

HOMELESSNESS IN SPAIN

KEY STATISTICS

National systems for data collection on homelessness are in place in Spain but there are some significant gapsⁱ. The estimated homeless population according to NGO service providers is between 23,000 and 30,000/35,000 peopleⁱⁱ. However, in Spain it is impossible to determine the extent of residential exclusion.

National Statistics

Since 2004, the [Spanish National Statistics Institute](#) (INE)ⁱⁱⁱ has carried out two surveys on homelessness:

- Survey of homeless people (EPSH-Personas Survey)
- Survey of homeless services (EPSH-Centros Survey)

Coverage is limited to municipalities with over 20,000 inhabitants. The definition of homelessness used by the national statistics institute covers:

- People sleeping rough (ETHOS 1.1)
- People living in emergency accommodation provided by the local authority or an NGO (ETHOS 2.1)
- People staying in long-stay group accommodation provided by the local authority or an NGO (non-emergency centres, shelters for victims of domestic violence, centres for asylum seekers or irregular migrants) (ETHOS 3.1 – 5.2)
- People living in buildings that would commonly be considered unsuitable for human habitation (ETHOS 12)
- People living in temporary accommodation such as B&Bs or guest houses
- People living in squats (ETHOS 8.2 and 8.3)

Locally speaking, Barcelona carried out a [one-night count of homeless people in May 2017](#) that was led by the council and the XAPSLL (acronym for the care network of homeless people in Barcelona).^{iv} A diagnosis of the situation in Barcelona in 2015 can be read [here](#)^v. Madrid carried out a “recount” in December 2015.

Key pull-out statistics

The estimated homeless population is 23,000-35,000 people.
Homeless shelters received an average of **16,437 people daily during the year 2016**. This figure is 20.5% higher than in 2014.

INCREASE/DECREASE IN NUMBER OF HOMELESS PEOPLE

There has been a rapid increase in the number of people in inadequate and insecure housing in the context of the economic and financial crisis. Growing unemployment and income falls have increased vulnerability to homelessness as more people are unable to meet housing costs. Austerity measures and cuts are having an impact on service capacity.

According to INE 2016 data^{vi}, the daily average of people who stayed in homelessness services **increased by 20.5% in 2016 compared to 2014**. Homeless shelters in Spain received an average of **16,437 people daily during the year 2016**. This figure is 20.5% higher than the registered in the previous homelessness services survey carried out in 2014. The average occupancy reached 85.9%, a figure higher than that observed in 2014, which was 81.8%.

Evolución de la capacidad y ocupación de la red de alojamiento



Centros según situación específica atendida¹



¹ Cada centro puede atender a más de una situación específica

Caritas and other NGO service providers consider that the real number of homeless people is much greater than the results of the INE survey indicate. Caritas reports that an estimated **6,000 to 10,000** people slept on the streets in Spain in 2011^{vii}. Caritas' figures also show an increase in the number of homeless people using their services from **24,463** in 2007 to **30,415** in 2011.

The counting carried out in Barcelona in May 2017, showed that in Barcelona alone, there are **1,026** people sleeping rough, **1,954** sleeping in residential centres or transitional houses and **415** in informal settlements. This makes a total of **3,395** homeless people, meaning the numbers have increased since 2016, despite an increase in the number of places offered in shelters (**941** rough sleepers, **1,907** homeless in services and **383** in informal settlements were counted in 2016)^{viii}.

In Madrid, the last count, carried out in December 2015, found **764** people sleeping rough and **1,141** sleeping in municipal facilities (RAIS).

CHANGE IN PROFILE OF HOMELESS PEOPLE

Homelessness Amongst Immigrants: There are indications that the proportion of migrants may have decreased slightly in 2013, as undocumented migrants were excluded from some legal social provisions and more than 1,000,000 migrants returned to their countries of origin.

“New Entrants” to Homelessness resulting from the Crisis:

There is evidence of a broadening of the socio-economic profile of the homeless population. An increasing number of homeowners are confronted with homelessness.

There has been an unprecedented increase in the number of mortgage foreclosures since the beginning of the financial and economic crisis.

According to the report “*El estado de la pobreza*” (“The state of poverty”) of EAPN (European Anti-Poverty Network), in 2015 there were **1,788,358** more poor people than in 2009. The AROPE Index (which measures poverty, joblessness and material deprivation) indicates that in Spain, **28,6%** of the population live at risk of social exclusion. In 2009 the percentage was **24,7%**.

Again, according to EAPN and the Living Conditions Survey of 2015, the percentage of workers at risk of poverty and social exclusion increased since 2014, rising from 17.6 % to 18.1 %. There has also been a general impoverishment of the population.

Working poor: In Barcelona, a new profile of homeless people has been observed: people that have unstable and precarious jobs who cannot afford to rent (due to high prices) and are forced to live in shelters. In 2016, **12,76%** of the people that used Barcelona's services for homeless people had a job (in 2012 it was **4,10%**)^{ix}.

Homelessness Amongst Women: Whilst most homeless people are men (**80.3%** according to the 2012 Survey by the National Statistics Agency), cities such as Segovia and Soria report an increase in the proportion of women in the homeless population.

Age of the Homeless Population: According to the National Statistics Agency, the average age of a homeless person was **42.7** in 2012 (compared **37.9** in the 2005 Survey). There is, however, consensus that youth homelessness may be hidden, as young people do not wish to be considered homeless and are reluctant to access traditional homeless services.

POLICIES & STRATEGIES

In April 2014, the Parliament approved the first Spanish National Homelessness Strategy and the Ministry is beginning to work with different NGOs to define and develop this Strategy. There have also been strategic developments at the level of different autonomous regions. Catalonia has produced a document known as the

“Model for Attention to Homeless People 2010”. It sets out the legal framework for tackling homelessness within the region.

This is seen by stakeholders as a prerequisite for a strategy with clear targets, responsible stakeholders, set budgets, and so on.

At regional level (Barcelona), NGOs are working on legal projects, such as energy poverty, rent regulation and a guaranteed minimum income. Previous experience in this domain is limited. There is, however, a precedent of annulment proceedings from the Constitutional Court of regional laws related to housing (in The Basque Country, Andalusia and Catalonia).

In the context of the crisis, funding cuts at the level of local and regional authorities are having a huge impact on social services

REMARKS ON KEY POLICY DEVELOPMENTS

- **Positive**

The Spanish Government adopted the first “Comprehensive National Homelessness Strategy 2015-2020” on 6 November 2015.

An official pilot experience on Housing First was launched by Barcelona’s City Council, involving an impact study and qualitative research. The project will last for 3 years and is generating a lot of expectation in public and private homelessness services providers all around Spain. RAIS also runs Housing First projects, in Malaga, Barcelona and Madrid^x.

The City Council in Barcelona, together with the XAPSLL, have designed a Homelessness Plan that will try to respond to all aspects of homelessness in Barcelona. An English version of this plan is available [online](#)^{xi}. The Catalan government (Generalitat de Catalunya) is also working on a Plan to fight homelessness in Catalunya, but it’s not available yet.

- **Negative**

Cuts to both welfare and homeless services are a major challenge in the current context, especially when combined with rising homelessness. In several Autonomous Communities, subsistence benefits to people in vulnerable situations or experiencing social exclusion

have decreased and/or become more difficult to access due to tougher eligibility requirements.

Life on the streets in Spain is about to get much harder. The Spanish Congress is poised to approve a bill on public security designed to control and punish behaviour on the street, including sanctions targeting the homeless. Individuals who damage public property or lead to its vaguely-defined “degradation” (“deslucimiento”) could be fined up to €600. Nongovernmental organisations in Spain are worried that this could lead to homeless people being fined for sleeping on a park bench or sitting on a street corner.

The national Government is refusing several local, regional and national measures proposed by other public authority levels and political parties to avoid evictions and its consequences.

Still no progress on the horizon in terms of increasing the affordable proportion of social housing within the housing stock. There is a threat to cut back on the already minimal social benefits, and housing remains to be defined as a personal problem, with no official support. Local authorities can offer a housing subsidy, which normally does not exceed 10 euros/month.

REFERENCES

- ⁱ See SALES A. (2015), "How Many Homeless People Live in Spain? Incomplete Sources and Impossible Predictions", *European Journal of Homelessness* Vol. 9, No. 2, December 2015 <http://www.feantsaresearch.org/download/salesejh2-2015article96043744236334400007.pdf>
- ⁱⁱ This is based on adding 6,000 to 10,000 rough sleepers that Caritas estimates to the 22,938 people INE surveyed in homeless services in 2012.
- ⁱⁱⁱ http://www.ine.es/dyngs/INEbase/en/categoria.htm?c=Estadistica_P&cid=1254735976608.
- ^{iv} http://recompte.barcelona/?page_id=8.
- ^v http://www.bcn.cat/barcelonainclusiva/ca/2016/2/sense_sostre2015_ang.pdf.
- ^{vi} http://www.ine.es/prensa/ecapsh_2016.pdf
- ^{vii} Caritas (2011) *Cáritas ante la crisis. VI Informe sobre las demandas atendidas a través de la red confederal de Acogida y Atención primaria*. Cáritas Española. Madrid.
- ^{viii} To know more about the numbers and the increases explanations: <http://sensellarisme.cat/es/el-recuento-2017-visualiza-1-026-personas-durmiendo-en-la-calle-y-1-954-alojadas-en-equipamientos/>
- ^{ix} https://cat.elpais.com/cat/2017/03/04/catalunya/1488652865_196235.html
- ^x https://www.raisfundacion.org/en/what_we_do/habitat
- ^{xi} http://ajuntament.barcelona.cat/dretssocials/sites/default/files/arxiu-documents/barcelona_plan_fighting_homelessness_2016-2020.pdf