HOW WAS THE REFORM OF SPAIN'S LONG-TERM CARE SYSTEM MADE POSSIBLE?

Spain 2020–2026

The law came last.

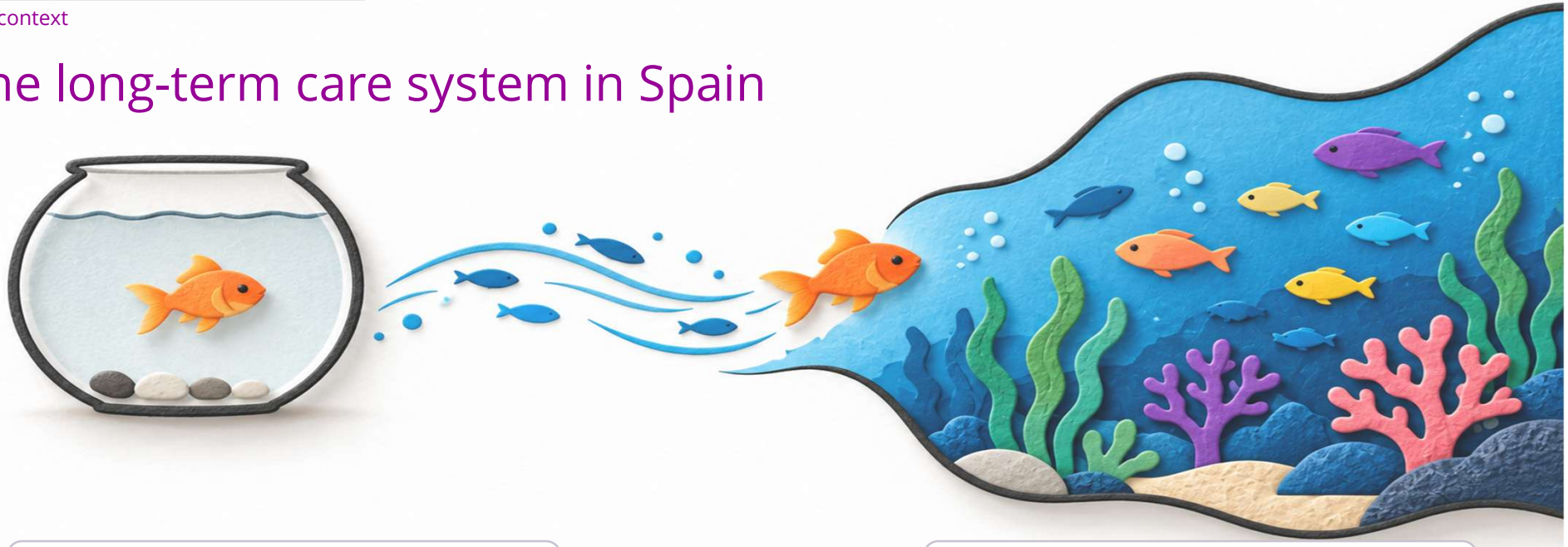
GLOBAL OBSERVATORY OF LONG-TERM CARE
GOLTC

24 September 2026

Elia Gómez Castro

The context

The long-term care system in Spain



PATERNALISTIC MODEL

- Insufficient support in intensity and amount
- People treated as passive recipients of care
- Market-driven approaches

RIGHTS-BASED APPROACH

- People as rights-holders
- Self-determination and life plans
- Community-based inclusion

Every person should be able to make choices about their own life and pursue their own life plans

The law reform: a paradigm shift

FROM CARE TO RIGHTS AND COMMUNITY

New understanding of dependency

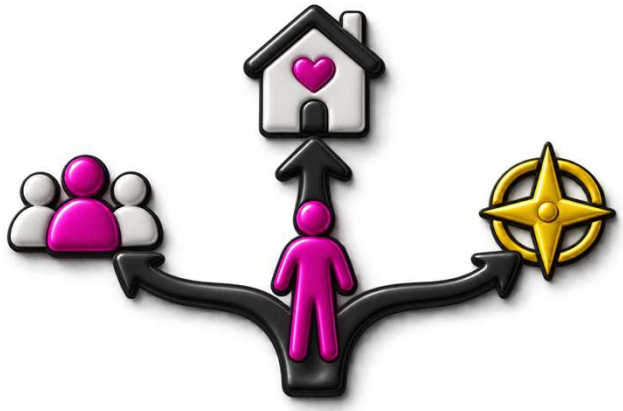
Incorporating social and relational context

New rights

Choice, independent living, community inclusion, restraint-free care

Stronger support for carers

More rights for family and relational caregivers



Redefined services

Grounded in rights, personalisation and life plans

New services

Housing support and assistive products

Social innovation

Regulatory sandboxes for new approaches

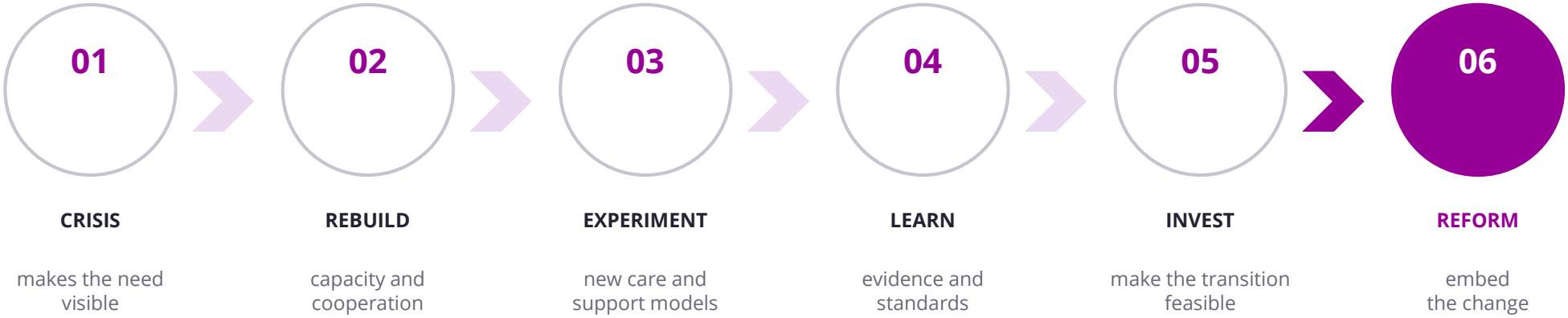
Quality and evaluation

Centred on rights and quality of life

The argument

The law reform came last

The law reform was the culmination of a sequence, not its starting point.



It was not a legislative "big bang". It was a cumulative process.

Interpretive framework: Kingdon (2011); Mahoney & Thelen (2010).

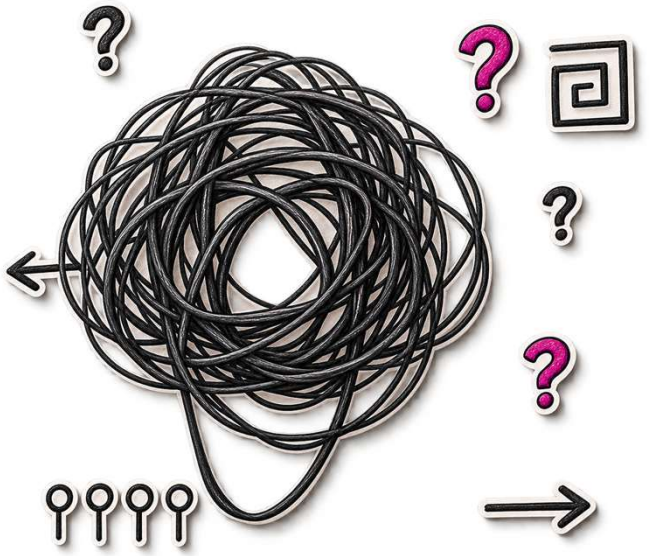
The trigger

2020: the status quo is disrupted

COVID-19 did not create the system's problems

It made them...

VISIBLE	exposed fragility
URGENT	compressed the political timetable
UNAVOIDABLE	raised the cost of inaction



The crisis opened a window for changing the model

Sources: EDI Study (2024); National Deinstitutionalisation Strategy (2024).

First instrument

2021: rebuilding the long-term care system's capacity

EMERGENCY ACTION PLAN

The turning point in the reform roadmap



WAITING LISTS

Improve management and reduce waiting times.

BENEFITS & SERVICES

Increase service intensity and benefit levels.

QUALITY & WORKFORCE

Strengthen standards and employment conditions.

FUNDING

600 € millionas/year in additional central-government funding

Before transforming the system, it first had to rebuild its capacity to act.

Source: Territorial Council for Social Services and the SAAD (15 Jan 2021).

Second instrument

2021: making transformation materially possible

COMPONENT 22 · PRTR

Reform + investment to change the model

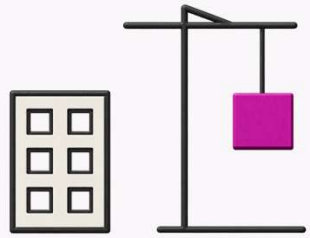
C22.R1 · STRENGTHEN AND CHANGE THE MODEL

- Strengthen long-term care and support.
- Promote person-centred care and support.
- Drive the shift to community-based support.



C22.I1 · FUND THE TRANSITION

- Deinstitutionalisation.
- Facilities adapted to the new model.
- Technology and local support.

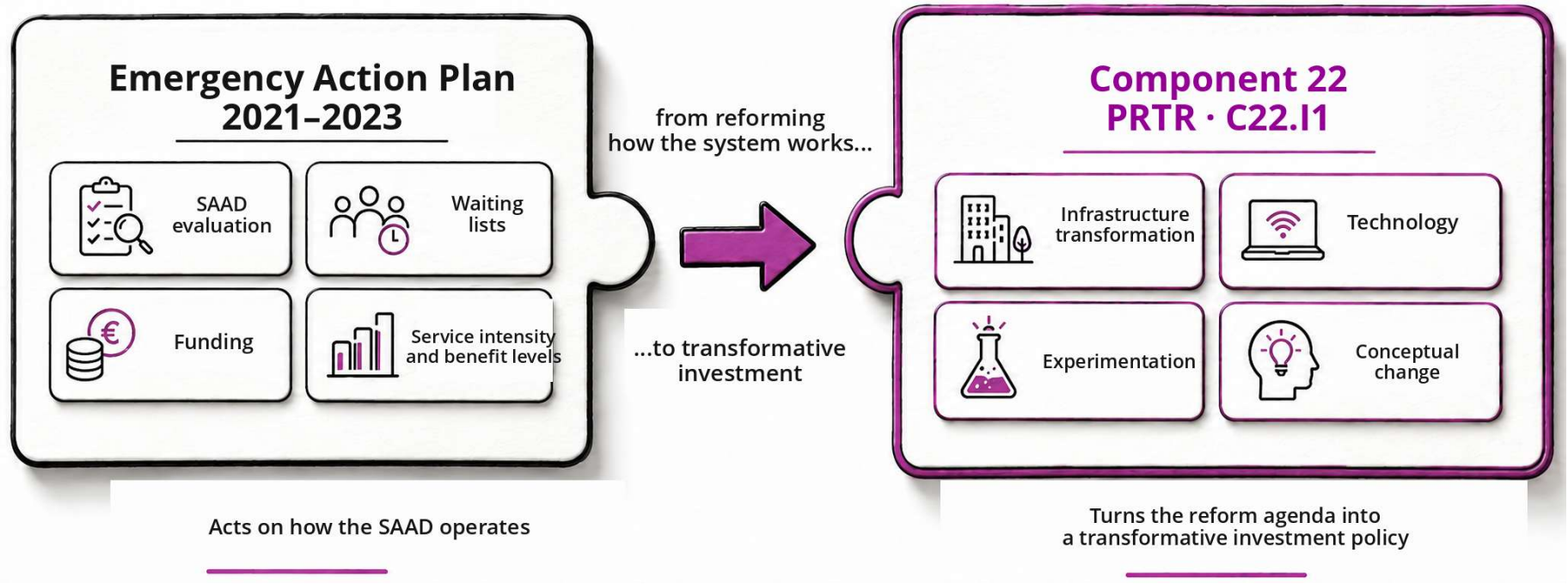


Changing the model entails transition costs. C22.I1 helps make it possible.

Source: Government of Spain, PRTR Component 22 (2023 version).

Transformation architecture

Two instruments. One process.



MUTUALLY REINFORCING

Sources: Emergency Action Plan (2021); PRTR Component 22 (2023); Royal Decree 675/2023.

01

Function 1 · Build the evidence base

Identify what needs to change and the direction of travel.

SAAD EVALUATION



System-wide assessment.

Regional disparities.

Costs, service intensity and funding.

Proposals to reform the LAPAD.

EDI STUDY



Conceptual framework for the transition.

Human rights.

Choice and control in community living.

Cultural, regulatory and workforce change.

SYSTEM DIAGNOSIS + **TARGET MODEL**

From “we know there are problems” to “we know what to change and where to go”.

4 functions — **reform**

Sources: IMSERSO, SAAD Evaluation; EDI Study (2024).

Four functions that made reform possible

02

Function 2 · Experiment and learn

Test solutions before scaling them into mainstream policy.

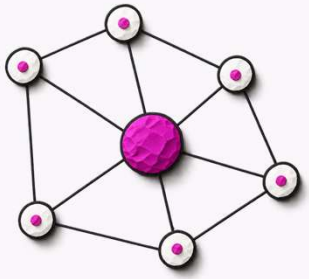
20 Projects | **€156m** | **137 Organisations** | **17 regions + Ceuta**



20 PILOT PROJECTS

Test real-world solutions for living in the community.

Test · observe · refine



VIDAS PLATFORM

Turn dispersed projects into shared learning.

Connect · compare · transfer

Experimentation reduces technical uncertainty and may reduce political uncertainty

Sources: VIDAS Platform; deinstitutionalisation pilot projects.

03

Function 3 · Agreements, rights and rules

The change moves beyond experimentation and into routine SAAD practice.



2022

QUALITY

New common accreditation and quality standards.



2023

PERSONAL ASSISTANCE

Common framework linked to independent living and life planning.



2023

BENEFITS & SERVICES

Higher home-care intensity and improved benefit levels.



2023

TELECARE

Complementary service except in residential care.

The new model starts to translate into requirements, entitlements and rights in practice.

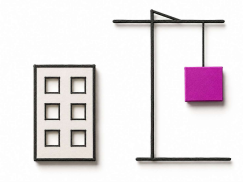
Sources: BOE-A-2022-13580; BOE-A-2023-12779; Royal Decree 675/2023.

Four functions that made reform possible

04

Function 4 · Make change implementable

A new model requires different infrastructure, workforce, governance and evaluation.



INFRASTRUCTURE

Transform spaces and bring support closer to where people live.



STRATEGY

Deinstitutionalisation 2024–2030 as a national policy.



WORKFORCE

Qualifications, new competencies and employment conditions that sustain the model.



EVALUATION

UNDER DEVELOPMENT

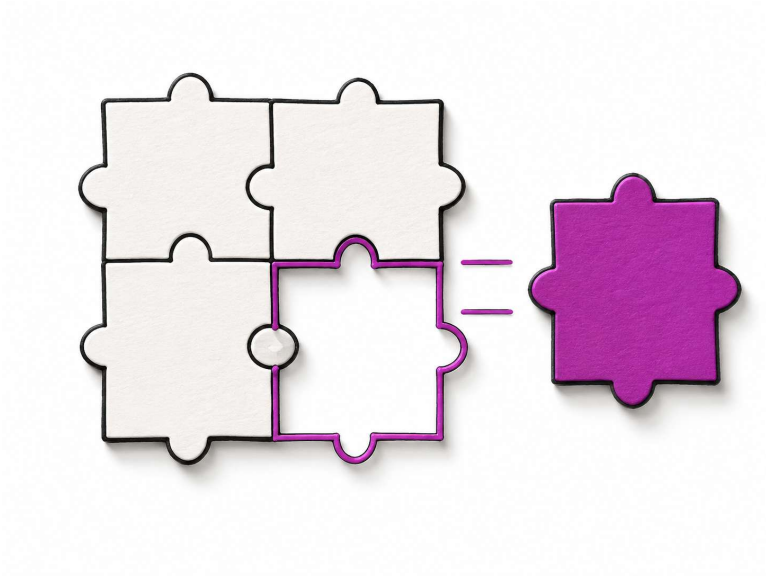
Build a common system to assess the real quality of support.

Transformation needs the capacity to sustain it; defining the model is not enough. We need to know whether it works.

Sources: National Strategy 2024–2030; IMSERSO, Quality Evaluation Working Group (2026).

The final piece

The Reform of the Dependency Law



Legal reform does not start from scratch; it gives statutory force to a change already under way

- **MORE RIGHTS** — will, preferences and life plans
- **MORE AUTONOMY** — where, how and with whom to live
- **MORE COMMUNITY** — local support and inclusion
- **MORE INDEPENDENT LIVING** — independent living and control over one's own life

16 Sept 2026 · Parliament completes approval

The law is the outcome of the previous process and can reshape the conditions for the next stage.

Sources: Congress of Deputies (14 July 2026); Senate (status of proceedings as of 13 Sept 2026).

What remains to be done

Passing a law does not automatically transform a system

The reform changes the architecture. What people experience will depend on implementation.

01 SUSTAINABLE FUNDING

Maintain sufficient resources beyond exceptional funding.

02 REGIONAL EQUITY

Reduce regional gaps in access, intensity, waiting times and quality.

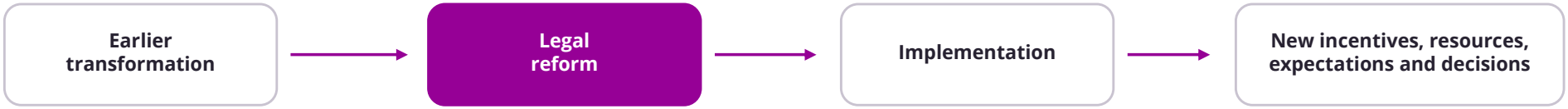
03 WORKFORCE

Ensure sufficient staff, appropriate qualifications and good working conditions.

04 IMPLEMENT & EVALUATE

Assess whether principles translate into real outcomes in people's lives.

POLICY FEEDBACK Public policy can also reshape the context for future decisions



The law can become a lever to deepen the transformation. Not automatically.

Sources: IMSERSO, SAAD funding and quality evaluation work (2026).

A lesson from Spain

Major reforms do not always begin by changing the law.

Crisis · evidence · experimentation · agreements · investment · rules · reform

First, the conditions changed

Then the law could change
The transformation is not complete

Now begins the hardest phase : turning rights and rules into real change in people's lives



The road ahead will be difficult, but worthwhile

Thank you