

National assignment rate and time to assignment of the Spanish NIE (Número de Identidad de Extranjero) in 2026: a retrospective analysis of 159 certificates with projections for 2027

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Research Article

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Abstract

Background. The Número de Identidad de Extranjero (NIE, the NIE number) is the identification number assigned by the Spanish Dirección General de la Policía (Policía Nacional) to foreign nationals with economic, professional or social ties to Spain. No official statistics are published on the number of NIE numbers assigned in Spain or on NIE processing time, the time applicants wait to obtain one.

Methods. A retrospective analysis was conducted of 165 NIE certificate pages (159 documents) issued between 22 April and 9 September 2026 to clients of a legal services firm, all obtained through applications submitted by a legal representative at the Madrid office of the Policía Nacional. Each certificate carries a sequential national registration number assigned by the Comisaría General de Extranjería y Fronteras that resets on 1 January. The national NIE assignment rate was calculated as the difference between registration numbers on certificates of different dates divided by the intervening working days (161 numbers on 35 dates). Time to assignment was measured from the date of application to the certificate date for 141 applications. The association between assignment rate and time to assignment was assessed by Spearman's rank correlation and quantile regression. Projections for the remainder of 2026 and for 2027 were derived from the observed rates.

Results. The national assignment rate was 4,610 NIEs per working day from 1 January to 22 April 2026 and 2,440 per working day on average from July to the end of August (interval range 1,800 to 2,620), a reduction of approximately 47%. The projected number of NIEs assigned in Spain in 2026 is 870,000 to 1,040,000 (central estimate 940,000). In the cohort, median time to assignment was 10 calendar days (95% CI 9 to 13; interquartile range 7 to 18). Time to assignment was inversely associated with the national assignment rate ($\rho = -0.34$; $p < 0.0001$): each reduction of 1,000 NIEs per working day was associated with an increase of 0.7 days at the median and 2.0 days at the 90th percentile. Applications made in July and August had longer times to assignment than those made in May and June (median 11 versus 8.5 days; $p = 0.039$).

Conclusions. Spain assigns close to one million NIE numbers a year at a rate that falls by about half during the summer, and the time applicants wait lengthens as the rate falls, most markedly for the slowest cases. The 2026 total is verifiable from any certificate issued in the last week of December 2026; the projections for 2027 will be scored against measured values in subsequent editions.

Keywords: NIE; NIE number; NIE number Spain; Número de Identidad de Extranjero; Spain; NIE processing time; asignación de NIE; Comisaría General de Extranjería y Fronteras; Policía Nacional

1. Introduction

The Número de Identidad de Extranjero (NIE) is the personal identification number that the Spanish Dirección General de la Policía assigns to foreign nationals who have economic, professional or social ties to Spain [1]. It is required to work, to purchase property, to open a bank account, to pay tax and to register a business. Applications may be made in person at foreigners' offices and police stations under the procedure "asignación de NIE a instancia de interesado", through a legal representative, or, for applicants outside Spain, through Spanish consular offices [2]. The Reglamento de Extranjería requires the assignment to be resolved within five days of the application entering the register of the competent body [3].

The Ministerio del Interior and the Policía Nacional publish no statistics on NIE assignment. The number of NIEs assigned per year, the variation of that number over the year, and the time applicants wait between applying and receiving the number (NIE processing time) are not reported in any official source. Estimates in professional and public sources are unsourced.

This study measures both quantities from primary documents. It exploits a feature of the certificate of NIE assignment: a sequential registration number, common to all certificates issued in Spain, that increases by one with each certificate and resets at the start of each year. The aims were (i) to measure the national rate of NIE assignment over 2026 and project the annual total, (ii) to measure time to assignment for a defined route of application, (iii) to test whether time to assignment varies with the national assignment rate, and (iv) to publish projections for 2027 in a form that can be verified.

2. Materials and methods

2.1 Data source

The study used every NIE certificate issued to clients of How to Be a Digital Nomad LLC between 22 April and 9 September 2026 (159 certificate documents, 165 certificate pages). All applications had been submitted by a legal representative under power of attorney at the Madrid office of the Policía Nacional (Avenida de los Poblados). Certificate date (F. Firma) and registration number were extracted from each document. Sixty documents contained a text layer and were read directly; 99 were scanned images and were read by optical character recognition at 400 dots per inch, the registration number being read from the rotated marginal text of the certificate. Between April and 9 September 2026 the firm opened 224 NIE applications for applicants of 30 nationalities, the largest groups being United Kingdom (26%), United States (10%), Ireland (9%), Germany (8%) and the Netherlands (8%).

2.2 The registration counter as a national measure

Each certificate carries a registration number of the form S 2026 0026001 00 NNNNNN, comprising the year, the code of the registering office (0026001, Comisaría General de Extranjería y Fronteras, Secretaría General) and a six-digit counter. The counter begins at one on 1 January and increases by one for each certificate registered, irrespective of the office at which the application was made. It therefore constitutes a running national count of NIE assignments in the calendar year.

The national assignment rate for an interval between two certificate dates was calculated as the difference between the counter values divided by the number of working days in the interval. Working days were Monday to Friday excluding Spanish national holidays and holidays of the Comunidad de Madrid. Rates are reported for intervals of at least three working days. The counter value on 22 April divided by the 75 working days elapsed since 1 January gave the mean rate for the first four months of the year.

Every registration number produced by optical character recognition was checked against the requirement that the counter increase strictly with certificate date; numbers failing the check were read again visually from the certificate image and corrected. The final series of 161 numbers on 35 certificate dates contains no violation of the ordering. Four certificates issued on 5 June 2026 in the paper format of the Brigada Provincial de Extranjería y Fronteras de Madrid carry no registration number and contribute to the time-to-assignment analysis only. Where several certificates shared a date, the median counter value for that date was used.

2.3 Variables and definitions

Time to assignment (NIE processing time) was defined as the number of calendar days from the date of application to the certificate date. The certificate is signed on the day of the police appointment (cita previa) at which the NIE is assigned; the certificate date is therefore the appointment date. Working-day equivalents were also calculated. Of the 159 certificates, 148 were matched to a dated application record; seven records with data-entry errors in the application date were excluded, leaving 141 for the analysis of time to assignment.

2.4 Statistical analysis

Time to assignment is summarised by median, interquartile range and 95% confidence interval for the median obtained by bootstrap resampling (3,000 resamples). Differences between months of application were tested with the Mann-Whitney U test. For the 133 applications made between May and September, the national assignment rate in the interval containing the application date was taken from the counter series; its association with time to assignment was assessed by Spearman's rank correlation and quantified by quantile regression at the 50th, 75th and 90th percentiles, estimated by linear programming.

2.5 Projections

The number of NIEs assigned in 2026 was projected from the counter value on 9 September (677,341) and the 78 working days remaining in the year under five assumed rates spanning the range observed in 2026. Assignment rates for 2027 were projected on the assumption that the seasonal profile observed in 2026 recurs. The fitted median regression was applied to the projected rate for July and August 2027 to produce a prediction for the cohort that will be tested in a later edition (Section 4.5).

3. Results

3.1 National NIE assignment rate, January to September 2026

Table 1 reports the national assignment rate for every interval of at least three working days between certificate dates. The rate was 4,610 NIEs per working day over the period from 1 January to 22 April. Between late April and mid-June it ranged from 3,410 to 5,360, with a single six-working-day interval at the end of April reaching 8,050. It fell in the second half of June and, from July to the end of August, averaged 2,440 per working day (interval range 1,800 to 2,620), approximately 47% below the rate of the first four months. In the first week of September it stood at 2,460 to 3,650.

Table 1. National NIE assignment rate by interval, 2026

Interval	Working days	Counter advance	NIEs per working day
1 January to 22 April	75	345,672	4,610
22 to 30 April	6	48,310	8,050
30 April to 14 May	9	48,219	5,360
14 to 22 May	5	19,929	3,990
22 May to 11 June	14	47,788	3,410
11 to 16 June	3	11,069	3,690
16 to 26 June	8	23,826	2,980
26 June to 3 July	5	12,914	2,580
3 to 13 July	6	17,475	2,910
13 to 17 July	4	10,910	2,730
17 to 24 July	5	11,840	2,370
24 to 29 July	3	7,872	2,620
29 July to 3 August	3	5,937	1,980
3 to 7 August	4	10,076	2,520
7 to 12 August	3	6,337	2,110
12 to 17 August	3	6,280	2,090
17 to 24 August	5	11,804	2,360
24 to 27 August	3	7,340	2,450
27 August to 1 September	3	5,405	1,800
1 to 4 September	3	10,963	3,650
4 to 9 September	3	7,370	2,460

Over the measured period as a whole (22 April to 9 September, 98 working days) the counter advanced by 331,669, a mean of 3,380 NIEs per working day. Had the January to April rate been maintained from mid-June to early September, approximately 117,000 more NIEs would have been assigned than were.

3.2 Projected annual NIE assignments in Spain in 2026

Table 2 gives the projected annual total under five assumed rates for the remainder of the year. The projected number of NIEs assigned in Spain in 2026 is 870,000 to 1,040,000, with a central estimate of 940,000 corresponding to a return to the April to September mean rate.

Table 2. Projected NIE assignments in Spain, 2026

Assumed rate, 10 September to 31 December	NIEs per working day	Projected annual total
Summer rate persists	2,440	867,000
Early-September rate persists	2,520	874,000
April to September mean	3,380	941,000
Spring rate	4,140	1,000,000
January to April rate	4,610	1,037,000

3.3 Association between the national assignment rate and time to assignment: test in a cohort of 141 applications

In the cohort, median time from application to certificate was 10 calendar days (95% CI 9 to 13; interquartile range 7 to 18; 90th percentile 25; maximum 49), equivalent to a median of 8 working days (Table 3). Applications made in July and August had a longer time to assignment than those made in May and June (median 11 versus 8.5 days; Mann-Whitney U, $p = 0.039$); June alone against July and August gave $p = 0.016$ (Table 4). April applications, made before remote notarisation was in general use and involving postal delivery of documents, are reported but excluded from the comparison. The September figure includes only applications completed by the data cut-off and is subject to right-censoring.

Table 3. Time to assignment in the study cohort, 2026 (n = 141)

Statistic	Calendar days	Working days
Median (95% CI)	10 (9 to 13)	8
Interquartile range	7 to 18	5 to 13
90th percentile	25	
Maximum	49	

Table 4. Time to assignment in the study cohort by month of application, 2026

Month of application	n	Median days (95% CI)	Interquartile range
April	8	25.5 (14 to 35)	15.5 to 35
May	9	8.0 (8 to 21)	8 to 19
June	17	9.0 (6 to 11)	6 to 11
July	49	12.0 (9 to 17)	7 to 17
August	51	11.0 (9 to 14)	8 to 20
September (censored)	7	6.0 (5 to 6)	5 to 6

For the 133 applications made between May and September, time to assignment was inversely associated with the national assignment rate prevailing on the date of application (Spearman's $\rho = -0.34$; $p < 0.0001$). Quantile regression (Table 5) estimated that each reduction of 1,000 NIEs per working day in the national rate was associated with an increase of 0.7 days in median time to assignment, 2.1 days at the 75th percentile and 2.0 days at the 90th percentile. The effect is concentrated in the upper part of the distribution: a fall in the national rate lengthens the slowest cases considerably more than the typical case.

Table 5. Quantile regression of time to assignment on national assignment rate (n = 133)

Percentile	Intercept (days)	Slope (days per 1,000 NIEs per working day)	Fitted value at 2,400 per day	Fitted value at 4,800 per day
50th	12.0	-0.7	10.2	8.4
75th	22.4	-2.1	17.3	12.2
90th	29.5	-2.0	24.8	20.1

3.4 Projected national assignment rate, fourth quarter of 2026 and 2027

Assuming recurrence of the 2026 seasonal profile, the national assignment rate is projected as in Table 6: 2,500 to 3,600 NIEs per working day in the fourth quarter of 2026, 3,300 to 4,600 in the first quarter of 2027, 3,300 to 4,800 in the second quarter, 2,300 to 2,800 in July and August 2027 and 2,700 to 3,600 in September 2027, a summer reduction of 40% to 50%.

Table 6. Projected national NIE assignment rate

Period	Projected NIEs per working day
October to December 2026	2,500 to 3,600
January to March 2027	3,300 to 4,600
April to June 2027	3,300 to 4,800
July and August 2027	2,300 to 2,800
September 2027	2,700 to 3,600

4. Discussion

4.1 Principal findings

Two quantities that no official source reports were measured from the certificates themselves. Spain assigned NIEs at approximately 4,610 per working day in the first four months of 2026 and at about 2,440 per working day, roughly half that rate, from July to the end of August; the annual total for 2026 is projected at 870,000 to 1,040,000. In a cohort of 141 applications, time to assignment lengthened as the national assignment rate fell, by about 0.7 days at the median and 2 days at the 75th and 90th percentiles for each reduction of 1,000 NIEs per working day, and applications made in July and August took longer than those made in May and June.

4.2 Interpretation against the statutory framework

The Reglamento de Extranjería requires resolution within five days of the application entering the register. For the route studied, the certificate is issued at the appointment itself, so the statutory period is satisfied on the day of registration. The time an applicant waits, a median of 10 days and 25 days at the 90th percentile, is spent before registration, in obtaining the appointment (cita previa). The statutory deadline therefore does not govern the component of the process that determines waiting time.

4.3 Seasonality in national NIE assignment rates

The fall in the national assignment rate began in the second half of June and had not fully reversed by the second week of September. The most plausible explanation is reduced staffing during the holiday period. The data cannot separate reduced capacity from reduced demand; however, the simultaneous lengthening of time to assignment is consistent with reduced capacity rather than with reduced demand, under which waiting times would be expected to shorten.

4.4 Strengths and limitations

The principal strength of the study is that the national assignment rate is derived from an official sequential identifier printed on every certificate; the measurement does not depend on who the applicants were, and it can be reproduced by any reader holding two certificates of different dates. The counter is taken to be national and to enumerate NIE certificates; both properties follow from the structure of the number and the system that generates it, and they can be tested with a certificate issued outside Madrid.

The limitations concern the cohort. First, it comprises the clients of one firm whose applications were submitted by legal representative at one office; applicants who attend in person at provincial offices, consular applicants, and clients of other representatives are not represented, and their times to assignment may differ. Second, the interval measured includes the applicant's own preparation of documents, which took a median of one day in this cohort. Third, applications still open at the data cut-off are excluded, which biases the most recent month towards shorter times. Fourth, holidays of the Comunidad de Madrid were excluded from working-day counts but other local holidays were not. Fifth, the seasonal profile is observed for one year only.

4.5 Prospective validation

Each projection in Section 3.4 and Table 2 is stated with the edition in which it will be compared against the measured value. The projected 2026 total is verifiable from the registration number of any certificate issued in the last week of December 2026. The projected rates for the fourth quarter of 2026 will be scored in the January 2027 edition, those for the first quarter of 2027 in the April 2027 edition, and those for July and August 2027 in the October 2027 edition. Differences between projected and measured values will be published.

The regression in Table 5 is tested in the same way. Applied to the projected rate for July and August 2027 (2,300 to 2,800 NIEs per working day), the fitted median regression predicts a cohort median time to assignment of 9.9 to 10.3 days and a 90th percentile of 24 to 25 days; the measured cohort values for those months will be reported in the October 2027 edition.

5. Conclusions

Spain assigns close to one million NIE numbers a year. The rate of assignment falls by approximately half during the summer, and the time applicants wait for an NIE lengthens as the rate falls, most markedly for the slowest cases. The measurements can be reproduced from any two NIE certificates, the 2026 total can be checked from any certificate issued at the end of December, and the projections for 2027 will be tested against measured values in subsequent editions.

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Author contributions

K.V. designed the study, supervised data extraction, performed the analysis and wrote the report.

Funding

No external funding was received. The study was funded by How to Be a Digital Nomad LLC.

Conflict of interest

How to Be a Digital Nomad LLC provides NIE application services to clients. The certificates analysed were issued to its clients. The national assignment rate and the projected annual total depend only on certificate dates and registration numbers and are unaffected by the source of the certificates. The time-to-assignment results describe the firm's route of application and are reported as such.

Data protection

Application records and certificates were processed under the legitimate interest of the firm in evaluating and reporting on the administrative process it operates within (Regulation (EU) 2016/679, Article 6(1)(f)). Personal data were used only to match certificates to application dates. No personal data appear in this report or in the released datasets, which contain only certificate dates, registration counters, application dates and derived intervals.

Data availability

Two datasets accompany this report under a Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 licence. Neither contains personal data. Reuse requires citation of this report.

- Dataset 1, CGEF_registration_numbers.csv: 161 rows. Columns: certificate_date (ISO 8601); registration_number_last6 (six-digit counter from the certificate registration number).
- Dataset 2, NIE_waiting_times_dataset.csv: 141 rows. Columns: application_date; nie_certificate_date; calendar_days; working_days.

Supplementary material

Supplementary Table S1. Registration counter by certificate date, 22 April to 9 September 2026 (161 certificates on 35 dates)

The rates in Table 1 can be reproduced from the median counter values below and the working-day counts in Section 2.2.

Certificate date	Certificates (n)	Lowest counter	Highest counter	Median counter
2026-04-22	1	345,672	345,672	345,672
2026-04-24	1	352,051	352,051	352,051
2026-04-30	2	393,960	394,005	393,982
2026-05-14	2	442,195	442,208	442,201
2026-05-22	5	462,106	462,176	462,131
2026-05-25	1	463,760	463,760	463,760
2026-06-11	1	509,919	509,919	509,919
2026-06-12	1	513,949	513,949	513,949
2026-06-16	3	520,972	521,028	520,988
2026-06-18	5	528,904	528,951	528,907
2026-06-26	1	544,814	544,814	544,814
2026-07-03	6	557,651	557,791	557,728
2026-07-07	4	563,411	563,485	563,456
2026-07-13	4	575,176	575,235	575,204
2026-07-15	5	581,379	581,428	581,413
2026-07-17	3	586,109	586,143	586,114
2026-07-21	5	590,589	590,681	590,633
2026-07-24	6	597,922	598,009	597,954

2026-07-29	2	605,806	605,847	605,826
2026-07-30	4	607,700	607,778	607,743
2026-08-03	2	611,747	611,780	611,763
2026-08-07	2	621,825	621,855	621,840
2026-08-11	13	625,660	626,726	625,706
2026-08-12	6	628,144	628,213	628,177
2026-08-13	8	630,974	631,074	631,009
2026-08-14	6	633,356	633,413	633,390
2026-08-17	11	634,372	634,529	634,458
2026-08-24	13	646,114	646,589	646,262
2026-08-27	5	653,566	653,654	653,602
2026-08-28	12	655,225	655,442	655,329
2026-08-31	1	656,670	656,670	656,670
2026-09-01	2	659,002	659,012	659,007
2026-09-04	8	669,915	670,067	669,970
2026-09-07	5	671,537	671,635	671,601
2026-09-09	5	677,300	677,391	677,341

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3. Real Decreto 557/2011, de 20 de abril, por el que se aprueba el Reglamento de la Ley Orgánica 4/2000. Artículo 206.
4. Regulation (EU) 2016/679 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 27 April 2016 (General Data Protection Regulation). Article 6(1)(f).

Version history

- Edition 1, September 2026. Data cut-off 9 September 2026. First publication.

Resumen

Ritmo nacional de asignación y tiempo hasta la asignación del NIE (Número de Identidad de Extranjero) en España en 2026: análisis retrospectivo de 159 certificados con previsiones para 2027

Antecedentes. El Número de Identidad de Extranjero (NIE) es el número de identificación que la Dirección General de la Policía asigna a los extranjeros con vínculos económicos, profesionales o sociales con España. No se publican estadísticas oficiales sobre el número de NIE asignados en España ni sobre cuánto tarda la solicitud de un número NIE.

Métodos. Todo certificado de NIE emitido en España lleva un número de registro nacional correlativo de la Comisaría General de Extranjería y Fronteras que se reinicia el 1 de enero. A partir de 159 certificados (165 páginas) emitidos entre el 22 de abril y el 9 de septiembre de 2026 a clientes de una firma de servicios legales, se leyeron 161 números de registro en 35 fechas. El ritmo nacional de asignación se calculó como la diferencia entre los números de registro de certificados de fechas distintas dividida por los días laborables intermedios, y se proyectó el total anual de 2026. El efecto del ritmo nacional sobre el tiempo hasta la asignación se contrastó en una cohorte de 141 solicitudes de la firma con fechas de solicitud y de certificado documentadas, mediante correlación de Spearman y regresión cuantílica.

Resultados. El ritmo nacional de asignación fue de 4.610 NIE por día laborable entre el 1 de enero y el 22 de abril de 2026 y de 2.440 de media entre julio y finales de agosto (intervalos de 1.800 a 2.620), una reducción cercana al 47%. La previsión de NIE asignados en España en 2026 es de 870.000 a 1.040.000 (estimación central: 940.000). En la cohorte, la mediana del tiempo hasta la asignación fue de 10 días naturales (IC 95%: 9 a 13; rango intercuartílico: 7 a 18). El tiempo hasta la asignación se asoció inversamente con el ritmo nacional vigente en la fecha de solicitud ($\rho = -0,34$; $p < 0,0001$): cada reducción de 1.000 NIE por día laborable se asoció con un aumento de 0,7 días en la

mediana, 2,1 días en el percentil 75 y 2,0 días en el percentil 90. Las solicitudes de julio y agosto tardaron más que las de mayo y junio ($p = 0,039$).

Conclusiones. España asigna cerca de un millón de NIE al año a un ritmo que se reduce aproximadamente a la mitad durante el verano, y el tiempo de espera de los solicitantes se alarga a medida que el ritmo cae, sobre todo en los casos más lentos. El total de 2026 es verificable con cualquier certificado emitido en la última semana de diciembre; las previsiones para 2027 se contrastarán con los valores medidos en ediciones posteriores.

Palabras clave: NIE; número NIE; NIE España; Número de Identidad de Extranjero; asignación de NIE; tiempo de tramitación; Comisaría General de Extranjería y Fronteras; Policía Nacional