

## Social Research Call

*Title:*

# *Revisiting the Welfare Magnet Hypothesis: Healthcare Access for Irregular Immigrants*



**Acronym:** WELFARE-MAGNET

**Project leader:** Javier Vázquez-Grenno

**Host organisation:** Institut d'Economia de Barcelona

**Main purpose of the project:** This project tests the welfare magnet hypothesis through Spain's 2012 healthcare reform for irregular immigrants. We leverage regional variation to assess whether access to public healthcare attracts immigration. Our approach combines causal inference with surveys on native attitudes. An embedded experiment explores how information shapes public perceptions.

**Design/methodology/approach:** We use quasi-experimental and experimental methods with administrative, survey, and original data. Spain's 2012 healthcare reform serves as a natural experiment analysed via DiD, triple-DiD, and event studies. A large-scale survey with randomized information treatments assesses shifts in public beliefs. Our mixed-methods design captures causal effects and links policy, migration, and public opinion.

**Potential results:** Immigration is shaped by many factors, with healthcare access playing a minor role. Despite regional variation in implementing Spain's 2012 policy, internal migration remained largely unchanged. However, the policy exacerbated negative perceptions, particularly among specific groups. Sharing factual information may challenge welfare magnet beliefs and enhance public understanding of immigration dynamics.

**Social relevance of the research:** This project explores how healthcare restrictions for irregular immigrants affect migration patterns, public opinion, and policymaking. These measures shape lives, fuel polarization, and erode social cohesion. By uncovering actual impacts and correcting misperceptions, the research aims to support more informed, humane, and cohesive immigration policies.

**Originality/value of the project:** This project provides causal evidence on how healthcare restrictions affect migration decisions. It uniquely connects policy impacts with public attitudes through original survey data and embedded experiments. Unlike existing surveys, ours directly examines beliefs about welfare-driven immigration, testing how real-world evidence shifts these beliefs, filling key gaps in policy-relevant migration research.