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# Migrant Origin Children and Child Poverty in Spain: A Decomposition Analysis

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## Abstract

Southern and Eastern European countries have historically had high child poverty rates. In the case of Spain, child poverty rates for migrant origin children, a growing population group, have remained among the highest across EU-27 countries in the last decades. Despite wide recognition among both researchers and policy makers of the scale of the problem, the factors explaining the poverty gap between migrant and native origin children remain under-researched. Applying the theoretical framework of ethnic penalties to the study of child poverty and using pooled data from the Spanish Survey on Income and Living Conditions, we explore the factors associated with the poverty penalty for three migrant origin groups of children–Ecuadorian, Moroccan, and Romanian– defined based on their parents' country of birth. Decomposition analysis results show the poverty penalty to be highest for Moroccan origin children, followed by Romanian and Ecuadorian. Our models account for a large amount of the observed gross poverty penalties, particularly in the case of Ecuadorian origin children for whom we are able to explain it in full. The household labour market position and parental educational attainment emerge as key explanatory factors, although we do observe substantial differences in the relative weight of risk factors across groups. These findings have important policy implications and make the case for the incorporation of an understanding of migrant origin differences into the child poverty agenda.

**Keywords** Child Poverty · Migrant Origin · Risk Factors · Poverty Penalty · Decomposition Analysis · Spain

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## 1 Introduction

Child poverty has been a structural problem for decades. Across Europe, children of migrant origin are overrepresented among children in poverty. Immigrant households, particularly those with children, have been the hardest hit first by the 2008 crisis and the following economic recession and, more recently, by the COVID-19 crisis (Borjas & Cassidy, 2020; Cantillon et al., 2017; Muñoz-Comet & Arcarons, 2024). This is particularly the case in the so-called new immigration countries (compared to old immigration countries such as the United States or the United Kingdom), and yet these realities are comparatively under-researched. To contribute to fill this gap, this article studies the case of Spain, a new immigration country with structurally high child poverty rates. According to the last Spanish Survey on Income and Living Conditions (SILC) data, migrant origin children account for 31% of the child population but constitute 52.7% of children in poverty. Although both researchers and policy makers recognise the scale of the problem, the factors explaining the poverty gap between migrant and native origin children remain under-researched. This article aims therefore to contribute to the broader literature on the determinants of this migrant origin penalty. Its objective is to be a starting point for this research topic in Spain, providing unprecedented evidence to support the incorporation of an understanding of migrant origin differences into the child poverty agenda.

Addressing the situation of migrant origin children is key to reducing poverty and inequality for at least three reasons. First, they are a fast-growing group in new immigration countries in Southern Europe. These countries have seen the immigrant population grow significantly since the beginning of the 21st century, being this particularly true for the case of Spain (Portes et al., 2016). Studying the determinants of the living standards of migrant origin children is therefore key to understand future trends in socioeconomic conditions (Borjas, 2011). Second, child poverty has negative consequences in terms of education, employment and health over the life course, what is known as the scarring effect (Duncan et al., 1998, 2012; Ermisch et al., 2001). Third, poverty has intergenerational effects, particularly for migrant origin children, meaning this scarring can affect subsequent generations (Ayllón et al., 2022; Ermisch et al., 2012; Parolin et al., 2022; Galloway et al., 2009).

As migrant origin children become adults, they might drag the consequences of childhood poverty and, since these are transmitted over generations, migrant origin groups may account for an increasing proportion of those in poverty over time. Understanding the determinants of poverty among this population group is therefore essential for designing effective policy responses. Early policy interventions have the potential to affect migrant origin differences in poverty throughout the life course, being the reduction of migrant origin differences in child poverty key for addressing long-term inequality in economic opportunity (Marí-Klose et al., 2010; Platt, 2009).

In the past decade, political attention to child poverty has increased leading to the design of important new policies and strategies both at the EU and national level. This article makes two important contributions to the child poverty and migration literatures. First, it uses novel data on parental country of birth–available upon request in the Spanish SILC– to more accurately define migrant origin. To our knowledge, this is the first study to use detailed parental country of birth information to study

child poverty in Spain. We focus on children from three origins–namely Moroccan, Romanian and Ecuadorian– and assess similarities and differences in migrant origin poverty penalties. This approach overcomes the limitations of treating migrant origin children as a homogeneous group or classifying them with the more often-used definition based on broader regional categories, allowing for a more detailed exploration of differences and similarities between more homogeneous groups. Second, we apply a decomposition analysis to assess whether differences in the distribution of risk factors across these groups explain differences in child poverty; as well as the contribution of each risk factor in explaining the poverty gap between each migrant origin group and native children. In doing so, this article contributes to the child poverty and migration literatures beyond the Spanish reality.

Moreover, we argue that monitoring indicators for migrant origin children is key to measure the effectiveness of mainstream measures to combat child poverty. As Platt (2009, p. 14) notes, many of the measures in place to monitor progress on child poverty are not (or not able to be) sensitive to migrant origin differences. This issue has gained prominence with the recent approval of the Council Recommendation establishing the European Child Guarantee, the main instrument at the EU level to fight child poverty, which identifies migrant origin children as a key target group to monitor (Council of the European Union, 2021). From a policy perspective, thinking both in terms of migrant origin compositional differences in poverty risk factors, and in terms of the scale of the migrant origin penalty, can better inform potential policy responses. Universal measures may be appropriate for addressing compositional differences (as they address social risks that broadly affect children with diverse backgrounds), while targeted measures–such as increasing benefits uptake or combating discrimination– might be needed to address specific migrantorigin penalties.

## 2 Child Poverty and Migrant Origin Children in Spain

Child poverty in Spain is significantly higher than expected for its level of economic development. From 2008 to 2023, Spain has consistently ranked among the EU countries with the highest child poverty rates, close to Bulgaria and Romania. Over this period, child poverty rates remained above 25%, peaking at 30.5% in 2014 during the economic recession. In 2023, the last available data, at 28.9%, the child poverty rate was 9.5 p.p. higher than the EU-27 average affecting 2.3 million children. Compared to other age groups, children have the highest risk of poverty in the country, followed by young adults. The characteristics of child poverty have also changed over time, with a notable increase, following the 2008 crisis, in chronicity and in-work poverty (Cantó et al., 2023; Lanau & Lozano, 2024). Maintaining these high levels of child poverty over time has also wider implications for society. A recent study by Cantó et al. (2023) estimates the cost of child poverty in Spain to be equivalent to 5,1% of the gross domestic product.

International reports underscore Spain's tax-benefit system as a key factor behind its high child poverty rates (Marí-Klose, 2019). As of 2021, public expenditure on family policies was 1.3% of GDP, well below the OECD average of 2.3%. Direct financial support to families is particularly modest. Furthermore, child-contingent

cash benefits schemes in Spain have traditionally provided support to higher deciles through tax relief (which poorer households cannot benefit from) and little or no support to low-income households. This should be radically changed to increase the efficacy of child income benefits in reducing poverty. Although the country has recently adopted reforms aimed at improving this support[1], the latest data still place its spending on family and child policies near the bottom of OECD countries. In this context, specific and adequate protection for children, beyond the core contributory programs, has been presented as key for upholding migrant origin and native children alike (Acevedo-Garcia et al., 2021; Bornukova et al., 2024; Smeeding et al., 2009).

Child poverty in Spain has a strong geographical dimension. Historical, demographic and socioeconomic differences across the territory result in asymmetries in affluence and labour market dynamism. Furthermore, regional governments have relevant responsibilities in social spending, particularly in those related to social exclusion, health, education and family policies. As a consequence, poverty rates vary widely across regions (Ayllón, 2017; Cantó & Ayala, 2014). A recently published map of child poverty at the district level based on geo-referenced tax register data shows both a clear north-south divide in child poverty and important poverty pockets in otherwise affluent regions and cities. This underscores the importance of a detailed territorialised notion of child poverty to understand the opportunity structures in which children grow up (Alto Comisionado contra la Pobreza Infantil, 2021; Chetty et al., 2018).

### 2.1 The Growing Presence of Migrant Origin Children

Spain has become one of the most important immigration receiving countries in the world. According to the Continuous Population Statistics data, the immigrant population has surged from virtually non-existent in the 1990s constituting almost 19% of the total population in 2024, i.e. 9.2 million foreign-born individuals, the highest number ever recorded. This percentage reflects an upward trend over the last two decades, only briefly interrupted during the Great Recession and the pandemic (Bayona-i-Carrasco & Domingo, 2024; González-Ferrer & Moreno-Fuentes, 2017). This increase in the contingent of the foreign-born population has been accompanied by a diversification of their countries of origin and a rapid territorial diffusion over the country. The foreign-born population is, however, still unevenly distributed across regions, with a difference of more than 20 p.p. between the regions with the highest and the lowest shares of foreign-born residents (Instituto Nacional de Estadística, 2024a).

Since Spain's emergence as an immigration country in the eighties to its current consolidation as a major immigrant destination, migration policy has undergone different stages. The two decades following the first immigration law of 1985 were characterised by high levels of irregular migration due to the mismatch between the need of foreign workers and the lack of adequate recruitment channels. During that

[1] Positive steps have been taken since 2022 after the introduction of a new non-contributory benefit for children living in households at risk of poverty (the *Complemento de Ayuda a la Infancia*). However, non-take up rates remain high (around 80%) eroding the capacity of this measure to reduce child poverty.

time, immigration policies struggled to keep up with rising demand for workers in fast-growing economic sectors such as construction or hospitality. These dysfunctionalities, in a country with a non-negligible informal economy, led to several mass regularisation programmes to collectively grant legal status.

Subsequently, the migration regime moved towards offering a more predictable path to legal and social integration, with irregularity becoming increasingly a transitory stage. Key milestones include the provision of access to services (e.g. health and education) to all immigrants registered in their local municipality independently of their legal status on the same terms as Spanish nationals in 2000, as well as the 2004 introduction of *arraigo*, a mechanism for regularising the status of immigrants individually on a rolling basis.

The migration boom in Spain, and the achievement of a more mature migration regime over time, has in turn resulted into one of the most important demographic processes the country has experienced: the growing number of children with a migrant background, i.e. born either abroad or in Spain to immigrant parents (2.5 million in 2023). While at an initial stage of the migration cycle research focussed more on the labour market and societal incorporation of adult immigrants (e.g. Bernardi et al., 2011; Cachón, 2009; Cebolla-Boado & González-Ferrer, 2013; Muñoz-Comet, 2016), in this later stage there is a need to consolidate a growing but still incomplete research agenda (e.g. Aparicio & Portes, 2021; Muñoz-Comet & Arcarons, 2022, 2024; Portes et al., 2016) that seeks to understand how their children–a highly heterogeneous group– are faring in different domains. For this, it is necessary to deepen our understanding of a complex interplay of processes at the behavioural, structural and political or institutional levels (Brady, 2019).

Among all migrant origins, Ecuadorian, Moroccan and Romanian have established longer-term presence and account for a large share of the foreign-born population in the country. As shown in Fig. 1, children from these three groups have consistently accounted for more than 30% of all migrant origin children, reaching more than 40%

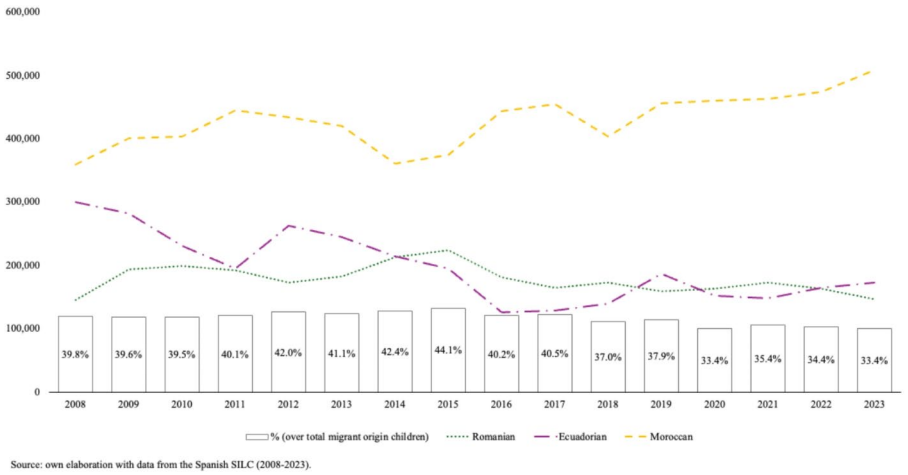



**Fig. 1** Evolution of the number of Moroccan, Romanian and Ecuadorian origin children and of the percentage over the total migrant origin children, 2008–2023

in several years. By studying them we capture, therefore, the experiences of a large subset of the migrant origin population. Moreover, from a more practical point of view, the three groups present large enough sample sizes of children for the analyses.

The three groups share similarities as well as differences. Moroccan immigrants started arriving in Spain in the mid-1980s attracted by a rising demand for low-skilled labour in agriculture, construction, and services. Initially settling temporarily, they started to settle in the country during the 1990s, with a demographic shift over time from predominantly unmarried male job seekers to increasing numbers of female economic migrants and an intensified female migration due to family reunification. Consequently, Moroccan origin children now constitute the largest foreign population in several large cities (Liu et al., 2019).

Romanian immigration experiences an exponential growth since the early 1990s. Arrivals intensified between 2002 and 2009, coinciding with Romania's access to the Schengen area and its entry in the EU in 2007, peaking in 2012. This trend declined afterwards due to the consequences of the 2008 economic crisis which led to very high unemployment rates for immigrants. Similar to Moroccans, Romanians were initially attracted by the high job growth in immigrant-dense industries such as agriculture and construction during the late 1990s and early 2000s, supported by an increasingly favourable immigration policy framework particularly at the EU level. Romanian women concentrated mostly in the domestic service sector (Viruela Martínez, 2011).

The Ecuadorian migration to Spain takes place in significant numbers since the end of the 1990s and the early 2000s, due mostly to a severe socioeconomic crisis in Ecuador. These inflows to Spain decrease, however, significantly from 2003 following the EU visa requirement implemented in August that year (Ramírez & Ramírez, 2005). While initially led by women, Ecuadorian migration shifted to sex parity over the years, with both women and men concentrating upon their arrival in non-qualified jobs. Women are employed primarily in paid domestic work, with particular adverse conditions despite their high educational and occupational qualifications, while men typically work in the agricultural sector (Domingo & Esteve, 2010; Gratton, 2007).

All three groups share therefore a relatively long history of migration to Spain and respond to the profile of economic migrants who initially entered the most precarious segments of the labour market (Bernardi et al., 2011). We might however expect significant differences between them due to differences in migration trajectories, language, access to citizenship and naturalisation process, cultural background, stereotypes and discrimination, experiences in the labour market and (lack of) access to welfare benefits, among other factors. For instance, sizable differences in naturalisation rates persist across groups (affecting for example children's access to benefits) as some non-EU origins groups such as Latin Americans have preferential access over other groups such as Africans or Asians.

Broadly speaking, children's rights are protected by a robust legal framework that rests on the Convention of the Rights of the Child and largely meets EU standards. Moreover, since the beginning of this century the migration regime has become more inclusive, increasingly providing access to rights and services and a clearer path to citizenship, the culmination of legal integration. The stepwise improvement of the legal status, from town-hall registration to eventually permanent legal status and then

access to nationality, does not guarantee, however, a convergence with the living standards of natives.

The functioning of the labour market and the welfare system leaves some social risks and needs largely unaddressed. Public support is mostly articulated through contributory benefits tied to formal employment trajectories and earnings (Moreno & Marí-Klose, 2024), excluding many immigrants in precarious and/or informal jobs due to strict eligibility criteria which require long and continuous formal employment careers (Moreno-Fuentes & Bruquetas, 2009).

This is aggravated by welfare state underinvestment in non-contributory programs. Targeted public expenditure against poverty and social exclusion, which could potentially benefit low-income migrant households, is largely ineffective in Spain. The levels of mean-tested income schemes comprising the last safety net are low and far from European standards (Marchal et al., 2014). Means tested benefits primarily target older unemployed people with low employability, the vast majority of whom are natives. Additionally, minimum income schemes, administered to a large extent by regional governments offer limited coverage, hindered by high non-take rates due to administrative burdens and insufficient income levels to lift people out of poverty. Added to this, restrictive eligibility criteria prevent undocumented but also recent migrants from accessing benefits (Ayala et al., 2021).

In sum, the characteristics of welfare citizenship in Spain, defined by the complex interplay of both migrant and welfare policies, result in the persistence of inequalities that particularly affect immigrants and their descendants.

### 2.2 The Conceptualization of a Migrant Origin Poverty Penalty

The term 'ethnic penalty', coined by Heath and Ridge (1983) and further developed in Heath and McMahon (1997) and Heath and Cheung (2007), offers a useful analytical framework for studying poverty differences between native and migrant origin children. Originally developed to study the sources of ethnic disadvantage in the labour market, the term 'ethnic penalty' referred to unobserved or unobservable differences both between and within groups (e.g. discrimination or skills) that affected group outcomes after the main observable correlates such as age or qualifications are accounted for. Since this first application, the concept has been used by migration researchers to summarise the combined effect of unobserved differences between groups beyond the labour market. Moreover, some authors have also differentiated between gross ethnic penalties–before accounting for any correlates of the outcome of interest– and net ethnic penalties–after accounting for key correlates–.

Following Platt (2009) and Baker et al. (2022), we apply this analytical strategy to the study of child poverty in Spain by defining both gross and net child poverty penalties[2]. We define 'gross penalties' as the difference in the probability of being in poverty between different migrant origin groups and natives before accounting for compositional differences in poverty risk factors. The gross penalty can be explained therefore by the different exposure of migrant and native origin children to known

[2] Instead of defining broad race/ethnic categories, often used in the Anglo-Saxon context, we explore how penalties vary by country of origin.

poverty risk factors. 'Net penalties' refer instead to the unexplained or residual differences between groups after accounting for key child poverty risk factors. The net poverty penalty can be attributed then to either differing poverty risks' specific factors (for instance a smaller protective effect of parental education for migrant origin children compared to natives); or to unobserved or unobservable differences between different origin groups, which may involve factors such as migrant discrimination in the labour market among others. In other words, a net ethnic poverty penalty can be defined as an unexplained difference in poverty risk between otherwise similar children in similar families from different migrant origin groups.

The goal is therefore to examine whether a migrant origin group has a higher child poverty rate since it has more characteristics that put it at risk, or whether there is an additional risk of poverty associated with being part of that group. Additionally, apart from attributing to these characteristics a share of migrant origin poverty risk differences with native children; we are also interested in identifying which characteristics are more or less important to the increased risk of poverty of a particular group. For this purpose, the most indicated analytical strategy is a decomposition analysis, as we will discuss in more detail in Sect. 3.1.

This approach offers useful indications for policy. If we can explain migrant origin differences in child poverty with respect to natives by differences in group characteristics, policy makers will be able to design effective poverty reduction policies by addressing these differences. If, by contrast, we are not able to explain migrant origin poverty risk differences and, therefore, net ethnic penalties remain, this points to a gap in the understanding of how poverty occurs for these groups, which implies the need for further research and explanation and, perhaps, for tailored or targeted policies, or at least an evaluation of the effectiveness of mainstream measures, for specific groups.

### 2.3 Child Poverty risk Factors and Their Interplay with Migrant Origin

Gross ethnic penalties in child poverty can be explained by migrant origin children being overrepresented in risk categories (i.e. compositional differences); by a different impact of risk factors by migration status or ethnic origin (i.e. interaction effects); or by migration related risk factors such as nativity, citizenship and discrimination. In what follows we identify key child poverty risk factors and discuss their interplay with migrant origin.

First, the literature consistently reports an association between poverty and household demographic characteristics (Ayllón, 2017; Guio et al., 2020; Nolan & Whelan, 2011). The drastic increase of single-parent families in many Western societies is seen as increasingly driving child poverty (Thévenon et al., 2018). Equally, families with more children, particularly those with three or more, face a higher risk of poverty (Stewart et al., 2023). The demands of caregiving, especially when children are still young, can be particularly burdensome for both single-parent and large families, making it difficult to balance work and family responsibilities. In the absence of accessible and affordable childcare, mothers (much more often than fathers) are likely to reduce their working hours and forgo part of their earnings. In a comparative study in 22 European countries based on EU-SILC data, Spain was the county where

a higher percentage of parents reported unmet childcare needs (UNICEF Office of Research, 2018, p. 40).

The association between cohabitation with extended family and poverty is complex (Verbist et al., 2020). On the one hand, pooling incomes–e.g. pensions from older relatives– can be an effective tool to boost household income reducing poverty risk. On the other, low-income households are more likely to be inter-generational (Lanau, 2023). Demographic factors offer therefore a first possible explanation for the migrant origin poverty penalty, as immigrants are on average more likely to have more children and a larger family size than natives. Moreover, some migrant origin groups also report higher rates of single parenthood (Cantalini & Panichella, 2019; Mussino & Cantalini, 2022). All these differences in demographic factors have been found to have a significant impact on ethnic inequalities in poverty (Iceland, 2019).

Second, human capital theories emphasize the critical role of educational resources on households' economic outcomes. Low educational attainment–having a secondary education diploma or less– increases the risk of poverty, while tertiary education generally has a protective effect (Guio et al., 2020; Thévenon et al., 2018). However, education may impact differently on the living conditions of migrant and native households as education and labour market experience are not easily portable: human capital acquired abroad is often less valued than that obtained domestically (Friedberg, 2000; Zeng & Xie, 2004). In Spain, Cebolla-Boado et al. (2015) find a growing inequality in educational returns for migrants and natives since the 2008 crisis, particularly affecting individuals of African and Latin American origins.

The health status of households is also a key dimension of human capital. Adults with activity-limiting health conditions may be severely impaired for paid work. Moreover, the presence of people with long-term illnesses or disabilities in the household also increases caring responsibilities and can affect the labour supply of (other) cohabiting adults (Salway et al., 2007). The relation between health and poverty is bidirectional, as poor health increases the risk of poverty while poverty can result in poorer health outcomes (Atkinson et al., 2007).

A third line of explanations emphasises the impact of the labour market participation and labour market structures on household income. Poverty risks are closely connected to disadvantage in the labour market. Indeed, parental worklessness is a strong predictor of child poverty (Guio et al., 2020; Hallaert et al., 2023; Thévenon et al., 2018). That said, the majority of poor children in Spain live in households where at least one adult works (Lanau & Lozano, 2024). This is also the case for children with a migrant background. Overall, immigrants in Spain exhibit higher employment rates than the native population (Instituto Nacional de Estadística, 2024b), though large differences between groups exist, especially among women (Arcarons, 2017). Moreover, as predicted by dual labour market approaches, immigrants tend to occupy jobs in sectors and labour segments characterised by precarious employment and higher unemployment risk (Bernardi et al., 2011; Consejo Económico y Social, 2019; Piore, 1983). Similarly, immigrant workers are overrepresented in fixed-term contracts and involuntary part-time work, associated with a higher risk of job loss, lower incomes and economic vulnerability (Martínez-Pastor, 2014; Muñoz-Comet & Steinmetz, 2020).

Human capital and labour market factors are often reported as drivers of ethnic poverty penalties (Crawley, 2010; Gustafsson & Österberg, 2018). Baker et al. (2022), in their study on ethno-racial inequalities in poverty (not child poverty), emphasize the substantial role of employment in explaining the black and white poverty gap in the U.S. compared to demographic factors. Similarly, in the UK Platt (2007, 2009) finds the work status of the household to explain a relevant share of the poverty penalty for most groups, particularly for Pakistani, Bangladeshi and black African children. While Borjas (2011) finds that human capital differences between immigrant and native households in the US account for a large portion of the observed disadvantage.

Fourth, contextual factors might also contribute to explain poverty penalties for migrant origin children, with geography and welfare state institutions serving as pivotal dimensions. Geographical contexts carry opportunities and constraints influencing individuals access to employment and social resources. Minorities often face spatial segregation, with many living in deprived areas, which place additional burdens that compound individual family circumstances (Zuccotti, 2019). While immigrants tend to concentrate in regions with lower levels of unemployment (Amuedo-Dorantes & De la Rica, 2010), a potentially protective factor, the concentration of poverty, especially in urban spaces, can hinder social mobility (Muñoz-Comet & Fernández-Monge, 2022).

Welfare state institutions play a major role in protecting children from poverty (Cantó & Ayala, 2014; Van Lancker & Van Mechelen, 2015). Countries with robust protection systems tend to have lower child poverty rates. The higher poverty rates among migrant origin children have been tied to the functioning of social policies, as "unwanted" immigrants are often institutionally barred from access to welfare State programmes (Hooijer & Picot, 2015). In Spain, immigrants, particularly those from non-EU origins, show lower rates of social insurance benefit recipiency in core programs, such as unemployment or old-age pensions, as well as in more categorically targeted programs such as paid paternity and maternity leave or contributory disability benefits (Moreno-Fuentes & Bruquetas, 2009).

Finally, a growing literature inspects the role of housing tenure in poverty processes (Mirza & Warwick, 2024). Tenure can be thought of as both a cause and a consequence of poverty (Deidda, 2015; Lanau & Lozano, 2024; Morelli et al., 2021). Renting can exacerbate poverty. Housing costs tend to be higher for tenants than mortgage holders heightening economic vulnerability (Eurostat, 2023; OECD, 2024). In Spain, the poor spend 38,3% of their income on housing, compared to 12.6% for the non-poor. At the same time, homeownership often indicates a household's ability to accumulate wealth, through earnings, inheritances or transfers (Morelli et al., 2021). Among migrants, homeownership may reflect a longer residency period that would have allowed more wealth accumulation. Thus, one might expect significant differences in home ownership both within and between migrant origin groups. Zorlu et al. (2014), for instance, report migrant origin differences in access to home ownership in the Netherlands, being Moroccans the most disadvantaged group on this regard.

Understanding the interplay between all these factors and, particularly, to which extent they account for the migrant origin penalty in child poverty in Spain is crucial to provide efficient policy responses. To this aim, in the following sections we test

the joint and individual contribution of these factors to the increased risk of poverty faced by Ecuadorian, Moroccan and Romanian children.

## 3 Data, Variables and Methods

### 3.1 Data and Sample

We use data from the Spanish SILC, an annual household survey conducted by the National Statistics Institute in Spain and coordinated by Eurostat at the European level, and the main source for assessing income and living conditions in the country (Wirth & Pforr, 2022). This survey is particularly appropriate for the study of child poverty and migration, as it provides, among other information, quality data on key variables such as household income and its components -by linking, in the case of Spain, information on the survey respondents to administrative records- together with information that allows for the identification of migrant origin children.

We limit our analysis to children (aged under 18) whose parents are born in Spain, Ecuador, Morocco or Romania. For the main results section, we use pooled data for the last three available years (2021–2023) to have a sufficient sample to ensure robust and representative estimates for each of the migrant origin groups. Related to this, from 2021 onwards the sample size of the survey increased significantly compared to previous years[3]. Moreover, by selecting this period we include both good and bad economic years[4], which allow for a more robust estimation of migrant origin inequalities in child poverty (Baker et al., 2022). In the end, the total number of observations amounts to 29,716 children. Among them, 26,861 have a native origin, while 2,855 are of migrant origin −564 are Ecuadorian, 1,807 Moroccan, and 484 Romanian–.

Even if SILC is the most appropriate data source for our purposes, the fact that it is not specifically designed to study migrant populations poses some limitations. These are related to the sample sizes for the different migrant origin groups in the country, small and with information only available for some groups under request; to the lack of migration-specific variables; or to the underrepresentation of more vulnerable profiles such as immigrants without legal status, which might lead to an underestimation of poverty among migrant origin children. We return to some of these considerations in the discussion.

### 3.2 Variables

Child poverty is a multidimensional phenomenon that can be conceptualised and measured in different ways. In this article we focus on monetary poverty and use Eurostat's official measure, which defines a child as being at risk of poverty if they

[3] Addressed initially in Spain to about 13.000 households, collecting information from approximately 35,000 persons each year, the number of interviews has increased gradually over time and, particularly, since 2021, when the new general framework regulation came into force.

[4] Income data refers to the previous year to data collection. For instance, data for 2021 reflects 2020 income, the year of COVID-19, and data for 2022 and 2023 refers to recovery and post COVID-19 periods respectively.

live in a household whose net equivalised disposable income is below 60% of the national median. The dependent variable is therefore a binary measure where 1 indicates monetary poverty and 0 no monetary poverty. Using an official income poverty measure has advantages in that it is ingrained in the national poverty reduction targets, and income is also known to influence a wide range of outcomes.

Migrant origin is our main explanatory variable. A child is considered to have a migrant origin if at least one parent is foreign born. Following Dollmann et al. (2014), when both parents are immigrants but from different countries, the country of birth of the mother (when available) is prioritised.

Based on the literature, we identify and operationalise different child poverty risk factors, classified in five clusters: demographic, human capital, labour market, geographic, and institutional. Demographic variables include household type, differentiating between 'single-parent', 'two-parent' and 'other' households; the number of economically dependent siblings (defined as siblings below age 18, or between 16 and 24 who are economically inactive); and the number of persons over pension age (65+). Second, regarding human capital related factors, we include the highest level of education among parents–'primary or less', 'secondary' and 'tertiary'–; and a variable that accounts for whether there are persons in the household who have a chronic illness or health problem. Third, regarding labour market related factors, we use number of workers in the household grouped into four categories: 'workless', 'one', 'two' and 'three or more'[5]. Fourth, we include two geographical variables: degree of urbanisation, with the categories 'low' (sparsely populated areas), 'mid' (intermediate density areas) and 'high' (densely populated areas), and regional unemployment rates, with the categories 'low' (below 15%), 'mid' (between 15% and 20%), and 'high' (above 20%). Fifth, to account for institutional factors, we define two binary variables that provide information on whether the household received any child/family and/or unemployment benefit respectively. Additionally, we include a housing tenure variable, and control for the year of the survey and age and squared age of the child and of the household head.

### 3.3 Methods

A decomposition analysis is the most suitable method to achieve our research objectives. It allows for the identification and quantification of underlying factors that explain, for instance, immigrant or gender differences in outcomes. In this case, gross child poverty penalties. Specifically, it decomposes inter-group differences in mean levels of an outcome–in our case, child poverty– into those attributable to different observable characteristics or "endowments" across groups–i.e. Ecuadorian, Moroccan and Romanian– and those due to different effects of characteristics or 'coefficients' of groups or also to unobservable differences.

[5] As the labour market participation is a central risk factor, we have tested different operationalisations including a household's Full Time Equivalent (FTE) measure; parental labour market participation; and the employment status of the household. In the end we opt for number of workers in the household as it has the largest explanatory power.

Due to the binary nature of the outcome variable, we use an extension of the linear Blinder-Oaxaca decomposition technique for logit, probit and other nonlinear models proposed by Fairlie (2005). This technique is particularly useful if one seeks to identify and quantify the separate contributions of group differences in measurable characteristics–here defined as poverty risk factors– to observed gaps. Thus, it allows identifying the relative contribution of each factor to a given group risk of poverty, by conducting counterfactual decompositions using the pooled sample as the reference group.

Following Fairlie (2005), the decomposition for the nonlinear equation $\boldsymbol{Y} = \boldsymbol{F}\left(\boldsymbol{X}\,\widehat{\boldsymbol{\beta}}\right)$ can be written as:

$$\begin{aligned}\overline{Y}^{N} - \overline{Y}^{MO} = &\left[\sum_{i=1}^{N^{N}} \frac{F\left(X_i^{N}\widehat{\beta}^{N}\right)}{N^{N}} - \sum_{i=1}^{N^{MO}} \frac{F\left(X_i^{MO}\widehat{\beta}^{N}\right)}{N^{MO}}\right] \\ &+ \left[\sum_{i=1}^{N^{MO}} \frac{F\left(X_i^{MO}\widehat{\beta}^{N}\right)}{N^{MO}} - \sum_{i=1}^{N^{MO}} \frac{F\left(X_i^{MO}\widehat{\beta}^{MO}\right)}{N^{MO}}\right]\end{aligned} \tag{1}$$

where $N_j$ is the sample size for origin group *j* (i.e. native, Ecuadorian, Moroccan and Romanian), $X_i$ a vector of values of the different poverty risk factors, and $\widehat{\beta}^{\,j}$ a vector of the estimates for origin groups. The first term in brackets represents the part of the migrant origin penalty in child poverty that is due to group differences in the distribution of the risk factors (X), and the second term represents the part due to differences in the group processes determining the levels of poverty (Y). This second term also captures the portion of the migrant origin penalty due to group differences in unmeasurable or unobserved endowments (i.e. the net penalty in child poverty). To calculate the decomposition, $\overline{Y}^{\,j}$ is defined as the average probability of the binary outcome of interest (i.e. being in poverty) for origin group *j* and *F* as the cumulative distribution function from the logistic distribution.

For the estimation of the total contribution, we calculate two sets of predicted probabilities and then take the difference between the average values of the two. However, our main interest is to identify the contribution of group differences in specific variables to the migrant origin gap in child poverty. To this aim, we first assume that $N_{MO} = N_N$ and that there exists a natural one-to-one matching of migrant origin and native observations. Then, using coefficient estimates from a logit regression for a pooled sample ($\widehat{\beta}^{\,*}$) we can express the independent contribution of $X_1$ to the migrant origin penalty as:

$$\frac{1}{N^{MO}} \sum_{i=1}^{N^{MO}} F\left(\widehat{a}^{*} + X_{1i}^{N} + \widehat{B}_1^{*} + X_{ki}^{N} + \widehat{B}_k^{*}\right) - F\left(\widehat{a}^{*} + X_{ki}^{MO} + \widehat{\beta}_k^{*} + X_{ki}^{N} + \widehat{\beta}_k^{*}\right) \tag{2}$$

As Eq. 2 shows, the contribution of each risk factor is therefore equal to the change in the average predicted probability from replacing the migrant origin group distribu-

tion for the one of natives of that risk factor (e.g. parental educational attainment) while holding the distribution of other variables constant. Then, the sum of the contributions from specific risk factors will be equal to the total contribution from all the risk factors assessed with the full sample.

However, there are some aspects that need to be considered. First, the assumption $N_{MO} = N_N$ does not hold in our case. This often happens as sample sizes for natives and migrant origin groups are rarely the same. We solve this, as suggested by Fairlie (2005), by drawing a random subsample of natives and match it randomly to each full migrant origin group sample. Then, as the results might depend on the random subsample of natives drawn, we perform 1,000 replications to ensure the full native distribution is approximated. Second, as unlike in the linear case results can be sensitive to the ordering of the variables due to the nonlinearity of the decomposition equation, we randomize the ordering of the variables, increasing the robustness of our results.

To execute Fairlie's decomposition technique in Stata, we use the 'fairlie' programme written by Jann (2006). This programme presents three important advantages. It allows for the specification of the number of replications, the calculation of standard errors, and the use of weighted data. We estimate separate decompositions for Ecuadorian, Moroccan and Romanian origin children compared to native origin children[6].

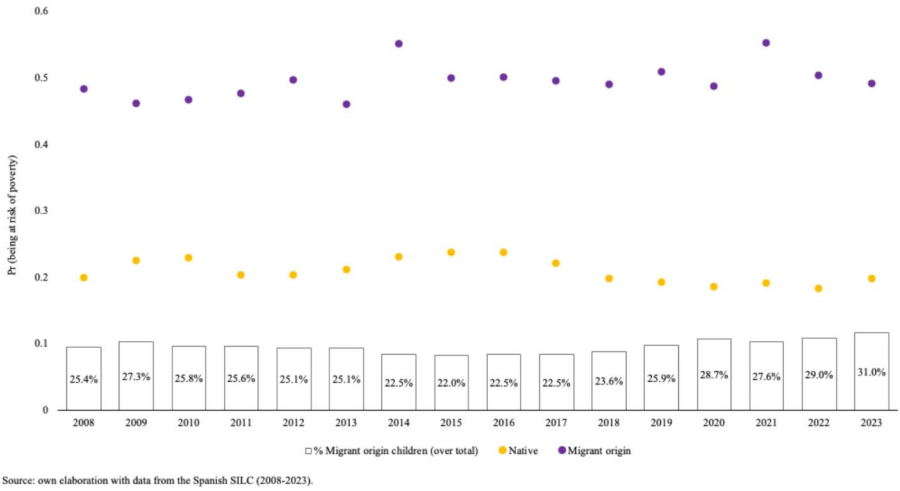
## 4 Results

Migrant origin children are significantly more likely to be income poor compared to natives. The probability of being at risk of poverty for migrant origin children, hovers around 50 to 55% during the 2008–2023 period (Fig. 2). The largest gross poverty penalties between migrant and native origin children are observed during economic shocks, i.e. in the Great Recession and the COVID-19 pandemic, when these surpassed 30 percentage points. To contextualize these results, the bars in the bottom part of Fig. 2 represent the share of migrant origin children over the total number of children. A brief decline is observed during the Great Recession, which was particularly harsh for immigrant families, while in 2023 migrant origin children represent almost a third of the child population in the country, the highest percentage in the historical series.

### 4.1 Child Poverty Penalties and Prevalence of risk Factors across Groups

Results in Table 1 confirm the significant poverty gaps between migrant and native origin children and indicate substantial differences between the three migrant groups in terms of the size of the observed gross poverty penalties. Almost 8 out of 10 Moroccan origin children, 4 out of 10 Romanian origin children, and slightly more than one third of Ecuadorian origin children are at risk of poverty in Spain. Thus, the largest penalty is for Moroccan origin children with a 57.9 p.p. difference with

[6] We use vce clustered standard errors to adjust for correlation of observations within individuals across years.




Source: own elaboration with data from the Spanish SILC (2008-2023).

**Fig. 2** Evolution of child poverty rates by migrant origin and of the percentage of migrant origin children over the total number of children, 2008–2023

respect to natives, followed by Romanian with a 23.8 p.p. difference, and Ecuadorian with a 14.5 p.p. difference.

Differences in the poverty risk partially reflect household and individual characteristics. Migrant origin children are generally less likely to live in a two-parent household than native children, although there are important differences between groups. Romanian, and to a lesser extent Ecuadorian origin children, are more likely to live in single-parent households (12.6 and 9.2% respectively). Ecuadorian and Moroccan origin children are substantively more likely to live in other type of household configurations, characterised by a larger number of adults (27.4 and 21.2% respectively). Similarly, the number of economically dependent siblings varies significantly across groups. Moroccan origin children have on average 1.8 siblings, almost twice as much as natives. Ecuadorian origin children also have a higher number of siblings than natives, while on average Romanian are similar to natives in this regard. In contrast, all groups, except for Moroccan origin children, have fewer 65 + adults in the household than natives.

Parental educational attainment is an important correlate of child poverty. Almost two thirds of native children have, at least, one tertiary educated parent. In contrast, more than 40% of Ecuadorian and Romanian origin children live in households with only secondary education, and for Moroccan origin children the highest parental education level is typically primary or less (69%). Regarding the labour market situation, a significant minority of Moroccan and Romanian origin children live in workless households (30.1 and 17.4% respectively). In contrast, Ecuadorian origin children are seven times more likely than natives to live in a household with three or more workers (17.3 vs. 2.4%), although they more commonly live in a household with two workers. Chronic illness in the household is more prevalent among migrant origin groups, particularly Ecuadorians.

**Table 1** Descriptive statistics on poverty and risk factors by migrant origin

| | Migrant origin | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| | Native | Ecuadorian | Moroccan | Romanian |
| Poverty | 19.2% | 33.7% | 77.1% | 43.0% |
| Household type | | | | |
| Single parent | 8.2 | 9.2 | 4.7 | 12.6 |
| Two parent | 83.4 | 63.4 | 74.2 | 78.3 |
| Other | 8.4 | 27.4 | 21.2 | 9.2 |
| Dependent siblings ($\bar{X}$) | 1.0 | 1.1 | 1.8 | 0.9 |
| Old persons ($\bar{X}$) | 0.1 | 0.0 | 0.1 | 0.0 |
| Parental education | | | | |
| Primary or less | 16.8 | 39.4 | 69.0 | 28.5 |
| Secondary | 17.3 | 44.6 | 20.1 | 46.9 |
| Tertiary | 65.9 | 16.0 | 10.9 | 24.6 |
| Chronic illness | 43.1 | 54.9 | 48.0 | 44.2 |
| Labour market participation | | | | |
| Workless | 5.8 | 5.6 | 30.1 | 17.4 |
| One adult works | 29.9 | 35.7 | 50.6 | 45.8 |
| Two adults work | 61.9 | 41.4 | 14.9 | 34.4 |
| Three or more work | 2.4 | 17.3 | 4.5 | 2.4 |
| Degree of urbanisation | | | | |
| Low density | 12.7 | 5.1 | 10.5 | 14.5 |
| Medium density | 34.5 | 37.8 | 50.7 | 43.0 |
| High density | 52.8 | 57.1 | 38.8 | 42.5 |
| Regional unemployment rate | | | | |
| Low | 62.4 | 66.7 | 66.6 | 73.3 |
| Medium | 26.5 | 26.9 | 25.6 | 21.1 |
| High | 11.1 | 6.4 | 7.8 | 5.6 |
| Child benefits | 11.2 | 12.6 | 15.8 | 8.8 |
| Unemployment benefits | 37.9 | 56.0 | 51.5 | 58.6 |
| Housing tenure | 79.4 | 34.9 | 30.3 | 41.9 |
| Age (child) ($\bar{X}$) | 9.0 | 8.7 | 8.1 | 9.0 |
| Age (household head) ($\bar{X}$) | 45.1 | 43.3 | 45.4 | 41.4 |
| *Observations (N)* | *26,861* | *564* | *1,807* | *484* |

Source: own elaboration with data from the Spanish SILC (2021–2023).

Notes: children (0–18 years old). Weighted means and percentages.

Regarding geographical factors, Ecuadorian origin children concentrate the most in densely populated areas (57.1%) while Moroccan and Romanian origin children are overrepresented in intermediate and sparsely populated areas (61.2% and 57.5% respectively). Compared to native, all migrant origin children, and particularly those of Romanian origin with almost three out of four, tend to concentrate in regions with low levels of unemployment[7]. This is expected, as often the main objective of their accompanying adults is to seek employment opportunities.

Moreover, it is interesting to note that immigrant households with children receive less child/family benefits than they should given their higher level of disadvantage. This seems to be particularly true for Romanian households, which, on average, receive less benefits than native households. In contrast, migrant origin children are more likely to live in households receiving unemployment benefits. The percentage is lowest for Moroccan origin children, which is consistent with the higher inactivity rates among this origin group.

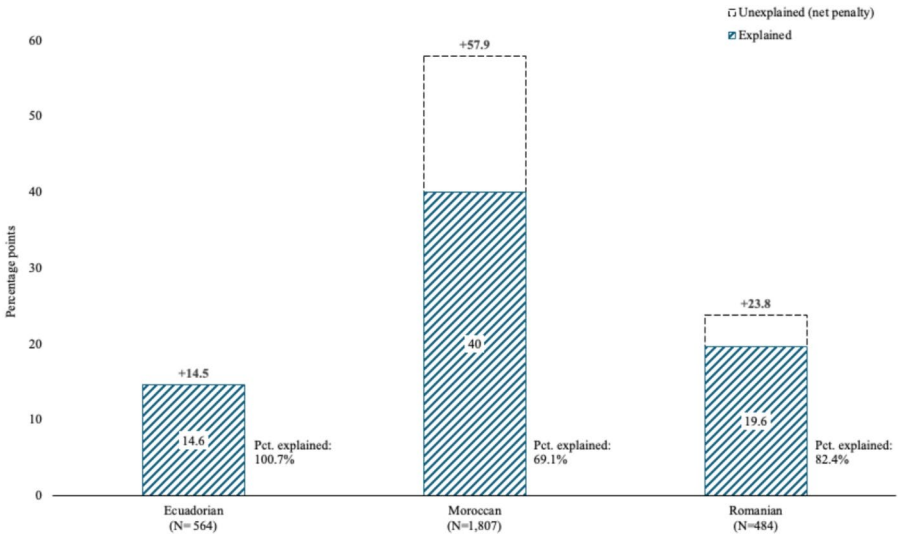
All in all, migrant origin children are more exposed to risk factors associated with poverty than natives, albeit with important variations between groups. Decomposition models next allow us to take into consideration all these risk factors simultaneously and, at the same time, disentangle their individual contribution in the explanation of observed gross poverty penalties for migrant origin children.

### 4.2 Decomposition Analyses

Decomposition analyses allow for identifying the proportion of the migrant-native origin poverty gap or gross penalty that is attributable to the different risk factors considered and the proportion that remains unexplained. Figure 3 reports a first summary of the findings. The height of each bar represents the size of the gross child poverty penalty for each group. The filled portion represents how much (in p.p.) of the observed penalties can be attributed to differences in risk factors between each migrant origin group and natives. This is also expressed in percentage terms next to each column to facilitate the comparison across groups (full results are available in Tables A1 and A2 in the appendix).

This first set of results, as already pointed out, confirm substantial differences across groups in the size of child poverty penalties but also in the proportion of the gross penalty that is explained. Moroccan origin children face the highest gross poverty penalty, with differences in risk factors accounting for 69.1% of it. For Romanian origin children, differences in risk factors account for 80.3% of the penalty. Thus, if Romanian origin children had the same distribution of risk factors as native children, their poverty rate would be 19.6 p.p. lower, considerably equating their situation with that of native children (although a net penalty of 4.2 p.p. would remain). For Ecuadorian origin children the gross penalty is fully explained by differences in risk

[7] About a third of Ecuadorian origin children live in the region of Madrid, followed by Andalucia, Catalonia and Murcia; Moroccan origin children live mainly in Catalonia, Andalucia and Murcia; and Romanian origin children live predominantly in the regions of Madrid and Valencia, followed by Andalucia and Catalonia.




Source: own elaboration with data from the Spanish SILC (2021-2023).

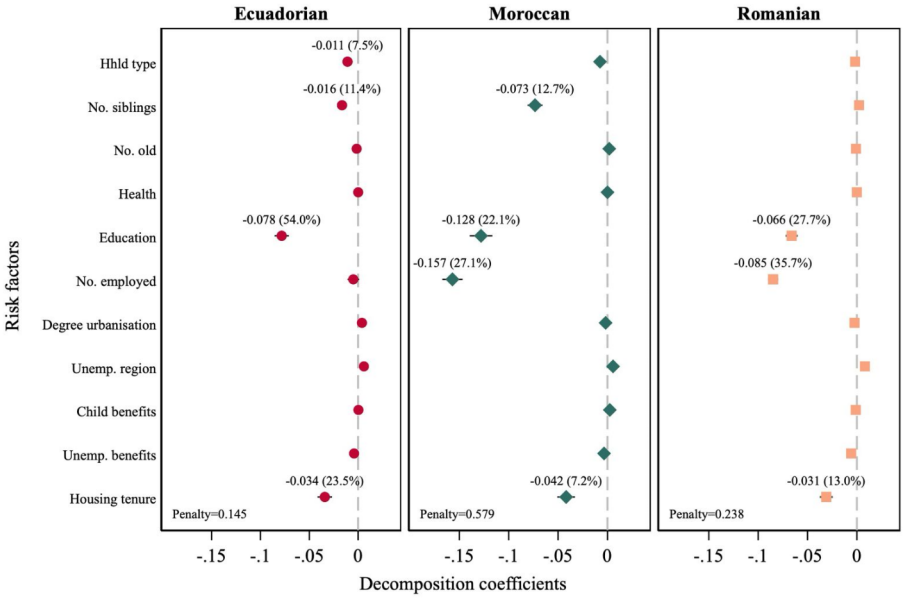
**Fig. 3** Migrant origin child poverty penalties: results from decomposition models

factors. Ecuadorian origin children are therefore the only group that does not have a net penalty once differences in the distribution of risk factors are considered.

One of the most interesting aspects of decomposition analyses is that these allow assessing the single contribution of the different risk factors to child poverty penalties across groups. Figure 4 shows the decomposition coefficients for each risk factor by origin group. Negative coefficients indicate that the risk factor reduces the penalty, while positive coefficients indicate that if the migrant origin group had the same distribution as natives in this particular risk factor, their penalty would actually increase. Therefore, the latter can be seen as protective factors. To ease comparison, Fig. 4 also reports in parentheses next to the coefficients the explained share of the gross poverty penalty by each risk factor. The relative contribution of each factor is obtained by dividing its coefficient by the gross poverty penalty reported for each group in the bottom left corner of each subgraph (see Table A3 in the appendix).

Starting with Moroccan origin children, two factors clearly stand out: household's labour market participation and parental educational attainment. Labour market disadvantage accounts for 0.157 (27.1%) of the gross poverty penalty, while a lower level of parental educational attainment explains 12.8 p.p. of the gross penalty, i.e. 22.1%. Household characteristics, specifically the number of economically dependent siblings, also explain a non-negligible proportion of the gap (12.7%). Moreover, differences in housing tenure explain 7.2% of the gap. The rest of the factors, including other household characteristics, geographical context and access to benefits explain a very small part of the native/Moroccan gross penalty.

For Romanian origin children, again education and employment related factors seem to be the most important. Jointly these two factors account for 63.4% of the gap. If Romanian origin children lived in a household with the same labour market participation than native children, their gross penalty would be reduced by 0.085 or 35.7%,




Source: own elaboration with data from the Spanish SILC (2021-2023).
Note: all labelled coefficients are statistically significant at the 0.001 level (see Table A4 in the appendix). Explained share of the gross poverty penalty in parentheses. Models control for year of interview, and age of the child and of the household head.

**Fig. 4** Contribution of risk factors to the 'explained' share of the child poverty gap by origin group

while differences in parental educational attainment account for 0.066 (27.6%) of the native/Romanian gross poverty penalty. The remaining part of the explained share is due to housing tenure (13%).

In the case of Ecuadorian origin children, differences in household labour market participation do not seem to be a decisive factor. The decomposition estimate is small in size and non-statistically significant. Differences in parental educational attainment do explain, however, as is the case of the other two groups, an important part of the native/Ecuadorian child poverty gap with a decomposition estimate of 0.078, or 53.6% of the gross penalty. The number of economically dependent siblings and household type also contribute to explaining the gross poverty penalty. Differences between native and Ecuadorian origin children in these two factors account for 11.4% and 7.4% of the gap respectively. Moreover, differences in household tenure explain a significant proportion of the penalty (23.5%).

Results show that factors such as constrained labour market participation and inequality of parental educational opportunities (both at origin and destination) and assets (notably tenure) are the most salient factors in explaining migrant origin child poverty penalties in Spain. Parental education explains a substantial proportion of the poverty penalty across groups ranging from almost a quarter of the native/Moroccan gap to more than half for Ecuadorians. Among Moroccan and Romanian origin children, differences with respect to natives in the number of employed adults in the household account for the highest proportion of the gross poverty penalty, i.e. more than a quarter and more than a third respectively. Demographic factors also play a role although to a much lesser extent than parental education and labour market

participation. The number of economically dependent siblings is, for instance, a particularly important factor for Moroccan origin children. Moreover, for all groups we find that housing tenure contributes significantly to the child poverty gap, while other factors considered play a comparatively minor role.

## 5 Discussion and Conclusions

This article builds on four main empirical certainties: child poverty is a structural problem in Spain; migrant origin children represent a substantial share of the total number of children; the migrant/native gap in the risk of child poverty has been large and stable over time; and the poverty rate of migrant origin children has remained the highest across EU-27 countries for decades. Despite these figures, and beyond the description of the problem, the enduring significance of migrant origin inequalities in child poverty has been largely unaddressed. To fill this gap, we have first calculated and then decomposed the gross poverty penalties of three groups of children– Ecuadorian, Moroccan, and Romanian– that together represent more than a third of migrant origin children in Spain.

Our findings confirm the importance of recognising heterogeneity when studying migrant origin children and poverty. The three groups analysed differ both in the size of the gross poverty penalty and in the extent to which it can be explained by different risk factors. The gross poverty penalty is particularly large for Moroccan origin children, for whom unexplained variance also remains the highest. Even if the goal of this article has been to identify and quantify the joint and individual contribution of measurable or observed characteristics to migrant origin group differences in child poverty, we can speculate that the net penalty for Moroccan children might be related to different unobserved factors such as access to legal status and nationality, language barriers and discrimination. Moreover, it could also be explained by the different protective effect of factors such as educational attainment with respect to natives as we have discussed above. At the other end of the spectrum, we find Ecuadorian origin children with the smallest gross poverty penalty, all of which is explained by the model. That said, decomposition models explain a substantial part of the observed gross penalties for all groups. In this regard, if we compare for instance the explained share of the child poverty gap for Moroccan children (more than two thirds) to Platt's (2009) explained share for Pakistani children in the UK, a reasonably comparable group, the explained share for the former is significantly higher.

In line with previous research on migrant origin poverty penalties in other countries using a similar approach, including Platt's (2009), the main conclusion of this article is that differences in parental education and household labour market participation are key in explaining migrant origin child poverty penalties. For Ecuadorian and Moroccan children, however, differences with natives in household type and size also explain part of the gross poverty penalty, although to a much lesser extent. Demographic variables seem therefore not to be a central explanatory factor once other risk factors are considered. This is also the conclusion of Baker et al. (2022) and Brady (2019), among others, who point out that researchers on poverty and immigration in the U.S. have traditionally overstated the role of behavioural characteris-

tics, particularly family structure, on outcomes, overlooking the importance of more structural factors such as education and labour market opportunities.

In the opening sections, we have argued that in Southern Europe, and in Spain specifically, the vulnerability of migrant origin children with respect to poverty has been largely overlooked. This has been the case despite the exponential growth of migrant origin children since the 2000's immigration boom, and the negative implications of this higher risk of poverty both at the individual and societal levels. In this context, we believe that our findings have important policy implications.

First, we report substantial gross migrant origin child poverty penalties, while pointing at the same time at the heterogeneity of experiences across origin groups, and argue, in consequence, for the need to address these penalties specifically in the broader child poverty policy agenda.

Second, our results indicate that to reduce migrant origin child poverty penalties, policies aiming at providing educational and labour market opportunities to first generation adult immigrants–i.e. the parents of the children in our sample– should be improved. These policies should level the playing field with natives by addressing more effectively immigrant-specific factors such as human capital devaluation, legal status, knowledge of the language and discrimination. Moreover, participation in educational or training programmes to complement or readapt skills to those needed in the country of destination should be enhanced. Given that most immigrants concentrate in the secondary segment of the labour market, measures addressed at improving conditions and reducing unemployment should also be prioritised (e.g. reducing sector-specific job destruction and temporary employment and improving minimum wages).

Third, our findings also support the idea that child poverty must be tackled through a child-centred rights approach. It has repeatedly been shown that an adequate tax-benefit system is key to reduce child poverty. Specific and adequate protection for children, beyond the core contributory programs, can play an important role in improving the situation of migrant origin children (Acevedo-Garcia et al., 2021; Smeeding et al., 2009). Poor migrant families with children (including those with a migrant background) would benefit greatly from a robust child-contingent support program such as those implemented in the United Kingdom and Ireland in the first decade of the twenty-first century; Poland, Latvia and Lithuania later in the second decade; and the United States with the expansion of the Child Tax Credit in 2021 (UNICEF Office of Research, 2023).

Providing financial support to families in need -including the eligibility of all children independently of their legal or migration status- is an important first step in tackling child poverty. However, further efforts are needed to break the cycle of disadvantage and to facilitate the incorporation of the next generations of migrants into the Spanish society. In the long run, the educational success of migrant origin children is a key factor to close socioeconomic gaps, thus avoiding the intergenerational reproduction of compositional effects. Hence, educational policies must address factors linked to educational outcomes of migrant origin students such as language barriers and language development from early childhood education and care to secondary education. This, together with their socio-economic background, explains a great deal of their comparatively lower performance in many countries (OECD, 2019). Another

key aspect that policies should address is socioeconomic segregation, which results in a high concentration of migrant origin children in underfunded public schools due to their overrepresentation in poverty.

This article represents a first step to position migrant origin children in the research and policy agenda on child poverty in Spain. Accordingly, it has some limitations, while also opening new research fronts. One of the main limitations, due to data constraints, is that we have not been able to differentiate between first- and second-generation children. Another limitation is that, even if we have focussed in the main migrant origin groups of children in the country, we have not included other important or more recently arrived groups (e.g. Asian origin children), whose experiences may be different and could help further elucidate the observed net penalties. Moreover, we have defined migrant origin using parental country of birth, but the role of nationality could be further explored.

Further research could also investigate the role of housing tenure in poverty processes in Spain, as native/migrant differences in this variable explain a significant part of the penalties across groups but the mechanisms remain unclear. Moreover, the unexplained penalty (30.9%) for Moroccan origin children opens avenues for further research, both qualitative and quantitative, to disentangle the role of discrimination and other omitted factors for this group. Qualitative approaches could contribute to the understanding of these factors by exploring subjective experiences of poverty among migrant origin children and their families. Further research could also go beyond monetary measures using other definitions of poverty or social exclusion exploring the multidimensionality of the phenomenon. Income poverty measures do not capture expenditures, access to services and other factors that influence living standards. In this sense, it is known that many migrants' journeys involve accumulating substantial debts. Repaying the debt can add to financial strain and, in some cases, the inability to repay adds to financial problems in the destination country. Similarly, sending remittances to family members who remain in the country of origin might further impact their standard of living. As a final reflection, our analysis reveals associations but cannot demonstrate causality. Future research could explore the causal relationships between the different risk factors identified and child poverty.

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**Data Availability** Data sharing not applicable to this article as no datasets were generated during the study.

## Declarations

**Ethical Approval** Not applicable

**Consent for Publication** Not applicable

**Statement Regarding Research Involving Human Participants and/or Animals** Not applicable.

**Competing Interests** The authors have no relevant financial or non-financial interests to disclose.



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