

## COUNTRY PROFILE

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### SOCIAL TOURISM IN SPAIN: A SUCCESS STORY...

By Francisco Moza Zapatero,  
Secretary General of Social Policy at the Spanish Ministry of Health and Social Policy  
Ministerio de Sanidad y Política Social [www.msps.es](http://www.msps.es)

In collaboration with  
Elisa Domènech Alcover, Project Director  
Segittur [www.segittur.es](http://www.segittur.es)

#### Introduction:

Spain is not only a very well-known tourist destination but is also a pioneer in senior tourism, an important target group for the social tourism sector. In this article, general indicators of tourism activity in this country are provided as an introduction to the real success story of IMSERSO's Europe Senior Tourism Project.

#### **Facts and Figures**

Spain is a world leader country in the field of tourism. The numbers demonstrate this leadership: the country occupies the first international position regarding holiday tourism and the second position as for international tourism receipts. With more than 57 million entries, it is also the third country in international tourist arrivals, as well as the destination that receives the most overnight stays in hotels from foreign tourists in the whole world. On top of all this there are more than 150 million tourist trips made by the Spanish in their own country. The weight of the tourism in Spain is undeniable.

In reference to the contribution of tourism to the country's economy, this industry is of key importance, since it contributes with almost 11 percent to the GDP (Gross Domestic Product) and to the employment while it corrects the deficit of the balance of payments in over a third. The contribution of tourism to the GDP represents more than a hundred billion Euros, tourism receipts surpass 40.000 million Euros and finally two million persons are employed in the activities related to the sector.

#### Social tourism initiatives

In addition, the different Governments have always prioritized social policies and diverse initiatives have arisen from the combination of social policy and tourist activity.

The most well-known and of enormous success is the IMSERSO Holiday Program for seniors, but there exist also various initiatives for the young and disabled, not only those supported by the central government but also the ones coming from the autonomous regions.

At present, Spain takes the subject of social tourism to the next level and proposes to the different EU Member states a transnational project, in which the tourists exchanges, in this case seniors, are carried out between the Member States. The Europe Senior Tourism project is already running in a pilot version, basing itself on experiences of success like the one by IMSERSO and on other transnational successes for instance the European ERASMUS program.

### The IMSERSO Holiday Program for seniors

According to recent studies, it has been verified that an important number of people wait until their retirement, that is to say until they have more free time, to start travelling or spend more time on travelling. For this reason programs for active ageing, which are set in motion to cover the aspects tied to the free time of the elderly and to support the social relations, become more and more required.

The Holiday Program for seniors, destined for 1.200.000 users, is socially very much a necessity and proof of this can be found in the fact that, for the season 2009-2010, more than 2 million applications were received. In addition to the demand for the Holiday Program for seniors, there is also the general satisfaction of the users. So, according to the last study realized by an external firm, 96,3 % of the participants intend to enroll in order to participate in the next convocations.

The success of this program not only resides in the satisfaction of the users, but also in the ample acceptance and appreciation expressed by different sectors that form part of the tourism sector. In this way, it can be affirmed that the Program actually constitutes one of the fundamental pillars that feed touristic streams during low season, relieving the phenomenon of seasonality, which negatively affects the tourist sector and more specifically the maintenance and the creation of jobs.

### Economic Impact

The consulting firm PricewaterhouseCoopers completed a study on the «Evaluation of the impact of the IMSERSO Holiday Program for seniors» in reference to the seasons 2006-2007 and 2007-2008. This study was concluded in December 2008. In accordance with internal records of IMSERSO and the ones brought on by PricewaterhouseCoopers in their study, direct employment generated in companies that provide services for the Program concerns 13.343 individuals.

The study also indicates that, according to the last available records of the Spanish Tourism Satellite Account, for every employment in hotels, there are 7,5 jobs in different branches of the tourism sector. Therefore it is estimated that the Program could very well be creating approximately 85.755 jobs during six months.

As for the economic impact of the Program, the study reveals that, for every euro that the IMSERSO invests in the financing, the Administration of the State recovers 1,54 Euros in saving of the services and subsidies for unemployment, and in the consequent collection through quotas for Social Security, IRPF (income taxes) and collection for VAT.

The Holiday Program for seniors constitutes an active measure for employment generation that has no cost for the public administrations, since the economic and fiscal effects of the Program allow recovering the investment made to finance it.

### Effects on health and well-being

The biggest impact of this program however is on the beneficiaries' health and well-being that stems from more physical exercise, consequence of the numerous visits and walks they realize, and from the improvement of the state of mind thanks to the entertainment activities that are programmed for them. It has also been stated that a significant part of the individuals who take part in the Program feel "healthier" when going on these trips. In addition to the fact of travelling itself, the ambience that is created favors the establishment of new social relations and the participation in activities that raise ones spirits. Therefore, the Holiday Program for seniors is recognized as an example of best practices in social tourism on a global scale and, in this sense, various countries have requested information about the management and development of the Program.

Recently the International Bureau of Social Tourism (BITS) granted the Jean Faucher Award 2008 to the Institute for the Elderly and Social Services for IMSERSOs exceptional contribution to the development of social tourism in Spain. The award was delivered during the closing session of the World Congress of Social Tourism, which took place in Quebec. This year, the Government of Spain has also granted to IMSERSO the "Badge to the Tourist Merit" for the management of the Holiday Program for seniors.

For all this, the Holiday Program for seniors is a consolidated program and it is our goal to preserve it and to improve it in all those aspects indicated by the users.