



Foundations gain weight in the face of new social challenges: employment, poverty, and young talent.



Iberdrola, Princesa de Girona, Grupo Social [ONCE](#), Santander, and Mapfre ask to better measure the social impact and strengthen capacities beyond immediate aid. The Spanish corporate foundations have put on the table the growing weight of their activity in the face of the main social challenges, from child poverty and labor inclusion to aging, education, disability, mental health, or digital transformation. They have done so during the round table 'Corporate Foundations of Spain and Ibero-America: The Value of Projects with Social Commitment'. An event organized this Wednesday by the CEOE Foundation, chaired by Fátima Báñez, in the framework of its sessions linked to the Ibero-American Business Meeting.

The debate brought together representatives from five major foundations -Iberdrola, Princesa de Girona, Grupo Social [ONCE](#), Santander, and Mapfre- with a common underlying concern: how to move from social action to projects capable of generating opportunities, autonomy, and capacities that remain [once](#) the intervention is over.

Child poverty, inclusion, and aging: the major challenges

Elvira Vega, general director of Fundación Mapfre, placed the fight against poverty, especially child poverty, among the main challenges. She pointed out that there are 412 million children in extreme poverty, with less than three euros a day, and explained that the foundation develops social projects in Ibero-America aimed at combating this situation.

Inclusion constitutes another of the major areas of action. Vega listed labor, digital, social, financial, and intergenerational inclusion, with a commitment to support and generate opportunities.

In addition, there is the demographic challenge. Spain is one of the countries with the highest life expectancy -only behind Japan and Switzerland, as she pointed out- and the average age of death is around 82 years. Against the view of aging solely as a burden, Mapfre advocates for the value of older people as a group that continues to support their families, starting businesses, and contributing experience.



Rural development, education, and mental health complete this diagnosis. In this last area, Vega pointed out that 30% of young people have problems related to mental health

The foundations, like the R&D of companies

Francisco Belil Creixell , president of the Fundación Princesa de Girona , focused on the talent and employability of young people . In his opinion, Spain and Ibero-America face similar social problems and there is room to share experiences and solutions.

Belil highlighted the dimension of the foundational sector in Spain: 15,000 foundations and half a million people employed directly . And he has defined foundations as “the R&D of companies” , precisely because they can work with longer time horizons and take on projects whose returns are not immediate or guaranteed.

This capacity allows, as he explained, to experiment and seek solutions looking ten to fifteen years ahead, in addition to working with allies and partners. The goal is not only to measure what happens during a project but also what capacities remain in society once the intervention ends

In the case of the Princess of Girona Foundation, this work focuses especially on talented and potential youth to whom support is offered to develop their abilities. The organization has a network of 1,000 mentors and also develops programs in Latin America.

A decentralized model close to the territory

Jaime Alfonsín, president of Fundación Iberdrola España , emphasized the collaborative ties between Spain and Ibero-America and explained the uniqueness of Iberdrola's model, which incorporates in its statutes the so-called social dividend , as a commitment to the societies in which it is present.

The structure responds to a decentralized model: wherever there is an Iberdrola company, there is a foundation that coordinates and channels the social projects that are considered priorities. The intervention, Alfonsín explained, is designed to be “close to reality” and does not consist so much in acting directly as in collaborating with social entities through specific projects.

Training and employment occupy a central place. In Ibero-America, Alfonsín pointed out one of the main problems as the gap between training and the labor market , along with the weight of the informal economy and gender inequalities.

In Spain, the diagnosis incorporates other elements. Jaime Alfonsín placed the number of people in a situation of exclusion at almost four million , warning of the erosion of the middle class since 2007, with a growing part moving towards situations of vulnerability.

He also pointed out that around 20% of the population lives in a situation of vulnerability despite being employed , so a variation in costs can be enough to deteriorate their situation. In addition, there is a child poverty rate of and the problem of the digital divide among young people, with artificial intelligence as a technology that can offer opportunities but also generate new risks.

Higher education as a social elevator



Matías Rodríguez Inciarte, president of Santander Universidades , defended the foundation's sustained commitment to higher education as a “great social elevator” . The strategy, initiated three decades ago, allowed for concentrating efforts in a single area and later adapting it to new needs.

Santander maintains agreements with 1,000 universities and has developed scholarship and aid programs aimed at talented individuals who lack economic resources. Through the micro-credentials of Santander Open Academy, the entity has already reached four million people

Employability constitutes another of its lines of action. Rodríguez Inciarte has pointed out that over the last year they have worked on 70,000 job vacancies , seeking to improve the alignment between market needs and workers, within a universe of 800,000 workers.

Entrepreneurship is the third major axis: between 2023 and 2025, Santander Universidades has supported 63,000 companies

The very transformation of the university also occupies an increasing space, given the changes in faculty, digitalization, and the coexistence between face-to-face and hybrid teaching. Rodríguez Inciarte added the need to improve the connection between Ibero-American university systems in light of the expansion of Latin American students and the current dispersion of the ecosystem.

ONCE: employment as an end and not as a means

Alberto Durán, first vice president of Institutional Coordination, Solidarity, and External Relations of the Grupo Social **ONCE** , defended the role of foundations as one of the main ways to channel philanthropy. “ There is no good social cause where there is not a foundation ,” he stated during his speech.

The Grupo Social **ONCE** presented its own experience as a model built over decades. Since , Durán explained, the organization has worked for the autonomy of blind people and, subsequently, for the inclusion of all people with disabilities.

Its approach is based on a premise: employment is not a means, but an end , because it allows for generating autonomy. The organization has a network of 21,000 people on the street and has built a group of about 40,000 people around its various lines of activity.

Durán also highlighted the transfer of knowledge to other companies. The **ONCE** Social Group shares its tools and experience to facilitate the incorporation of people with disabilities and, as he has pointed out, this work has contributed to companies incorporating more than 111,000 people with disabilities

The organization also has an observatory dedicated to accessibility and has extended its activity to areas such as housing. Durán has claimed in this regard the role of **ONCE** in facilitating access to housing for people with disabilities.

Emplea Lab and the challenge of turning aid into opportunities

In this same debate fits the experience of Emplea Lab , driven by Fundación CEOE and Cáritas, as an example of intervention focused on labor insertion. The project, also presented in these days



followed by DEMÓCRATA , achieves an insertion rate close to and places the accompaniment of people as one of its central elements.

The adaptation of the vacancies to the available profiles, specialization and traceability of results are part of a model that seeks for social intervention to lead to effective incorporation into the labor market.

The experience has also been subject to evaluation by the Bank of Spain within its analysis of social inclusion projects, focusing on elements such as guidance and improvement of job quality.

The case of Emplea Lab summarizes a good part of the debate at the table: it is not only about addressing a situation of vulnerability, but about creating the conditions for the person to be able to get out of it

From social project to lasting impact

The interventions of the five representatives have outlined different areas - child poverty , young talent, training, employment, disability, aging, education, mental health or digitalization -, but also a common evolution of corporate social action.

The foundations are increasingly seeking concrete projects, alliances, measurement of results, and capacities that remain after the intervention. The social dimension thus ceases to be limited to economic contribution and begins to incorporate knowledge, accompaniment, training, employment, and transfer of tools.

Rodríguez Inciarte added an internal dimension: social action is also transforming the relationship between companies and their own employees, with a growing weight of pride of belonging and sustainability criteria in the evaluation of companies.

The debate has ultimately left an open question: in the face of increasingly broad and complex social challenges, corporate foundations seek not only to finance responses but also to become instruments capable of experimenting, generating opportunities, and leaving installed capacities in society