

Diagnosis 2022

Homelessness in

Barcelona

Trends and relationship with the labour market

XAPSLL

Xarxa d'Atenció
a Persones
Sense Llar
BARCELONA

Promoted by:
Barcelona City Council



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Contents

Content	3
1. Introduction	5
2. Methodology	8
2.1. Diagnosis of homelessness in Barcelona, 2022	8
2.2. Homelessness and the job situation in Barcelona	8
Quantitative analysis	9
Qualitative analysis	10
3. Results of the street and facilities surveys, 2021 and 2022	14
4. Labour market and homelessness	25
4.1. Quantitative data analysis	26
4.2. Qualitative data analysis	32
A job, what for? The function of a paid job	32
Much more than just financial income	33
The shame: “I don’t want help, I want a job”	34
The relationship with the labour market is also an impediment to recovery	35
Difficulties in accessing the labour market and keeping a job	36
Getting organised and looking for a job while living on the street	36
Feeling rejection, the weight of stigma and one’s own insecurities	36
Bureaucracy and the digital divide	37
Other labour market exclusion factors	38
Support for entering or returning to the labour market	39
5. Conclusions	42
Tackling the effects of homelessness and not the causes is not enough	42
The gender perspective and hidden homelessness	43
The special vulnerability of the foreign population	43
Homelessness and the labour market	44
6. References	46





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1. Introduction

Since 2008, the Barcelona Support Network for the Homeless (Xarxa d'Atenció a Persones Sense Llar de Barcelona, XAPSLL) has been publishing regular diagnostic reports on homelessness in the city. From the first count of homeless people and the report *Who's sleeping on the street?: A social and citizen investigation on people without a roof over their head* (Cabrera, Rubio and Blasco, 2008) to the report presented below, twelve years have passed. In that time, six publications have been released showing data collected jointly by social entities and the City Council on the extent and impact of homelessness, in addition to specific research on aspects that shape the policies of care and support for homeless people.

This report presents an update of the statistical data sets produced by the XAPSLL. Barcelona has quantitative data on the trends in homelessness in the city thanks to the work of all the agents involved in providing a response to this problem. Year after year, the XAPSLL's Diagnosis and Counting Committee coordinates the efforts of organisations and the Administration to calculate the number of people assisted in accommodation or residential services and the number of people who are obliged to sleep rough. These efforts focus on street surveys, the processing of data from the municipal services that carry out actions in public spaces and the annual surveys of people assisted, following the methodologies described below. The monitoring and diagnostic work carried out by the XAPSLL allows 37 organisations and the City Council to generate solid and consensus-based data on homelessness in the city, which have been presented in a series of publications that began in 2008 and have been known since 2011 as diagnostic reports.

Since 2015, the diagnoses have updated the available data on homelessness in the city of Barcelona and have contributed to the research. The report "Diagnosis 2022. Homelessness in Barcelona. Trends and relationship with the labour market" updates the statistical series and adds a new subject to the series of studies. The aim of these studies is to create knowledge that further improves the support and care that the city offers to homeless people, and to influence social policies in order to combat social and housing exclusion.

This labour-focused approach to providing support is motivated by the everyday experience of service professionals as a whole: assisting people in their integration into the labour market is considered a way of helping them to emerge from homelessness and gain access to economic income that will allow them to maintain an independent life. However, job insecurity and the relentless increase in prices and difficulties in accessing any kind of housing solution make it necessary to rethink the role of paid work in escaping poverty or homelessness.

In response to this concern, the Diagnosis and Counting Committee proposed that the report should include empirical evidence to facilitate debate on the role of labour market integration in services and programmes for homeless people. This proposal, accepted in a plenary meeting of the XAPSLL, resulted in the inclusion in this document of data from a survey carried out at the end of 2021 on a sample of people in accommodation and residential services in Barcelona, and the results of qualitative research carried out between March and June 2022.



Reports on homelessness in Barcelona conducted by the XAPSELL, 2008-2022

Cabrera, P.; Rubio, M. J.; Blasco, J. (2008). *Who's sleeping on the streets?: A social and citizen investigation on people without a roof over their head*. Barcelona: Caixa Catalunya, Welfare Projects.

Sales, A. (2012). *Diagnosis 2011. Homeless people in Barcelona on 8 November and trends in residential resources*. Barcelona Support Network for the Homeless.

Sales, A. (2013). *Diagnosis 2013. Homeless people in the city of Barcelona and trends in the resources of the Support Network for the Homeless*. Barcelona Support Network for the Homeless.

Sales, A.; Uribe, J.; Marco, I. (2015). *Diagnosis 2015. Homelessness in Barcelona: trends and intervention policies*. Barcelona Support Network for the Homeless.

Guijarro, L.; Sales, A.; Tello, J.; De Inés, A. (2017). *Diagnosis 2017. Homelessness in Barcelona. Trends and access to housing*. Barcelona Support Network for the Homeless.

De Inés, A.; Guzmán, G.; Verdaguer, M.; Contreras, M. (2019). *Diagnosis 2019. Homelessness in Barcelona. Trends and homelessness among young people*. Barcelona Support Network for the Homeless.





2. Methodology

2.1. Diagnosis of homelessness in Barcelona, 2022

The sources of the statistical series presented in this and previous reports come mainly from the homelessness surveys carried out by the XAPSLL and are complemented by data provided by Barcelona City Council's social intervention services in public spaces (currently the Social Support Service for Homelessness in Public Spaces, SASSEP). These services provide estimates of the number of people sleeping rough on the streets based on their monthly detections and the number of people living in illegal settlements on occupied plots of land.

The XAPSLL has conducted six surveys of people sleeping rough on a single night in Barcelona. These were carried out in 2008, 2011, 2016, 2017, 2018 and 2021, and involved the participation of more than seven hundred voluntary workers who were divided into teams to walk the streets and squares of the city following specific routes to ensure the entire municipal territory was covered. In 2018, the XAPSLL agreed to carry out the night-time street surveys every two years, but due to the Covid-19 pandemic, the action scheduled for 2020 was postponed and ended up taking place on the night of 19 to 20 May 2021.

In order to monitor homelessness in public spaces on an annual basis, during the years in which a street survey was not carried out, the estimates of Barcelona City Council's social intervention services in public spaces were used to approximate the number of people spending the night on the streets. When the results of the one-night surveys are compared against data from the municipal services, the deviation is minimal. Therefore, we have two complementary sources that ensure solid evidence of the number of rough sleepers in the city and any numerical changes over time.

Similarly, each year since 2011, organisations and the City Council have been carrying out a survey of people attended to in accommodation and housing programmes for homeless people on a single night. Thanks to this systematic effort, once a year Barcelona records the number of people who are in situations of housing exclusion covered by the XAPSLL and the services specialised in providing support for homeless people. The street and facilities counts are carried out on the same night in order to have as accurate a picture as possible of the number of homeless people in the city and to avoid counting people twice.

2.2. Homelessness and the job situation in Barcelona

As the data collected by the XAPSLL are updated, complementary research is also carried out. The overall aim is to assess how the relationship of people attended to by the city's institutions and services with the labour market has impacted their pathways in terms of housing exclusion and the recovery of their self-sufficiency.

Qualitative research has been carried out to explore the interaction between homelessness and the labour market, which is contextualised with quantitative data

from a recent survey of people assisted by the city's services. This intersectional analysis¹ examines how the employability of homeless people has marked their life pathways and how the lack of housing has conditioned their relationship with the labour market.

It also analyses the resources available for integrating people receiving support from XAPSLL services into the labour market with the aim of recovering their independence.

1

It is understood that social factors interact with each other in defining the structure of people's opportunities. Taking into account the intersectionality of these factors means considering the joint impact of issues such as gender, ethnic and geographical origin, racialisation and age on people's lives.

Overall aim

Assess how people assisted by XAPSLL organisations' relationship with the labour market has marked their housing exclusion and recovery pathways.

Specific aims

1. Perform an intersectional analysis of how the employability (professional and personal skills, abilities and knowledge) of homeless people has marked their housing exclusion pathways and how the lack of housing has conditioned their relationship with the labour market.
2. Analyse whether the resources available for the job placement of people assisted by the network are suitable for them to recover their personal independence.


Quantitative analysis

Between April 2021 and January 2022, the Barcelona Institute of Regional and Metropolitan Studies conducted a survey of people housed in collective housing facilities and temporary accommodation for homeless people in the city of Barcelona. The overarching aim was to collect descriptive data on their background as well as their housing exclusion pathways and the factors that have defined them.

The 319 valid surveys include responses from people in housing facilities and dwellings that make up the

specific social services for homeless people offered by XAPSLL organisations and Barcelona City Council through the Municipal Institute of Social Services. They have been selected intentionally² to reproduce the characteristics of the universe of 2,800 people assisted by XAPSLL facilities and services, according to the variables of gender identity, nationality (Spanish, EU, non-EU) and age (grouped into ranges). These are people who have been given assistance because they are homeless and, at the time of answering the survey, were receiving social and housing support.

2 Difficulties in managing the interviews, possible biases in the process of substituting people who refused to be interviewed and the difficulty in drawing up a census of the population universe ruled out the possibility of a random selection of the sample.



Qualitative analysis

In order to delve deeper into the pathways of the homeless respondents and the factors that influence their employability in the formal and informal labour market, we followed a qualitative research approach based on semi-structured interviews.

Nine interviews were carried out with homeless people in a variety of situations of homelessness, and twelve interviews were carried out with XAPSLL professionals between March and June 2022. The XAPSLL facilitated contact between the respondents and the two researchers who carried out the fieldwork. The selection of respondents strove for diversity in terms of gender, geographical origin and housing situation. When arranging the interview and at the beginning of the interview, the participants were made aware that the aim of the research was to explore their difficulties in accessing the labour market and their experiences in relation to work in order to improve the support and social care services. When selecting the professionals to be interviewed, it was considered important that they should work in different organisations (in terms of size and profiles of the population preferentially assisted) and hold different positions in the organisation.

An effort was made to ensure the presence of people specialised in job placement and others not directly involved in this area of support in the sample.

The interviews were recorded using a tape recorder (after the participants had signed the relevant permissions for their anonymous use strictly for the purposes of the research) and gave rise to ethnographic research notes in the form of a text file containing an explanation of the context of the interview and the main results. All the interviews were then transcribed verbatim (partially) and summarised according to the research objectives. The verbatim transcriptions and quotations that appear in this report contain the minimum information necessary on each person interviewed to contextualise their accounts and guarantee their anonymity.

The qualitative data analysis relies on a categorisation of the transcription fragments that were relevant to the research. The results come from the interaction between theoretical knowledge and empirical data, with the aim of generating new knowledge that is of relevance in job placement actions in other contexts with similar institutional characteristics.



Characteristics of the respondents who suffer or have suffered from homelessness	
Minimum age	20
Maximum age	68
Average age	43.7
Number of men	11
Number of women*	8

*including 1 trans woman

Number of Spanish nationals	9
Number of EU foreign nationals	1
Number of non-EU foreign nationals	9

Number of foreign nationals with work and residence permits	4
Number of foreign nationals without work and residence permits	5

Characteristics of the respondents from XAPSLI services and organisations	
Minimum age	26
Maximum age	64
Average age	39.2

Number of men	5
Number of women	7

Number of Spanish nationals	11
Number of EU foreign nationals	1
Number of non-EU foreign nationals	0

Number of foreign nationals with work and residence permits	12
Number of foreign nationals without work and residence permits	0





3. Results of the street and facilities surveys, 2021 and 2022

The trend in the number of people detected in the XAPSLI surveys is very similar to the estimates of Barcelona City Council's social intervention in public spaces teams, which are calculated on the basis of the number of different people detected over the course of a month in the performance of their investigation tasks.

If we take into account the results of the surveys, there was a significant increase between 2008 and 2016, which places the number of people sleeping rough on the streets at around nine hundred. This figure remained stable until the 2022 survey. The results of the 2021 survey indicated a slight reduction in the number of people sleeping rough compared to the 2018 survey, as well as a decrease in the number of people living in squats in abandoned premises and houses. The significant increase in the number of accommodation and housing resources between 2019 and 2020 helped to contain an increase in the number of homeless people. In 2022, however, data from Barcelona City Council's

social intervention services in public spaces show that the number of people sleeping rough on the city's streets on a single night has returned to pre-pandemic levels and has once again exceeded 1,000.

The increase and the return to the situation prior to 2019 is taking place despite the fact that in 2021 and 2022 there were more places available and more people housed than ever before. In 2019, 2,117 homeless people were housed in resources, while in 2020 this figure rose to 2,719, to which 549 were added to shelters to facilitate the lockdown of homeless people during the Covid-19 health emergency. The number of people registered on a single night in XAPSLI residential centres and programmes was 2,808 in 2021 and 2,803 in 2022. So, while the number of homeless people is at an all-time high, the availability of social support services and programmes offering accommodation or residential solutions to homeless people in Barcelona is higher than ever.

Table 1.
Trend in the number of homeless people in Barcelona according to the data collected in XAPSLI surveys, 2008-2021

	2008	2011	2016	2017	2018	2021	2022
	N	N	N	N	N	N	N
People sleeping rough according to XAPSLI citizen surveys	658	838	941	1,026	956	895	1,063
Squats (data from the SASSEP)	265	695	383	415	444	340	331
XAPSLI resources	1,190	1,258	1,907	2,006	2,130	2,808	2,803
<i>Proportion of the homeless population living in collective housing centres or in individual accommodation</i>	56%	45%	59%	58%	60%	69%	67%
TOTAL	2,113	2,791	3,231	3,447	3,530	4,043	4,197

NOTE: Pending the next XAPSLI survey, the number of people sleeping rough in May 2022 is provided by the SASSEP.

The total number of homeless people counted by the XAPSLL continues to grow, despite the fact that the proportion of the population attended to in housing facilities has increased considerably in recent years. If

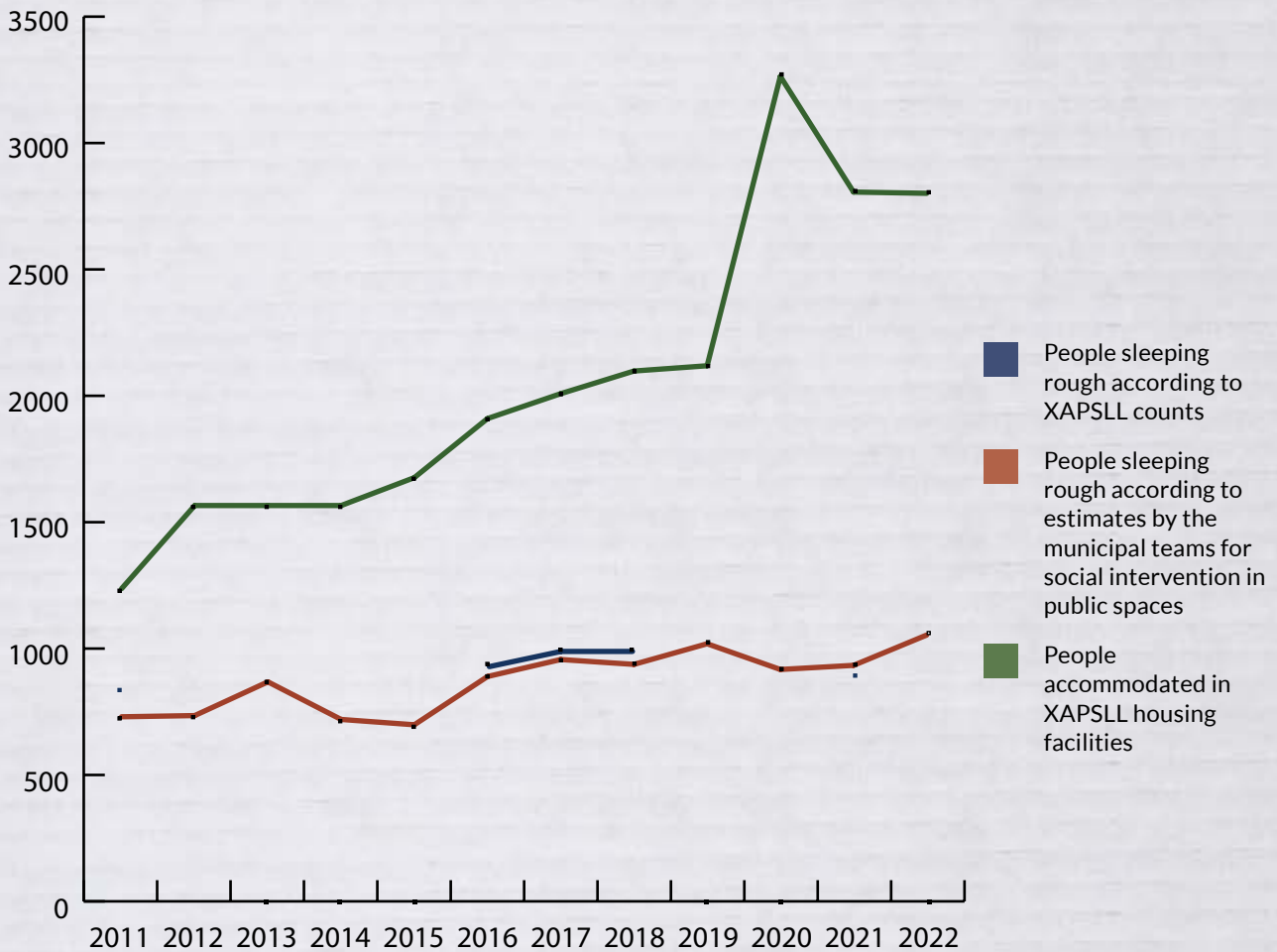
the increase in residential and housing resources is not leading to a reduction in the number of people forced to live on the streets, it is because an increasing number of people are continuously falling into this situation.

Table 2. Trend in the number of homeless people living on the streets and accommodated in the housing resources of the XAPSLL, Barcelona, 2011-2022

	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022
People sleeping rough according to XAPSLL citizen surveys		838					941	1,026	956			895
People sleeping rough according to the estimates of the municipal teams of social intervention in public areas	726	731	870	715	693	892	962	942	1,027	921	938	1,063
People accommodated in the XAPSLL's housing resources	1,230	1,561	1,451	1,561	1,672	1,907	2,006	2,096	2,117	2,719	2,808	2,803
People accommodated in emergency facilities during the Covid-19 pandemic lockdown										549		



Figure 1. Trend in the number of homeless people living on the streets and housed in XAPSLL's housing facilities. Barcelona, 2011-2022



However, the growth in the number of people detected on the street has been significantly lower than the growth in the number of people attended to by XAPSLL resources. Between 2008 and 2022 the number of people counted in the surveys carried out on facilities increased from 1,190 to 2,803. The trend in the total number of places (notwithstanding the margins of error and series gaps that are to be expected in a data collection involving 37 organisations and the municipal administration) shows that in the context of the pandemic there has been a significant increase in the number of places in residential centres, which is a response to the consolidation of projects created as emergency facilities at the beginning of the pandemic and which have been transferred to stable locations with the possibility of providing privacy and self-sufficiency to residents. There has also been a notable increase in the number of people living in dwellings financed by

institutions, which is the result of the transformation of temporary accommodation in boarding houses and sublet rooms into flat-sharing programmes.

Of the total 2,803 places available in the city in 2022, 1,892 were from the Municipal Care Programme for Homeless People. These are places offered in public facilities or in facilities belonging to organisations that have entered into an agreement with Barcelona City Council for all or some of their places. Nearly a thousand (911) of them are privately owned.

Of the 1,892 public and subsidised places available, 40% are provided in residential centres, 28.4% in dwellings and 31.7% were emergency accommodation places contracted in boarding houses and hotel establishments. Strictly private places are mainly concentrated in dwellings (75%).

Table 3. Places occupied on the night of 18 May 2022 in the survey of facilities, by type and ownership

		N
Public and subsidised places	Housing centres	755
	Dwellings	537
	Boarding houses / Rooms	600
<i>Total public and subsidised places</i>		1,892
Private places	Housing centres	118
	Dwellings	684
	Boarding houses / Rooms	109
<i>Total private places</i>		911
Total		2,803

Figure 2. Percentage of public and government-subsidised places occupied on the night of 18 May 2022 according to the facilities count, by type of facility

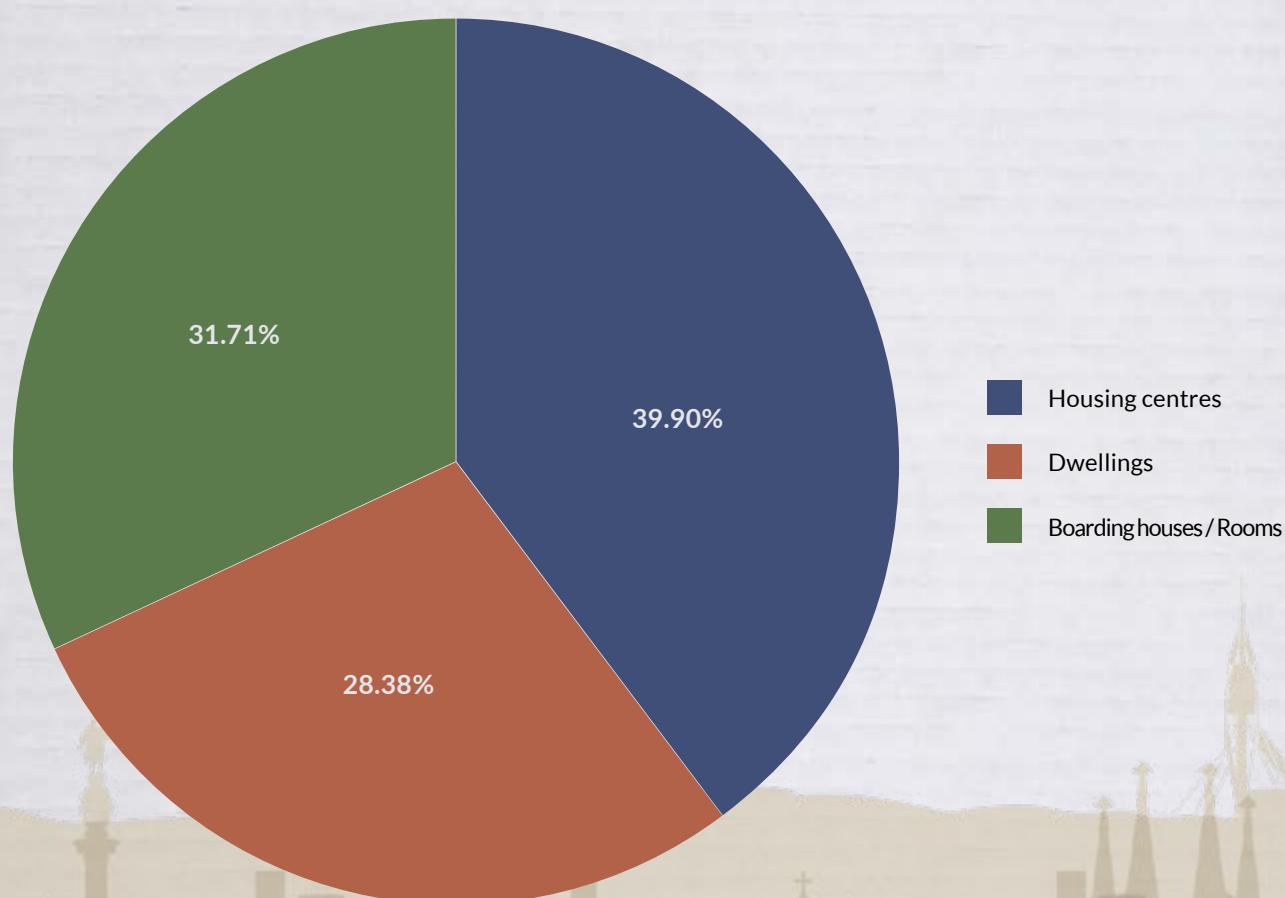
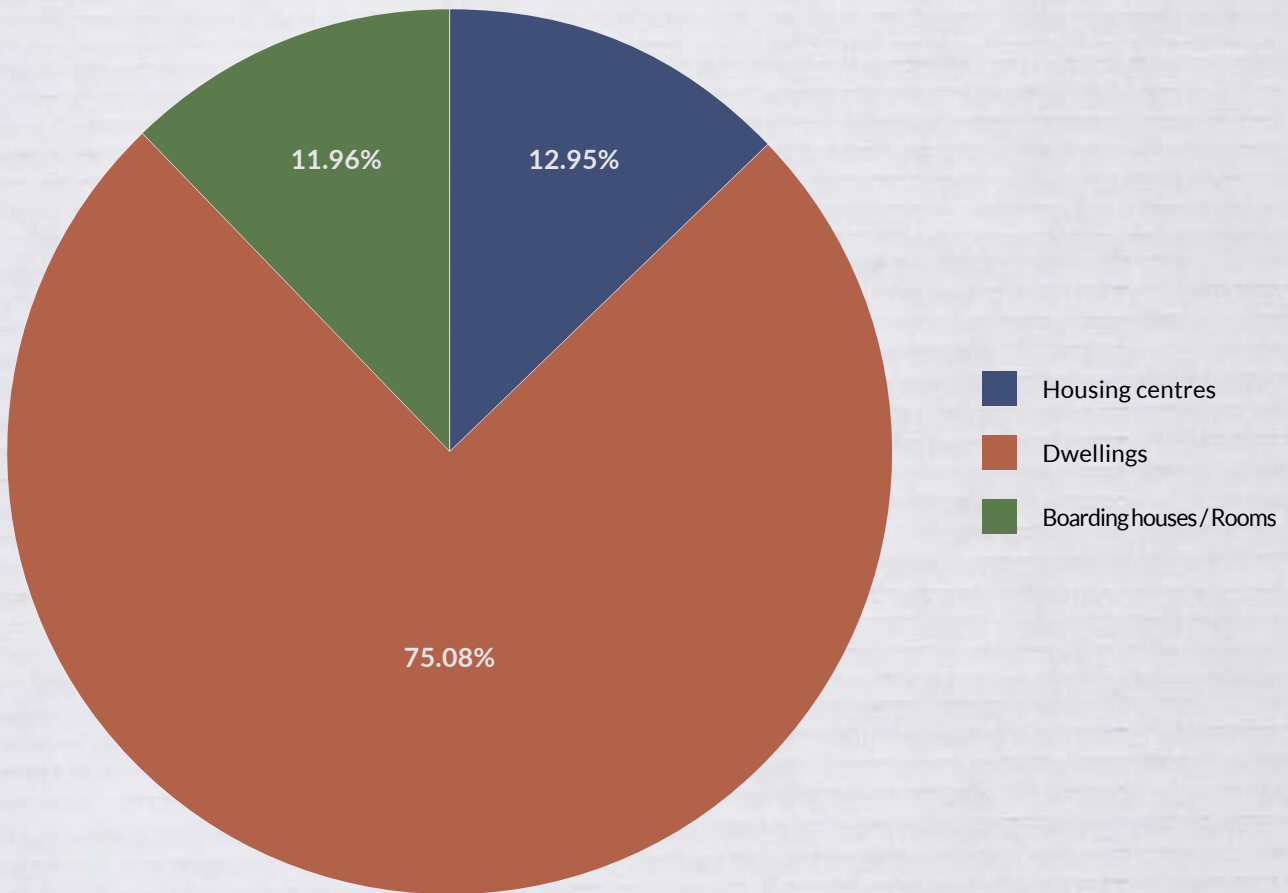


Figure 3. Percentage of private places occupied on the night of 18 May 2022 according to the facilities count, by type of facility



In the last decade, the use of dwellings (flats) to offer housing solutions to homeless people has been on the rise. At present, more than 40% of the places are offered in flats, whereas ten years ago the proportion was just over 20%. This does not mean that the number of places in residential centres or the number of people circumstantially housed in boarding houses and rented

rooms has decreased in absolute terms. Accommodation and the supply of housing solutions by institutions and the City Council have grown in all their forms, but the main effort has been directed towards using dwellings for temporary housing programmes and for new residential programmes of a definitive nature, such as those inspired by the Housing First approach.³

³ The cornerstone of Housing First is the provision of individual, stable and permanent housing for homeless people. This social intervention approach was first systematised in New York in the 1990s by psychologist Sam Tsemberis. Pathways to Housing (Tsemberis et al, 2004).

Table 4. Trend in the number of people housed in XAPSLL resources, by type of resource, %, 2008-2020

	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2020	2021	2022
	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%
Housing centres	42.0	37.9	38.4	39.7	33.0	41.9	45.6	45.9	32.3	43.9	36.9	25.0	31.7	31.2
Dwellings	15.3	16.5	18.8	20.1	22.3	23.7	31.9	28.8	39.8	34.3	39.5	30.2	44.6	43.6
Boarding houses / Rooms	42.7	45.6	42.9	40.2	44.7	34.4	22.6	25.4	28.0	21.8	23.6	28.0	20.5	25.3

In relation to the socio-demographic data of the people attended to by the XAPSLL resources, the proportion of men has decreased. In contrast, the proportion of women and children has increased. We find the cause of this variation in the opening of specific facilities for

women over the course of 2021, motivated by the growing interest of organisations and Barcelona City Council in hidden homelessness situations and the need for non-mixed spaces and facilities specialised in women's support.

Table 5. Gender of people housed in XAPSLL resources, %, 2009-2020

	March 2009 N ¹ =1,141	March 2010 N ¹ =1,141	March 2011 N ¹ =1,229	March 2012 N ¹ =1,560	March 2013 N ¹ =1,451	March 2014 N ¹ =1,593	March 2015 N ¹ =1,672	May 2016 N ¹ =1,907	March 2017 N ¹ =2,006	May 2018 N ¹ =2,130	May 2019 N ¹ =2,171	May 2020 N ¹ =2,558	May 2021 N ¹ =2,808	May 2022 N ¹ =2,803
	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%
Men	64.9	65.2	65.7	61.6	62.7	64.2	64.4	61.7	60.4	58.1	57.6	53	59.1	48.6
Women	23.8	23.3	22.6	28.9	25.9	21.8	21.8	23.5	23.2	25.5	24	28	25.8	28.5
Non-binary gender													0.1	0.5
<18 boys													8.3	11.8
<18 girls	11.3	11.5	11.7	9.5	11.4	14.1	13.8	14.8	16.4	16.5	18.3	19	6.7	10.4
<18 non-binary gender													0	0.2

¹ Number of people for whom information is available.

The proportion of people under 18 years of age has risen from 13.4% of the total to 19.5%. The weighting of the rest of the age groups maintained a very similar structure to that of previous years. The decline in the number of children and adolescents among the overall assisted population during the pandemic has given way to a rise that is concentrated in the

housing facilities for family units of the Municipal Care Programme for Homeless People, and in the temporary accommodation for families in boarding houses and hotels supported by some organisations and the municipal services themselves. These family units are mostly single-parent families headed by a woman.

Table 6. Age of people housed in XAPSLL resources, 2009-2020

	March 2009 N ¹ =1,121	March 2010 N ¹ =1,110	March 2011 N ¹ =1,228	March 2012 N ¹ =1,561	March 2013 N ¹ =1,451	March 2014 N ¹ =1,616	March 2015 N ¹ =1,657	March 2017 N ¹ =1,985	May 2018 N ¹ =2,130	May 2019 N ¹ =2,171	May 2020 N ¹ =2,242	May 2021 N ¹ =2,164	May 2022 N ¹ =2,223
	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%
<18	11.7	11.8	11.9	9.4	11.2	14	13.9	16.8	16.5	18.3	16.7	13.4	19.5
18-65	79.5	79.9	79.9	82	78.4	77.8	76.9	75.3	75.9	73.4	75.6	78.4	72.7
18-30	n/d	n/d	n/d	n/d	n/d	n/d	14.6	12.3	13.6	17.9	19.5	20.6	17.9
31-50	n/d	n/d	n/d	n/d	n/d	n/d	40.4	38.6	36.4	31.7	33.5	34.7	34.1
51-65	n/d	n/d	n/d	n/d	n/d	n/d	22	24.4	25.8	23.8	22.5	23.1	20.6
>65	8.8	8.3	8.2	8.6	10.4	8.2	9.2	7.9	7.7	8.2	7.8	8.3	7.8

¹ Number of people for whom information is available.

The distribution according to broad categories of nationality has been stable since 2019. A third of the people attended to are Spanish nationals, only 7.5% are EU foreign nationals and 54.1% are non-EU foreign nationals. Of the total number of people attended to, the proportion of people in an irregular situation is 27%. This proportion has decreased in comparison to

2020, which is attributable to the significant presence of people in an irregular situation who were housed in the extraordinary emergency units because of Covid-19. Many of these people, who had been living in substandard housing, returned to these situations shortly after the end of the lockdown without entering the support circuit for homeless people.



Table 7. Nationality of people housed in XAPSLL resources, %, 2009-2020

	March 2009 N ¹ =1,119	March 2010 N ¹ =1,121	March 2011 N ¹ =993	March 2012 N ¹ =1,549	March 2013 N ¹ =1,446	March 2014 N ¹ =1,563	March 2015 N ¹ =1,672	March 2017 N ¹ =1,908	March 2018 N ¹ =1,944	May 2019 N ¹ =2,014	May 2020 N ¹ =2,318	May 2021 N ¹ =2,191	May 2022 N ¹ =2,195
	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%
Spanish	38.3	34.9	52.8	37.7	42.6	46.1	41.6	46.3	42.8	36.3	32.1	33.7	34.4
EU citizens	9.1	7.6	10.1	8.7	11.3	11.7	10.9	11	13.1	11.3	7.0	8.0	7.5
Non-EU citizens	52.5	57.5	37.2	53.6	46.1	42.2	47.5	42.7	44.1	52.3	61	58.2	54.1
Non-EU, regular situation	14.9	17.9	20	23.7	24.5	25.5	27.8	28.6	30.2	26.9	29.9	34.2	27.1
Non-EU, irregular situation	37.6	39.6	17.1	30.0	21.6	16.7	19.6	14.1	13.9	25.5	31	24.1	27.0
International asylum applicants	Included in the category "Non-EU, regular situation" until 2022.												3.8

¹ Number of people for whom information is available.

After a significant increase in the number of people with no income between 2019 and 2020 caused by the entry of many people experiencing homelessness due to the lockdown into the emergency units, the proportion of people with no economic resources now stands at 34.7%. The proportion of recipients of the guaranteed citizen income increased from 7.1% in 2018 to 11.2% today. The proportion of people with income from work stands at 14.4%.

The most frequent source of income is non-contributory pensions: 22.3% of the people surveyed receive income from the National Institute of Social Security

in the form of non-contributory pensions, required ageing and invalidity insurance (SOVI) pensions, disability pensions or widowhood pensions. When adding contributory and non-contributory pensions, the minimum living wage, the guaranteed citizen income and other public benefits, public transfers reach only 43% of the population attended to.

This low coverage of public benefits has prompted some organisations to offer complementary financial aid. Fifteen per cent of the people attended to receive monetary transfers through aid programmes run by social institutions.



Table 8. Origin of the income of the people housed in XAPSLL facilities on 18 May 2022

	N	%
Number of people with no income	771	34.7%
Number of persons with income from a salary or paid activity	321	14.4%
Number of people receiving the guaranteed citizen income	249	11.2%
Number of people receiving the minimum living wage	34	1.5%
Number of people receiving benefits or allowances due to unemployment (or exclusion from the labour market)	42	1.9%
Number of people receiving disability, retirement (contributory and non-contributory), widowhood or SOVI pensions	496	22.3%
Number of SS disability pension recipients	45	2.0%
Number of people receiving other public aid	91	4.1%
Number of people receiving aid from social institutions	333	15.0%
Number of people receiving aid from family or friends	29	1.3%
Number of people with income from begging	11	0.5%
Number of people with income from unknown sources	65	2.9%





155



4. Labour market and homelessness

Until the beginning of the 2000s, job placement and earning a wage was considered a fundamental tool for preventing poverty in the social policies developed within the framework of the European welfare states (Márquez, 2008). The growing numbers of workers with incomes below the poverty line have called into question the ability of paid employment to guarantee the minimum material welfare needed to escape from social exclusion (Martínez-Martín *et al.*, 2018), but finding work continues to be essential for people who experience poverty first-hand with the aim of earning an income, and job placement continues to occupy a central place in the activity of services offering them support and assistance.

In the field of homelessness and in the care of those people hit hardest by impoverishment, earning income through paid work is also one of the ways for those receiving support to stabilise their situation and regain their independence. With homelessness on the rise in all European countries in recent decades, boosting the employability of homeless people has been considered one of the key responses to the problem (Batty *et al.*, 2015) on the assumption that those who earn a wage can cover their basic needs, including housing (Shier *et al.*, 2012).

In recent years, changes in the labour and housing markets have called into question, more intensely than ever before, the relationship between working in the labour market and protection from poverty, both for the low-income population and for the homeless population. The increase in the proportion of the working

poor in Spain is accompanied by a growing concern about phenomena that are difficult to quantify, but which are very present in the daily activities of all the professionals and services that provide support to people in situations of extreme poverty and affected by homelessness. The chances of finding a paid job have been maintained in recent years, but the opportunities to regain independence and access a stable housing solution through the labour market are increasingly limited.

The quantitative and qualitative results of two research studies are presented below, with the aim of diagnosing how the relationship between people receiving support from XAPSLL organisations and the labour market is affecting their housing exclusion and recovery pathways. The weakening link between work and protection from social exclusion motivates this analysis and questions the adequacy of the resources made available to people in the network when it comes to encouraging their entry into the labour market to recover their independence.

The quantitative data, taken from a survey carried out during the second half of 2021, provide a general framework for understanding the relationship between the population attended to by XAPSLL services and resources and the labour market. The qualitative data, extracted from nineteen in-depth interviews with people receiving support and professionals on the relationship between the labour market, housing exclusion and homelessness, are presented on the basis of this reference framework.



4.1. Quantitative data analysis

Almost a quarter of the people surveyed between April 2021 and January 2022 who were receiving support from XAPSELL facilities and services stated that they were carrying out some activity or working in exchange for financial compensation. Having

a job, whether formal or informal, was more common among women than men. Among the survey respondents, 27.6% of the women and 21.3% of the men claimed to do some work in exchange for financial income.

Table 9. Do you work or do any activity that generates an income?

	Gender with which the person identifies him/herself		
	Female	Male	Total
Yes	27.55%	21.27%	23.20%
No	72.45%	78.28%	76.49%
DK/NA/Blank	0.00%	0.45%	0.31%

* No one surveyed answered with options other than male or female.

When respondents were asked whether they had received money in exchange for work in the last month, the proportion of both men and women who answered in the affirmative was 14%. The number of participants who considered that they were working at the time of the survey was significantly higher than those who reported having received a salary or a payment for an

activity carried out in the previous month. This may indicate that the housing stability that comes with living in a centre facilitates the search for income from work, but it may also be an expression of the considerable instability that the respondents experience and that, while around a quarter consider that they “work”, only 14% can report recent income from their activity.

Table 10. In the last month, have you received money in exchange for work?

	Gender with which the person identifies him/herself		
	Female	Male	Total
Yes	14.29%	14.48%	14.42%
No	85.71%	85.52%	85.58%

* No one surveyed answered with options other than male or female.



Among the respondents who claimed to work, only 40% had stable or occasional activities and were registered with the Social Security; 33% of the total were salaried activities and about 7% were occasional activities. Sixteen per cent were

employed without being registered with the Social Security and 33% were engaged in occasional irregular activities or in the informal economy. About 11% did not know if they were registered or refused to answer.

Table 11. If you work, what type of activity is involved?

	Gender with which the person identifies him/herself		
	Women (N=27)	Men (N=48)	Total (N=75)
Wage-earning activity, registered with Social Security	40.7%	29.2%	33.3%
Uninsured wage-earning activity	25.9%	10.4%	16.0%
Occasional wage-earning activity, registered with Social Security	11.1%	4.2%	6.7%
Occasional uninsured wage-earning activity	14.8%	43.8%	33.3%
DK/NA/Blank, but works	7.4%	12.5%	10.7%
Total	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%

* No one surveyed answered with options other than male or female.

People who were not doing any paid activity were asked what they considered to be the main cause of this situation. Thirty-one per cent stated that they were unable to work due to physical problems or incapacity for work, 28.6% stated that they were looking for work without success, and 26.9% attributed their exclusion from the labour market to the fact that they did not have a work permit.

The factors of exclusion from the labour market perceived by the survey respondents show significant differences according to gender. There is a higher impact of work incapacity and physical problems among women (39.1%) than among men (27.8%). It should also be noted that 8.7% of women say they are unable to combine work and caregiving, while only 0.6% of men say they have this problem.



Table 12. What is the main reason why you do not do any paid activity?

	Gender with which the person identifies him/herself		
	Women (N=69)	Men (N=176)	Total (N=245)
I am looking for work	31.9%	27.3%	28.6%
I am training	2.9%	6.8%	5.7%
I am retired	4.3%	4.0%	4.1%
Incapacity for work / Physical problems	39.1%	27.8%	31.0%
I do not have a work permit	10.1%	33.5%	26.9%
I am unable to find a job that I can combine with my caregiving responsibilities	8.7%	0.6%	2.9%
I cannot right now; I first need to get out of a particularly critical situation (gender violence, addictions, etc.)	2.9%	0.0%	0.8%
DK/NA/Blank	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%

* No one surveyed answered with options other than male or female.

For those interviewed, exclusion from the labour market is very often at the root of their housing exclusion. When asked about the main reasons why they became homeless, 63% said that employment problems were one of the causes. It is the most mentioned factor for

both men and women after financial problems, which are closely related. In addition, 8.7% of women consider caregiving responsibilities to be an impediment to carrying out a paid activity.⁴

4 To learn more about the specific difficulties faced by homeless women with children in their care, see the Catalan-language report *Research on homelessness in families in Barcelona (2018-2021)* by Matulic *et al.* (2022) with the support and initiative of the XAPSLL.

Table 13. What are the main reasons why you lost your home? (Multiple answer)

	Gender with which the person identifies him/herself		
	Female	Male	Total
Employment problems (loss of job, change of working conditions, etc.)	63.3%	63.3%	63.3%
Financial problems (lack of money, denied financial aid, used up savings, etc.)	80.6%	66.5%	70.8%
Problems related to remaining in the previous dwelling (eviction, end of rental contract, rent increase, etc.)	37.8%	20.8%	26.0%
Problems related to the lack of “papers” (or the need to start from scratch after having emigrated to another country)	21.4%	32.6%	29.2%
Problems with alcohol and/or other drug use (kicked out of home, spent all your money, etc.)	6.1%	12.2%	10.3%
Own will (because that’s what you have decided, free lifestyle choice)	1.0%	1.4%	1.3%
Health problems (chronic illnesses, disability, hospitalisation, etc.)	17.3%	20.4%	19.4%
Family problems or break-up (separation from your partner, death of family members, family disinterest, etc.)	26.5%	25.8%	26.0%
Domestic violence by partner	20.4%	0.5%	6.6%
Domestic violence by other family members	12.2%	2.7%	5.6%
Problems related to gambling (gambling addiction, spending family money, being kicked out of the house for this reason)	2.0%	1.4%	1.6%
Leaving an institution and no or absent family network (prison, child protection centre)	3.1%	14.0%	10.7%
Problems with shelter networks (penalties for misbehaviour, rules considered to be rigid in terms of timetables, pets, etc.)	0.0%	2.7%	1.9%
Problems related to war or conflict (or other types of violence in your country of origin)	4.1%	3.6%	3.8%

* No one surveyed answered with options other than male or female.

Sixty-eight per cent of the women surveyed and 60% of the men consider that in order to “get out of the care system” they need a job (employment or income from work). In the spontaneous answers to the question “What would you need to leave this centre and the care system?”, work and salary were the most frequently mentioned factors, followed by money or

financial transfers from the Administration, a flat, an affordable room and, lastly, recovering a relationship with someone close. The prominence of the labour market in the discourse of those surveyed reflects the multiple functions of paid work and its role in defining the pathways of social exclusion or inclusion (Batty *et al.*, 2015).

Table 14. What would you need to leave this centre and the care system? (You can choose multiple answers)

	Gender with which the person identifies him/herself		
	Female	Male	Total
Money or financial transfers from the Administration	57.14%	44.34%	48.28%
A job, an occupation, income from work	68.37%	60.63%	63.01%
A flat	69.39%	40.72%	49.53%
Find a room I can afford	31.63%	37.10%	35.42%
Recover a relationship with a family member / friend / partner	18.37%	14.93%	15.99%

* No one surveyed answered with options other than male or female.

The ability to stabilise one’s own housing situation without the support of a service, organisation or programme does not only depend on income, but on the disposable funds, which are one of the main determining factors. Forty-two per cent of the sample had no income, 16% had an income of less than 400 euros

per month, almost 30% had an income of between 401 and 800 euros, and 7% had an income of more than 800 euros per month. The women in the sample have a higher income than the men. Only 29.6% of those surveyed do not have any source of financial resources.



Table 15. Monthly income of the surveyed population

	Gender with which the person identifies him/herself		
	Female	Male	Total
0	29.59%	47.51%	42.01%
Between €1 and €400	20.41%	14.03%	15.99%
Between €401 and €800	37.76%	26.24%	29.78%
Between €801 and €1,200	9.18%	3.17%	5.02%
Over €1,200	2.04%	0.90%	1.25%
DK/NA	0.00%	0.90%	0.63%
Blank	1.02%	7.24%	5.33%

* No one surveyed answered with options other than male or female.

Work is the main way of earning an income that facilitates independence. Within the survey population, 52.6% of those without a job have no income, while the same is true for 3.3% of employed people registered with the Social Security and 2.7% of employed people not registered with the Social Security. Of the people who are in formal employment, 10% earn between 1

and 400 euros a month, 40% earn between 401 and 800, and 40% earn more than 800. Of those who work in the informal economy, 56.8% earn between 1 and 400 euros, 18.9% between 401 and 800, and 5.2% more than 800. Among those who work without being registered, 16.2% say they do not know how much they get paid.

Table 16. Level of income of the people surveyed, according to their relationship with employment activity

	No activity	Employment activity registered with Social Security	Employment activity not registered with Social Security
No income	52.6%	3.3%	2.7%
Between €1 and €400	10.8%	10.0%	56.8%
Between €401 and €800	30.3%	40.0%	18.9%
Between €801 and €1,200	2.0%	33.3%	2.7%
Over €1,200	0.4%	6.7%	2.7%
DK/NA	4.0%	6.7%	16.2%

4.2. Qualitative data analysis

Between March and June 2022, nineteen interviews were carried out with homeless people in different situations of housing exclusion and different relationship levels with the XAPSLL services, and eleven interviews were carried out with professionals from social institutions and municipal resources.

In our analysis of the interviews, three main narratives were identified. These have been used to structure the presentation of the results:

1. The social function of paid work, and the real and symbolic importance of job placement in the pathways of exclusion and personal recovery.
2. The difficulties faced by people without a home in accessing the labour market.
3. Assessments of inclusion policies and of the support and assistance offered and received by the services in relation to obtaining or maintaining paid employment.

A job, what for? The function of a paid work

In Spain, care for the homeless has been included in the scope of action of social services since the creation of the public social services system in the 1980s. As Rubio-Martín (2018) points out, recognising the provision of services to people without a roof over their head and the homeless as a task of public social services was a first attempt to professionalise services run mainly by volunteers, and to move the issue of homelessness from the sphere of public order to that of social policies.

The main focus of the actions of social services (both public and third-sector initiatives) continued to concentrate on providing temporary accommodation to offer shelter and prevent the people affected from having to spend the night in the open. At the end of the 1990s and the start of the 2000s, growth in temporary accommodation and the increasing body of empirical evidence around the difficulties suffered by people who have been homeless in recovering their in-

dependence prompted these services to take on more and more functions in order to offer more comprehensive support focused on the concept of reintegration, in which finding a job plays a very important role (Cabrera, 2008).

Drawing on the responses of more than three hundred professionals to a standardised questionnaire, Cabrera (2009) stated some years ago that service workers identified lack of access to housing and exclusion from the labour market as the main causes of homelessness. However, when asked what they needed to better support the people in their care, most of the responses were oriented towards asking for more resources to meet basic needs (food, accommodation, hygiene and clothing) and more time to provide better assistance to people and to dignify care. Paradoxically, concern about entry into the labour market was secondary and references to the need for housing were few and far between.



Much more than just financial income

In the same research, when the professionals referred to employment, they focused on the need to improve the employability of people receiving assistance. The ability to obtain and maintain a paid job was considered the core of integration policies aimed at homeless people; however, there was no mention of policies to generate jobs compatible with situations of housing exclusion. The focus of job placement programmes (or socio-occupational programmes, as they are referred to in many texts) is support in (re)entering the labour market. Work integration is claimed to be a way to achieve a stable income, to put daily routines in order, to reinforce self-esteem and to rebuild relationship networks (Cabrera, 2008).

The professionals interviewed in Barcelona in 2022 also believe that the search for paid work is an important factor in the process of overcoming homelessness among people in the care of services. At the same time, they point out that entering the labour market alone is no guarantee of overcoming and leaving behind situations of housing exclusion. The labour market can be an unfriendly environment for people who have accumulated experiences of severe exclusion and, consequently, the support must be comprehensive and adapted to their changing needs.

It's important, obviously, because you need to work to live. But I don't think it's the only important factor, not by a long shot. Sometimes the difficulty is not so much in finding a job as in keeping it. Especially when you spend a lot of time on the street or in an extreme situation, it is relatively easy to lose skills... So the work with the person has to be very cross-cutting, not only focused on job placement. The needs of the people, their abilities, their weaknesses and so on must always be assessed. And everything has to be worked on at the same time. If the underlying problem is not work, we are likely to end up back at square one. (Housing services professional)

[The job] would be very good for some [...]. Well, I think this is true for all of us. For the sake of employability and dignity. Everyone likes to be useful in some way. (Housing services professional)

Work provides the necessary income to rebuild a life project. However, from the perspective of both the people in care and the professionals, financial resources are not the only goal of integration into the labour market. It is hoped that finding a job will provide other benefits corresponding to the socially ascribed benefits of work. The people interviewed said that paid work boosts self-esteem and generates a sense of identity and belonging to society. One word that appeared frequently in conversations was *dignity*.

I don't work much for money, personally, if I have a job that pays 900 a month, to rent a room, that would do me [...]. There is a saying in Italy: *il lavoro nobilita l'uomo* ("work ennobles man"). Having a job fulfils you. Doing something perfect and having your boss come to you and say "Good job!" is a little satisfaction that stirs something inside you, that tells you that you're doing great, that makes you feel proud. (Resident in a centre; male, EU nationality, 36 years old)

Work is important because everybody works. You have to work to have a tomorrow, a future [...]. Work keeps you stable, it keeps you in the network, in the global network, just like mobile phones do with kids. (Resident in a centre; male, Spanish nationality, 60 years old)

The discourses on the importance of work in one's life journey are marked by the moral value that society as a whole attributes to work. One of the people interviewed, a man close to retirement age, openly identified exclusion from the labour market with criminal activities, arguing that this exclusion pushes people to look for illegal alternatives to obtain income. At another point in his account, he also says that work helps to organise one's own routines and to avoid the kind of slovenliness in which he believes many homeless people find themselves. In his opinion, having a job is a determining factor in dignifying one's own life project and, at the same time, he identifies inactivity as a risk factor for not keeping up a lifestyle and habits that are socially acceptable and morally correct.

There are only two things we can do: be a criminal – swindling, stealing, and so on – or be a worker; there's nothing else. Either good or evil; it's a balance. So a sensible person's first thought is: "I don't want to be in prison. That scares me because there are very strange people in prison and they could kill me or anything could happen to me, and besides, I don't want to be locked up... I'd lose my freedom. Isn't it better to work? Of course it's better to work." [...] It also helps me get organised [have a routine]. Because when I see these people living on the street, in total exclusion, with this filth, with these beards, drinking alcohol and all this, I think: "This happens because they don't work, because they don't have a work routine." And if you take these people out of that and you put them in a job, these people change. They change their mindset, because they no longer appreciate what a dignified life is. When I see these people sleeping on the streets and with a difficult past, I think it's because they don't work. (Resident in a centre; male, Spanish nationality, 64 years old)

The shame: “I don’t want help, I want a job”

The discourses are a response to the dominant social representations of homeless people. The people interviewed make potential value judgements about their situation by using work or the will to work to position themselves in the group of people who are “deserving” of the social support they receive. As studies with a retrospective view (Rubio-Martin, 2017) and analyses of the representation of homeless people in the media (Serrano and Zurdo, 2013) have shown, the greater part of public opinion considers that actively looking for work is a fundamental requirement for people to be considered worthy of this support.

Feelings of shame for one’s own situation and the experience of poverty as a personal failure mark the relationships that people in care build while living in housing facilities and centres. One of the professionals interviewed explained that one of the concerns of the people receiving assistance when participating in activities in the local civic centre was how to introduce themselves to other neighbourhood residents. The shame of presenting themselves as users of a housing centre for homeless people and being identified with the stereotypes that apply to them limits social relations and motivates self-justifying discourses. Actively looking for a job and valuing the virtues of work brings people closer to the hegemonic narratives about the ethics of work.

–For me, [work gives me] everything. Everything [spoken confidently]. –It’s not just about the money?
–No, no. It gives me... [long pause]. Now I’m on holiday for a month from work, and I’m thinking about what I’m going to do this month [laughs]. They say I should rest. That it seems like I don’t make the most of my time [laughs]. But, anyway... (Resident in a centre; male, Spanish nationality)

Discourse around the rejection of monetary transfers to people living in poverty is also reflected in the answers given by the interviewees. One of the interview-

ees, a woman of non-EU foreign nationality, has had a string of very precarious jobs with inadequate salaries to maintain a stable room. She insists that she has not come to Europe to live on benefits but to work to help her family. In her opinion, social benefits deepen the feelings of shame for what is perceived as an individual failure.

One has to work: to live, to eat, to feed others... I am not here to ask for help [referring to benefits]; I am here to work, to help my family, my daughter. (Resident in a centre; female, non-EU nationality, 36 years old)

The desire to distance oneself from the stereotypes associated with begging involves a theatricalisation of this activity. If having a job is a prerequisite for being part of society or the civic community, in the words of Loïc Wacquant (2009), subsistence activities that are typical of situations of exclusion seek to be assimilated with a formal job. A young interviewee who had been in a child protection centre in Melilla explained how he was “working” in car parks with a yellow vest, while assuring that he was here (in Barcelona) to find a job.

[To get food when I was in the Melilla Juvenile Centre], sometimes I worked in car parks. [...] You pick up a yellow vest whenever you want, but you don’t do anything, you just stand there. People know that you’re trying to make a living and you don’t have anything, and that it’s not your job. You don’t make sense, because you don’t do anything either. Some people give, others don’t; it’s like a tip. There was no company, no contract, nothing. [...] People know that you are from the juvenile centre. Because we were famous [laughs ironically], because it’s full of Moroccan minors. When they see that you want to work and so on, and that you don’t want to steal... They give you something. (Resident in a centre; male, non-EU nationality, 21 years old)



The relationship with the labour market is also an impediment to recovery

Most of the people receiving assistance claim that work is the main solution to their problems. According to the previous survey, the results of which are set out in the previous section, 61% of the people surveyed said that what they needed to leave the facility in which they lived was a paid job. However, depending on the circumstances, work can be an obstacle to recovering independence.

One of the interviewees, close to retirement age, explained how the working conditions of the last jobs he had held impacted his health. Not only did I feel the wear and tear of working in the morning, I also felt the pressure of not failing in the commitment I had made and not losing my job. His age, close to retirement, led him to take on the activity with resignation and to use expressions such as “as long as the body can take it”.

If you don't work hard, your body will thank you for it. Because the idea that work is health is a lie. Work kills! You get up at 5 o'clock in the morning on a building site, in the cold or in the heat... Work is not about health. These last few jobs have been killing me. I do it so I don't starve to death. I'll keep going it for as long as my body can take it, but this is killing me. I hardly sleep at all. I have to get up at 4 o'clock. There have been times when I couldn't sleep. My subconscious won't let me sleep anymore; I get very nervous because I'm afraid of not waking up. Anxiety. (Resident in a centre; male, Spanish nationality, 64 years old)

An example of a recovery process that is difficult to reconcile with entering the labour market was explained by one of the interviewees, who had decided that he needed to start a detoxification process. The interviewee stated that it was not the right time for him to start a paid job. Despite the difficulties of the present time, finding a job in the future was a constant in his discourse.

I can't work now. I need to focus on kicking the drugs. I told my sponsor that, regarding the plan to find a job, it would be better to wait a little bit, because I am in the process of quitting drugs. So, my main goal is to stop using drugs. Right now I'm not in the right place to start a job. I'm not about to give my word to someone and let them down. I now need space for myself, I have told them so, and they have given it to me. Later I will look for a job, but for the moment I'm going to be a bit selfish and take care of myself, even my psychiatrist told me to do so. I have a group of professionals behind me, so it would be impolite

and disrespectful of me not to take advantage of that. (Resident in a centre; male, Spanish nationality, 44 years old)

The pressure of accepting the dominant discourse that work is the only legal way to earn an income – and to form part of society – when there are obstacles to maintaining a job generates a frustration that is amplified in the case of migrants. The burden of not letting down family members who have stayed behind in the country of origin or possible situations of financial dependence lead migrants to put earning a salary before any other need. Several professionals point out that this can be a problem in overcoming the impact of experiences during the migration process or in situations of living on the streets once on European soil.

They talk to me about the need to have money and work right away. It may not be what's best for them; sometimes it's hard to get them to see that. (Housing services professional)

They come here with a very strong belief that work is the only way to measure their success. The only goal they have is to secure a job, it doesn't matter which. It may not be dignifying, but it does show that they have achieved their goal, for themselves and, above all, for their families. They want to show off to the family, to show that they have succeeded. (Housing services professional)

We tell many kids to go and visit their families for a few days because it will be good for them, but they refuse. Not because they don't want to be with them, but because they don't want to return jobless and empty-handed. They want to go back down with some money for the family, so that the people can see that they have succeeded. It's very important for them. Many place the need to find work above all else. (Housing services professional)

The mythification of the virtues of work as a solution to (or way to improve) all the factors of vulnerability (money, relationships, emotions, training, habits, etc.) is much more present in the discourse of the people in care than in that of the professionals. However, after expressing the vital objective of working, most of the people interviewed expressed fears about the compatibility between the jobs they could get and their recovery process.

Some jobs make you lose things you didn't know you had. You have to do things that make you happy,

and not do them out of inertia or social impulses. [...] [It is] the falsehood of if you have a job you have

succeeded. (Resident in a centre; male, Spanish nationality, 53 years old)

Barriers to accessing the labour market and keeping a job

The interaction between homelessness and other factors of social exclusion create many highly complex barriers for homeless people to access (or return to) the labour market. Having temporary accommodation provided by a service or an organisation can

improve the starting point for finding employment, but there are struggles that persist because of the person's background, the characteristics of the care system itself, and the stigma attached to homeless people.

Getting organised and looking for a job while living on the street

The people interviewed spoke about the problems they have faced in finding or keeping a job while sleeping on the streets or in precarious accommodation. The difficulties of everyday life increase when you want to maintain a paid activity. The people interviewed mentioned not having space for their belongings and not having a place to leave their pets as the main problems.

Maintaining good personal hygiene is also an additional effort for those who sleep on the street or in precarious accommodation. One of the interviewees recounted how he used to wash and shave at his workplace at a time in his life when he slept in a car. He explained how his "manager" finally made it easier for him to continue using the facilities so he could shower.

We had nowhere to leave our cases. Then we were lucky enough to meet a fellow countryman who agreed to let us leave them at his house. (Resident in a centre; male, non-EU nationality, 53 years old)

[...] I pay 75 euros a month to BlueSpace [storage space company] to store my stuff. I keep all my good things there: a cooker, a TV, a washing machine... (Resident in a centre; male, Spanish nationality, 60 years old)

[In a civil service job] I had to say [that I was sleeping in the car]. I got caught in the toilet at work with toothpaste and a razor, and the cleaning lady asked me: "Don't you have a home?", and in the end I had to tell them. And if you lie, it will be worse. [...] My manager said to me: "Why didn't you tell me earlier? Why didn't you say something? You can take a shower here." Fantastic. They let me go upstairs early so that I could take a shower and everything. Great. A wonderful person. [I had not said anything before] because I was ashamed. (Resident in a centre; male, Spanish nationality, 44 years old)

Feeling rejection, the weight of stigma and one's own insecurities

Shame is associated with the stigma suffered by homeless people and it is present in all their social relations. Some of the people interviewed, aware of the stereotypical images that guide people's attitudes towards homeless people, explained that they have felt additional pressure at work to be punctual and to maintain a neat appearance and perfect personal hygiene.

I feel judged. I feel that if I'm late one day all the people will think it's because I'm an alcoholic and I went out partying. (Resident in a centre; male, Spanish nationality, 64 years old)

People housed in facilities for the homeless continue to feel the burden of stigma, even though they have a place to live. One of the interviewees, a young woman who at the time of the interview had an employment contract, did not disclose at her workplace that she was living in a centre for homeless people out of fear that they would fire her and to avoid their pity. One of the interviewees preferred to say that he lived in a room with an acquaintance to forestall the prejudices he expected from those around him.

If they ask me where I live, I make up that I have a room at a mate's house. [...] I was afraid of how they might react. Not everyone understands. I get that there are people in Barcelona who ask you for a euro and then you see them go off and buy some cheap wine; I understand the annoyance. But not all [homeless] people are like that. Honestly, there are people who really want the euro and will go and buy a loaf of bread. When I was on the street I always tried to buy bread; a man would give me a euro and with that money I would try to buy a loaf of bread and a packet of mortadella. (Resident in a centre; male, EU nationality, 36 years old)

I don't like to talk about it. It's not because I'm afraid of being told to go, it's because that's the way I am: I keep things to myself. I don't like to be looked at with pity, as someone who has nothing. And I know they can't help me, they're just going to say "I'm sorry".

I prefer to share my problems with my family and that's it; not my friends or work colleagues. (Resident in a centre; female, non-EU nationality, 36 years old)

Related to stigma, the visible consequences of living on the street in terms of one's appearance cause rejection by potential employers and insecurity for people who go through selection processes time and time again. This is where the high cost of oral health treatment and the aesthetic impact of dental problems can become a very evident sign of extreme poverty and be related to life on the streets and complex problems.

I had a lot of interviews and, as soon as they see my mouth, it's "we'll call you", but they never do. I even did a test, which went well. But there are surely other people who would do as well as me, but their teeth are okay, so, of course... It's normal. (Resident in a centre; male, Spanish nationality, 44 years old)

Bureaucracy and the digital divide

The professionals and people receiving assistance agreed that, however positive the recovery process may be, bureaucracy is one of the main obstacles to entering the labour market. Some used the word *bureaucracy* to refer to the administrative procedures required to obtain essential documents and to enter into an employment relationship. One of the professionals summed up her criticism of the amount of paperwork that has to be done with the phrase "they already have enough with what they have" and complained that the procedures related to the Foreigners' Office or Social Security were made worse by the complex internal referral processes between the different social services.

In relation to entering the labour market, problems are identified with the procedures for obtaining a Social Security number. Getting an appointment at the offices or initiating procedures through the Social Security electronic office becomes a very exhausting and time-consuming activity for the people interviewed.

I was out of work for a long time because I didn't have a Social Security number. I went 35 times [he remembers it perfectly] to the Social Security offices to get the number. Fighting. With no institutional support whatsoever. No European support. To get it, I had to register as self-employed, otherwise it was impossible. I signed up to work for Glovo and got a document that allowed me to get the number. On top

of that, the worker at the Social Security office was very flippant and had no empathy for me. (Resident in a centre; male, EU nationality, 36 years old)

The processes of automation and digitalisation of citizens' relations with public administrations have widened the digital divide. They identified the pandemic and lockdown as a turning point that accelerated the implementation of remote assistance and the need to make appointments online to carry out any procedure.

When we were locked down, I didn't know how to sort out the ERTE [emergency labour force adjustment plan]. I did not get paid for three months. I had nothing. We were in a terrible state. I was unable to talk to support, I couldn't get through for almost five months. [...] In the end I was lucky that the headmistress at my daughter's school helped me to get my ERTE payment, but we had a hard time. (Resident in a centre; female, non-EU nationality, 36 years old)

The digital divide directly affects the exercise of people's rights. According to data from the National Statistics Institute, people who are inactive in the labour market have the most difficulties in completing digital procedures, followed by those who are unemployed and those who are employed.⁵ Digital skills condition access to and communication with public administra-

5 <https://www.elcritic.cat/noticies/combatre-la-bretxa-digital-per-assegurar-drets-ciudadans-74347>

tions, and professionals are spending more and more time supporting and guiding people through the maze of applications and validations that electronic offices have become.

It is a handicap. It began as a very serious handicap; most of them don't even have internet at home. Not even a computer, nor a mobile phone. And don't even get me started on the procedures for applying for the guaranteed income or renewing the single-parent card, because these are very complicated procedures. I find it difficult, and I normally work with this and am used to it. (Housing services professional)

For most of the interviewees, the lack of digital skills causes problems and distress when interacting with the administrations, but the professionals also pointed out that the digitalisation of personnel selection processes is also a barrier for a part of the homeless population. Whereas a few years ago it was possible to find work in person by hand-delivering CVs and applying for jobs, nowadays job applications and procedures are accessed via company websites. You need a device, access to the internet, digital skills and a minimum level of literacy.

It is quite clear that this is a handicap. I deal with different profiles: the profiles of people who are not literate – that is, able to read in the language of the host country where they are in order to have access

to information – but they can clean or water the plants... All doors are closed from the outset. If you don't know that here it says such and such, you can't do anything. In the past, they would carry a paper CV and people would accept it. Not now, now they say: "Check the web page", and they don't know what to do. These people are out straight away, unless there were some sort of professional labour counsellors there to constantly do all the work of writing the presentation letters, writing the CV, sending it, following up on the offer... If you don't have this skill, you are very dependent. And if you're 45, it can take you three or four years to learn. You're out, it's really harsh. We also meet many people from Morocco, both men and women, who have not been able to study. They came here many years ago to clean private homes or work as labourers and so on, and now they don't know what to do or how to find work. Then there are those who can read, maybe they can read, but they don't know how to use a computer. They need to take a computer course, but by the time they are proficient enough with technology, several years will have gone by. We always help them with their CVs. (Housing services professional)

To find a job on the internet you have to know how to write well, you have to know how to express what you do and so on... We don't know how to do this. (Resident in a centre; male, non-EU nationality, 21 years old)

Other labour market exclusion factors

The obstacles related to stigma, bureaucracy and digital procedures were the most frequently mentioned and the ones that the people interviewed explained in more detail, but their stories reveal some others that hinder employment opportunities. These struggles interact with other factors of social exclusion and increase the risk of homelessness.

Respondents with prior work history expressed concern about the demand for experience in the sectors where opportunities arise and the lack of official certification of skills or competences that they have acquired in previous paid activities. Those who had suffered more intensely from exclusion from the labour

market explained that the main obstacles to getting a job and keeping it were low literacy levels and problems with other workers.

The over-representation of the foreign population among the homeless means that the barriers to accessing the labour market that specifically affect the migrant population have a special bearing on the recovery processes and on the support provided by the services and organisations of the XAPSLL. One of the professionals interviewed stated categorically that the main difficulty experienced by the residents of the residential centre where she works is the administrative situation.



With the Law on Foreigners and the requirement to obtain a full-time contract for one year, it is very difficult to obtain a work permit. The labour market does not require such long contracts, but rather short contracts.

In addition to the difficulties of regularisation, there is the racism and stigma they face for being Moroccan or African. (Housing services professional)

Support for entering or returning to the labour market

Part of the support provided to people using XAPSLL services consists of facilitating their (re-)entry into the labour market. The support given by professional teams involves including insertion pathways in the person's work plan, coordinating with specialised services or directly seeking employment opportunities. Some professionals also spoke about how well group sessions work to guide people's job search and improve the strategies they use.

We also provide a lot of support at the time of the interview. We hold individual and group sessions on how to face interviews or how to prepare for exams. (Housing services professional)

Courses and training play an important role in the range of resources that organisations can mobilise to promote and facilitate entry into the labour market. Training to prepare oneself for interviews, write CVs and pass selection processes goes hand in hand with training programmes to improve employability (or the ability of people to carry out a task demanded by the labour market). After going through many selection processes, one of the interviewees summed up his experience and frustration by stating that "they already know before the interview that you won't make the cut" and that "training is just useless entertainment". In his opinion, companies already know who they will hire and they want younger people with "a different look".

The educators and the psychologist were the ones who motivated me a bit to see that I had to open my eyes, to get some training... That's why they offered me a course.

The whole thing is a hoax. It's a protocol. [...] Training is a waste of time. They explain how to do the theatrics in an interview: how to speak, how to greet each other, how to move your hands, how not to cross your legs and so on. But, the truth is, they already know before the interview that you won't make the cut. At the end of the day, training is just useless entertainment. (Resident in a centre; male, Spanish nationality, 40 years old)

The professionals are also critical of the usefulness of training to overcome selection processes. Although two of them, who are directly involved in supporting job placement, said that many people need guidance when looking for a job, writing a CV and going for an interview. They recognise that the string of negative responses in selection processes generates a lot of frustration. The professionals interviewed also consider that training to join the labour market covers only a small part of people's needs in their recovery process and that it must be coordinated with work to recover self-esteem and confidence, and with more general support in terms of managing one's own economy, finding a place to live and looking after social relationship networks.

The people receiving services have experienced a wide range of situations and exclusion processes. Some need support to reorganise their daily lives, plan their expenses or manage their relationship with a banking institution. The professionals interviewed also pointed out that it is important to take into account the loss of motivation after an initial period of great involvement in seeking employment.

[...] The job will probably have a fairly low salary and, if you have never had to manage it, because you have not had the privilege of renting a property, you may be overwhelmed at the beginning when the bill arrives. If you do not plan your shopping, you may find yourself without money on the 20th of the month. Or maybe just with a home and a job, without help, you don't know how to put your name on the utilities, how to claim benefits... Someone has to help you. Unless you have already done it, unless you already know how to do it. (Housing services professional)

And not only formal training, but also informal training, such as self-knowledge. They lack a lot of self-knowledge. They do not know themselves and, if they do not know themselves, they cannot find their purpose. Discovering who they are, their limitations, their potential... A lot of them still have a long way to go. And, when they find out, it really shows. They feel

very different from the rest. There are many people who don't know what to say when asked something about themselves. [...] There are young people who don't even know what their favourite colour is, perhaps because they have never been asked this question. (Professional at a juvenile housing service)

Foreigners in an irregular administrative situation have to face the contradiction of living under the pressure of their migratory pursuits and the impossibility of finding a formal job. Due to this, migrants using the services expressed frustration at not being able to send money to their family back home, and shame when explaining the conditions in which they live in Barcelona. In their discourse, the desire to find a job and earn an income is always present. But they have no chance of being hired and their only source of income is the informal labour market.

In the case of young people, training and entering the labour market is key to building an independent life project. However, foreigners in an irregular administrative situation come up against the limitations of the legal framework for obtaining work and residence permits.

They cannot access almost any training because they do not have documentation. The foundations that offer training are usually linked to the SOC (Catalan Unemployment Office) in order to obtain some benefit in exchange. This makes it impossible for people without documentation to gain access. They have no choice but to get training from other associations. But there are very few training courses, of very few types, and they are not officially recognised. [...] Nowadays, there are many programmes subsidised by the European Union that offer training. While these programmes are looking for many young people to fill places, the users of the centre cannot access them. Training courses for young people where many places are not filled, and young people who are unable to do them. (Professional at a juvenile housing service)

In these cases, a large part of the task of all services and professionals consists of finding ways to overcome the obstacles arising from administrative irregularities and the regulatory framework in the area of immigration. Through programmes that accept them and that include internships that allow them to build a link with a company that may offer them work, the aim is to find the possibility of obtaining a one-year, full-time contract that will allow them to start the settlement process.

The professionals warned of the tough series of tests to which these young people are subjected. It is a race that takes place in an extremely competitive environment and in which they must constantly appeal to the good will of the agents involved, especially the business community.

It is almost impossible to find work when they have no documentation. They cannot find any route, only a specific strategy that might provide them with the possibility. But it is very difficult. The strategy consists of the young person doing an internship in a company and "making the employer fall in love with them". If the undocumented migrant is just another number that can be replaced, the employer will never hire them because it would mean paying more and dealing with more bureaucracy. Therefore, it is important to create a link between the young person and the employer, so that the latter ends up hiring them and completing the paperwork. If the young person is hired for one year, they are already completing the steps to be able to obtain the documentation in the future. In order to be hired, the young person is required to do an internship in a company they do not necessarily have to like. Not only do they have to endure the internship doing a job they may not like, but they have to compete with all the other interns and stand out from the rest. Moreover, they have to create a sentimental bond with the employer. It is very hard, but it is almost the only option available to the users of the centre who do not have documentation – or even a network. (Housing services professional)





5. Conclusions

The conclusions and recommendations drawn from the analysis of the data on street surveys and people attended to at XAPSELL facilities, and those relating to specific studies on homelessness and the labour market, are presented in three sections: the first is devoted

to general considerations on the trend in homelessness in Barcelona, the second to the change in the profile of the homeless population, and the third to the relationship between homelessness and the labour market.

Tackling the effects of homelessness and not the causes is not enough

Since the beginning of the 21st century, we have seen a progressive and constant increase in homelessness in Europe. In 2015, the European Federation of National Organisations Working with the Homeless (FEANTSA) began publishing a series of annual reports entitled “Overview of housing exclusion in Europe” in which it compiles the quantitative data available on the trend in housing exclusion in the countries of the European Union. Despite the difficulties in obtaining comparable sets of data, these reports show that the upward trend is shared year after year in all member states, with the exception of Finland. Based on available data, FEANTSA (2021) estimates that between 2009 and 2019 the number of people sleeping rough or in night shelters and hostels has grown by 70% to 700,000 people.

The city of Barcelona has not remained untouched by this growth. Since 2008, when the survey of people sleeping on the streets and in facilities began, there has been an increase in all forms of housing exclusion. On the night of 12 March 2008, 658 people were detected spending the night on the city’s streets, while in the last survey carried out by the XAPSELL on 19 May 2021, the count was 895 people. It should be noted that, following some stable figures, Barcelona City Council’s social intervention services in public spaces have detected a new increase since that date, and in the May 2022 report they estimated 1,063 people sleeping rough in the city.

In parallel to this increase, the annual surveys also carried out by the XAPSELL of people attended to in residential facilities and services aimed at combating homelessness show a noticeable increase in the resources available. Whereas in 2008 there were 1,190 places available, in May 2022 there were 2,803. This increase has not only been quantitative: innovations have been incorporated in the newly implemented ser-

vices as a result of the debates and consensus reached between organisations and the municipal administration within the framework of the XAPSELL. As a result, priority has been given to services that promote independence and respect people’s privacy, flexible lengths of stay and the creation of new services based on (temporary or permanent) access to housing.

However, one conclusion from these data sets is that, while the **addition of resources providing support and care to homeless people has indeed offset the increase in the number of people sleeping rough, it has not reduced their numbers.** The reactive policies pursued by local administrations and social institutions come up against labour and housing market regulations, the limited coverage of Social Security benefits, and foreign policies. These areas are far from the municipal decision-making sphere, but they have a direct impact on the living conditions of the lower-income population.

The only strategies to have succeeded in reducing the number of people sleeping rough are those that combine an expansion of social care through housing policies, improvements in social protection for particularly vulnerable groups and legislative changes. The legal recognition of the right to housing for the homeless in Scotland since 2001 and the Finnish strategy to eradicate homelessness are the only examples of a significant reduction in the number of homeless people in Europe. In both cases, the care has been accompanied by important prevention mechanisms, coordination between cities and national public administrations, and major agreements not to use homelessness as a partisan political weapon.

In parallel to the implementation of policies that address the structural causes of homelessness, Catalan

administrations need to advance in guaranteeing territorial equality in the roll-out of social protection policies in general, and in particular in providing support and care for homeless people. Measures aimed at guaranteeing the registration of all city dwellers, access to

the health system and access to social services, and at improving the coverage of guaranteed income systems would help to prevent homelessness, which is most prevalent in the city of Barcelona and in the larger municipalities of the metropolitan area.

The gender perspective and hidden homelessness

The XAPSLL organisations not only collect the absolute number of people attended to in residential facilities and services once a year, but also report on the basic socio-demographic characteristics of these people. By tracking the data series, we are able to detect changes in the population receiving assistance.

Between 2021 and 2022, the proportion of adult men decreased to 48.6% of the total, the lowest figure in the whole series. The main reason for this change is the opening of specific facilities for women throughout 2021, motivated by the growing interest of organisations and Barcelona City Council in tackling situations of hidden homelessness, more often than not involving women, and by the need to have non-mixed and specialised spaces for the support of homeless women.

The facilities and services specialising in care for homeless women have opened up a line of work that needs to be expanded and further developed. Half of

the homeless women in Barcelona's facilities surveyed at the end of 2021 had never slept on the street (Sales, 2022). **Given that female homelessness is often hidden and very often does not manifest itself on the street, mechanisms are needed to detect women who are in situations of severe housing exclusion but are not sleeping on the street.**

In a sector that has traditionally focused on men, special attention must also be paid to the needs of LGBTI people and those outside the gender binary. Research carried out throughout Europe (Fraser *et al.*, 2020) and the practice of services and organisations in Barcelona show that **having a sexual orientation other than heterosexuality or being gender non-binary are risk factors for social exclusion and homelessness.** The androcentric design of services also contributes to the fact that many people avoid them and are left in situations of hidden homelessness that also require specific detection mechanisms.

The special vulnerability of the foreign population

One third of the people attended to are Spanish nationals, 7.5% are EU foreign nationals and 54.1% are non-EU foreign nationals. The proportion of people in an irregular administrative situation is 27%. There is a large over-representation of people of foreign origin in the care system, which is not only explained by the administrative exclusion caused by not having a residence or work permit. It is also attributable to the multiple risks that migrants face due to the structural discrimination they suffer, the less extensive social protection to which they have access and the weakness of family support networks (Càritas Diocesana de Barcelona, 2021). The services for homeless people have adapted to the diversity of the origins of the population they serve. More and more resources are being allocated to providing support for migrants, which often requires specialised legal expertise. It is foreseeable that this need will intensify in the coming years, given the growing difficulties arising from

the lack of adaptation of social protection systems to the reality of migratory movements and the administrative barriers that foreigners face in their dealings with the Administration.

The specific social services for homeless people increasingly carry out tasks related to making up for the shortcomings of other systems that more or less explicitly exclude the foreign population, and to help the people they serve to navigate the obstacles posed by the procedures related to migration control. Adapting the care and support services for homeless people to this reality means increasing the resources allocated to legal advice and creating specific circuits for job placement linked to regularisation processes. Improving care may make it possible for some people to escape from their situation of housing and social exclusion, but **it is necessary to modify the structural conditions that generate a high risk of homelessness**

among the migrant population, and this requires legislative changes and for the General State Adminis-

tration to provide resources and reorganise the system of foreigners' offices.

Homelessness and the labour market

Despite the fact that homelessness is associated with a lack of financial income and, therefore, exclusion from the labour market, 27.6% of the women surveyed and 21.3% of the men surveyed in the XAPSLL housing facilities said that they were doing or had started an employment activity, and 14% claimed to have received income from a job in the month prior to the survey.

Of these employed people, only 49.3% carry out stable or occasional activities that are registered with the Social Security. Therefore, the other half performed paid activities without a contract. Only 43% of unemployed people had some kind of financial income (from benefits, aid or transfers from organisations or family members). Among people in work, 97% had an income. Those with a higher level of income were those who maintained a formal work activity, although only in some cases did this income exceed 800 euros per month. The proportion of women surveyed with a job was 27.5%, compared to 21.3% for men. Women were also the ones who most frequently carried out an activity registered with the Social Security: 41% as opposed to 29% of men. The job placement of women in services is easier and quicker than for men, but it takes place in low-paid sectors (such as cleaning or personal care) and the income they earn is not enough to stabilise their housing situation.

The main cause cited by those surveyed as the reason for not working were health or physical problems. These impediments were more frequently mentioned by women than by men. The central nature of work and exclusion from the labour market in the lives of the people in centres is also evident when asked about the causes of their homelessness: 63% attribute it to unemployment and the inability to work. When asked what they needed to get out of their situation and live their lives independently, 68% of women and 60% of men said they needed a job.

Regardless of the relationship they have had with the labour market throughout their lives, work holds great symbolic importance both for people suffering from homelessness and for their environment, including the professionals who support them. In the 2000s, when the professionalisation of care for homeless people began to consolidate within the framework of social services (Rubio-Martin, 2018), integration into the labour

market was at the centre of social intervention (Cabrera, 2008). Not only was it considered a way of obtaining financial income, but it also constituted the activity around which social relations were reconstructed, order was recovered in everyday life and meaning was given to participating in society.

The people interviewed for the qualitative phase of the research recognised the material and symbolic importance of finding work, while expressing a certain pessimism about the real options of having access to a home or renting a stable dwelling thanks to income from work. Both the discourses of the professionals and those of the people receiving the services were dominated by concern about the difficulties of holding a job in a changing and precarious landscape and about the barriers to accessing housing (or any form of housing solution), among which the price of housing is one of the most important.

Actions to promote job placement among the people getting service support must take into account two fundamental issues. The first is that finding a job is only part of the recovery process for people who have experienced homelessness. The function of social support is not only to facilitate this integration but also to ensure that it is sustainable over time, that it is beneficial for the person and that it interacts positively with the other areas of their lives. The second, closely related to the first, is that job placement is not always a positive factor in the lives of the people receiving support. **Paid work is not an end in itself and there are situations in which performing or even looking for a job can have a negative impact on the person's recovery.**

The ability to obtain and maintain a paid job is still considered the core of labour integration policies aimed at homeless people, hence the importance of training to face selection processes, training in skills demanded by the labour market and support in finding employment. However, there is **a lack of policies that generate jobs compatible with people in situations of housing exclusion and with complex personal circumstances, which are often associated with pathways of social exclusion.**

Much of the activity carried out by the specific social services for homeless people is aimed at filling the gaps caused by other protection systems failing to adapt to

highly complex situations. The entry into the labour market of those who have experienced these situations requires inclusive policies rather than insertion through pathways that can be hostile, frustrating and inadequate. **An alliance is needed between public employment agencies and specific services to promote personalised programmes that are consistent with the principles of person-centred care** which are increasingly present in the planning and development of services in the network.

It must be possible to reconcile the recovery processes that the people receiving support are undergoing with their integration into the labour market, and to prevent taking up a job from becoming a step backwards. For this reason, integration programmes must take into account the complex needs of each person, and services must accept that some people need assistance and support over a long period of time, even if they have work and an income. In this regard, it is important to remember the high risk of long-term unemployment suffered by people in the last few years of their working lives and how these situations of exclusion from the labour market affect income when they reach retirement age. **Improving the possibilities for people to maintain their independence from the age of 65 onwards would require specific integration strategies for facilitating Social Security contributions in the last years of their working lives.**

Migratory backgrounds and the exclusion factors associated with the Law on Foreigners generate a particularly complex context of relations with the labour market for an increasingly large part of the people receiving support from the services. More than a quarter of the people taking part in the survey said they were unable to access the labour market because they did not have a work and/or residence permit. In the interviews, both people of foreign origin and professionals expressed that, regardless of skills and abilities, not having a work permit was for many an insurmountable barrier to finding a job. Nationality and administrative status strongly condition social risk structures and relationships with the labour and housing markets, as well as the intensity and effectiveness of social protection mechanisms. Moreover, it is much more difficult for foreigners to get a job and keep it over time, and their work is often done without a contract or registration with the Social Security system. The precarious nature of their employment means that their Social Security contributions are low, as are the benefits that they may be entitled to.

The harsh conditions for obtaining residence and work permits through the settlement procedure complicates the conditions for integrating the population with an irregular status. Furthermore, job instability and difficulties in carrying out any foreign-related procedures with the State Administration can cause people with such permits to suddenly end up in an irregular situation. As noted in previous diagnostic reports (Guijarro *et al.*, 2017; De Inés *et al.*, 2019), **in order to prevent homelessness, it is necessary to implement regulatory changes that make regularisations easier and more flexible; to develop job placement policies that take into account the bureaucratic requirements of the regularisation processes; and to have the State Administration streamline foreigners' procedures** in order to offer a good service to the migrant population.

Difficulties in dealing with the administrations and red tape do not only affect foreigners; they have come up time and time again in the interviews. The digitalisation of procedures, which could be an ally in reducing waiting times and speeding up administrative processes, has become an insurmountable barrier for part of the population. Supporting people in all types of online procedures has become a fundamental task of the professional teams. When it comes to matters related to employment and the economic benefits that derive from it, bureaucratic complications and slow response times undermine the ability to establish preventive strategies. When a person who has no housing stability (who has recently left the care system for homeless people, who is supported by an organisation or service, who is living in substandard housing, etc.) loses their job, this can very quickly lead to homelessness. **The more complicated a person's personal and financial situation is, the more important it is for administrations to act swiftly to prevent homelessness.**

Finding a job and receiving a salary is just one more way to escape from homelessness. In some cases, the relationship with the labour market can be counterproductive to the recovery process of a person who has experienced severe social and housing exclusion. Nonetheless, if all people supported by the services who are willing and able to do paid work could overcome all the barriers that prevent them from accessing the labour market, many of them would find a way out of their situation.



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