Resource

First steps after arriving in Gran Canaria: a basic guide to paperwork

Ubuntu Canarias · Reviewed in November 2026



If you have just arrived in Gran Canaria, these are the first steps we recommend. You don't need to do everything on the first day, but the sooner you start, the better: many procedures depend on others.

Important: this guide gives guidance, but it does not replace advice about your specific case. Requirements change and each town hall has its own way of doing things. Reviewed in November 2026.

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1 Register with the town hall

The padrón is the register of the people who live in a municipality. It is the first thing worth doing, because it opens the door to almost everything else: healthcare, your children's school and some forms of support. It is also important proof that you live in Spain and can help you show how long you have been here in some immigration procedures.

Registering does not regularise your situation or give you a residence permit: it is a municipal procedure, separate from immigration. You can register even if you don't have papers.

What to bring

- Your passport. You don't need an NIE.
- A document for your home: the rental contract or, if you rent a room, an authorisation signed by the owner of the home or the person who holds the contract, with a copy of their ID.

Where

At the padrón office of your town hall. You usually need to book an appointment.

If you have no fixed address: the town hall's social services can process your registration. **Remember:** if you are from a country outside the European Union and do not have a long-term residence permit, you must renew your registration every two years. If you don't, you may be removed from the register.

More information: Registering in the Canary Islands, step by step.

2 Healthcare

If it is an emergency, go to the health centre or hospital straight away.
Emergency care is provided even if you don't have papers. Children and pregnant women have special protection.

To have a family doctor, you can apply for recognition of your right to public healthcare even if you are not legally resident. You apply at the administrative unit of your health centre. You will need to show who you are and that you normally live in Spain.

What to bring

- Your passport or another photo ID.
- Proof that you live here: your padrón certificate or, if you don't have it, other documents such as a school enrolment, a social services report or bills in your name.

You will sign a responsible declaration. When you submit the application you receive a provisional document that lets you receive care while it is being processed. The administration has a maximum of three months to reply.

If you are in Spain on a temporary stay (for example, you entered as a tourist or with a short-stay visa), you will also be asked for a favourable report from social services. **If you receive a bill after being treated,** don't ignore it: ask for help to review it.

More information: Health guide for migrants in the Canary Islands.

3 Free legal advice

Before starting any immigration procedure, get advice about your case. It is free at many organisations and helps you avoid mistakes that can cost a lot of time later.

- **Las Palmas Bar Association (Colegio de Abogados):** handles free legal aid for people without resources. Foreign nationals can apply even if they are not legally resident, if they meet the financial and legal requirements. Tel. 928 31 02 00 (Monday to Friday, 8:00 to 15:00). Call first so they can tell you which office to go to and what to bring.
- **Social organisations** such as CEAR, Red Cross, UNHCR, ACAMEI, Fundación Cepaim or Fundación ECCA Social offer guidance and advice. You will find their details in our directory.

If you have fled your country because your life, freedom or safety are in danger, you can apply for international protection (asylum) with the National Police. Get advice before doing so.

More information: Can you get a free lawyer even without papers? · Questions about immigration

4 Social services and basic needs

If you need help with food, clothes, a place to sleep or any other basic need, you can go to:

- **Your town hall's social services:** ask for an appointment at the social work unit in your neighbourhood. They can advise you on support, write social reports and help you register at the town hall if you have no address.
- **Social organisations** such as Cáritas (in many parishes), Red Cross and other reception associations.

More information: Directory of social resources in Gran Canaria.

5 Children: school and health

Foreign children under 16 have the right to education, whatever their administrative situation. Basic education is compulsory and free between the ages of 6 and 16. You can apply for a place even if the school year has already started.

What to do

- Ask at the school closest to your home or at the town hall.
- Bring the child's passport or birth certificate, the padrón and, if you have it, the vaccination record.

Also book an appointment with the paediatrician at your health centre: children have the right to healthcare.

6 Learning Spanish

Speaking Spanish will help you with everything: paperwork, work and daily life.

- **Adult Education Centres (CEPA):** they are public and free. Some offer Spanish classes as part of their basic initial training. Ask at the one in your municipality.
- **Social organisations** such as ACAMEI or Red Cross also run classes.
- **Spanish every day with Ubuntu:** our free WhatsApp group for practising. Join here.

More information: Free training.

7 Basic bank account

There is a basic bank account, the «cuenta de pago básica», which banks must offer. People legally resident in the European Union (even without a fixed address), asylum seekers and people without a residence permit who cannot be expelled are entitled to it.

- **What to bring:** passport or ID with a photo. If you are legally resident in Spain, also a document that proves it, such as your residence card. If you are an asylum seeker, the red card or the receipt of your application. You will sign a declaration that you have no other account in Spain. You usually apply at a bank branch, not online.
- **How much it costs:** a maximum of €3 a month. It is free for people in a vulnerable situation who meet certain income and asset limits. If you have no other documents to prove it, a social services report may help. **Be careful:** in practice, some banks charge a monthly or quarterly fee when you open an account with only a passport. Before signing, ask how much you will pay and ask specifically for the «cuenta de pago básica», which by law cannot cost more than €3 a month.
- **If they refuse:** the bank must reply in writing, within 10 working days of receiving your complete application, and explain why. Ask them to stamp a copy of your application with the date. You can complain to the bank's customer service department.

8 Working

To work legally in Spain you must be entitled to work, depending on your nationality and your administrative situation. If you are from a European Union country, free movement rules apply. If you are from a country outside the EU, you need an authorisation that allows you to work, except in some cases set out in the law.

Working without authorisation can have consequences. But if you have worked and have not been paid, or have had an accident at work, you still have rights: get advice to find out how to make a claim.

- **If you have applied for asylum:** if your application has been admitted for processing and, after six months, it has not been decided for reasons that do not depend on you, you can work. The authorisation must appear on your applicant document (the «red card»).
- **If you don't have papers:** there are ways to regularise your situation, such as arraigo. Get advice to find out which one fits you.
- **In the meantime:** use the time to train, learn Spanish and, if you have qualifications, find out how to get your degree recognised.

More information: Regularisation: what now? · Getting a foreign qualification recognised · Job offers in Gran Canaria

9 Watch out for scams

- **Immigration appointments are free.** Nobody can sell you an appointment.
- **Nobody can sell you papers,** a padrón or a work contract to regularise you. Be wary of anyone who promises to regularise your situation for money or offers you fake work contracts.
- **Be wary of any offer that asks you for money in advance** to give you a job, a home or a procedure.
- **Don't hand over your original passport** to anyone other than the authorities.

- **Keep copies of all your documents,** on paper and as photos on your phone. Papers with your name and a date (medical appointments, courses, reports) can later help you show how long you have been here, although their value depends on each procedure.

10 Useful phone numbers

- **112**
  Emergencies (free, 24 hours)
- **016**
  Gender-based violence (free; it does not appear on the bill, but it does appear in your phone's call log: you can delete it)
- **012**
  Canary Islands Government information
- **928 31 02 00**
  Las Palmas Bar Association
- **642 418 617**
  Ubuntu Canarias (WhatsApp only) · info@ubuntucanarias.org

The information in this guide is for guidance only. Requirements may vary depending on your circumstances and the regulations in force: check each procedure with the relevant body. Ubuntu Canarias does not process documents or replace legal advice. If you have questions, write to us and we will help you find who to turn to.

Sources: Technical instructions for the municipal register (BOE, 2020) · Royal Decree 180/2026, healthcare · Organic Law 4/2000 on foreign nationals · Organic Law 2/2006 on Education · Immigration Regulation (RD 1155/2024) · Royal Decree-law 19/2017, basic payment accounts · Bank of Spain · Las Palmas Bar Association.