
Homelessness among Migrants in Spain

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- › **Abstract_** *This paper explores homelessness (defined using the ETHOS model as living rough and houselessness) among migrant groups in Spain. There is growing evidence that migrants (defined in Spain as ‘foreign nationals’) are increasingly strongly represented in the homeless population of Spain. Experience of homelessness also appears to be particularly acute among recent migrants and to be becoming less common among more established migrant groups. However, while there is some evidence that migrants become less at risk of homelessness as they establish themselves in Spanish society, some migrant groups appear to face a situation of sustained housing exclusion. Some limitations in the available evidence base are also discussed.*
- › **Keywords_** *Homelessness ; rooflessness ; rough sleepers ; housing exclusion ; housing discrimination ; migrants*

Introduction

This paper analyses evidence that migrants in Spain are disproportionately represented in the homeless population. It draws on the existing literature, the 2001 census, the annual population data of the Spanish national statistical institute (Instituto Nacional de Estadística, INE) and the surveys of homeless people conducted by INE in 2003, 2005, 2006 and 2008.

The paper first sets the context for the discussion by very briefly describing immigration patterns in Spain. Second, it summarises the evidence on the causes of homelessness among migrant people. Third, it looks in detail at the experience of homelessness among recent migrants. Fourth, it considers some possible effects of the current economic crisis on migrants. The paper concludes with a brief discussion.

Immigration Patterns in Spain

Economic migration into Spain has grown dramatically in recent decades. In 1995 the total 'migrant' population¹ (defined as 'foreign nationals' in Spain) was some 500,000 people. By 2010 the migrant population had reached 5.7 million people.² The total migrant population increased from some 1.4 per cent of the Spanish population to 12.2 per cent during the period 1996 to 2010. Much of that growth is quite recent; migrants accounted for just 2.3 per cent of the Spanish population in 2000. Spain currently has one of the highest immigration rates in the world, about eight times greater than that of France, and one of the largest migrant populations in the European Union (Actis et al., 2008). Recent immigration into Spain is broadly comparable to some of the mass migrations of the last two centuries (Aranda, 2006).

Recent immigrants to Spain have been predominantly citizens of other EU member states (41 per cent), followed by Latin American people (27 per cent) and then people from Africa (18 per cent). Other groups are less numerous (INE, 2010).

According to the most recent data available (Ministerio de Trabajo e Inmigración, 2010) it can be estimated³ that some 8 per cent of the migrant population may be undocumented (i.e. not legally resident in Spain). This undocumented group appears to be largely Latin American in composition (around 60 per cent of undocumented migrants), with a significant minority of Africans (around 11 per cent) and a wide range of other nationalities also being present in smaller numbers. The situation of these undocumented migrants prevents them from accessing conventional labour and housing markets, with the consequent risk of exclusion (Martínez and Fernández, 2006).

¹ Some migrants are affluent retirees from developed countries such as Germany or the United Kingdom, who arrive in Spain with the resources to buy or build housing that they will own outright, however, they represent less than 10 per cent of all migrants in Spain.

² INE: www.ine.es/welcoing.htm.

³ The most recent records of the Ministry of Labour and Immigration (Ministerio de Trabajo e Inmigración, 2010) show that 4,791,232 foreign nationals had a certificate of registration or residence permit at 31 December 2009. As Domingo and Recaño (2005) note, we can get an initial estimate of the scope of clandestine immigration in Spain by comparing these figures with the register and subtracting the number of EU nationals who cannot be in a clandestine situation.

Causes of Homelessness among Migrants in Spain

For the purposes of this paper, homelessness is defined using the ETHOS typology developed by FEANTSA.⁴ According to this definition, homeless people are those who are 'roofless' or 'houseless'. ETHOS defines people who are roofless as including people living rough in public or external spaces without a shelter that can be defined as living quarters. The roofless group also includes people who are in emergency accommodation such as homeless shelters. Houseless people include those in hostels, temporary accommodation, transitional supported accommodation, women's shelter accommodation and temporary accommodation for immigrants as well as people who are about to leave institutional care without any settled housing being available to them.

Recent migrant populations can often be at a heightened risk of social and economic exclusion. Access to education and health care services in Spain, even for undocumented recent migrants, is possible, which is not the case in some other EU member states (Chauvin et al., 2009). However, difficulties centred around language, unfamiliarity with welfare systems, job application procedures and other barriers to the labour market, including qualifications not being recognised and racist attitudes among employers, can be issues for recent migrants in Spain. Exclusion from labour markets is, as elsewhere in the EU, associated with housing exclusion and experience of poor housing conditions. Discrimination from landlords, overcrowding and insecurity of tenure are widespread among recent migrants (Martínez and Fernández, 2006; Bosch, 2008; Colectivo IOE, 2006; Bosch and Gibaja, 2005; Fundación de la Comunidad Valenciana, 2004; FRA, 2009; CILP, 2007; RAXEN and EUMC, 2005; Edgar et al., 2004).

Migrants can face structural barriers to securing affordable and suitable housing. As is the case in many member states, general problems in the supply of affordable and adequate housing exist in Spain. Spain lacks a significant social-rented sector,⁵ which some research has suggested can particularly disadvantage recent migrants seeking affordable and adequate housing (Czischke, 2007). The Spanish private-rented sector, representing about 10 to 15 per cent of the whole stock, is also relatively small. Furthermore, the shortage of affordable owner-occupied housing progressively worsened with the sharp increase of housing prices between 1998 and 2007. In this period house prices rose by 158 per cent (at a rate of over 17 per cent per year on average).

⁴ See www.feantsa.org/code/en/pg.asp?page=484.

⁵ Without reliable updated data it can be estimated that the social-rented sector represents around one per cent of the housing stock (Ghekiere, 2009; Czischke and Pittini, 2007).

Alongside these shortages, there is also some evidence of discrimination against migrant groups in the rental market (SOS Racisme-Catalunya, 2009; SOS Racismo, 2008a and 2008b; Arjona and Checa, 2007; Páez, 2006; Colectivo IOE, 2006 and 2003; Fundación de la Comunidad Valenciana, 2004; SODEPAU and FAVB, 2003; UAB, 2002; Projecte Xenofilia, 1997). One study into discrimination by landlords against ethnic minorities (Colectivo IOE, 2003) reported that 55 per cent of respondents experienced prejudice. Difficulties in accessing suitable and affordable housing can also be coupled with cultural and linguistic remoteness, lack of social and family networks and difficulties in accessing the labour market (Cabrera, 2001; Cabrera and Malgesini, 2002; Sabater and Sagarra, 2004; Subirats, 2004).

However, some research on migrants in Spain suggests that homelessness disproportionately affects recent migrants. Rooflessness, use of informal arrangements, squatting and use of homeless shelters is relatively widespread among new migrants (Colectivo IOE, 2006). As time passes, migrant people in Spain appear to experience homelessness at decreasing rates. Some research suggests this is because they build up a range of informal supports; become more familiar with Spanish society, including learning the local language(s); start to access the labour market; and, eventually, secure housing for themselves (Labrador and Merino, 2002; Colectivo IOE, 2006; Bosch and Gibaja, 2005).

The question of where migrants tend to be housed as they become established in Spanish society is worth brief consideration. High rates of housing exclusion are common among many migrant groups (Bosch, 2008; Colectivo IOE, 2006; Fundación de la Comunidad Valenciana, 2004). As is common throughout the EU, some migrant and ethnic minority groups are concentrated in specific urban areas within Spain. There are concerns that these spatial concentrations of ethnic and cultural minorities are often in areas characterised by high rates of worklessness and social and housing exclusion. Housing in these areas is often in poor repair, overcrowded and unsuitable in other respects (Martínez Veiga, 1999; Cabrera and Mira, 2000; Subirats, 2004; Checa, 2004; Arjona and Checa, 2007; García, 2008).

Homelessness among Migrants in Spain

Migrant people living rough

In 2005 the INE conducted a major interview-based survey of homeless people, known as the 'EPSH-Personas' survey, which drew on recent US and French surveys for its methodology (Burt, 2001 ; Join-Lambert, 2009). The EPSH-Personas only covered municipalities with over 20,000 residents. As the survey mainly took place in the more densely populated municipalities and did not cover a significant part of rural Spain, the data do not provide national-level statistics.

The EPSH-Personas survey of homeless people counted 21,900 individuals who were houseless or roofless, of whom 8,212 (37.5 per cent) were living rough⁶ (INE, 2005). Just over half of the group of people living rough were migrants (54 per cent).

Data from surveys of people living rough in some major Spanish cities show a similar trend (see Table 1). A survey in Barcelona on one night in March 2008 reported that 62 per cent of people living rough were migrants (i.e. foreign nationals). The largest groups of people living rough were Romanians (16.3 per cent of the total), Moroccans (8.9 per cent) and Poles (5.2 per cent) (Cabrera et al., 2008b).

In Madrid, a count carried out on one night in December 2006 reported that 55 per cent of people living rough were migrants. A further count in 2007 also reported that 55 per cent of people living rough were migrants, while the count on one night in February 2008 reported that 53 per cent of people living rough in Madrid were migrants. This 2008 count showed that Romanians were the largest group among migrant people living rough (32.2 per cent), followed by Poles (10.5 per cent), Moroccans (7.7 per cent) and Portuguese (7.7 per cent) (Cabrera et al., 2008a).

The Barcelona and Madrid counts of people living rough found that 9.7 per cent and 13.8 per cent respectively of people living rough reported that being an 'undocumented' migrant was one of the reasons why they were homeless (Cabrera et al., 2008a and 2008b).

The smaller city of Lleida conducted a count on one night in April 2008 and found that three-quarters of a (fairly small) number of people living rough were migrants (Cabrera et al., 2008b). This survey and other research (Leal and Mayeur, 1998; Martínez Veiga, 1999; Cabrera and Malgesini, 2002; Defensor del Pueblo Andaluz, 2001a, 2001b and 2006; Checa and Fernández, 2003; Arjona and Checa, 2007) suggest that high representations of migrants among people living rough may not be confined to the major cities, but may also be found in smaller towns, particularly those in agricultural areas.

⁶ Defined by INE as sleeping rough or sleeping in abandoned cars, basements, corridors, staircases (i.e. without any form of accommodation).

Table 1: People living rough according to the s-nights in Barcelona, Madrid and Lleida. Proportion of migrants^a among people living rough and ratio of rough sleepers per 10,000 inhabitants

City and date of count	City population		Rough sleepers		Ratio rough sleepers
	Total inhabitants ^b	% of migrants ^a	Total	% of migrants ^a	per 10,000 inhabitants
Madrid 12 December 2006	3,132,463	14.98 (469,352)	621	55	1.98
Madrid 26 February 2008	3,213,271	16.8 (539,624)	651	53	2.02
Barcelona 12 March 2008	1,615,908	16.9 (273,175)	634	62	3.92
Lleida 28 April 2008	131,731	18.3 (24,016)	70	75	5.31

Source: Cabrera et al., 2008a and 2008b, and INE.

^a Migrants are defined as 'foreign nationals'.

^b Population closest to the date of the count (www.ine.es).

As Table 1 illustrates, the proportion of migrant people among people living rough ranges from 53 to 75 per cent and it appears that the higher the proportion of migrant people in a city's population, the higher the proportion of migrants among people living rough. The rate of rough sleepers ranges from 2 to 5 people per 10,000 inhabitants. However, it is worth bearing in mind that counts of people living rough suffer from a number of methodological limitations and have to be treated with caution. There is international evidence that they tend to under-represent the actual scale of living rough, while differences in methodology can make any comparison between counts problematic (Burt, 2001).

A survey carried out by Colectivo IOE (2006) looked at the experiences of 909 economic migrants. This survey suggested that, among new migrants, experience of living rough tended to be higher. Among migrants who had lived in Spain for less than one year, 4 per cent reported living rough. Experience of living rough dropped to 1.5 per cent among migrants who had been living in Spain for two to five years and to 1 per cent among those who had been living in Spain for five years or longer.

Migrant people using homelessness services

INE has conducted three major surveys of the Spanish homeless network (EPSH-Centros), which took place in 2003, 2006 and 2008 (INE, 2004, 2007 and 2008). This network comprises centres that offer services such as accommodation, meals and training to homeless people. The surveys focused on the activities and characteristics of homelessness services, including looking at the homeless people who used them. The surveys have indicated marked increases in the representation of migrants among people using homelessness services (see Table 2).

Between 1975 and 1994 migrants typically represented approximately 5 per cent of people using Spain's homeless network. In the mid-1990s this figure began to rise and then it increased very sharply from 2002. In 2008 INE reported that almost 63 per cent of the homeless people receiving services were migrants (see Table 2).

Table 2: Number of places and proportion of migrants^a in the homeless network, Spain, 1975–2008

Years	1975	1994	1995	1996	2000	2002	2003	2006	2008
Total daily accommodation places in the network	–	–	–	–	–	11,316	12,139	13,033	13,650
% of migrants ^a among the population attended to	5	5	10.1	8	13–24 ^b	41	58.2	47.2	62.7

Sources: DIS, 1975; Rico et al., 1994; Lucas et al., 1995; Cabrera and Malgesini, 2002 (for 1996, 2000 and 2002); INE survey on homeless people (EPSH-Centros) (for 2003, 2006 and 2008).

^a Migrants are defined as 'foreign nationals'.

^b Estimated.

Overall representation of migrants in the general homeless population

The 2005 EPSH-Personas survey, while limited in its coverage to municipalities with over 20,000 inhabitants, does give some broad indication of the overall extent to which migrant people are represented in the living rough and houseless populations of Spain. The 2005 survey showed a clear predominance of people from Africa (43.6 per cent of all migrants), followed by EU nationals (20.8 per cent), the rest of Europe (16.7 per cent) and North and South America (14 per cent). Moroccans (16 per cent of all migrants), Romanians (9 per cent) and Algerians (7.5 per cent) were the nationalities that were most strongly represented (see Table 2). Collectively, citizens of Romania, Bulgaria and Poland represented 16 per cent of the migrant homeless population covered by the EPSH-Personas survey (see Table 3).

Table 3: Migrants^a in the homeless population, Spain, 2005

	People	%
Total		
Spanish	11,341	51.8
Migrants ^a	10,559	48.2
Migrants^a by region of origin		
Africa	4,604	43.6
European Union	2,194	20.8
Other continental Europe	1,765	16.7
America (North and South)	1,478	14.0
Asia and other territories	519	4.9
Nationality of migrants^a		
Moroccan	1,689	16.0
Romanian	951	9.0
Algerian	795	7.5
Portuguese	673	6.4
Malian	604	5.7
Bolivian	487	4.6
Bulgarian	409	3.9
Polish	330	3.1

Source: INE (EPSH-Personas), 2005.

^a Migrants are defined as 'foreign nationals'.

The EPSH-Personas survey also reported that recent migrants appeared to be quite strongly represented among homeless people in Spain. Among migrants who were homeless, 41 per cent had been living in Spain for less than one year, compared with 19 per cent who had been living in Spain for more than five years. These findings are similar to those of the other research projects on homelessness and on the experience of economic migrants in Spain already referred to.

According to the EPSH-Personas survey, rates of employment among migrant homeless people were very low. Only 15 per cent of migrant homeless people reported being employed, which was a marginally higher rate than the level of employment among homeless Spanish people (9 per cent). Furthermore, the survey indicates that homeless migrants hardly receive any type of welfare payment such as unemployment benefit, invalidity benefit, retirement pension or any other kind of benefit. Just 3 per cent of homeless migrants received a welfare payment compared with 32 per cent of Spanish homeless people.

The EPSH-Personas survey also suggests that, on average, migrant experience of homelessness is more recent. Around 50 per cent of homeless migrants had been without housing for less than one year, whereas the proportion of Spanish homeless people in the same situation was only 30 per cent.

Although health services are open to migrants, including those who are undocumented, the EPSH-Personas survey reported that half of migrant homeless people did not have a health care card, which meant exclusion from the health care system. The extent to which this might mean that the significant numbers of migrant homeless people who lack health care cards are also otherwise undocumented cannot be established from the survey.

Some increases in undocumented migrants among homeless service users have been reported in La Rioja (Gobierno de La Rioja, 2004).

Outlook for the Future

After a decade of economic growth, the Spanish economy started to decline in 2007. Since then the rate of unemployment has risen to 20 per cent in Spain, and exceeds 30 per cent among migrants (Pajares, 2010). In this context, the number of migrants arriving in Spain between 2009 and 2010 has been the lowest in the last decade and there is now an expectation that the migrant population will stabilise at 13 to 14 per cent of the total population.

Migrants can lack the financial resources and access to the labour market that would enable them to pay a mortgage or rent. There is a concern that this problem may increase due to high unemployment rates among migrants. According to Pajares (2010), overcrowding to reduce costs, use of the poorest housing stock on the same basis, the temporary return of part of a family (or those workless members) to the country of origin or an individual or household leaving Spain may all be strategies that migrants pursue in response to problems in affording housing. Another outcome may be migration to other European countries less affected by the economic crisis.

Conclusions

There is a need for some caution in interpreting the research and statistical data from Spain. Some data are restricted to individual provinces or major cities and there are limitations to the 2005 EPSH-Personas survey as noted above. Although the available evidence base is not sufficiently strong to be conclusive, it does indicate a consistent pattern. Migrant experience of homelessness in Spain, specifically homelessness among recently arrived foreign nationals, appears to be relatively high and migrants appear to represent a rapidly increasing proportion of all homeless people. According to the most recent night counts carried out in some

Spanish cities, the proportion of migrants among people living rough ranges from 50 to 75 per cent. Likewise, some 63 per cent of all people attending the homeless network are migrants.

Indications that the heightened risk of homelessness may to some extent be time limited for migrant groups raise some interesting questions. Being more speculative, this might hint that migrant homelessness may be more closely linked to relative position in the housing and employment markets than it is to individual characteristics as, once migrant people become more firmly established in Spain, they appear to be at steadily reducing risk of experiencing homelessness.

By comparison with Spanish homeless people, a slightly higher proportion of homeless migrants are employed. However, people who are homeless migrants rarely receive any kind of welfare benefit.

The potential impact of wider economic events on levels of migrant homelessness is difficult to determine. In 2006 Spain was one of the main destination countries for economic migrants, both in the EU and globally. It could be argued that the extent of the current economic depression across the EU and within Spain will reduce the incentive to migrate as it becomes more and more difficult to find work. For migrants who are already in Spain, however, the risk of unemployment and associated lack of resources to pay for housing is greater than that for Spanish-born people and thus overcrowding rates, subletting and homelessness are expected to rise among migrants. In this context, migration rates into Spain may fall compared with other EU countries with better employment prospects.

Further research on the impact of the economic crisis upon migrant homelessness is needed to determine, for example, the magnitude of the problem, living conditions, ways of social integration of homeless undocumented migrants, the capacity of homeless networks to meet needs, the magnitude and characteristics of transnational migrations of homeless migrant people within the EU and current housing strategies adopted by migrant people to reduce costs. However, to a great extent, this research can only be carried out if and when the data on homelessness becomes more robust and addresses its current limitations.

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