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# How Many Homeless People Live in Spain? Incomplete Sources and Impossible Predictions

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- › **Abstract\_** *In Spain, it is impossible to determine the extent of residential exclusion. Despite this, predictions are made using as a basis the few sources that currently exist, which presents a dangerously biased view of the prevalence and evolution of homelessness. In December 2014, the European Observatory on Homelessness published the report 'Extent and Profile of Homelessness in European Member States', in which it warned about the current obstacles to determining the extent of homelessness in the fifteen countries where the organizations of the Federation are based. The report attempts to compare across nations, and it places Spain in a privileged position in terms of the prevalence of homelessness and the rise of residential exclusion in the latter years of the recession. This optimistic data contrasts with the macro indicators of poverty and extreme poverty, which present Spain as one of the countries where the financial crisis has had the most impact on the population. This article analyses the data sources on homelessness in Spain in order to outline the causes of the downward bias of predictions. The example of Barcelona (the city that has the most complete information) is used to identify the methodological and structural causes affecting the quality of data at state level.*
- › **Keywords\_** *extent of homelessness Spain, methodological limitations, ethos definition of homelessness*

## Introduction

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Data on the extent of homelessness in Spain are few and fragmented. The fact that local governments are accountable for the social care of homeless people, and that there is no state-level social action plan are the reasons that the systematization of information depends in large part on the political will of the local administration and their priorities. Here, the current limitations to quantifying homelessness in Spain will be assessed and predictions will be made using current sources on the reach and evolution of homelessness during the recent period of austerity.

The European Commission (2013) estimates that 410,000 people sleep rough on a random night throughout the EU. It is also claimed that more than four million people are exposed to a situation of homelessness each year. As a result of the scarce statistical information currently available about homelessness prevalence in the different EU countries, these predictions must be considered with due care. In December 2014, the European Observatory on Homelessness published the report *'Extent and Profile of Homelessness in European Member States'* (Busch-Geertsema *et al.*, 2014), in which they pointed out the ongoing obstacles to determining the extent of homelessness in member states.

According to the sources consulted by the European Observatory, the prediction of homelessness prevalence in the countries demonstrates significant disparities. In the Czech Republic in 2012, a homeless incidence of 0.3 percent of the population was estimated. In Denmark in 2013, a national count set a 0.1 percent prevalence. In Finland also in 2013, prevalence was 0.15 percent and in France it was 0.24 percent in 2012. In Germany, the prevalence estimated in 2012 was 0.35 percent. In this context, the low prevalence of homelessness registered by Spanish statistics can seem surprising. From the data collected by the Survey of Homeless People conducted by the National Institute of Statistics (INE) in 2012, 22,939 homeless people in Spain were counted, which corresponds to 0.05 percent of the population. The different methodologies used to determine these estimations and the diverse definitions of homelessness currently in use make comparison between countries problematic. Whereas in some cases all the people who have experienced a homeless situation during a year are being considered, in other cases all the homeless people at a specific time are being counted. And whereas some countries are able to include those people sleeping rough in the count, other countries include them only partially or they simply count the occupied places in residential centres.

With any doubt, the low homelessness prevalence in Spain is due to methodological factors and not the social reality. Existing evidence would actually predict a strong rise in residential exclusion. The strong impact of the recession on the living conditions of the population – especially those in the lower-income social class – and the stream of evictions due to mortgage foreclosures in the last few years would suggest that Spain is at the forefront when it comes to increased homelessness. The poverty gap (percentage difference between the poverty risk threshold and the average income of homes under this threshold) rose from 26.4 percent to 31.4 percent between 2006 and 2012, whereas in the Eurozone, the rise in the same period was from 22.1 percent to 23.4 percent.

The causes of housing access problems started long before the real estate bubble burst. In 2006, the Special Rapporteur on adequate housing, Miloon Kothari, visited Spain and compiled a report in which he concluded that the right to housing had been systematically violated in the state with the collaboration and through the tolerance of the public administration (Colau and Alemany, 2012). The report noted that the state housing sector had been extremely commercialized.

Extremely easy access to mortgage credit and public policies like the application of the ‘right of urban renting’, which promoted purchases in the housing market and converted renting into an uncertain and financially unattractive option created access problems. Those on lower incomes couldn’t deal with the demands of a mortgage despite the concessions offered by banks. Among these were many young people who were suffering a deterioration in labour conditions and adults in unstable work situations or situations of recurring unemployment. In this second group, difficulties in stabilizing their housing situation were added to other factors of social exclusion, which increased the risk of becoming homeless. While in 1997, households with a mortgage were devoting 37.6 percent of their income to mortgage repayments, in 2007 the proportion had risen to 51.2 percent (Colau and Alemany, 2012). And there is a close relationship between access to housing and the risk of social exclusion. Research by Sarasa and Sales (2009a; b) on pathways and factors of social exclusion in the city of Barcelona revealed that people who were suffering severe forms of social exclusion had faced repeated obstacles to accessing dignified housing throughout their life due to their low financial capacity and lack of family support or patrimony.

The unexpectedly low prevalence of homelessness in Spain and modest growth during the Great Recession makes a review of the sources and methodologies of quantifying housing exclusion essential. Below, the current sources are presented in order to establish the limitations of transnational comparisons of the prevalence of homelessness and detect possible methods of improvement.

## National-level Sources

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The only body that produces quantitative data on homelessness at state level is the National Institute of Statistics (INE) through two surveys: the *Survey of Homeless People* and the *Survey on Support Centres for Homeless People*. Data collected in both surveys relate only to people who have presented at 'specialized' centres for homeless people.

### *INE Survey of Homeless People*

This survey collects data from care facilities in towns of more than 20,000 inhabitants. The collection lasts six weeks (from 13 February to 25 March), when, according to the organizations, there is the highest demand for housing and food services. Two editions of the survey have been carried out – the first in 2005 and the second in 2012. As the survey indicates, a person is considered homeless when he/she is older than 18 and, in the week before the survey, has used some care facility or accommodation service and/or food service, and has slept at least once in any of the following support services in towns with more than 20,000 inhabitants: a hostel, shelter or residence; a women's refuge for victims of sexual violence; a centre for refugee or asylum seekers; a flat provided by a public body, NGO or other organization; an occupied flat; a hostel or hotel paid for a public body; a public space (train, underground or bus station, parking area, public garden, parking lot...); or a non-conventional dwelling (the hall of a property, a cave, a car...).

Contact with the people surveyed was made through the facilities and services provided by specialized organisations. The frame of observation is opened through soup kitchens, hygiene services and night accommodation services, gaining access in this way to people who sleep rough in public spaces or in non-conventional dwellings. However, an important weakness of this survey methodology is that it does not provide information on roofless people who don't have any contact with the services provided by public bodies or NGOs. Consequently, the survey underestimates those who do not engage with services.

Comparing the 2005 and 2012 surveys, we can observe a decrease in the number of people who sleep rough in public spaces (from 4,924 to 3,419) and in non-conventional dwellings (from 3,294 to 2,943). This would suggest that the Spanish housing crisis hasn't had any impact on the most severe situations of homelessness. However, it is necessary to remember that the survey is not capable of establishing a total number of homeless people and that it approximates the number of homeless people who, in a certain moment, go to some service to meet different housing needs.

With regard to the rest of the housing modalities covered by the survey, there is a moderate increase in the numbers of people housed in shelters or residences, flats provided by NGOs or other organizations, or in hostels or hotels sponsored by an NGO or other organization: from 10,632 people registered in these three types of services in 2005 to 14,681 in 2012. This increase is systematic and highlights the pressure on organizations and local social services in trying to respond to the increasing demand where there are clear budget limitations and political restrictions on the number of places that can be offered. In other words, it is the growth capacity of night-accommodation places that is being measured and not the increasing need.

Finally, there are other types of night accommodation where the figures reflect random changes in access to information rather than any social phenomenon. The lower number of people staying overnight in refuges for female victims of sexual violence and those staying in care centres cannot be explained by any structural change.

**Table 1. People Without Housing According to Overnight Services**

	2005	2012
Shelter or residence	8,454	9,915
Women's refuges	666	103
Care centres	618	44
Flat provided by an NGO or other organization	1,862	3,537
Occupied flat	1,765	1,738
Hostel/hotel paid for by an organization	316	1,239
Public area	4,924	3,419
Non-conventional dwellings	3,294	2,943
Total	21,900	22,938

Sources: INE Survey of Homeless People, 2005; 2012

### ***INE Survey on Support Centres for Homeless Persons***

The *Survey on Support Centres for Homeless Persons* (INE, 2003; 2006; 2008; 2010; 2012) collects data on specialized homelessness centres throughout the country. The main objective of the research is to study the different aspects of the support centres for homeless people, ranging from the general – information on services provided, clients and their profiles – to their economic and functional aspects, including financial contributors, human and financial resources, normal periods of activity, capacity and occupancy rates. Looking at the evolution of places offered by organizations and administrations as supplied by the survey confirms that a special effort has been made in the last few years to broaden the capacity of the housing network.

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**Table 2. Evolution of the Capacity of the Housing Network for Homeless People in Spain**

	Capacity	Occupied places
2006	13,033	10,829
2008	13,650	11,844
2010	15,778	13,701
2012	16,346	14,050

Source: INE Survey on Support Centres for Homeless Persons (2006; 2008; 2010; 2012).

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## Counts and Local Research

### *Madrid*

The last count of roofless people made in the city of Madrid was on 13 December 2012. It was the sixth count and nearly 1,000 citizens volunteered to walk through the city streets to count and survey the people who were sleeping rough in public areas. The volunteers encountered 701 roofless people, of whom 83 were not sleeping rough but staying overnight in the emergency rooms of hospitals, in train stations or at the airport.

The counts done in Madrid focused on people who don't use accommodation services. In the last edition (2012), 43 percent of the people found were awake and 69 percent of them accepted to be interviewed. From this sample, it needs to be pointed out that a high rate didn't have any connection at all with support services for homeless people. The most common type of service used was the soup kitchen and only 26.8 percent of people interviewed stating that they had used them (Muñoz *et al.*, 2012). The low impact of support services among people who sleep rough highlights the poor capacity of the methodology used in the INE's Survey of Homeless People to quantify the true extent of homelessness in Spain.

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**Table 3. Roofless People Located By Counts In the City of Madrid: 2006, 2008, 2009, 2010, 2012.**

	People
December 2006	621
February 2008	651
February 2009	553
December 2010	596
December 2012	701

Source: Muñoz *et al.*, (2012)

## Zaragoza

In Zaragoza, two counts have been done: the first in 2010 and the second in 2012. In both, the same methodology as in Madrid was used, deploying volunteers in a single night. In the 2010 count, 158 people sleeping rough in public areas were identified (equivalent to 0.023 percent of the population of the city of Zaragoza). In the 2012 count, 186 people were counted (0.027 percent of the population), equalling a 17.7 percent rise in two years.

## The Basque Country

In June 2013, the Documentation and Research Centre SIIS and the Eguía-Careaga Foundation published the *Study of the Situation of People with Severe Housing Exclusion* in the three capitals of the Basque country, Donostia (San Sebastián), Vitoria and Bilbao. The study aimed to quantify the number of people in a situation of severe housing exclusion, using as a reference the night of the 17 to 18 October 2012 and considering those people who slept on the streets of these three cities on that night as well as people who were housed in the different centres and specialized services for the support of homeless people. This fieldwork had two precedents in the Basque Country: the count done in Bilbao in 2010 and the one done in Donostia in 2011.

**Table 4. People in Situations of Severe Social Exclusion Counted in Vitoria, Bilbao and Donostia on the Night of 17 to 18 October 2012.**

	Vitoria	Bilbao	Donostia
People located on the street	29	148	66
People housed in accommodation services	279	738	444
Total people on the street and using services	308	886	510
Rough sleepers per 1000 inhabitants	0.12	0.42	0.31
People housed in accommodation services per 1000 inhabitants	0.86	0.64	0.67
Total rate of homelessness per 1000 inhabitants	0.95	0.72	0.78

Source: SIIS-Centro de Documentación y Estudios (2013)

The definition of severe housing exclusion used in the Basque report includes sleeping rough in a public space and staying overnight in a shelter for homeless people, be it a shelter or emergency shelter, a mid-term accommodation centre or a social inclusion flat.

## Quantifying the Variation in Changing Surroundings: The Experience of Barcelona

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Barcelona is the Spanish city that has the most detailed data on the extent of homelessness. The Network of Attention to Homeless People (XAPSLL: a network where specialized organizations and local government combine resources and work together) published three reports in 2008, 2011 and 2013, and it monitors annually all unpublished data that is registered in internal reports. The Network organizations count and collect basic socio-demographic data from people who stay overnight in accommodation centres on the night of 11 to 12 March every year. On two occasions, in 2008 and 2011, the data on people who sleep rough was collected by counts in which more than 700 volunteers walked through the city on the same night. Between 2008 and 2014, the Network worked with estimations from the Street Educators team of the Social Insertion Service of Barcelona City Council, which reports monthly on the number of new people detected in all of the city's districts.

The XAPSLL systematizes the information according to the ETHOS categories. Of the 13 ETHOS categories, the network is able to collect fairly complete information for the categories 2, 3, 7 and 8. The information gathered and handled by the City Council's Social Insertion Service provides knowledge on categories 1 and 8 – people who live in a public space or rough and people who live in settlements or shacks. It also gets partial information on category 4 – living in women's refuges – due to the partial specialization of one of the network's entities, but that is only an incidental piece of data in the wider reality of this type of support service in the city, as many such entities do not belong to XAPSLL.

Despite the fact that XAPSLL is not able to monitor all the ETHOS categories, the understanding that the different realities of housing exclusion are interconnected has meant that, since 2011, these categories are considered a reference point in the production of knowledge about homelessness and social exclusion in Barcelona. In the period between 2011 and 2014, a stability in the total numbers of homeless people counted in all the categories is observed, and there is even a decrease from 3,126 people in 2012 to 2,749 in 2014. This decrease is due to a small reduction in the numbers of people detected on the street and a reduction in the numbers of people living in settlements of non-conventional housing. The remaining categories, which are linked to the offer of places provided by the Network, continued to grow because of the collective effort of the organizations and the administration to tailor those offers to the strong demand for housing services that they meet on a daily basis.



**Table 5. Number of Homeless People in the City of Barcelona by ETHOS Classification**

	Operational category	Number of people, 8 November 2011	Number of people, 11 March 2012	Number of people, 11 March 2013	Number of people, 11 March 2014
Roofless	1. People sleeping rough in a public place	726	731	870	715
	2. People in overnight shelter and/or forced to spend the day in the public area	197	230	259	304
Houseless-ness	3. People who live in hostels or accommodation for the homeless. Temporary housing.	320	281	333	407
	4. People who live in women's refuges for victims of sexist violence	<i>n/a</i>	20	4	15
	5. People who live in temporary accommodation for immigrants and asylum seekers	<i>n/a</i>	<i>n/a</i>	<i>n/a</i>	<i>n/a</i>
	6. People who live in a care centre or residential centre with the perspective of being discharged shortly without an available sheltering facility	<i>n/a</i>	<i>n/a</i>	<i>n/a</i>	<i>n/a</i>
	7. People who live in supported accommodation housing for homeless people	342	332	356	548
	8. People who live in legally insecure housing	399	698	499	337
Insecure housing	9. People who live under threat of eviction	<i>n/a</i>	<i>n/a</i>	<i>n/a</i>	<i>n/a</i>
	10. People who live under the threat of violence from the family or the partner	<i>n/a</i>	<i>n/a</i>	<i>n/a</i>	<i>n/a</i>
	11. People who live in 'non conventional' and temporary housing	695	834	595	423
Inadequate housing	12. People who live in an unfit housing according to Law	<i>n/a</i>	<i>n/a</i>	<i>n/a</i>	<i>n/a</i>
	13. People who live in overcrowded housing	<i>n/a</i>	<i>n/a</i>	<i>n/a</i>	<i>n/a</i>
	<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>2,679</b>	<b>3,126</b>	<b>2,916</b>	<b>2,749</b>

Source: Sales (2013) and Non published data provided by XAPSLL<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> The Network of Attention to Homeless People in Barcelona (XAPSLL) collects annual statistics and publishes biannual reports. XAPSLL provided figures of 2014 for this article.

In general terms, we could conclude that the effort of the organizations in broadening their services is reducing the number of people on the street, despite the recession in Barcelona. To do so, however, would be to omit the qualitative information provided by the same organizations and the local government. In the period 2011 to 2014, there were strong fluctuations in the numbers of those living in settlements as a result of evictions and police operations in industrial units and other buildings. There is no way of knowing where the people who have disappeared from the count went, though a fairly plausible hypothesis would be that there has been a rise in the number of hidden and smaller settlements.

With regard to the people who use the accommodation services, there has been a diversification in the types of support being offered, which could distort the data series. New services aimed at preventing homelessness in cases where people have been seriously affected by the recession have emerged. These services have also been offered to people who are experienced in living on the street. The service that modifies the reading of the data series most significantly is one concerning one-family housing provided by *Cáritas* Barcelona. Between 2013 and 2014, this organization launched 342 one-family accommodation units; in March 2014, these units hosted, with social support, 512 families (more than 1,000 people). Although it is not considered a specialized service in providing shelter to homeless people, with any doubt these services contributed to the decrease in categories 7 and 8, since they are providing housing to an unspecified number of people who may also be on the list of possible tenants of inclusion flats or hostels/hotels funded through the organisation. Both *Cáritas* and other big social organizations in Barcelona admit they have diversified assistance modalities without having a clear idea of the boundary between the fight against housing exclusion and the classical approach to homelessness.

Although before 2011 the ETHOS categories wasn't used as a reference point, we can reconstruct the data series for 2008, when the first count of people on the street was done. In March of that year, the number of people counted sleeping rough and in accommodation services for homeless people on one single night was 2,017. By March 2014, the total numbers of people registered as being on the street, in settlements and in network accommodation facilities had risen to 2,749. The 36 percent rise in the homeless population (defined as the number of people sleeping rough, housed in the network services and living in settlements) is due to a 27 percent increase in the numbers of people sleeping on the street, a 60 percent rise in the number of people living in settlements and a 35 percent increase in the number of people housed in accommodation services.

**Table 6. Number of Homeless People in the City of Barcelona 2008, 2011, 2013, 2014**

	12 March 2008	12 March 2011	12 March 2013	12 March 2014
People sleeping on the street	562	726	870	715
Settlements	265	695	595	423
People sleeping in the network's accommodation facilities	1190	1258	1468	1611
<b>Total</b>	<b>2,017</b>	<b>2,679</b>	<b>2,933</b>	<b>2,749</b>

Source: Sales (2013); Non published data provided by XAPSL

If we look at the two main data sources on the evolution of roofless people sleeping in a public area, there is an obvious rise between 2008 and 2011. The number of different people registered by the Social Insertion Service of the City Council rose progressively from 2011 until coming to a halt, and the counts made in a single night in March 2008 and November 2011 present a 32 percent rise.

**Table 7. Evolution of People Detected Sleeping in the Public Space by the City Council's Social Insertion Service Street Team In Two Counts.**

	People detected by SIS	People counted on the one-night counts	Deviation
March 2008	562	634	<b>12,81 percent</b>
March 2009	669		
March 2010	619		
March 2011	711		
November 2011	726	838	<b>15,43 percent</b>
March 2012	731		
March 2013	870		
March 2014	715		

*Note: Data of settlements in temporary or non-conventional dwellings not included*

Sources: Sales (2013); Non published data provided by XAPSL

Between 2008 and 2014 a noticeable increase was thus registered in Barcelona in the most severe type of housing exclusion, which contrasts with the stability conveyed, according to the State, by the INE surveys results. The systematization of data in Barcelona enables us to identify tendencies that, due to a lack of complete information, cannot be fully quantified, but they hint at a possible bias in the quantification of homelessness in Spain.

Firstly, the rise that was found in Barcelona in the numbers of people sleeping on the street cannot be compared with the rest of Spain because of the deficiencies in the only source available. The *Survey of Homeless People* only accounts for people who use hygiene, food or accommodation services and who confirm they have slept on the street in the week before the survey. A true figure for numbers of people who are sleeping on the street doesn't exist and data reading must be done in relation to the capacity of the assistance network to provide services and not the reality of the street.

Secondly, data from Barcelona indicates that there are new necessities that are being attended to by services traditionally aimed at homeless people. The report published by XAPSELL that contained data from 2011 (Sales, 2012) warned about the changing profiles of homeless people, seen in almost all European countries, as there was a sharp increase in the numbers of families using night accommodation services. Between March and November 2011, the number of people belonging to families that used these services rose from 114 to 178. These figures didn't include people housed in pensions or subletting and thus couldn't quantify the actual size of the problem; they merely raised a concern regarding the trend. The 2012 and 2013 data collection for services does contain the number of people housed in pensions and subletting with their nuclear family. This change in data collection, along with the response of entities and social services, which prioritize housing in inclusion flats or specialized facilities – such as the Temporary Family Shelter in Navas – makes it difficult to construct a readily comparable statistical series. However, the differences between 2012 and 2013 do outline a continued rise in the number of families in need of housing. The 343 people that used services with their family in 2012 rose to 531 in 2013.

Thirdly, in the context of a social emergency, assistance dynamics have diversified. In Barcelona, several entities have launched new forms of support that are not considered homeless services, but they are providing services to families and individuals who would otherwise swell the numbers of people sleeping on the street. At the same time, in the process of reviewing the inclusion pathways of people who have lived a certain time on the street, the classification of services has become blurred, which leads us to question of just what is a homeless facility and whether it is useful to distinguish it from other types of housing available for people without a home. In Barcelona, it is very significant that in just one year Caritas made available 512 supported one-family accommodation units, which house people who have suffered homelessness and others who haven't – especially families with minors. The specialized nature of the INE's Survey of Homeless People and its definition of support services limit the tool's capacity to gauge this type of reaction by the organizations.

Fourthly, the restrictive definition of homelessness used by the INE surveys ignores the reality of the settlements of shacks or substandard housing, which have grown intensively in recent years in cities like Barcelona. These settlements are linked to marginal economical activities, such as the scrap metal collection, and are full of people and families who worked in other types of jobs before 2008. The evolution of this type of housing exclusion hasn't been registered at state-level.

When comparing the prevalence of rough sleeping throughout Spain according to the *Survey of Homeless People*, and the prevalence of rough sleeping in the cities where a count has been done recently or where reliable information is available, a notable divergence is confirmed. Prevalence in cities that have their own data ranges from 0.012 percent in Vitoria to 0.044 percent in Barcelona. The INE survey, however, suggests a figure of 0.007 percent. This lower percentage is a result of not counting roofless people who don't use any support services and the fact that the survey is only carried out in towns of more than 20,000 inhabitants. The lack of data collection tools at a national level makes it impossible to know the figures and evolution of rooflessness in Spain and it would be strongly recommended not to make predictions based on the *Survey of Homeless People*, due to its enormous bias.

**Table 8. Prevalence of Rooflessness According to Local Studies and State-level Research**

	People sleeping on the street overnight	percent of population sleeping on the street overnight
Barcelona (2013)	715	0.044
Madrid (2012)	701	0.022
Bilbao (2012)	148	0.042
Donostia (2012)	66	0.035
Vitoria (2012)	29	0.012
Zaragoza (2012)	186	0.027
Spain (2012)	3419	0.007

If we look at growth in the percentages of the homeless population, big divergences are also confirmed. Whereas the Survey of Homeless People only registers a 4.7 percent growth between 2005 and 2012, in the city of Barcelona there is a 30.1 percent growth in the period 2008 to 2012, and in Madrid and Zaragoza in just two years (2010-2012), the number of people sleeping on the street rises nearly 18 percent. Part of this difference can be caused by the metropolitan characteristics of those cities, but it is clear that methodology has a deep impact. The proportion of rough sleepers who are surveyed is predictably low and it will be lower the more people remain outside the support service system. The growth registered in the INE surveys is due to the support network's capacity to spread and adapt to the new circumstances.

**Table 9. Percentage Growth of the 'Roofless' Population According to National and Local Research: Spain, Barcelona, Madrid and Zaragoza**

Spain 2005-2012	4.7
Barcelona 2008- 2012	30.1
Madrid 2010- 2012	17.6
Zaragoza 2010- 2012	17.7

## Conclusions

If we quantify the people who use homeless care facilities in different periods of time, any changes in the figures will be indicative of the support network's capacity to adapt to a new context rather than the evolution of homelessness itself. The tiny rise in homelessness detected by the INE's Survey of Homeless People reflects an increase in the number of places available in support services, but it does not show any changes in the number of people who sleep on the street and don't get any kind of support, or the number of people in new housing types that have emerged in response to the housing emergency that has been ongoing since 2008.

In the transnational comparison, the low prevalence of rough sleepers or the rooflessness situation in Spain is surprising. This paper argues that the methodology deployed in the INE's *Survey of Homeless People* limits and underestimates the phenomenon. Only those people sleeping on the street who use the care intervention network support services are surveyed and counted. Nevertheless, the number of people who sleep on the street and use hygiene or food services provided by organizations within the intervention care network is relatively low.

At the same time, the slight growth registered in the numbers of people using accommodation services can also not be considered an indicator of the evolution in homelessness in Spain. Data can be used to analyse trends as to the characteristics of the people affected but not to quantify the phenomenon. As in other European countries, for methodological reasons, the focus is placed on the offer of services, not on the demand. Despite the fact that it's understandable to think that the places offered must be a response to the growing demand, there are many factors that influence this. Homeless policies are framed at the local level and social organizations play an important role in their development. The 2007 recession has greatly affected Spanish public bodies in general and especially the local institutions. That's why considering the evolution of the number of places offered as an approximation of how demand has evolved is even more biased in times of crisis.

To complement and validate the trends detected in the data analysis of the support services, it is crucial to get more information about what is happening on the street. There is no data about non-supported demand, apart from the isolated pieces of local research detailed above. A state- or regional-level strategy to fight against severe housing exclusion should incorporate tools to identify the magnitude of homelessness, at least in the cities. The shortage of policies and strategies beyond the local level also means that there has been no development of integrated systems with comparable information. It would also be important to try to estimate the number of households that get support from private entities or local social services to pay for housing (or rooms) and identify the new types of housing support while quantifying their impact.

Far from the ultimate objective – which should be to predict the number of people in each of the ETHOS categories – it is essential to improve the tools for finding out what happens on the street and how the forms of support for homeless people and people who suffer housing exclusion are changing, in order that trends may be identified and policies coordinated beyond the local level.

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