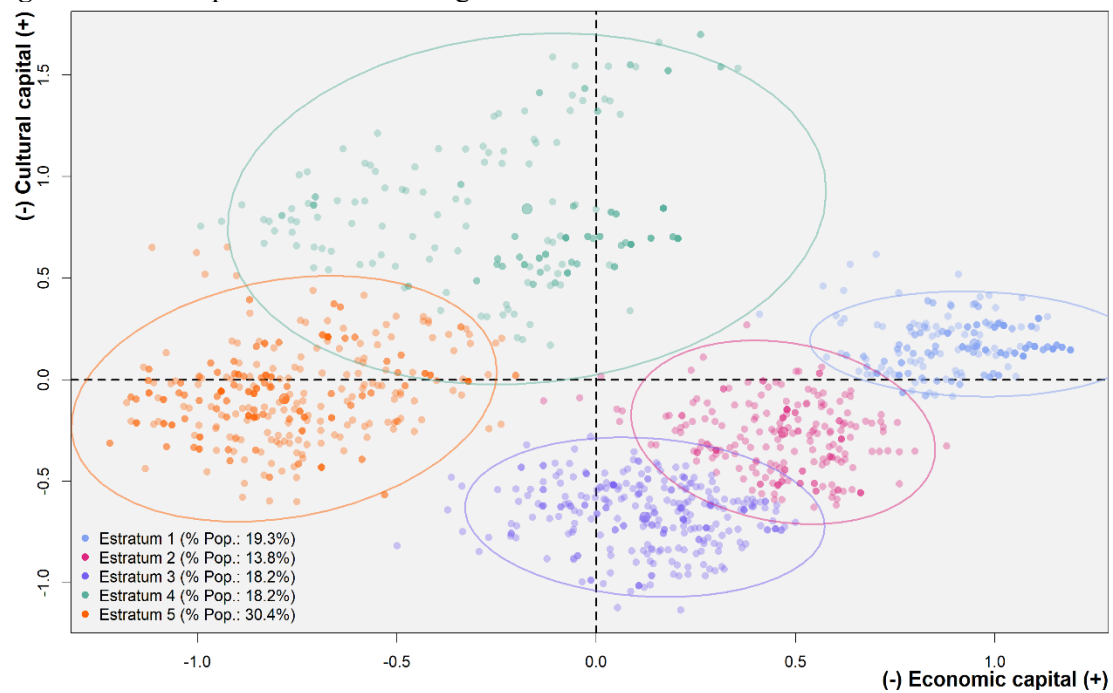
Moving beyond a static perspective, this reconfiguration of the social stratification system in Catalonia raises pertinent questions for the future. Firstly, the heightened polarization

by origin within the youngest age cohort may signal an emerging ethno-stratification process, particularly among populations of African and Latin American descent. This trend is not observed among the Asian population, where the representation of more socially privileged strata is increasing—a finding that lends empirical weight to the theory of segmented assimilation (Portes & Zhou, 1993).

Secondly, the accumulation and transmission of assets are becoming increasingly significant factors in social differentiation and reproduction. Given the growing divergence between real wages and wealth (Adkins et al., 2020; Killewald et al., 2017), any reflection on the future of stratification must position intergenerational transmission of resources as a central axis of social differentiation dynamics. Finally, recent research suggests a robust correlation between the social fragmentation driven by the socioeconomic transformations of recent decades and political fragmentation (Bó et al., 2018; Bosworth & Snower, 2019). Consequently, it remains to be seen how the factors identified here will shape political dynamics in the coming years.

3.6. Appendix

Figure A 3.1 Subspace of individuals aged 30 to 39



Source: Own work based on EU-SILC 2023.

Table A 3.1 Categories' percentage contribution to the tow first factorial axes. General social space

Variables	Eje 1	Eje 2
<i>Rural-Urban</i>		
Urban	0.03	0.26
Intermediate	0.00	0.18
Rural	0.14	0.30
<i>Education level</i>		
Primary or less	0.02	15.46
1 st stage secondary	1.09	2.18
2 nd stage secondary	0.75	0.16
Tertiary	2.24	15.01
<i>Income per consumption unit (quintile)</i>		
1	5.60	1.74
2	1.66	1.14
3	0.03	0.35
4	0.93	0.17
5	6.83	5.68
<i>Housing tenure</i>		
Owner w/ mortgage	3.09	3.01
Owner w/out mortgage	5.86	8.08
Other	2.88	0.59
Rent	19.88	2.61
<i>Housing precarity</i>		
0	1.04	0.02
1	0.15	0.18
2	0.54	0.14
+3	0.75	0.00
<i>ESeG</i>		
1_2 Manag/Professional	3.04	15.02
3 Technicians	0.17	2.39
4 Small entrepreneurs	0.08	0.03
5 Clerks and skilled service	0.03	1.20
6 Industrial skilled employees	0.47	0.10
7 Less skilled employees	5.10	0.00
8 Retired >= 65	2.20	15.21
9 Unemployed < 65	2.65	0.26
<i>Wealth (quartile)</i>		
1	22.21	2.99
2	3.15	4.77
3	4.75	0.52
4	2.66	0.25

Source: Own work based on the ECV 2023.

Table A 3.2 Strata composition. General social space. Active variables

Variables	Strata						Total
	1	2	3	4	5	6	
<i>Rural-Urban</i>							
Urban	64.2	59.7	58.8	56.1	71.5	62.6	61.1
Intermediate	27.9	29.9	28.8	34.3	20.9	29.9	29.4
Rural	7.9	10.4	12.3	9.6	7.7	7.5	9.5
<i>Education level</i>							
Primary or less	0.0	1.3	59.4	10.4	0.0	19.2	16.8
1 st stage secondary	0.3	10.4	19.8	41.1	0.8	27.3	18.7
2 nd stage secondary	4.0	27.9	18.6	38.6	9.3	35.7	24.6
Tertiary	95.7	60.4	2.2	10.0	89.9	17.8	39.9
<i>Income per consumption unit (quintile)</i>							
1	0.7	4.3	17.9	24.9	5.4	41.2	17.4
2	3.3	12.2	25.2	30.8	11.4	32.9	20.7
3	8.3	18.0	26.6	24.4	23.6	18.4	19.9
4	23.9	28.1	21.2	16.7	30.3	6.9	20.2
5	64.0	37.4	9.0	3.3	29.3	0.7	21.9
<i>Housing tenure</i>							
Owner w/ mortgage	68.1	40.4	5.7	47.8	2.9	0.5	28.3
Owner w/out mortgage	31.7	59.5	94.3	48.5	0.6	1.9	43.4
Other	0.1	0.1	0.0	1.5	20.9	14.8	5.0
Rent	0.1	0.1	0.0	2.2	75.7	82.7	23.2
<i>Housing precarity</i>							
0	62.4	54.0	55.1	41.5	52.9	37.6	49.8
1	22.0	28.3	29.4	31.0	20.9	33.7	28.5
2	11.6	12.0	10.2	17.4	19.0	17.1	14.2
+3	4.1	5.7	5.3	10.1	7.2	11.5	7.5
<i>ESeG</i>							
1_2 Manag/Professional	68.5	8.1	0.0	0.0	44.6	0.2	15.5
3 Technicians	15.9	15.1	0.4	3.7	22.4	2.7	8.7
4 Small entrepreneurs	0.6	8.3	1.5	10.5	4.0	6.4	5.6
5 Clerks and skilled service	10.8	20.8	0.3	5.6	16.2	7.6	9.8
6 Industrial skilled employees	0.7	6.5	1.6	17.6	2.1	12.4	7.6
7 Less skilled employees	0.2	3.3	0.7	21.3	2.2	27.8	10.4
8 Retired >= 65	1.7	26.3	92.3	7.4	2.2	13.0	26.7
9 Unemployed < 65	1.5	11.5	3.1	33.8	6.3	29.9	15.7
<i>Wealth (quartile)</i>							
1	1.4	0.3	1.3	6.2	99.2	100.0	29.9
2	36.3	49.5	72.1	71.4	0.1	0.0	41.8
3	47.1	36.8	21.4	20.1	0.6	0.0	22.0
4	15.2	13.3	5.1	2.3	0.1	0.0	6.3
Total	14.3	20.6	18.3	18.4	8.9	19.4	100.0

Source: Own work based on the ECV 2023.

Table A 3.3 Strata composition. General social space. Supplementary variables

Variables	Strata						Total
	1	2	3	4	5	6	
<i>Gender</i>							
Man	49.5	49.7	43.0	49.6	48.1	47.7	47.9
Woman	50.5	50.3	57.0	50.4	51.9	52.3	52.1
<i>Age group</i>							
<30	6.1	5.3	0.3	7.3	10.1	10.3	6.3
30-39	22.3	14.2	0.6	15.2	35.2	28.3	17.7
40-49	28.8	18.4	1.9	21.5	31.6	27.8	20.4
50-59	28.2	26.0	2.5	32.6	15.4	15.2	20.2
60-69	13.4	20.1	21.9	17.8	5.9	8.3	15.5
>=70	1.2	16.1	72.8	5.6	1.7	10.2	20.0
<i>Region of birth</i>							
Spain	91.2	92.6	96.1	83.5	69.2	43.4	79.7
Rest EU	3.5	2.2	0.7	3.9	8.2	4.3	3.4
Other Europe	1.3	0.9	0.0	0.8	3.9	3.1	1.5
Asia	0.2	0.6	0.3	2.5	1.3	3.0	1.3
Latin America	3.8	3.2	0.9	6.8	17.1	31.5	10.2
Africa	0.0	0.6	2.1	2.5	0.2	14.7	3.8
Total	14.3	20.6	18.3	18.4	8.9	19.4	100.0

Source: Own work based on the ECV 2023.

Table A 3.4 Categories' percentage contribution to the tow first factorial axes. Subspace 30 to 39

Variables	Eje 1	Eje 2
<i>Rural-Urban</i>		
Urban	0.00	0.00
Intermediate	0.04	0.01
Rural	0.12	0.00
<i>Education level</i>		
Primary or less	0.50	0.05
1 st stage secondary	1.53	6.33
2 nd stage secondary	2.03	1.80
Tertiary	5.88	8.51
<i>Income per consumption unit (quintile)</i>		
1	4.40	0.12
2	1.48	3.58
3	0.05	0.70
4	0.81	0.24
5	5.76	0.76
<i>Housing tenure</i>		
Owner w/ mortgage	8.64	4.64
Owner w/out mortgage	1.20	0.67
Other	1.67	29.91
Rent	17.13	0.89
<i>Housing precarity</i>		
0	0.42	0.08
1	0.22	0.03
2	0.00	1.81
+3	0.53	0.65
<i>ESeG</i>		
1_2 Manag/Professional	11.20	12.24
3 Technicians	1.60	2.35
4 Small entrepreneurs	0.00	0.73
5 Clerks and skilled service	0.51	7.83
6 Industrial skilled employees	0.25	1.39
7 Less skilled employees	7.95	0.46
8 Retired >= 65	0.00	0.00
9 Unemployed < 65	1.20	0.27
<i>Wealth (quartile)</i>		
1	17.31	9.49
2	4.16	3.09
3	3.11	1.37
4	0.27	0.00

Source: Own work based on the ECV 2023.

Table A 3.5 Strata composition. Subspace 30 to 39. Active variables

Variables	Strata					Total
	1	2	3	4	5	
<i>Rural-Urban</i>						
Urban	65.7	62.3	53.7	70.7	61.6	63.1
Intermediate	26.7	26.4	32.8	24.5	31.2	28.4
Rural	7.6	11.3	13.5	4.8	7.2	8.5
<i>Education level</i>						
Primary or less	0.0	0.2	15.1	0.0	13.1	6.0
1 st stage secondary	0.0	12.3	50.3	0.7	28.0	17.6
2 nd stage secondary	0.3	25.4	25.3	4.2	35.5	20.5
Tertiary	99.7	62.1	9.2	95.1	23.5	55.9
<i>Income per consumption unit (quintile)</i>						
1	0.4	16.3	26.6	3.6	41.3	20.5
2	1.1	27.6	35.6	9.4	33.0	22.4
3	12.5	19.2	24.3	28.5	20.4	20.5
4	21.4	23.9	12.3	31.1	5.2	17.3
5	64.6	13.1	1.2	27.5	0.1	19.3
<i>Housing tenure</i>						
Owner w/ mortgage	72.9	60.1	42.2	0.5	0.6	31.3
Owner w/out mortgage	27.1	39.9	57.8	0.0	0.1	20.3
Other	0.0	0.0	0.0	21.3	15.7	8.6
Rent	0.0	0.1	0.0	78.2	83.6	39.8
<i>Housing precarity</i>						
0	63.8	42.6	44.9	51.1	39.3	47.1
1	20.6	26.1	31.2	15.9	34.7	26.7
2	12.0	24.3	14.4	26.9	15.5	18.5
+3	3.6	7.0	9.5	6.1	10.6	7.7
<i>ESeG</i>						
1_2 Manag/Professional	73.0	10.6	0.0	49.7	0.5	24.0
3 Technicians	16.1	22.3	2.3	25.8	1.9	12.9
4 Small entrepreneurs	0.2	10.3	12.4	2.7	4.8	5.7
5 Clerks and skilled service	9.9	23.1	3.8	16.8	17.4	15.6
6 Industrial skilled employees	0.6	8.3	16.6	2.2	12.5	8.2
7 Less skilled employees	0.2	11.5	23.3	0.1	35.8	16.7
8 Retired >= 65	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0
9 Unemployed < 65	0.0	14.0	41.6	2.7	27.1	17.0
<i>Wealth (quartile)</i>						
1	1.6	1.7	1.3	100.0	100.0	49.4
2	47.3	58.6	83.0	0.0	0.0	30.9
3	42.7	35.8	14.0	0.0	0.0	17.1
4	8.4	4.0	1.8	0.0	0.0	2.6
Total	18.2	21.3	11.9	16.8	31.9	100.0

Source: Own work based on the ECV 2023.

Table A 3.6 Strata composition. Subspace 30 to 39. Supplementary variables

Variables	Strata					Total
	1	2	3	4	5	
Gender						
Man	45.6	44.6	57.2	49.4	50.0	48.8
Woman	54.4	55.4	42.8	50.6	50.0	51.2
Region of birth						
Spain	93.7	79.1	74.2	71.1	33.7	65.4
Rest EU	2.9	3.2	4.0	9.7	4.9	4.9
Other Europe	0.6	2.1	1.4	1.3	2.9	1.9
Asia	0.6	2.5	8.1	1.9	1.8	2.5
Latin America	2.2	13.1	7.2	15.9	41.5	19.9
Africa	0.0	0.0	5.1	0.1	15.1	5.4
Total	18.2	21.3	11.9	16.8	31.9	100.0

Source: Own work based on the ECV 2023.

~ Chapter 4 ~

Unequal Family and Employment Contexts for Children and Adolescents in Spain

Carlos Ruiz-Ramos

Andrés Felipe Castro Torres

Under review at Social Indicators Research

Abstract

Over recent decades, economic and social transformations have reshaped family structures and labour market dynamics across Western societies. In Spain, these shifts have intensified family and employment changes, disproportionately affecting children in socially disadvantaged groups. While previous research often examines these inequalities through single dimensions such as education or occupation, this paper adopts a multivariate approach to better capture the stratified exposure to instability. Using retrospective data from the 2018 Spanish Fertility Survey, we reconstruct parents' family and employment trajectories from children's perspective, covering the period from conception to age 18. We apply Multiple Correspondence Analysis and clustering techniques to identify "probable social classes"—distinct configurations of social (dis)advantage—and assess children's exposure to contextual changes across these groups using longitudinal entropy measures. Our findings offer two key contributions: first, the development of a multidimensional, data-driven model that captures the social stratification structure in Spain; second, empirical evidence of how intersecting social inequalities shape children's differentiated exposure to family and parental employment changes.

4.1. Introduction

In contemporary Spain, rising instability in both partnership and employment trajectories has increased children's exposure to shifting family and economic circumstances (Mari Klose et al., 2016; OECD, 2022). In the last four decades Spain has experienced a rapid transformation of its family formation and dissolution dynamics, converging from a predominantly traditional model to the European trends concerning divorce rates, cohabitation, singlehood, non-marital births, and repartnering (Garriga & Cortina, 2017; Lesthaeghe, 2010). This convergence in family demographics has been associated with the profound socioeconomic transformations

that took place from the 1980s onwards. The continued expansion of educational attainment and women's participation into the labour force, the stagnation of real labour income, and the growth of economic uncertainty and job instability led to more frequent changes in family structures (Adkins et al., 2020; Blossfeld & Kiernan, 2019; Kohler et al., 2002).

Children's exposure to parental family and employment transitions are not evenly distributed among socioeconomic strata. Research in Western societies suggests that socially disadvantaged groups are the most exposed to familial and financial transitions (Lindemann, 2024; Raley et al., 2015; Raley & Sweeney, 2020). In addition, low socioeconomic status (low-SES) groups have fewer economic resources—such as income, wealth, and savings—to cope with unplanned circumstances and to provide additional support to their children when needed (Hardy et al., 2019; Lindemann, 2024). Accordingly, inequalities in family and employment instability have become a relevant factor in the intergenerational transmission of social inequalities (Perkins, 2019).

When differentiating across parental social groups to measure the stratified exposure of children to family and employment changes, extant research has relied on single variables. These variables include parents' educational attainment, occupation, and race/ethnicity (McLanahan, 2004; Raley et al., 2019). In doing so, these studies rule out the potential reinforcing nature of socially privileged and socially disadvantaged categories, and the fact that they tend to correlate. The correlations between advantages and disadvantages are the core of social stratification. Moreover, individuals do not experience the social world through a single characteristic (e.g., being unemployed), but through the intersection of the multiple categories they are attached or belong to over the life course (e.g., multiple unemployment spells during marriage) (Johnson-Hanks et al., 2011). A more encompassing measure of socio-economic position is needed to better capture the association between individuals' position within the social stratification structure, their life trajectories, and children's and adolescents' exposure to changes in their family and financial contexts.

We focus on Spain to explore the associations between a multidimensional measure of parental socioeconomic status, their partnership and employment trajectories, and children's exposure to differential family and parental employment contexts. We compare our results with those of a univariate approach to highlight the need of a multidimensional lens. We draw our data from the 2018 Spanish Fertility Survey and apply Multiple Correspondence Analysis to measure the social stratification structure and the different existing configurations of advantages and

disadvantages among the adult Spanish population. We then use Clustering techniques to find the social groups in which these privileged and unprivileged configurations converge. Borrowing the term from Bourdieu (Bourdieu, 2005), we call these groups probable social classes defined as collectives of people that share material living conditions and social status. Finally, we reconstruct parental partnership and employment status trajectories to capture the family and employment contexts in which children grew. We visualise these trajectories along children's life course from the year before birth to the age of 18, and examine the different degrees of exposure to changes across probable social classes via longitudinal entropy measures (Pelletier et al., 2020).

This paper makes two main contributions. First, following previous work in other European countries (see Atkinson and Schmitz 2024 for Germany, Toft (2018) for Norway, and Savage et al. (2013) for the United Kingdom), we propose a multidimensional and intersectional measure of individuals' position within stratification systems called probable social class to analyse the Spanish social stratification system using data-driven methods. Second, we examine how the intertwined inequalities captured by the probable social classes are associated with the unequal exposure of children and adolescents to changes in their family and employment contexts.

4.2. Background

The intersectional nature of social stratification requires a perspective that considers the intersection among multiple axes of inequality, and the occurrence of social advantages and disadvantages in individuals' life courses. In the next section we review the demographic and economic trends affecting individuals' trajectories during the last 30 years in Spain, including literature on the social stratification of partnership and employment trajectories. Finally, we develop the theoretical foundations of our approach to social stratification.

4.2.1. Measuring stratification in family and employment trajectories in the Spanish context

Spain's demographic trajectory stands out as an example of the deep changes in family formation trajectories and fertility patterns that took place in high-income countries over the past few decades. Between the 1990 and 2010, Spain's Gross Divorce Rate climbed from 0.6, one of the lowest in Europe, to the regional mean (2.2) (Esping-Andersen et al., 2013). The growth in divorce rates occurred alongside the decline of marriage and the increase of

cohabitation arrangements. These dynamics increased the share of single-parent households from 1.7% to 5.2% between 2000 and 2020 (Meil et al., 2023), heightening the exposure of children to changes in family composition. In parallel, Spain experienced one of the largest migratory processes in contemporary Europe (Cebrián, 2009). Between the mid-1990s and mid-2020s the country became the second-largest recipient of international migration in the European Union (EU), attracting over 7.5 million migrants—18.2% of the population.

On the economic side, the targeted liberalisation reforms of the labour market and the rising demand for low-skilled jobs fostered the emergence of precarious employment among youth, women, and migrants (Vives et al., 2011). For these population groups, even before the 2008 economic crisis, employment precarity was not a stepping stone towards more stable trajectories and upward mobility, but a long-term condition (Cebrián, 2008; Toharia et al., 2001). The Great Recession deepened this vulnerability, destroying more than two million jobs, disproportionately affecting already disadvantaged groups (López-Andreu & Verd, 2016).

Over the last 30 years Spain has undergone profound transformations in its population, family, and economic dynamics, reshaping the social stratification structure and significantly increasing the exposure of children to changing family and employment environments. These changes did not affect all groups equally. Previous literature reveals that in most high-income countries, normative and stable life trajectories are persistently more common among socially privileged population groups (Furstenberg, 2014; Smock & Schwartz, 2020). Research on family and employment dynamics show stratified patterns of exposure to changing partnership and employment histories, meaning that low-SES individuals are more likely to experience multiple partnership and employment transitions than more affluent individuals (Fasang & Aisenbrey, 2021; Matysiak et al., 2014; Raley et al., 2019).

The main variables used to measure stratification in the risk of experiencing repeated work and partnership transitions in the existing literature are: education level (Conger et al., 2010; Lundberg et al., 2016), occupation and employment status (Jalovaara, 2001), homeownership (Krapf & Wagner, 2020), race/ethnicity (McLanahan, 2004), migration background (Carrasco et al., 2020), and family educational background (López-Andreu & Verd, 2016). Yet, scholars are increasingly recognising the importance of the interaction among these variables.

Individuals' educational attainment, occupation, income, homeownership status, migrations status, and social background are interrelated and mutually reinforcing socioeconomic factors. Their interactions are likely to influence children's exposure to changes in multiple life domains

including family context and employment instability. For instance, Hogendoorn et al. (2022) find that the higher risk of partnership dissolution among low-educated individuals in Australia is not only the result of economic hardship, but of the combined effect of strains in multiple life domains, including social relations, health, and residence. This multiple strain approach is aligned with the intersectional perspective on social stratification adopted by Fasang and Aisenbrey (2021) in the US. The authors emphasize that the unfolding of work and family life trajectories are not only influenced by a single characteristic, but by the configuration of multiple socioeconomic factors structuring individuals' available resources and opportunities.

In Spain and other Southern European countries, the dualisation process of labour markets, i.e. the segmentation between protected and well-paid employments, and those characterised by lower salaries and more precarious conditions (Barbieri & Cutuli, 2016), increased employment insecurity among population groups concentrated in unprotected occupations and vulnerable economic sectors (Gioachin et al., 2023; Vandecasteele, 2011). Molina & López-Roldán (2015) find that low-educated workers and those in elementary occupations are overrepresented in fixed-term and non-standard contracts. Consequently, workers with low education credentials face more frequent job transitions, longer unemployment spells, and weaker social protection compared to highly educated workers (Struffolino, 2019).

Migration background further stratifies employment pathways in the Spanish labour market. Segmented assimilation processes concentrate migrant workers in precarious jobs and vulnerable sectors (Bayona-i-Carrasco & Domingo, 2024a; Mooi-Reci & Muñoz-Comet, 2016). As a result, migrant workers experience a higher risk of job loss compared to natives. These differentials are not fully explained by differences in the socioeconomic composition of migrants and natives, like occupation and educational attainment. Discriminatory practices and other unexplained mechanisms contribute to migrants' disproportionate exposure to employment instability (Carrasco et al., 2020).

While educational attainment is often treated as a key predictor of employment trajectories, its explanatory power has been found to be persistently weaker in the Spanish context (Carabaña, 1997). López-Andreu & Verd (2016) find that since the early 2000s, educational credentials no longer guarantee stable employment. Instead, family background is more decisive than one's own educational attainment in shaping young adults' employment trajectories.

Similarly to employment trajectories, exposure to multiple changes in partnership status is also socially stratified. Education consistently predicts marital dissolution. In most high-income

countries, low-educated individuals are more likely to divorce or experience serial cohabitation compared to their highly educated counterparts (Conger et al., 2010; Lundberg et al., 2016).

Occupation has also been used to measure the extent to which the risk of partnership dissolution is stratified. Jalovaara (2001) finds that despite the meaningful differences between blue- and white-collar occupations in Finland, most of the association between occupational status and divorce disappears once education is controlled for. By contrast, permanent or repeated spells of unemployment significantly increase the probabilities of marital dissolution, especially for men in heterosexual couples (see Boertien & Härkönen (2018) for Britain; and Jalovaara (2001) for Finland).

Housing tenure and affordability further influence partnership stability in multiple European countries. In Britain, Boertien & Härkönen (2018) find that more stable relationships among highly educated women are mediated by homeownership, meaning that owning a home significantly reduces the risk of divorce. The protective effect of homeownership against changes in partnership status has also been found in Finland (Jalovaara, 2001) and Germany (Krapf & Wagner, 2020). The latter also found an association between higher housing costs relative to household income and higher risk of union dissolution.

4.2.2. A multidimensional perspective of social stratification

Our approach to measuring children's stratified exposure to familial and financial instability draws on Bourdieu's concept of social space, understood as the distribution of social agents according to the volume and composition of their capital (Bourdieu, 1984). This approach broadens stratification analysis by incorporating intersecting dimensions of inequality as manifest in the joint lack of concentration of economic, cultural, social, and symbolic capital (Bourdieu, 2002). This multidimensional perspective allows us to a) incorporate socially relevant factors constituting social stratification structures in different social settings (Atkinson, 2021; Fachelli & López-Roldán, 2022); and b) recognise and empirically account for the intersection between multiple sources of inequality (Flemmen, 2013; Hill Collins & Bilge, 2016).

Thus, the notion of social space offers a representation of the social reality that emphasises relations in a continuous hierarchy of social positions rather than a set of discrete predefined groups (e.g., College educated, Immigrants, Blue-collar). The multivariate nature of the social space allows one to consider not only hierarchical positions in a particular dimension (e.g., low-

high income, primary-tertiary education), but the interaction, and the coexistence of social advantages and disadvantages. This approach to social stratification is increasingly relevant due to the declining centrality of labour in the stratification structure and the growing importance of housing and wealth as key axes of social differentiation (Adkins et al., 2020; Killewald et al., 2017).

The interplay between multiple axes of stratification draws a connection between the social space approach and intersectionality theory. Both frameworks allow to identify broader social structures shaping individuals' life courses. In this regard, individuals' resources, opportunities, and outcomes are not only affected by achieved individual characteristics (e.g., education, occupation), but also by other ascribed dimensions and household level characteristics (Hale et al., 2023; Hill Collins & Bilge, 2016; Western et al., 2012). Intergenerational social mobility and the transmission of resources between parents and children further influence descendants' available resources, their life trajectories, and their social position (Leopold & Schneider, 2011; Toft, 2018).

Within a social space, social agents with similar characteristics will occupy close positions, whereas individuals with opposed socioeconomic profiles will appear distal to each other. These social proximities and distances allow us to identify probable social classes, meaning, collectives sharing material living conditions and social status.

4.3. Data and methods

We draw our results from the 2018 Spanish Fertility Survey (2018-SFS) developed by the Spanish National Institute of Statistics (INE). The 2018-SFS is a nationally representative cross-sectional survey that collects demographic and socioeconomic information on individuals aged 18 to 55 along with their childbearing, marital, and employment trajectories. The sample comprises 17,175 individuals: 14,556 women and 2,619 men.

Table 4.1. Number To investigate the differences in the familial and labour context in which children grow up by parental probable social classes, we focus on individuals aged 39 to 55. This analytical sample allows us to link parental, marital and employment histories with children's life courses from the year preceding childbirths to their age at the time of the survey. Table 4.1 shows the number of individuals in our analytical sample and the number of children, by parental age group and place of birth. As seen in Table 4.1, the analytical sample is adequate for studying the relationship between probable social classes and children's growing-up

contexts as it accurately reflects fertility and migration patterns of the first decade of the 21st century in Spain (Domingo & Gil-Alonso, 2007). Most individuals in our sample are Spanish-born followed by people from Latin American and Caribbean countries. Other national and regional origins are mainly composed by African-born individuals, although Asia, and North America are also included. They represent around 2.5% of the sample, with children being slightly overrepresented, a signal of the link between migration and fertility, especially first births (González-Ferrer et al., 2017).

Table 4.1 Number of individuals and children in the analytical sample by parental age groups and place of birth - Spanish National Fertility Survey 2018

Place of birth		Age group			Total	%
		39-44	45-49	50-55		
European Union	Individuals	101	93	95	289	3.0
	<i>Children</i>	<i>140</i>	<i>121</i>	<i>116</i>	<i>377</i>	<i>2.9</i>
Latin America and Caribbean	Individuals	225	136	150	511	5.3
	<i>Children</i>	<i>326</i>	<i>217</i>	<i>233</i>	<i>776</i>	<i>5.9</i>
Others	Individuals	118	61	66	245	2.5
	<i>Children</i>	<i>232</i>	<i>111</i>	<i>110</i>	<i>453</i>	<i>3.4</i>
Spain	Individuals	2,992	2,505	3,143	8,640	89.2
	<i>Children</i>	<i>3,857</i>	<i>3,417</i>	<i>4,298</i>	<i>11,572</i>	<i>87.8</i>
Total	Individuals	3,436	2,795	3,454	9,685	100.0
	<i>Children</i>	<i>4,555</i>	<i>3,866</i>	<i>4,757</i>	<i>13,178</i>	<i>100.0</i>

Source: Own work based on the EF 2018.

4.3.1. Measuring parental probable social classes under a data-driven and multivariate approach

The social space is operationalized using a dimensionality reduction technique called Multiple Correspondence Analysis (MCA) (Greenacre & Blasius, 2006). MCA aims to detect underlying structures in the data, that is, linear combinations of the original variables that identify the most relevant elements in the data (Boelaert & Ollion, 2025). Each of these linear combinations is a continuous numerical variable that constitutes a dimension (axis) of the social space. Individuals obtain their coordinates along the axes of social differentiation according to their characteristics. This topological representation of social space draws on individual-level data to construct a social reality that exists independently of the individuals themselves (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992; Weininger, 2005).

We follow a multivariate data-driven approach to measure probable social classes using seven demographic and socioeconomic variables. The variables included are: individuals' educational attainment, access to housing considering the type and the cost for accessing, household income, occupation, parents' education, region of birth, and urbanisation. Together, these variables reflect the cumulative result of the opportunities and achievements throughout the life courses of individuals, along with their context and family background. The variables were selected after a careful examination of data quality and availability in the 2018-SFS, and are in line with multivariate measurement approaches to social stratification applied in Spain and in other European contexts (Atkinson & Schmitz, 2024; Blasius et al., 2019a; Fachelli & López-Roldán, 2022; Hugrée et al., 2022).

Given individuals' age, our seven variables and their clustering reflect the confluence of life-long opportunities and disadvantages. Outcomes such as being a homeowner and having or lacking educational credentials are not circumstantial but rather embedded in individuals' life courses. In addition, the multivariate aspect of our measurement reduces the probability of misclassifying somebody due to exceptional circumstances such as temporary unemployment or financial shocks affecting household income. Finally, by including information at the household level we move beyond individual resources, considering the structure of opportunities of individuals and the role of family on social stratification (Wright, 2005a).

To measure probable social class, we implement a Multiple Correspondence Analysis (MCA) on these seven variables to identify the social space, followed by a Clustering Analysis based upon the first two MCA axes. Factorial axes are individual-level numerical variables that summarise the associations among the seven input variables.

We prefer factorial axes over other methodologies for clustering such as model-based clustering and Latent Class Analysis because factorial axes are data-driven measures that summarise the confluence of categories. The summarising and configurational nature of factorial axes put the emphasis on critical social cleavages and divisory lines in terms of privileges and disadvantages. The relative weight of the top eigenvalues of an MCA's singular value decomposition serves as a measure of the strength of the confluence among the variables in the analysis, i.e., as a measure of how strongly privileges and disadvantages overlap and covary. Such emphasis and measures cannot be achieved explicitly with other methodologies (Le Roux & Rouanet, 2004).

In the social space, two individuals with similar characteristics across the seven input variables will have similar coordinates in the factorial axes making them close to one another. Likewise, individuals with diverging values across variables will be distant by virtue of having diverging factorial coordinates. Thus, the model is a good tool for grouping individuals in the spirit of probable social classes, i.e., capturing the overarching social structure by bundling individuals with similar characteristics, opportunities, and living conditions. We identify these classes in three steps. First, we calculate an individual-level distance matrix using the first two factorial axes and the Euclidean distance. Second, we input this matrix into the Ward method to identify individuals' clustering structure and select, via average silhouette width, total within sum of squares and gap statistics, a few adjacent cluster solutions. Third, we consolidate the cluster solutions using the k-means algorithm (Hartigan & Wong, 1979). The combination of the Ward method and the k-means algorithm favour the identification of spherical clusters and avoids excessively small groups while maximising the between-group variance. As a result of these steps, we keep and interpret a five-cluster solution.

4.3.2. Probable social classes and childrearing contexts

We assign the probable social class of the parents to their offspring assuming that the confluence of (dis)advantages captured by the clustering influences the context in which children were conceived, born, and raised. Using information on children's year of birth, we link parental marital and employment histories to children's life courses from one year before birth to their age at the time of the survey. This linked data allows us to study the familial and labour contexts in which children grew up.

We move away from analysing family changes through the lens of deviations from normative family structures (Cross et al., 2022). Instead, we focus on the stratified exposure to instability irrespective of the type of transition. Hence, we derive implications for the study of family and social inequalities, by calculating two child-level standardised longitudinal entropies, one for partnership status and another for employment histories. Equation (1) shows how longitudinal entropy is calculated for a given individual.

$$(1) \quad h(\pi_1, \dots, \pi_\alpha) = -\sum_{i=1}^{\alpha} \pi_i \log \pi_i$$

In equation (1), α is the number of possible states, and π_i the share of time spent in the i th state. Thus, children's life course entropy captures the variation in parental partnership and employment status from the year of conception (i.e., one year before birth) to the child's age.

Due to the standardization, this measure ranges from 0 to 1, with zero meaning that parents have the same marital or employment status during children's life course, and one indicating that they experience the maximum number of transitions.

Next, we regress these longitudinal entropies on probable social classes and each of the seven variables of the MCA, one at a time (bivariate models), and all in one model (saturated model). All these models control for parental and child age and we use the saturated model as a benchmark. Finally, we study the gaps in the exposure to family and employment instability (entropy gaps) across all models and compare the Bayesian and Akaike Information Criteria (AIC and BIC, respectively) for all specifications against the saturated specification computing AIC and BIC ratios. Because the women and men samples are independent, we conduct our analysis separately for fathers and mothers and include standardised sampling weights for representativity.

4.4. Results

4.4.1. The social space among adults in Spain

The MCA results indicate that the seven input variables are strongly correlated, and that there is a confluence of advantages among the privileged strata, whereas intermediate social positions and low-status categories split into a group where unemployment, low education, and low income are relatively alleviated by homeownership. According to the 2018-SFS data, privileges and disadvantages give rise to different socioeconomic profiles among the adult population. These profiles allow us to study social groups based on their living conditions as defined by the confluence of socially privileged and socially disadvantaged categories.

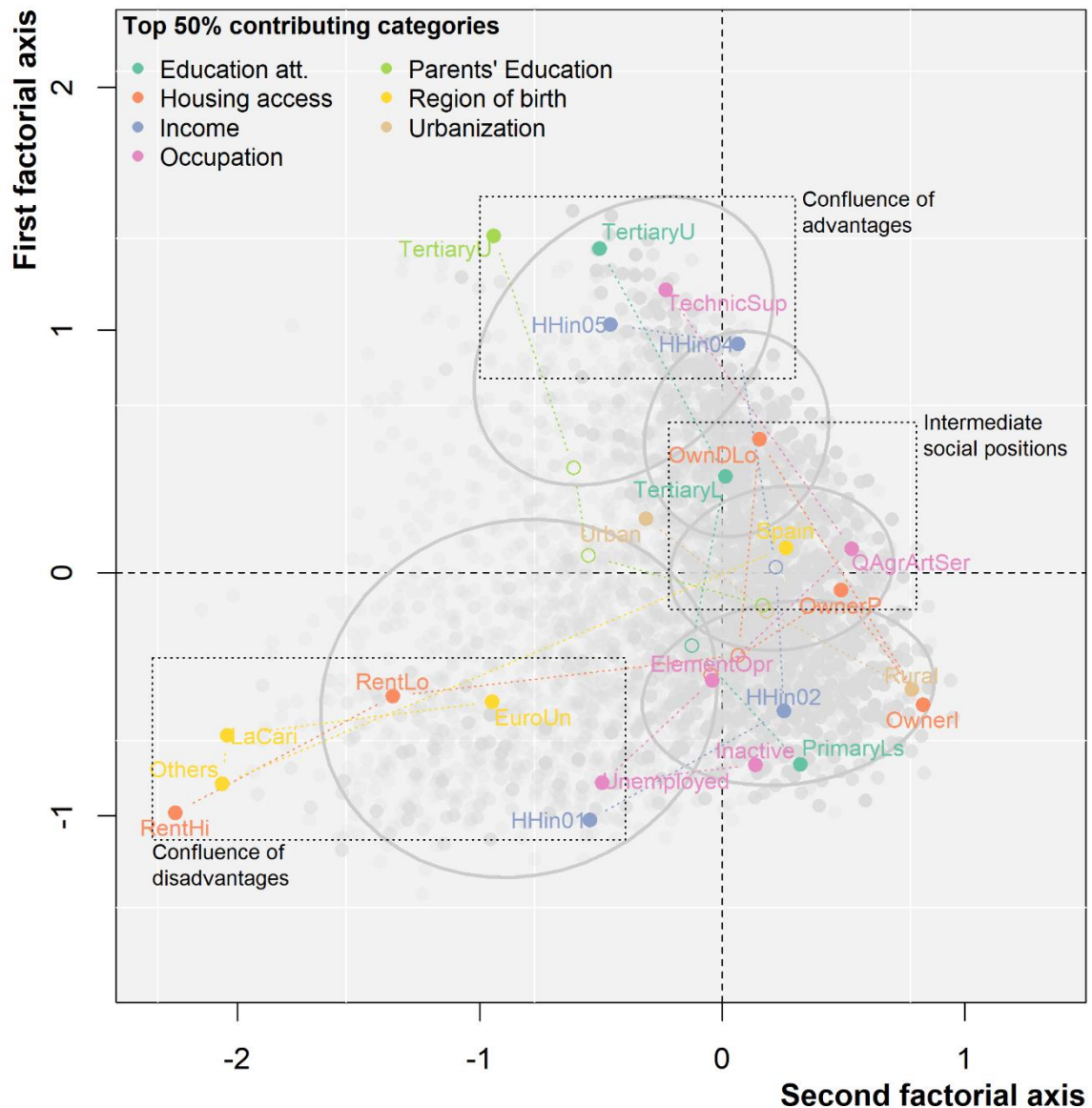
Figure 4.1 shows the distribution of top contributing categories along the first two MCA axes. These two axes comprise 73.5% and 17.3% of the total inertia (variance), respectively. To favour interpretation, categories of the same variables are connected with dotted lines and only the top 50% contributing categories to the axes' inertia are labelled. Grey dots represent individuals, while ellipses comprise the 90% of individuals in each cluster (i.e. probable social classes).

The two axes constitute a social space in which the first dimension (vertical) accounts for variables associated to different typologies of capital (Total capital). More specifically, highly educated individuals, working in qualified occupations, residing in high-income households, and with highly educated parents are located at the top of the first axis. This confluence of

social advantages appears opposed to individuals at the bottom, who experience a confluence of disadvantages represented by unemployment, inactivity, elementary occupations, low-income, and parents with fewer educational credentials. In between, intermediate social positions are characterised by tertiary-low education credentials, access to homeownership, and mid-level occupations. The second axis (horizontal) reveals a strong association between migration and access to housing. On the left-hand side of this second dimension, we find individuals with migrant backgrounds residing in rented homes. On the right-hand side, instead, native-born individuals tend to be homeowners. This result is in line with previous research on the nativity divide in access to housing in contemporary Spain (Delclós, 2023). A detailed description of the axes' composition can be found in Tables A4.1 and A4.2 in the Appendix.

Hence, the top-left quadrant of Figure 4.1 comprises socially privileged categories, namely, tertiary education in both respondents and their parents, the top income categories, and prestigious occupations along with low financial burdens for accessing homeownership. On the contrary, the bottom-left quadrant concentrates a series of socially disadvantaged categories including high financial burdens due to rent, unemployment, and the lowest income category. Two region-of-birth categories lay at the bottom-left corner of this quadrant: Latin American and Caribbean and Other than the European Union. The location of these categories means that adults from these two regions tend to live in disadvantaged conditions with respect to the overall population concerning income and access to the labour and the housing markets. The two quadrants on the right mainly consist of native-born respondents with access to homeownership, distributed along the axis of capital accumulation, i.e., the various categories of income, educational attainment and occupation.

Figure 4.1 Social space for individuals aged 39 to 55. Cloud of categories and individuals



Source: Own work based on Fertility Survey 2018.

Note: Only the top 50% contributing categories to the variance of the first, and second axes are labelled. Grey dots represent individuals. Ellipses represent the 90% confidence intervals of the clusters.

4.4.2. Probable social classes

There are three structural patterns in the distribution of the probable social classes in the social space. First, there is a net hierarchy in terms of overall resources, opportunities, and intergenerational relations across our cluster solution. Individuals in Cluster 1 have the most resources, socially valued credentials, and the best living conditions compared to all other clusters. The reverse is true for individuals in Cluster 5. Second, not all the seven variables correlate perfectly with the clusters; while privileged categories correlate positively among top

clusters, some clusters comprise both, relatively privileged and disadvantaged categories. Third, commonly used variables in the analysis of social stratification like income, educational attainment, and occupation appear split across the probable social classes, revealing complex dynamics in the social stratification structure.

The next paragraphs briefly summarise the main characteristics of each cluster including their relative size in parenthesis. Importantly, most of the complexities comprising these clusters and interrelations among variables would be masked in univariate analysis based solely on migration status, educational attainment or occupational categories. Table A4.3 in the appendix presents a complete description of the clusters.

Cluster 1 (9.8%) is an urban well-off social class with 92.3% of individuals born in Spain or the European Union. Individuals in this cluster are concentrated in the top categories of all seven variables including educational attainment, prestigious occupations, high income, and homeownership, either paid or with low financial burden. Virtually one-half of the parental generation of this cluster had tertiary education themselves (47.9%), a very high share compared to 11.1% among the entire analytical sample.

Cluster 2 (19.7%) displays the largest share of Spanish-born individuals across all the clusters (98.3%). This group is also highly educated with tertiary lower education being the most common educational attainment (51.5%). In terms of occupation, 64.3% are managers, and qualified workers. This cluster has a similar homeownership rate compared to Cluster 1 but with a slightly higher prevalence of fully paid dwellings. Income levels are lower compared to Cluster 1. Notably, 78.1% of the parental generation of this cluster finished primary education as most.

Cluster 3 (28.3%), the largest of the five clusters, comprises 97.2% Spanish-born individuals, with a non-negligible share of residents in intermediate areas. Secondary and tertiary low education categories comprise 68.4% of these individuals, and 72.2% of them are occupied in intermediate or elementary occupations. Homeownership rates are similar to the preceding clusters, but significant shares of individuals in the cluster have a high financial burden due to a mortgage (9.0% vs 3.0% in Cluster 2). Accordingly, most individuals in this group are in below-average household income categories.

Cluster 4 (28.2%) is predominantly Spanish-born (95.3%). Notably, educational levels are strikingly low with 69.1% of the individuals with primary education or less. Individuals in this

group are almost evenly distributed in urban and rural areas. Inactivity affects one-fifth of the population and those working hold elementary occupations. Cluster 4 exhibits the highest shares of individuals accessing dwelling through inheritance (13.5% vs 5.6% in the overall sample). Most of the individuals in this cluster live in households with income below 1,500 euros per month. Expectedly, the parental generation displays similarly low levels of educational attainment, with 92.1% of parents having primary education, at most.

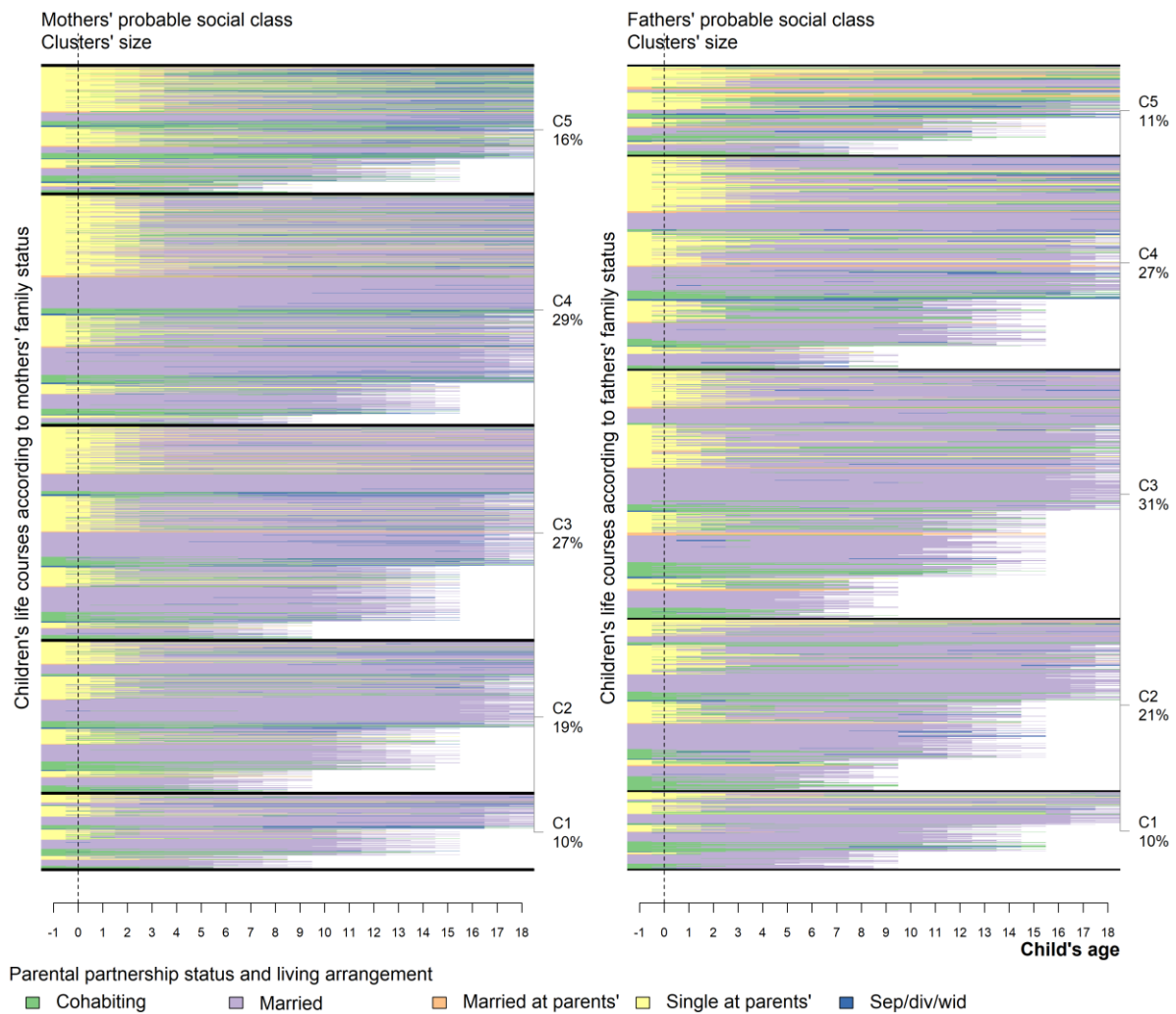
Cluster 5 (14.0%) comprises immigrants from all regions of origin, with Latin American immigrants being the majority (34.3%). However, still 31.0% of the members of the group are natives. The educational profile of this cluster is higher than cluster 4, although income levels are the lowest among the five probable social classes. Inactivity and unemployment affect 16.5% and 26.2% of this population group, respectively, vs only 12.3% for both categories in the overall sample. The clearest mark of social disadvantage in this group comes from housing conditions and income. About three-fourth (74.8%) of individuals in cluster 5 are tenants, and the 28.9% spend more than the 40% of the household income in paying the rent (4.3% in the overall sample). This implies the lowest homeownership rate among all the clusters. Regarding income, more than two-thirds live in households with less than 1,500€ monthly income. Unexpectedly, the parental generation is better educated than parents of Clusters 3 and 4, and slightly better than the overall sample.

All in all, the confluence of mixed categories of privileges and disadvantages across clusters, along with the clear hierarchy in terms of socioeconomic resources and status from cluster 1 to 5, demonstrate the needs of a multivariate and intersectional lens to social stratifications in modern societies, especially if they are home of a significant share of immigrants.

4.4.3. Family and employment histories through children's life course lens

Figure 4.2 displays children's life courses from one year before birth (x -coordinate = -1) to their age at the time of the survey. Children's life courses are sorted by parental probable social class, age groups (0-5, 6-11, and 12-18), and parental marital status one year before birth. Each year of children's lives is coloured according to their parental marital status and whether parents resided with their progenitors (i.e., children's grandparents).

Figure 4.2 Children's family contexts from one year before birth to age 18

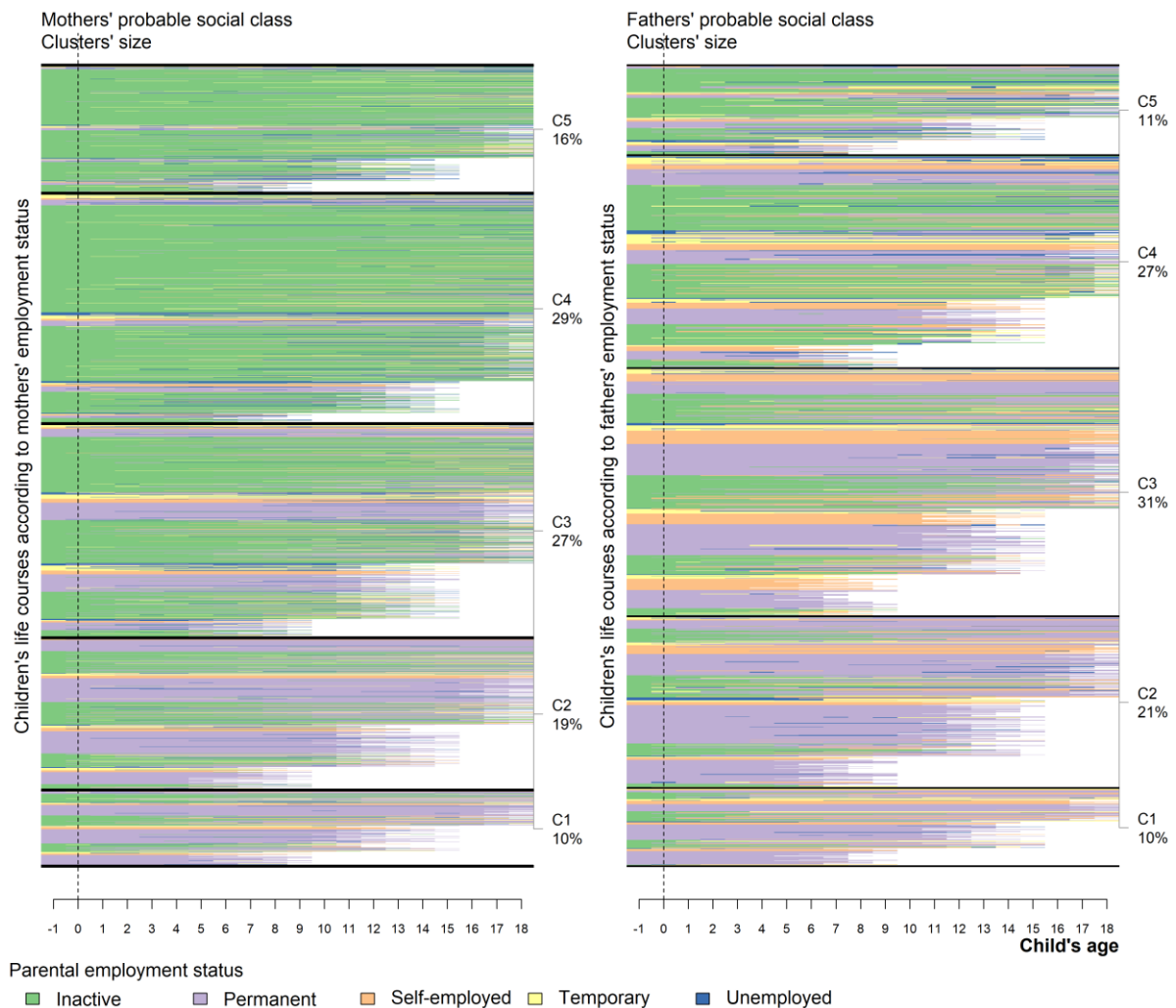


Source: Own work based on Fertility Survey 2018.

According to Figure 4.2 the overarching patterns of marital status from children's life course perspective are similar between mothers and fathers. On the contrary, we find sharp probable social class gradients in premarital births and the amount of change children experience from conception to adolescence. Figure 4.2 also suggests that marital and coresidential contexts for children to parents in extreme clusters are quite different. The proportion of married individuals at all years before childbirth is lower in more socially disadvantaged clusters compared to more privileged ones. As a result, at children's birth, there is a higher prevalence of single parenthood and cohabitation in C4, and C5 compared to C1 and C2. In addition, whereas union dissolution seems to be a feature of cohabiting unions among C1 and C2, it appears across all types of unions -marriages and cohabitation- in C4, and C5, and it is particularly marked among women in C5. In addition, union dissolution in high-order clusters seems to occur earlier than in other clusters.

The greater diversity of marital statuses and union instability among high-order clusters goes along with a high prevalence of variegated employment histories and unstable trajectories. As seen in Figure 4.3, most life trajectories among children in the upper strata occurred in contexts of sustained permanent contracts.

Figure 4.3 Children's employment contexts from one year before birth to age 18



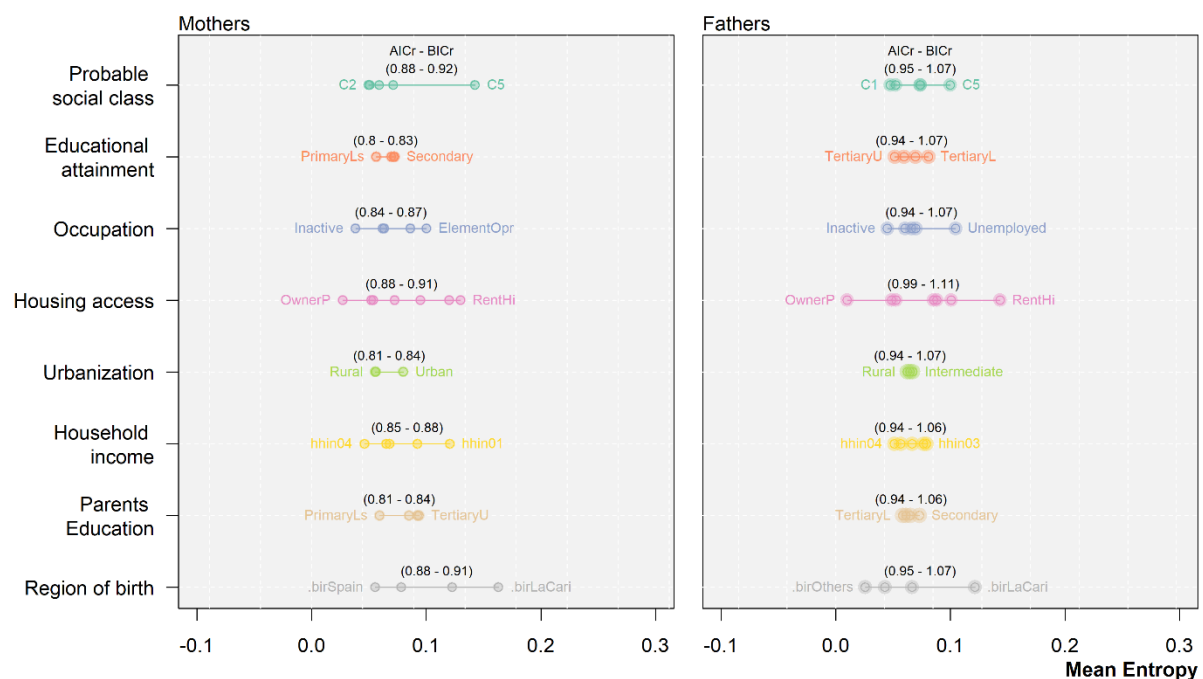
Among more disadvantaged probable social classes, permanent contracts become less prevalent and self-employment and inactivity take larger shares among fathers and mothers. Temporary contracts and self-employment arrangements are also more visible, particularly among fathers in C3. At the end of the clustering structure, i.e., in C4 and C5, permanent contracts are virtually non-existent; overall inactivity dominates among fathers and mothers with sporadic spells of temporary contracts and self-employment. The traditional sexual division of work whereby men are expected to participate in the public/economic production, whereas women are

confined to the private/care realm, makes this prevalence of inactivity more salient among mothers than fathers.

4.4.4. Implications for the study of family inequalities

Figure 4.4 shows the predicted mean longitudinal entropy of adults' partnership trajectories over the life courses of children across probable social classes and all the categories of the variables in the model. These predicted means reflect the average variation in parent's partnership status along children's life course from conception to age 18 net of the child's age and parents' cohort. A high mean entropy implies greater diversity of partnership states. Background markers exceeding the circle lines indicate high uncertainty in estimates, particularly among fathers due to small sample size. Vertical lines are 0.25 standard deviations apart.

Figure 4.4 Mean longitudinal entropy gaps in family trajectories from birth to 18 years old between the minimum and the maximum category of each variable



Source: Own work based on Fertility Survey 2018.

The numbers in parentheses are the AIC and BIC ratios. These numbers indicate how well each variable predicts longitudinal entropy relative to a model with all MCA variables as predictors, termed saturated model. Ratios close to one indicate good fit relative to the saturated model.

According to Figure 4.5, the range of children's mean entropy across mothers' probable social classes is larger than the range across mothers' educational attainment, occupation,

urbanisation, household income, and parental education. These results mean that the confluence of privileges and disadvantages, as captured by probable social classes, leads to identifying larger gaps in partnership trajectories among mothers than five out of the seven input variables. In addition, the magnitude of the AICr and BICr ratios for the probable social classes, 0.88 and 0.92, respectively, indicate that this variable predicts longitudinal entropy of mothers' partnership trajectories almost as good as a saturated model. The larger values of the BICr relative to the AICr suggest that the complexity of the saturated model may not be justified. This is also true for the other variables, but the ratios are slightly lower than those of the probable social classes.

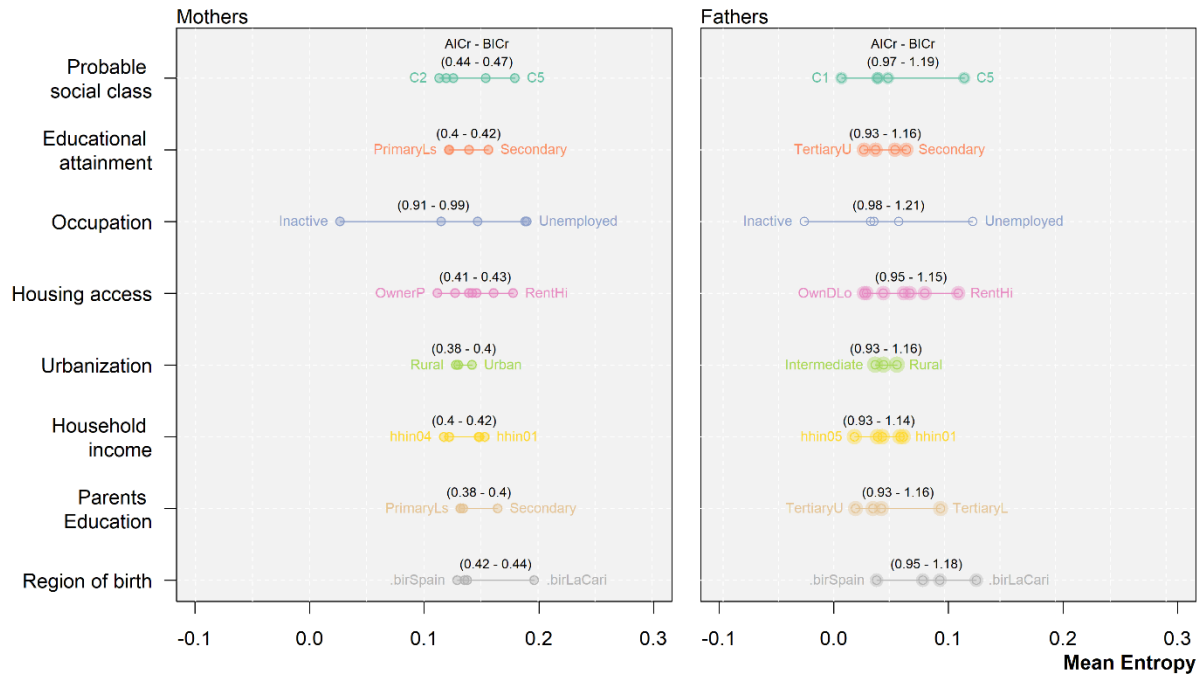
Importantly, whereas the entropy difference between C1 and C2, and C5 is more than half a standard deviation, the entropy gap by mothers' educational attainment and parental education are below 1/4th standard deviations, meaning that relying on any of these two latter variables will significantly underestimate gaps in partnerships variation across children's life courses. This is not to say that educational credentials do not matter. They do, in the context of the other variables that correlate positively with both high and low educational attainment.

Region of birth and housing access display larger ranges in the mean entropies compared to probable social classes mainly due to a large mean in a single category: Latin America and the Caribbean (LaCari), and high financial burden due to rent (RentHi). However, the AIC and BIC ratios favour probable social classes.

For fathers, besides the greater uncertainty in mean entropy estimates -mainly due to the smaller sample size- overall patterns suggest that social factors influence their partnership trajectories quite differently compared to mothers. The gap across probable social classes is smaller than the gap across the mean gaps in occupation, access to housing and region of birth. Only the gaps among education, urbanisation, income, and parental education categories are smaller than probable social class gaps. In addition, the AIC and BIC ratios across all variables, including probable social classes, are similar. The BIC ratios indicate that individual variables fit the data better than the seven variables together. This result means that the increase in complexity that results from adding predictors is weakly justified for fathers.

Figure 4.5 compares mean entropies, highlights gaps among categories, and assesses goodness of fit between bivariate and saturated models predicting the longitudinal entropy of parent's labour trajectories.

Figure 4.5 Mean longitudinal entropy gaps in employment trajectories from birth to 18 years old between the minimum and the maximum category of each variable



Source: Own work based on Fertility Survey 2018.

In terms of gaps' sizes, results for the employment trajectories of mothers are very similar to those of partnership trajectories. The gap across probable social classes is larger than most other variables with exceptions due to single categories such as Inactive (Occupation) and LaCari (Region of birth). Probable social classes yield more significant gaps in employment entropies than mothers' educational attainment, urbanisation, income, and parental education, reinstating the fact that focusing on educational categories solely would likely underestimate gaps in employment histories' variation.

In terms of the AIC and BIC ratios, single-variable models do poorly compared to the saturated model when predicting the longitudinal entropy of mothers' employment trajectories, except for occupation where the AIC and BIC ratios are 0.91 and 0.99, respectively, indicating a strong predictive power. The low mean entropy associated with the Inactive category indicates that mothers tend to stay inactive throughout their children's infancy and adolescence. At the other end of the entropy gap, unemployment is associated with employment trajectories with multiple changes, meaning that unemployed mothers' status changes several times throughout their children's life courses.

For fathers, mean employment entropy gaps by probable social class are significant with more than half a standard deviation separating the upper (C1) and lower probable social classes (C5).

The gap is only larger among occupation categories. As for the case of mothers, these latter gaps indicate the cumulative influence of inactivity and unemployment for steady and varying employment trajectories, respectively.

A significant difference between fathers' and mothers' results pertains to the AIC and BIC ratios for employment entropies. Whereas these ratios indicate poor predictive capacity of individual variables for mothers' employment entropies, they yield a very high goodness of fit for fathers with ratios ranging from 0.93 to 1.21. This discrepancy could be associated with the fact that employment trajectories for women are overwhelmingly marked by inactivity, especially among the middle and lower classes (Figure 4.3), which likely reduces the role of socioeconomic factors on mothers' employment status. In other words, the sexual division of work reduces social factors' explanatory capacity for public sphere matters among women whereas it is very salient for men. Interestingly, this sex difference in the explanatory capacity of socioeconomic variables is reversed for partnership trajectories, which typically are seen as a private and care-related (i.e., non-productive) realm.

4.5. Conclusions

In most high-income countries, the family and parental employment contexts in which children grow up are strongly stratified (Amato et al., 2015). We highlight the configurational nature of the social stratification system in Spain, and thereby reveal the existence of large differences across lower-, middle-, and upper probable social class children in terms of family and employment contexts. Specifically, we rely on MCA and clustering techniques to cluster adults aged 39 to 55 into five groups termed probable social classes. Next, we visualise and describe divergent familial and employment contexts over children's life courses from conception to adolescence by parental probable social class. This approach brings two main contributions: first, the use of probable social classes as a measure of social stratification; second, the substantial stratification that probable social classes reveal regarding the exposure of children to contextual instability along their life courses.

The use of MCA and cluster analysis expands research on social stratification by recognising its multidimensional nature. It is the interplay between the multiple dimensions of inequality that frames individuals' resources and opportunities. The location of individuals along the social stratification structure depends not only on their income, occupation or education level,

but on the interaction among them and other stratification factors, such as social and migration background.

One of the key aspects of this approach is that it sheds light on the coexistence of social advantages and disadvantages, and the interaction between axes of inequality. The method moves beyond linear hierarchical positions and discrete predefined categories, providing a nuanced representation of stratification dynamics. For instance, we find that individuals with shared income, education, or occupation levels can be positioned into different probable social classes by virtue of their differences among other axes of inequality. In this regard, the lower economic returns of migrants' educational credentials found in cluster 5 (i.e., the most socially disadvantaged) is an example of the interacting forms of inequality experienced by some population groups (DiPrete & Eirich, 2006).

The method proposed provides a continuous measure of social stratification, sensitive to the characteristics of the context. The MCA identifies the most relevant axes of social differentiation between individuals in each particular social setting. In the Spanish case, we find two main axes of social stratification. The first one differentiates by the amount of income, occupational prestige and educational attainment of individuals. The second axis differentiates by modes of access and financial burden for accessing housing, a factor that is strongly associated with migration background.

In contemporary Spain migration status, educational and occupational opportunities, access to housing, income levels, and family backgrounds intersect, shaping the overarching social structure in which individuals interact, make decisions, and develop their life trajectories. The social stratification structure forms individuals' realities, influencing their demographic behaviour, socioeconomic outcomes, and the reproduction of inequalities. The confluence of disadvantages is the main characteristic of the lower probable social classes, except in terms of educational credentials, reflecting an untapped potential in these groups (e.g., clusters 4 and 5).

Moving along the social space, the confluence of relative privileges such as homeownership and specific disadvantages such as financial burdens due to mortgages or unemployment and low-paid occupations characterises the lower-middle classes (i.e., clusters 3 and 4), further signalling the synergistic and intersectional nature of privileges and disadvantages. These middle classes are mostly composed of native-born individuals. Because these classes represent 75% of the total population, they are likely to drive the aggregate results. However, by looking at them from a probable social class perspective, we learn that they are not homogeneous.

Generally speaking, we find an urban class with increased educational attainment compared to the parental generation (cluster 2). Additionally, we find a large working class split along the lines of educational attainment and occupational prestige, on the one hand, and homeownership and rural residence on the other (i.e., clusters 3 and 4).

The remaining pattern is that of the confluence of privileges, in particular privileges that persist across generations such as access to higher education. Co-occurring privileges characterise the upper probable social class (i.e., cluster 1). Immigrants are not the majority in this stratum, but their shares are larger than those of the middle classes, demonstrating an emerging layer of complexity within South-North migration streams such as that of Spain and Latin American.

Research has shown that children of parents with fewer years of schooling experience more changes than those of highly educated ones (McLanahan, 2004), but the extent of this difference may be underestimated as other factors beyond education were not considered. According to our results, differences in children's exposure to changing familial context are larger when assessed through probable social classes than when examined through educational attainment categories.

Our results underline the traditional division between the so-called public and the private spheres of social life and their socially-warranted attribution to men and women, respectively (Pateman, 1989; Schwartz, 2010). Socioeconomic and social status factors display a greater explanatory power for father's employment trajectories relative to their partnership histories. Conversely, for mothers, socioeconomic factors are more meaningful when analysing partnership trajectories, but are scarcely useful when measuring labour instability, due to the high prevalence of inactivity among women. Hence, gender roles and the gendered division of work between the public and the family spheres appear to have a remarkable role when measuring gender differences in the social factors that help explain children's divergent familial and labour contexts.

This research has limitations that need to be considered. First, data on partnership and employment trajectories are available only for respondents. Hence, we lack information on other members of the household influencing the context in which children and adolescents grow. Second, despite the use of weights and the fact that the analytical sample is representative of both men and women at the national level, the vast majority of our sample is women, which can influence the definition of the clusters.

A relevant avenue for future research involves analysing the mechanisms that amplify or mitigate the potential effects on children of parental family and labour changes across diverse social groups. The understanding of the transmission pathways is crucial for designing effective public policies that provide children with the necessary support to ensure their full development. Finally, we have attempted to move away from debates on the effects on children of deviations from normative family arrangements. Non-normative family arrangements have been identified as the cause of children's diverging developmental outcomes. However, authors like (Cross et al., 2022) emphasise the importance of structural factors, such as racism, in shaping the association between changes in family structure and children's outcomes.

4.6. Appendix

Table A 4.1 Contributions of the variables to the factorial axes

Variables	Axis 1	Axis 2
Place of birth	3.4	30.9
Educational attainment	25.5	5.0
Occupation	26.9	7.0
Access to dwelling	10.2	33.8
Place of residence	3.1	9.4
Household income group	24.9	6.4
Parent's education (higher achiever)	6.0	7.6
Sum of contr. above 14.3%	77.3	64.7
Total	100.0	100.0

Note: Bold numbers indicate contributions above the mean.

Table A 4.2 Contributions of the categories to the factorial axes

Variables and Categories	Axis 1	Axis 2
Place of birth		
European Union	0.6	2.5
Latin America and Caribbean	1.2	15.0
Others	1.2	9.6
Spain	0.4	3.8
Educational attainment		
Primary and below	9.4	2.2
Secondary	1.0	0.2
Tertiary low	2.1	0.0
Tertiary upper	13.0	2.6
Occupation		
Inactive	3.6	0.1
Unemployed	4.3	1.9
Elementary and Operators	2.5	0.0
Qualif. agric, Artisans and Services	0.1	4.0
Technicians and Superiors	16.4	0.9
Access to dwelling		
Owner other	0.6	0.0
Owner paid	0.1	4.3
Owner inherited	0.8	2.4
Owner indebted low	5.2	0.6
Owner indebted high	0.4	0.0
Renter low	1.3	12.4
Renter high	2.0	14.1
Place of residence		
Urban	1.2	3.4
Intermediate	0.4	0.7
Rural	1.4	5.3
Household income group		
<1000€	8.7	3.4
1000-1500€	3.1	0.8
1500-2500€	0.0	1.0
2500-5000€	9.3	0.1
>5000€	3.8	1.1
Parent's education (higher achiever)		
Primary and below	0.7	1.4
Secondary	0.0	1.7
Tertiary low	0.5	1.4
Tertiary upper	4.9	3.1

Note: Bold numbers indicate contributions above the mean.

Table A 4.3 Composition of the clusters. Individuals aged between 39 and 55

<i>Clusters</i>	1	2	3	4	5	Total
Place of birth						
European Union	5.3	1.3	2.2	3.6	13.3	4.3
Latin America and Caribbean	4.7	0.2	0.3	0.7	34.3	5.6
Others	3.0	0.1	0.4	0.4	21.5	3.5
Spain	87.0	98.3	97.2	95.3	31.0	86.6
Educational attainment						
Primary and below	0.4	1.9	27.8	69.1	34.1	32.5
Secondary	3.5	14.5	29.8	22.9	34.4	22.9
Tertiary low	22.4	51.5	38.6	7.7	24.1	28.8
Tertiary upper	73.7	32.1	3.8	0.2	7.5	15.7
Occupation						
Inactive	0.9	2.2	9.3	24.5	16.5	12.3
Unemployed	1.9	1.6	6.1	22.8	26.2	12.3
Elementary and Operators	1.9	9.0	34.8	35.8	39.8	27.5
Qualif. agric, Artisans and Services	6.7	22.9	37.4	16.4	10.2	21.8
Technicians and Superiors	88.6	64.3	12.5	0.6	7.2	26.1
Access to dwelling						
Owner other	3.2	5.7	6.0	11.5	6.5	7.3
Owner paid	13.4	27.0	33.2	39.4	4.7	27.8
Owner inherited	0.9	3.7	3.2	13.5	0.4	5.6
Owner indebted low	61.3	57.1	46.6	18.4	8.3	36.8
Owner indebted high	3.9	3.0	9.0	12.2	5.3	7.7
Renter low	15.1	3.5	2.0	4.7	45.9	10.5
Renter high	2.1	0.0	0.0	0.2	28.9	4.3
Place of residence						
Urban	82.9	60.1	52.3	32.4	63.9	52.9
Intermediate	15.7	31.6	35.4	40.5	31.6	33.7
Rural	1.3	8.2	12.3	27.1	4.4	13.5
Household income group						
<1000€	1.6	2.0	5.1	34.7	44.7	18.0
1000-1500€	2.3	5.1	18.7	38.5	23.0	20.6
1500-2500€	12.1	29.0	48.8	24.4	23.6	30.9
2500-5000€	51.4	51.5	21.6	1.8	5.6	22.6
>5000€	32.6	12.4	5.8	0.5	3.1	7.8
Parent's education (higher achiever)						
Primary and below	39.3	78.1	86.9	92.1	74.3	80.2
Secondary	12.8	8.6	8.1	5.6	13.0	8.7
Tertiary low	13.7	7.7	3.8	2.1	8.4	5.7
Tertiary upper	34.2	5.6	1.2	0.1	4.2	5.4
Total	9.8	19.7	28.3	28.2	14.0	100.0

Table A 4.4 Coefficients of the association between each variable and the longitudinal entropy of family trajectories for children from birth to 18 years old.

	Estimate	P-value		Estimate	P-value
Probable social class			Place of residence		
C1	0.071	0.000***	Urban	0.080	0.000***
C2	0.050	0.000***	Intermediate	0.056	0.000***
C3	0.051	0.000***	Rural	0.056	0.000***
C4	0.059	0.000***	Parent's age 40-44	-0.002	0.853
C5	0.142	0.000***	Parent's age 45-55	-0.066	0.000***
Parent's age 40-44	0.003	0.768	Children's age	0.005	0.000***
Parent's age 45-55	-0.049	0.000***	Household income		
Children's age	0.004	0.000***	<1000€	0.121	0.000***
Place of birth			1000-1500€	0.092	0.000***
Primary and below	0.057	0.000***	1500-2500€	0.068	0.000***
Secondary	0.073	0.000***	2500-5000€	0.046	0.000***
Tertiary low	0.072	0.000***	>5000€	0.065	0.000***
Tertiary upper	0.069	0.000***	Parent's age 40-44	-0.001	0.919
Parent's age 40-44	-0.003	0.815	Parent's age 45-55	-0.059	0.000***
Parent's age 45-55	-0.065	0.000***	Children's age	0.004	0.000***
Children's age	0.005	0.000***	Parent's education		
Occupation			Primary and below	0.059	0.000***
Inactive	0.038	0.001**	Secondary	0.092	0.000***
Unemployed	0.086	0.000***	Tertiary low	0.085	0.000***
Elementary and Operators	0.100	0.000***	Tertiary upper	0.094	0.000***
Q. agric, Artisans & Services	0.062	0.000***	Parent's age 40-44	-0.002	0.896
Technicians and Superiors	0.063	0.000***	Parent's age 45-55	-0.063	0.000***
Parent's age 40-44	-0.001	0.944	Children's age	0.005	0.000***
Parent's age 45-55	-0.059	0.000***	Place of birth		
Children's age	0.004	0.000***	European Union	0.123	0.000***
Access to dwelling			Latin A. & Caribbean	0.163	0.000***
Owner other	0.095	0.000***	Others	0.078	0.000***
Owner paid	0.027	0.02.	Spain	0.056	0.000***
Owner inherited	0.052	0.001**	Parent's age 40-44	0.005	0.683
Owner indebted low	0.054	0.000***	Parent's age 45-55	-0.048	0.000***
Owner indebted high	0.072	0.000***	Children's age	0.004	0.000***
Renter low	0.120	0.000***			
Renter high	0.130	0.000***			
Parent's age 40-44	0.004	0.761			
Parent's age 45-55	-0.047	0.000**			
Children's age	0.004	0.000***			

pvalue: 0.000 ***; 0.001 **; 0.010 *; 0.050 .

Table A 4.5 Coefficients of the association between each variable and the longitudinal entropy of employment trajectories for children from birth to 18 years old.

	Estimate	P-value		Estimate	P-value
Probable social class			Place of residence		
C1	0.119	0.000***	Urban	0.142	0.000***
C2	0.113	0.000***	Intermediate	0.130	0.000***
C3	0.154	0.000***	Rural	0.128	0.000***
C4	0.125	0.000***	Parent's age 40-44	0.000	0.972
C5	0.179	0.000***	Parent's age 45-55	-0.026	0.041.
Parent's age 40-44	0.002	0.867	Children's age	0.002	0.000***
Parent's age 45-55	-0.015	0.228			
Children's age	0.001	0.007*	Household income		
Place of birth			<1000€	0.153	0.000***
Primary and below	0.121	0.000***	1000-1500€	0.148	0.000***
Secondary	0.156	0.000***	1500-2500€	0.148	0.000***
Tertiary low	0.139	0.000***	2500-5000€	0.117	0.000***
Tertiary upper	0.122	0.000***	>5000€	0.122	0.000***
Parent's age 40-44	0.001	0.960	Parent's age 40-44	0.002	0.894
Parent's age 45-55	-0.023	0.067	Parent's age 45-55	-0.021	0.097
Children's age	0.002	0.000***	Children's age	0.001	0.002*
Occupation			Parent's education		
Inactive	0.027	0.024.	Primary and below	0.132	0.000***
Unemployed	0.190	0.000***	Secondary	0.164	0.000***
Elementary and Operators	0.188	0.000***	Tertiary low	0.134	0.000***
Q. agric, Artisans & Services	0.147	0.000***	Tertiary upper	0.132	0.000***
Technicians and Superiors	0.115	0.000***	Parent's age 40-44	0.001	0.939
Parent's age 40-44	0.004	0.734	Parent's age 45-55	-0.023	0.060
Parent's age 45-55	-0.014	0.232	Children's age	0.002	0.000***
Children's age	0.002	0.000***			0.000***
Access to dwelling			Place of birth		
Owner other	0.142	0.000***	European Union	0.138	
Owner paid	0.111	0.000***	Latin A. & Caribbean	0.196	0.000***
Owner inherited	0.139	0.000***	Others	0.135	0.000***
Owner indebted low	0.127	0.000***	Spain	0.129	0.000***
Owner indebted high	0.161	0.000***	Parent's age 40-44	0.005	0.691
Renter low	0.146	0.000***	Parent's age 45-55	-0.016	0.207
Renter high	0.178	0.000***	Children's age	0.001	0.001**
Parent's age 40-44	0.003	0.786			
Parent's age 45-55	-0.016	0.215			
Children's age	0.002	0.000***			

pvalue: 0.000 ***; 0.001 **; 0.010 *; 0.050 .

Table A 4.6 Coefficients of the association between each variable and the longitudinal entropy of family trajectories for children from birth to 18 years old.

	Estimate	P-value		Estimate	P-value
Probable social class			Place of residence		
C1	0.048	0.070	Urban	0.065	0.011.
C2	0.074	0.008*	Intermediate	0.067	0.011.
C3	0.052	0.046.	Rural	0.063	0.021.
C4	0.074	0.006*	Parent's age 40-44	-0.015	0.563
C5	0.100	0.001**	Parent's age 45-55	-0.055	0.036.
Parent's age 40-44	-0.015	0.556	Children's age	0.004	0.000***
Parent's age 45-55	-0.053	0.045.			
Children's age	0.004	0.000***	Household income		
Place of birth			<1000€	0.077	0.005*
Primary and below	0.060	0.023.	1000-1500€	0.057	0.032.
Secondary	0.070	0.01.	1500-2500€	0.079	0.003*
Tertiary low	0.081	0.002*	2500-5000€	0.051	0.045.
Tertiary upper	0.051	0.063	>5000€	0.067	0.025.
Parent's age 40-44	-0.018	0.500	Parent's age 40-44	-0.016	0.554
Parent's age 45-55	-0.056	0.035.	Parent's age 45-55	-0.052	0.045.
Children's age	0.005	0.000***	Children's age	0.004	0.000***
Occupation			Parent's education		
Inactive	0.045	0.176	Primary and below	0.065	0.01*
Unemployed	0.104	0.001**	Secondary	0.073	0.014.
Elementary and Operators	0.066	0.012.	Tertiary low	0.058	0.056
Q. agric, Artisans & Services	0.070	0.009*	Tertiary upper	0.061	0.055
Technicians and Superiors	0.060	0.018.	Parent's age 40-44	-0.015	0.558
Parent's age 40-44	-0.016	0.551	Parent's age 45-55	-0.055	0.035.
Parent's age 45-55	-0.056	0.033.	Children's age	0.005	0.000***
Children's age	0.004	0.000***	Place of birth		
Access to dwelling			European Union	0.043	0.178
Owner other	0.085	0.007*	Latin A. & Caribbean	0.122	0.001*
Owner paid	0.010	0.732	Others	0.026	0.375
Owner inherited	0.101	0.012.	Spain	0.067	0.008*
Owner indebted low	0.053	0.058	Parent's age 40-44	-0.014	0.597
Owner indebted high	0.049	0.103	Parent's age 45-55	-0.053	0.042.
Renter low	0.088	0.006*	Children's age	0.004	0.000***
Renter high	0.143	0.000**			
Parent's age 40-44	-0.010	0.711			
Parent's age 45-55	-0.044	0.117			
Children's age	0.005	0.000***			

pvalue: 0.000 ***; 0.001 **; 0.010 *; 0.050 .

Table A 4.7 Coefficients of the association between each variable and the longitudinal entropy of employment trajectories for children from birth to 18 years old.

	Estimate	P-value		Estimate	P-value
Probable social class			Place of residence		
C1	0.007	0.769	Urban	0.044	0.025.
C2	0.038	0.082	Intermediate	0.036	0.072
C3	0.038	0.073	Rural	0.055	0.021.
C4	0.047	0.03.	Parent's age 40-44	0.045	0.031.
C5	0.114	0.000***	Parent's age 45-55	0.017	0.436
Parent's age 40-44	0.045	0.036.	Children's age	0.005	0.000***
Parent's age 45-55	0.022	0.325			
Children's age	0.004	0.000***	Household income		
Place of birth			<1000€	0.061	0.012.
Primary and below	0.037	0.075	1000-1500€	0.058	0.011.
Secondary	0.063	0.003*	1500-2500€	0.038	0.065
Tertiary low	0.053	0.013.	2500-5000€	0.043	0.045.
Tertiary upper	0.026	0.242	>5000€	0.018	0.426
Parent's age 40-44	0.041	0.054	Parent's age 40-44	0.047	0.026.
Parent's age 45-55	0.015	0.472	Parent's age 45-55	0.018	0.401
Children's age	0.004	0.000***	Children's age	0.004	0.000***
Occupation			Parent's education		
Inactive	-0.026	0.387	Primary and below	0.041	0.02.
Unemployed	0.121	0.000***	Secondary	0.034	0.199
Elementary and Operators	0.057	0.005*	Tertiary low	0.093	0.007*
Q. agric, Artisans & Services	0.035	0.090	Tertiary upper	0.019	0.554
Technicians and Superiors	0.032	0.112	Parent's age 40-44	0.045	0.027.
Parent's age 40-44	0.044	0.032.	Parent's age 45-55	0.016	0.436
Parent's age 45-55	0.014	0.499	Children's age	0.005	0.000***
Children's age	0.004	0.000***	Place of birth		
Access to dwelling			European Union	0.093	0.014.
Owner other	0.043	0.094	Latin A. & Caribbean	0.125	0.001*
Owner paid	0.029	0.222	Others	0.078	0.04.
Owner inherited	0.079	0.016.	Spain	0.037	0.041.
Owner indebted low	0.026	0.175	Parent's age 40-44	0.044	0.031.
Owner indebted high	0.066	0.015.	Parent's age 45-55	0.017	0.408
Renter low	0.061	0.022.	Children's age	0.004	0.000***
Renter high	0.109	0.003*			
Parent's age 40-44	0.047	0.027.			
Parent's age 45-55	0.021	0.320			
Children's age	0.004	0.000***			

pvalue: 0.000 ***; 0.001 **; 0.010 *; 0.050 .

~ Chapter 5 ~

Conclusions

People's social realities are constituted by the confluence of multiple social categories. However, so far, the multidimensional nature of social experiences and stratification has not been sufficiently addressed in research on Spain. This dissertation highlights the relevance of thinking of social stratification not as a vertical hierarchy in a single dimension (a “social ladder”), but as a social space of inequalities constituted by the interaction among the manifold axes of inequality. My findings underscore the usefulness of an inductive and multidimensional perspective on social stratification that moves away from linear hierarchical perspectives. The intersection among dimensions of inequality renders a social space in which the position of individuals and population groups is a spatial representation of the confluence of material living conditions in multiple life domains.

Throughout this dissertation I have empirically examined social stratification systems in Spain and Catalonia, analysing how these structures are related to life trajectories. Against the backdrop of profound economic, social, and demographic transformations, social stratification systems are becoming increasingly complex. Changing employment relations, migration-driven shifts in population composition, the declining centrality of the labour market in determining social position, and the emergence of new axes of social differentiation have transformed stratification systems into multidimensional spaces where multiple sources of inequality interact (Adkins et al., 2020; Barbieri & Cutuli, 2016; Esteban Aprea et al., 2011).

This dissertation contributes to knowledge by providing an inductive framework for measuring stratification from a multidimensional perspective and for identifying the primary axes of social differentiation. The joint analysis of statistical categories that measure socioeconomic status provides a nuanced understanding of people's living conditions. Acknowledging the interrelated nature of social categories is increasingly relevant for understanding social divides emerging within rapidly changing societies. Processes such as the growing heterogeneity of population origins and the increasing barriers faced by younger cohorts in achieving normative

life trajectories (van Wijk & Billari, 2024) suggest that distinct social groups are differentially affected by various stratification dimensions. Accordingly, some differentiation axes can be more distinguishing for some groups than for others. I show how this approach treats social stratification not merely as a theoretical construct, but as a lived reality linked to people's life courses.

In the following pages, I synthesise the key findings of the thesis, articulated around four themes:

- The **configurational approach to social stratification** explores the main dimensions of social differentiation of the Spanish and Catalan stratification systems, and how these dimensions interact and converge into particular social groups.
- A life course perspective on social stratification offers insights on the stratification of life trajectories and the **disruption of normative life transitions**.
- The analysis of **migrants' distribution within the social space** examines the distinct inequality dynamics influencing migrants' living conditions and their relative position within the social space.
- Finally, recent processes of fragmentation occurring at the lower end of the stratification structure are influencing the link between **social class and social stratification**.

5.1. Findings

5.1.1. A configurational approach to social stratification

A configurational perspective on social stratification shows that what determines individuals' position within the stratification structure is the intersection among social categories (Hill Collins & Bilge, 2016). Individuals within the same occupational or educational group may belong to different social strata based on their differences across other axes of inequality such as income, social background, housing tenure and wealth. This configurational approach captures complex dynamics of inequality wherein individuals can experience social advantages in some domains and disadvantages in others. At the group level, the coexistence of (dis)advantages as expressed through living conditions allows for the identification of population groups in which specific configurations of social privilege and disadvantage converge.

My results suggest that, in contemporary Spain, three main dimensions structure the social stratification system: 1) education, occupation and income, 2) family background, and 3)

housing and wealth. Regarding the first dimension, standard approaches have relied on occupational classes, educational attainment, and income to operationalise social standing (Barone, 2021). Indeed, these three factors appear to be strongly correlated, and constitute the main stratification dimension of the Spanish social space. While in most of my analyses high educational attainment is strongly correlated to qualified occupational categories and high-income levels, my results reveal relevant nuances that need to be acknowledged.

The weakened association between education and occupation, and between occupation and income among specific population groups, underscores the interrelation of various dimensions of inequality. For instance, I find a misalignment between migrants' educational credentials and occupational status in the most socially disadvantaged strata. Overqualification illustrates the systematic penalty in the occupational status experienced by migrants in the Spanish labour market, a finding that is aligned with previous research in Spain and other European countries (Johnston et al., 2015; Larsen et al., 2018; López-Roldán et al., 2011). In this regard, Cuadrado, Gómez and Sastre (2024) found that, in 2022, Spain and Italy were the two European countries with the highest percentages of overqualification among the immigrant population. More specifically, one in two immigrants in Spain and Italy were overqualified, compared to the 30% in France and Germany. In a similar vein, I identify a group of young professionals for whom the link between high-status occupations and high income is attenuated, a finding that speaks to the impact of recent labour market transformations on the precarisation of employment relations. A similar pattern was found by Molina and López-Roldán (Molina & López-Roldán, 2015). These authors show that the expansion of fixed-term contracts throughout the Spanish labour market generated wage differentials between permanent and temporary contracts, even after controlling for workers' characteristics and economic sector.

Beyond achieved characteristics, such as education, occupation and income, ascribed attributes remain fundamental to stratification dynamics. In this respect, family background plays a central role in structuring the Spanish social stratification system. Over the last 40 years, educational expansion in Spain enabled upward mobility trends to tertiary educated groups from relatively disadvantaged households (Gil-Hernández et al., 2017, 2020). Nonetheless, the most privileged positions remain concentrated among established advantaged groups. This is evident in the most socially privileged stratum (stratum 1), whose tertiary education credentials are transmitted from previous generations. In contrast, stratum 2 displays a pattern of intergenerational upward educational mobility, indicating distinct social trajectories between the two most privileged strata. This is particularly relevant in light of previous findings

concerning the role of parental background. As demonstrated by López-Andreu and Verd (2016), one of the aftermaths of the Great Recession in Spain was that the employment trajectories of young adults became increasingly dependent on family background rather than on individuals' own educational attainment. Consequently, social background had a protective effect against employment precarity, offering more stable and linear trajectories to young adults from advantaged milieu, relative to their less privileged counterparts.

My research findings also suggest that, irrespective of occupational prestige and income level, social standing is increasingly dependent upon homeownership and wealth accumulation. As a result, wealth and tenure status have emerged as primary axes of social differentiation in Spain. The growth of housing prices with respect to households' income has widened the gap between established homeowners—who benefit from asset appreciation—and "latecomers," whose financial burden for accessing the housing market raises progressively. Consequently, exclusion from the residential market takes on generational, origin-based, and stratification dimensions, meaning that younger cohorts, migrants, and worst-off population groups—the "latecomers"—now face more difficulties for accessing the housing market than older cohorts, some native groups, and advantaged social strata.

Strata 4, 5, and 6 in my results exemplify the growing importance of housing. Despite sharing many socioeconomic traits, the high percentage of homeownership in stratum 4 contrasts with the predominance of tenancy in stratum 6, where migrants are overrepresented. In stratum 4, however, homeownership is often associated with high financial burdens and precarious housing conditions. Hence, the high percentage of homeownership via inheritance in stratum 4 can be interpreted as an intergenerational protection mechanism against an adverse housing market. Similarly, the group of young professionals (stratum 5) shares some of the characteristics of the most privileged strata, such as tertiary education and qualified occupations. Yet lower income levels relegate them to the rental market, limiting their potential for wealth accumulation. These results summarise currently disconnected literature on the effects of the housing crises in Spain (Delclós, 2023; Martínez del Olmo, 2024), offering a comprehensive perspective on the interaction among social phenomena.

The link between access to housing and life transitions such as family formation is particularly salient in the Spanish context. While access to housing is becoming a pre-requisite for union formation and childbearing, the high cost of housing limits the possibilities of achieving normative life-course milestones (Mulder, 2006). Against this backdrop, analysing the

interactions among stratification patterns, social background, access to housing and wealth accumulation offers relevant information on the life trajectories of social groups.

5.1.2. Disruption of normative life transitions

Normative life trajectories are being disrupted for younger cohorts and other population groups (Barbieri et al., 2015). Over the last four decades, educational expansion and the growing demand for qualified workers in the Spanish labour market opened “room at the top” for the native youth (Breen & Müller, 2020). However, employment precarity and rising housing costs hinder life transitions and the achievement of normative life trajectories. Fertility decline, delayed emancipation and tenants’ growing mean age exemplify the limits of traditional life paths in contemporary Spain.

In this regard, my findings stress the key role of age and the life cycle in the social stratification structure. Indeed, one’s position in the social space (i.e. specific configurations of material living conditions) can be largely influenced by the stage of life. Yet, my results challenge normative perspectives on the life cycle for some social groups. For instance, while age appears to influence the social standing of natives, European migrants, and second-generation individuals, position in the social space is much less dependent on the stage of life for Latin American-, Asian-, and African-born migrants.

In addition, I find that while the distribution of education, income, and wealth is less skewed among younger cohorts compared to the overall population, the more uneven distribution of occupation and housing turn these two factors into central dimensions of young cohorts’ social stratification structure (Brun, 2024; Salas Rojo, 2024). The unequal distribution of resources among social groups underlines the fact that different population groups can be subject to social stratification systems structured around distinct axes of inequality. Furthermore, housing tenure and occupation are strongly related to the social position of the family of origin, underlying the significance of the intergenerational transmission of social advantage for younger cohorts’ social standing. In a similar vein to the age-graded stratification dynamics, migrant populations are also subject to distinct differentiation processes. Accounting for these heterogeneities is necessary to achieve a comprehensive understanding of contemporary social stratification and its evolving nature.

5.1.3. Migration within the social space

Migrant population groups in Spain experience a remarkable confluence of social disadvantages. The origin composition of the social stratification structure reveals how segmented labour market assimilation, lower incomes, and barriers to housing access limit migrants' wealth accumulation and their full incorporation into the host society (Delclós, 2023). These findings align with social polarisation theories on the accelerating role of migration (Requena et al., 2011). While social polarisation in Spain started before the first migratory boom of the late 1990s (Bernardi & Garrido, 2008a; Molina & López-Roldán, 2015), migrants' social exclusion could be heightening this process by pushing this population group towards the most socially disadvantaged strata. On the contrary, privileged positions are filled by natives and a minority of well-off migrants. My results show that African-born individuals are at the extreme end of this exclusionary dynamic, as this origin group is virtually non-existent among the most socially advantaged strata. The poor socioeconomic outcomes and the barriers to the incorporation process of African-born migrants in Spain have also been underscored by previous research. Gastón-Guiu and colleagues (2021, 2024) find that occupational and residential segregation is substantially higher among African-born migrants, and that education level and occupation cannot explain the gap in the exposure to unemployment and job instability between African- and Spanish-born individuals.

Notably, a significant share of the foreign-born population in the most socially disadvantaged strata possesses higher educational credentials than natives in intermediate strata, while experiencing worse economic returns. Such lower returns to higher education levels fuel a process of cumulative disadvantage (DiPrete & Eirich, 2006), widening origin-based social divides and fostering the intergenerational reproduction of inequalities (López-Roldán et al., 2011). In this regard, research comparing the protective role of education against unemployment for migrants and natives in Spain finds that migrants' educational credentials are less able to protect them against unemployment (Cebolla-Boado et al., 2015).

The confluence of social disadvantages experienced by migrant populations and their location in the social space is partly influenced by the migration process itself. Several migration-specific factors shape incorporation patterns into the host society. One of these factors is the age at which the migration takes place. Migration at younger ages is associated with higher degrees of both structural and socio-cultural integration in the host country (Åslund et al., 2009; Fokkema & De Haas, 2015), as longer exposure to institutional, market, and cultural

arrangements increases migrants' knowledge of and resources to access opportunities in the receiving country (Söhn, 2011). The effect of duration of residence extends to second-generation migrants: using Swedish register data, Åslund, Böhlmark and Nordström (2009) found that the educational, employment and residential outcomes of children born to migrants were substantially shaped by the length of time that the family had spent in the host country.

In this regard, duration of residence is also associated with more proficiency in the destination language (Chiswick & Miller, 2001). Communication skills are central for incorporation processes across multiple domains. For migrant children, proficiency in the destination language is crucial for educational attainment, while for adults, limited language competence constrains labour market opportunities, income levels, and social relations (Esser, 2006; Ghio et al., 2023). In the Spanish context, Amuedo-Dorantes and de la Rica (2011) found that language skills were associated with task specialisation in the labour market: migrants from non-Spanish-speaking regions were more concentrated in manual and low-skilled tasks, whereas natives and migrants from Spanish-speaking countries were more likely to hold more interactive tasks and qualified occupations.

A further determinant of the incorporation process concerns the legal and institutional barriers established by nation-states to control population flows. Institutional recognition of the right to stay in the destination country is a central axis of access to resources and opportunities (Massey & Bartley, 2005; Söhn, 2014). Holding an irregular status limits migrants' fundamental rights, constrains individual development, and hinders incorporation processes (Solanes Corella et al., 2025).

Although these migration-specific factors position most immigrants within socially disadvantaged groups, migrants are also present across the middle and upper social strata. Recent migratory dynamics, especially from EU and Latin American countries, might explain this process (Domingo & Bayona-i-Carrasco, 2024). In the same vein, a considerable share of the population in the most disadvantaged strata is native-born. Despite the fact that population origin diversity is growing across all social strata, internal sociodemographic heterogeneity is growing faster among the most socially disadvantaged groups. At the lower end of the stratification structure, I identify a socio-demographically diverse stratum of individuals who share similar material living conditions. This social stratum is comprised of both natives excluded from the benefits of recent transformations of the Spanish society, and migrants experiencing barriers to their full incorporation into the host society.

5.1.4. Social class and stratification

Alongside the growing heterogeneity of the lower social strata, my results reveal a fragmentation process of the traditional working class along new axes of social stratification. The core sections of the thesis identify a social stratum with the traits of the traditional working class (stratum 4). This social group shares many characteristics with the most socially disadvantaged strata, such as the prevalence of industrial and elementary occupations, and a high incidence of inactivity and unemployment. However, stratum 4 has experienced a relative displacement due to two main factors. First, most individuals in stratum 4 are homeowners, a relative privilege compared to the exclusion from the housing market experienced by other population groups. Second, there has been an influx of foreign-born population into even more precarious positions.

The emergence of new axes of social differentiation and the growing heterogeneity at the lower end of the stratification system challenge the sociopolitical organisation and collective action of the socially disadvantaged groups, limiting its constitution into a politically active social class (Bernardi & Garrido, 2008a). Fragmentation and heterogeneity at the lower end of the stratification system contrasts with a remarkable homogeneity among the more socially advantaged strata, whose concentration into small areas of the social space indicate strong similarities in their socioeconomic profiles and living conditions.

5.2. Limitations

In this section I first address limitations related to the use of Geometric Data Analysis (GDA) and the construction of the social space; I then move to the limited attention paid to gender-based stratification issues throughout the dissertation; finally, I discuss limitations related to the operationalisation of migration and the migrant-specific factors affecting incorporation patterns into the Spanish society.

GDA is a data-driven method, as such, the construction of the social space is inherently sensitive to sample and variable selection. The variables employed in the core chapters were chosen based on established literature on social stratification, on existing criticisms to similar approaches (Lambert & Griffiths, 2013; Mills, 2014), and on data availability. However, richer data may offer a more comprehensive perspective of social stratification and reveal new and meaningful axes of stratification. For instance, information on wealth composition and income sources would improve our understanding of horizontal stratification dynamics among the most

socially privileged strata. Sample dependency has also been criticised as a potential source of inconsistency (Mills, 2014). Yet, the three data sources employed in this dissertation demonstrate a strong association across the three stratification structures, underscoring the methodological robustness of the approach.

The use of survey data also limits the scope of the analysis. Small sample size, underrepresentation, low-response rates and other recording issues limit surveys' capacity to capture extreme positions, such as extremely wealthy households, and population groups living at the margins (Flachaire et al., 2023; Königs & Terrero-Dávila, 2025). Accordingly, my results render a social space constrained to a limited range of social positions in which elite and marginalised groups are most likely underrepresented. I might be thus overlooking relevant social dynamics affecting the overall social stratification structure. Potential solutions for the underrepresentation problem would be the use of register data to capture elites' socioeconomic characteristics or target surveys capturing the living conditions of specific social groups.

Although I find significant differences in employment and partnership trajectories between men and women (chapter 4), the gender perspective on social stratification is not the primary focus of the dissertation. The use of variables at the household level implies aggregating households' available resources and partially obscuring within-household gender differences. Despite this, I do find small gender differences in the stratum composition—the share of women tends to be lower among strata with a higher prevalence of industrial occupations. A more detailed analysis of within-cluster gender differences would provide relevant insights on the specific differentiation processes affecting women's position in the social stratification structure. Using variables at the individual level, comparing within-households stratification dynamics, or using data sources more focused on gender dynamics (e.g. Generations and Gender Survey) would enrich our knowledge on social stratification.

Migration to Spain is a relatively recent phenomenon. Thus, the share of foreign-born population among older age groups is still small. Given this age structure, results on first- and second-generation migrants with ages above 60 years old should be interpreted with caution. Additionally, regarding second generations, the lack of information on parents' region of origin limits the identification of eventual distinct incorporation pattern by ancestors' origin group.

Migrants' position within the social stratification system of the host society is influenced by migration. The socioeconomic outcomes and the incorporation strategies of migrants are largely contingent upon age at migration, duration of residence, language proximity and

proficiency, legal status, as well as the varying degrees of labour market, residential, and school segregation that constrain the formation of social networks. Despite the relevance of these determinants in the study of migration and social stratification, the methodological approach fails to sufficiently disentangle the specific underlying mechanisms driving the incorporation of distinct origin groups into the host society.

5.3. Implications and future research

Throughout this dissertation I have stressed the need for an inductive and multidimensional approach to social stratification. This perspective draws on the concept of social space to think about social stratification not as a social ladder, but as a multidimensional space of inequalities. Using the social space both as a sociological concept and as a methodological approach facilitates explaining social phenomena by contextualising them. Social processes such as fertility decline, and social and political polarisation do not take place into the void, or isolated from their context. Rather, they take place into pre-existing social structures and affect particular social groups constrained by specific configurations of material living conditions.

Social stratification is not a rigid concept. On the contrary, the substantive meaning of social categories change over time and contexts (Johnson-Hanks, 2007), as can change the correlation between categories of privilege and disadvantage. Educational expansion and the shift in the returns obtained from tertiary education credentials exemplify the changing role of social categories in stratification systems (Unt et al., 2013; van der Ploeg, 1994). By the same token, while some dimensions of inequality—such as income or occupation—may lose its centrality as axes of social differentiation, others—such as housing access—may gain relevance (Adkins et al., 2020). Future research should address these dynamics and analyse how the social stratification structure has evolved over recent decades; the main drivers of these changes; and potential future patterns of social divide.

The increasing centrality of housing and wealth as dimensions of social stratification is one of the most salient findings of the thesis. Growing real residential prices limit the unfolding of some life transitions and hinder migrants, disadvantaged social strata, and youth's capacity to accumulate resources. Consequently, the current Spanish socioeconomic context appears inadequate for the fulfilment of normative expectations regarding the living conditions of these population groups. Against this backdrop, the changing role of housing and wealth set the intergenerational transmission of resources as a key factor for guaranteeing normative life

trajectories and transitions, and as a protection mechanism in the reproduction of social position between generations (Sotoudeh & Floridi, 2025). Open questions for future research include the implications of the growing housing and wealth divides for stratification dynamics, the taxation of intergenerational transfers, and public attitudes towards social inequalities and redistribution.

When considering social stratification from a longitudinal perspective, a remarkable implication of the multidimensional perspective is that social mobility can take place in multiple directions, rather than only following upward or downward paths in linear hierarchical schemes. Accordingly, individuals may simultaneously experience diverse mobility trajectories in various life domains. This multidimensional approach can therefore improve our knowledge on mobility patterns of different population groups. For instance, analysing the evolution of the average living conditions of each social stratum and its relative position with respect to others could offer insights on the evolution of inequality and stratification patterns. Similarly, exploring mobility trends among distinct origin groups could reveal origin-based stratification patterns that univariate approaches to social mobility leave unaccounted. Furthermore, within-stratum social mobility patterns based on demographic characteristics such as gender, age, and origin would also contribute to improving our knowledge on social exclusion, stratification, and social mobility.

In contemporary Spain, the interaction between the social polarisation process described in the introductory section of the thesis and the concentration of migrant population groups at the lower end of the social stratification structure may have social and political implications in the form of an ethnic stratification process and political polarisation. Ethnic stratification is particularly salient among African-born individuals residing in Spain and Catalonia. The strong correlation between origin and position in the social stratification system experienced by this population group may be pointing to the legitimisation of a social hierarchy of inequalities structured around origin or phenotypical characteristics. Furthermore, the fragmentation of the most socially disadvantaged strata both in terms of material living conditions and sociodemographic composition could not only limit its constitution as a self-aware and politically active social class but lead to within-stratum fragmentation. Recent vote patterns and the emergence of new political options at the far-right of the political spectrum could be associated with recent social stratification dynamics.

As this dissertation shows for the Spanish context, social stratification is increasingly complex. Understanding how socioeconomic, demographic and technological changes modify pre-existing stratification systems, how social factors interact, and how various population groups fare and unfold their life trajectories within these structures is essential for analysing contemporary societies. While this inductive and multidimensional approach is aligned with previous findings on stratification dynamics in Spain, my research offers a comprehensive framework, capturing social phenomena, not as isolated elements, but as interconnected processes operating within overarching structural contexts.

5.4. References

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