

# **BARCELONA CITY COUNCIL AND THE HOMELESS**

## **2005 A YEAR OF HIGHS AND LOWS**

**ASSOCIACIÓ PROHABITATGE**

## **INTRODUCTION: A CONTRADICTIONARY CONTEXT**

On balance, the welfare services provided for the homeless by Barcelona City Council in 2005 can be deemed positive, especially when we compare them with the services offered up until now. So far, however, the new municipal homeless policy has been quantitative (welfare-based) rather than qualitative (aimed at supporting the process of social reintegration). By way of example, the capacity of night shelters has increased by 75% compared to figures for 2004.

Barcelona's new homeless policy forms part of the *Pla Municipal per a la Inclusió Social 2005-2010* (hereafter, the Municipal Social Inclusion Plan), which was approved towards the end of 2004. The aim of the fifth strategic line of this Plan – the improvement and expansion of services dealing with social exclusion dynamics and situations – is to redefine the municipal homeless care programme and to improve the welfare services provided for this group.

In parallel to this favourable context and willingness to improve the situation of the homeless, on the 9th of November, Barcelona City Council partially approved the draft bill for its *Ordenança de Mesures per Fomentar i Garantir la Convivència a la Ciutat* (Ordinance on Measures to Promote and Guarantee Social Harmony in the City), which has been a cause for concern among social organisations. The preamble of the legislation states its purpose as “to eradicate any behaviour that could perturb social harmony and to minimise uncivil behaviour”. However, as Joan Subirats, Professor of Political Science of the Autonomous University of Barcelona, points out, when we actually scrutinise this rather praiseworthy aim, we stumble across issues such as begging, the homeless, street trading, prostitution, and alternative and unconventional uses of public space.

To add further fuel to the debate, in October, five houses in the older neighbourhoods of diverse Catalan towns collapsed – all within a period of six days – resulting in the deaths of five Moroccan nationals. These tragic events brought to light a series of practices and situations that force the residential exclusion of certain groups, such as immigrants, low-income families, and the elderly.

Thus we see that, on the one hand, the City Council appears willing, with its Municipal Social Inclusion Plan, to implement public policies to improve the living conditions of the homeless, while on the other, it is introducing a municipal ordinance to encourage civil behaviour that criminalises and socially stigmatises a group which, as is well-known, can only be dealt with by means of integrated and strong social policies implemented over long periods. To round off this section, the collapse of the old properties above has revealed a situation whereby specific population groups are suffering from severe residential exclusion.

We will now analyse these three phenomena in turn.

## 1. THE POSITIVE: THE MUNICIPAL SOCIAL INCLUSION PLAN 2005-2010

At the end of last year, Barcelona City Council approved its Municipal Social Inclusion Plan 2005-2010, which contains a series of specific measures for helping the homeless. These actions are organised around two main objectives:

### 1. *Networking.*

To revise and reinforce the model of social care and reinsertion. This will entail, firstly, coordination of the different services available (social urgency care, open environment programme, services covering basic needs and resources for day care and night shelters) and, secondly, increased cooperation between institutions and associations.

### 2. *Extension of the services offered and adaptation to new needs.*

- To rework and adapt the municipal model of attention for social urgencies and the project for social-insertion intervention in the open environment to the new dynamics, situations and needs of the homeless.
- To improve and expand soup kitchens, showers, laundries and cloakrooms.
- To improve and increase temporary housing centres.
  - To redefine the existing private and municipal day centres and night shelters (Can Planas, Meridiana, Sant Joan de Déu, Nostra Senyora de Montserrat –see Table 2), and contract-based services.
  - To create new shelter services.
  - To create a public list of social inclusion housing as a transitional resource to encourage insertion itineraries among individuals dealt with by the municipal homeless care network.

Nonetheless, the majority of the objectives of Barcelona City Council's Social Inclusion Plan are merely quantitative and care-based, and not therefore qualitative. This is the basis for the actions carried out by the City Council since the Plan was approved; a Plan that appears somewhat lacking in measures to debilitate the causes of social exclusion (lack of housing, drug-addiction, low level of studies, etc.).

We should point out that the plan also includes inclusion strategies for housing and for social-labour, social-educational and public health contexts, as well as actions allowing it to progress in its zero poverty objective. Nonetheless, it has been demonstrated that the use of general social services that have not been adapted to the specific needs of the homeless is an ineffective strategy.

## ACCOMPLISHMENTS THUS FAR: NEW NIGHT SHELTER PLACES

As illustrated in Tables 1 and 2, up until 2004, the number of night shelter places in Barcelona did not exceed 235, of which only 50 were public places at the Can Planas shelter. The remainder – the Sant Joan de Déu and Santa Lluïsa Marillac shelters, and beds in hotels and boarding houses – were private.

According to the Municipal Social Welfare Department, there are 800 homeless people living on the streets of Barcelona, though other sources, such as the Community of Sant Egidí, estimate this figure to be closer to 2,000. One thing is certain, however: in addition to these 800 homeless individuals, there are others that sleep in boarding houses or in precarious conditions in sublet rooms.

On 22nd of October 2004, the *La Vanguardia* newspaper reported that there were 2,704 homeless people living in Barcelona in 2003, of whom 1,711 lived in camps while the remainder lived on the streets, in boarding houses or in sublet properties. The 2005 Statistical Yearbook of the City of Barcelona also reveals that the City Council's social insertion services dealt with 3,459 homeless people in 2004 who, according to the Council, were the individuals who used the social services.

**TABLE 1**

<b>SOCIAL INCLUSION SERVICES AND THE HOMELESS</b>					
					Source: Barcelona City Council
<b>Limited-stay centres by service points. 2000-2004</b>					
<b>Centre</b>	<b>2000</b>	<b>2001</b>	<b>2002</b>	<b>2003</b>	<b>2004</b>
<b>CAN PLANAS</b>					
<b>Places</b>	<b>50</b>	<b>50</b>	<b>50</b>	<b>50</b>	<b>50</b>
<b>Users</b>	<b>276</b>	<b>259</b>	<b>193</b>	<b>265</b>	<b>241</b>
<b>ALBERG ST. JOAN DE DÉU</b>					
<b>Places</b>	<b>50</b>	<b>50</b>	<b>50</b>	<b>50</b>	<b>50</b>
<b>Users</b>	<b>617</b>	<b>544</b>	<b>544</b>	<b>499</b>	<b>489</b>
<b>SANTA LLUÏSA MARILLAC</b>					
<b>Places</b>	<b>-</b>	<b>-</b>	<b>35</b>	<b>35</b>	<b>35</b>
<b>Users</b>	<b>-</b>	<b>-</b>	<b>70</b>	<b>75</b>	<b>88</b>
<b>HOTELS AND BOARDING HOUSES</b>					
<b>Places</b>	<b>130.9</b>	<b>87.6</b>	<b>63.7</b>	<b>91.3</b>	<b>86</b>
<b>Users</b>	<b>754</b>	<b>310</b>	<b>255</b>	<b>477</b>	<b>317</b>
<b>TOTAL PLACES:</b>					
	<b>230.9</b>	<b>187.6</b>	<b>198.7</b>	<b>226.3</b>	<b>221</b>
<b>TOTAL USERS:</b>					
	<b>1,647</b>	<b>1,113</b>	<b>1,062</b>	<b>1,316</b>	<b>1,135</b>

There continues to be a clear deficit in the number of night-shelter places in Barcelona. If we calculate that the homeless population of Barcelona consists of 800 individuals, the places available up until 2004 covered just 30% of the demand while, if we consider this group to be composed of 2,000 individuals, then the night shelter supply does not even meet 12% of the demand.

To remedy this severe deficit, from May to October 2005, the City Council set up three new night shelters (the Meridiana facilities, social inclusion housing, and the Mar Bella centre – see Table 2) and for 2006 it plans to open a new centre with a capacity for 30 individuals (the Horta facilities).

**TABLE 2**

EVOLUTION OF MUNICIPAL NIGHT SHELTER PLACES				Source: Barcelona City Council		
	2004		2005 (October)		2006 (planned)	
<b>PUBLIC PLACES</b>	Can Planas centre	50	- Can Planas centre	50	- Can Planas centre	50
			- Meridiana facilities	40	- Meridiana facilities	40
			- Social inclusion housing	30	- Social inclusion housing	100
			- Mar Bella centre	100	- Mar Bella centre	100
			- Horta facilities		- Horta facilities	30
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>50</b>	<b>220</b>	<b>320</b>			
<b>SOCIAL INITIATIVE PLACES</b>	- St. Joan de Déu	50	- St. Joan de Déu	50		
	- Sta. Lluïsa Marillac	35	- Sta. Lluïsa Marillac	35		
	- Hotels and boarding houses	100	- Hotels and boarding houses	100		
	<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>185</b>	<b>185</b>			
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>235</b>	<b>405</b>				

## THE THREE NEW NIGHT SHELTERS

### 1. The Meridiana centre

Until 2004, this facility was a day centre that only offered night shelter in the winter months. However, on 25th of May 2005, it was converted into a low-demand service with a capacity for 40 individuals. The centre permits temporary stays and calculates that the average stay will last for one year.

The services it offers are:

1. Night shelter 365 days a year, from 8 pm to 8 am.
2. Food (breakfast and dinner)
3. Personal hygiene (showers and cloakroom)
4. Social care

5. Healthcare
6. Possibility of gradual connections with other services and social resources to enable individual insertion processes.

The profile of the persons to which the facility is aimed is one of lone individuals or couples without children, with a high level of chronification, who reject and are incapable of using resources that impose certain demands. It is also aimed at individuals known to the street teams for some time.

At the beginning of 2006, the Municipal Social Welfare Department will set up a centre in the Horta neighbourhood with similar characteristics to those of the Meridiana centre: a facility with few demands, that will provide 30 night-shelter places and a shower, dining room, and cloakroom service.

## **2. Social inclusion housing**

In June 2005, the Municipal Social Welfare Department launched the first 23 social inclusion dwellings of the 50 indicated in the Municipal Social Inclusion Plan. These properties have a capacity for up to 100 individuals. At the end of 2005, it is expected that at least 10 dwellings will be in operation. The remaining 13 will be incorporated over the first few months of 2006.

Two types of housing have been designed:

1. Shared social inclusion housing for lone individuals and single-parent families.
2. Unshared, family housing for single family units.

This resource is aimed at a variety of individuals, ranging from lone persons and/or homeless families with children unable to pay rent, through to individuals or families who have entered the homeless care network and managed to obtain a certain degree of autonomy enabling them to take on the responsibility of a home and their children, if any, and to individuals and families on a social work plan who have taken on the commitment to meet their expenses until they reach a level of self-sufficiency allowing them to become independent.

Stays in this type of housing will be limited and users will have to take part in an insertion plan and show that they are willing to adopt habits of living in a community, organisation and personal care.

## **3. The Mar Bella Centre**

On 10th of October 2005, the Mar Bella sports centre began operating as a low-demand night shelter with a capacity for 100 individuals, who can stay for a maximum of four nights. Up until last year, the centre was only set up during the "Cold Operation", which provides shelter for the homeless on the coldest days of the year.

The Municipal Social Welfare Department has not yet named the centre that will replace the Mar Bella sports centre during the “Cold Operation”. It is also not yet known where the winter shelter will be set up, as the venue for this used to be the Meridiana centre, but this was converted into a low-demand night shelter facility in May 2005.

Since it opened in October, the Mar Bella centre has dealt with an average of 80 people a day. The centre is open from 9 pm to 9 am, and its attention and accompaniment service operates from 11 pm to 4 am. This service is carried out by the Catalan Red Cross, which is also in charge of the multidisciplinary reception and night care team.

***Result: three new night shelters and continuing deficits***

To sum up, the 235 night-shelter places available in Barcelona in 2004 have increased to 405 this year, but they still fall short of meeting the needs of the 800 homeless individuals living in Barcelona, according to official estimates.

This series of welfare actions, implemented as part of the Municipal Social Inclusion Plan, contrasts with the lack of actions for developing integrated social reinsertion plans with specialist activities aimed at rehabilitating chronic alcoholics living on the streets, for example.

Moreover, other services such as soup kitchens, have not yet been expanded, though Table 3 shows that the number of users increases year upon year: from 7,286 in 2000 to 14,229 in 2004.

Table 4 shows that, combined with the deficit in this area, Barcelona has just three municipal soup kitchens – Navas, Paral·lel and Meridiana – the same number as those set up by non-profit organisations – La Terrasetta, Santa Llúisa Marillac and Prisba.

**TABLE 3**

Source: Barcelona City Council	2000	2001	2002	2003	2004
<b>SOUP KITCHENS</b>					
<b>Centres</b>	3	3	3	3	3
<b>Places</b>	525	550	609	702	680
<b>Users</b>	7,286	8,888	11,075	12,845	14,229

**TABLE 4**

<b>SOUP KITCHEN SERVICES 2003</b>		Source: Barcelona City Council
<b>SERVICE</b>	<b>PLACES</b>	<b>MEALS SERVED</b>
<b>MUNICIPAL</b>		
Navas. Meridiana, 238	<b>347</b>	<b>126,209</b>
Paral·lel. Paral·lel, 97	<b>200</b>	<b>65,514</b>
The Meridiana day centre	<b>40</b>	<b>9,500</b>
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>587</b>	<b>201,223</b>
<b>SOCIAL INITIATIVES</b>		
La Terrasetta (Ass. Rauxa)	<b>155</b>	<b>54,456</b>
Sta. Lluïsa Marillac	<b>15</b>	<b>5,270</b>
Prisba	<b>18</b>	<b>6,324</b>
<b>TOTAL OVERALL</b>	<b>188</b>	<b>66,050</b>
<b>TOTAL BARCELONA CITY COUNCIL</b>	<b>775</b>	<b>322,879</b>

## **2. THE NEGATIVE: MORE HOMELESS ON THE STREETS AND CRIMINALISATION**

Despite the willingness of Barcelona City Council to improve its services for the homeless, this group has also suffered from a series of unfortunate actions aimed at the latter during 2005. The most important and controversial of these was the Council's approval, though not yet definitive, of the Ordinance on Measures to Promote and Guarantee Social Harmony in the City. We will now analyse this ordinance, along with its related issues:

### **Camps**

A phenomenon which has now become habitual in Barcelona is that of individuals grouping together to sleep in public spaces. Every three months, the Social Services Department of City Council creates a map of camps of homeless people – groups of more than eight people who share a public space, on private land or in empty properties. In the last quarter of 2004, 7 of these were identified, compared to 10 and 19 in the third quarter of 2003. The individuals that form part of these camps fluctuate, hence there were 779 individuals in the first term of 2003, 389 in the second and 315 in the third. In October 2005, there were 300 people living in these camps.

The individuals in these camps account for 60 to 65% of the homeless people living in Barcelona (*La Vanguardia* 22-10-04). Almost half are immigrants, chiefly Galician and Portuguese families, who live in trucks, vans, caravans and wooden shacks.

### ***The homeless at the airport of Barcelona***

On 30th of October 2005, the newspaper *El Periódico de Catalunya* reported that a group of 15 homeless people, which increased to dozens according to the season of the year, habitually live and sleep in the airport of Barcelona. AENA, the company that manages the airport acknowledges the situation and maintains that it has not yet found a way to solve the problem, suggesting that the only solution lies with institutional collaboration in order to channel these individuals towards the municipal social services.

### ***Expulsion of the homeless from the centre of Barcelona***

“Municipal police force clear centre of Barcelona of its homeless during festival”. This was the headline of the *El Punt* newspaper on 28th of September 2005. During the Mercè festival (Barcelona’s popular celebrations) non-uniformed Guàrdia Urbana police officers forced 25 homeless people to leave the city centre and took them to police quarters. Jordi Hereu, Councillor for Safety and Mobility, denied that they were put with arrested delinquents, pointing out that they “received normal care, albeit at another facility so as not to saturate the social services in the centre”. The City Council also justified its decision by alluding to “the increased demand for use of public space in the centre during the Mercè celebrations”.

### ***Hiding the homeless problem***

On 10th of November 2005, the *El Mundo* newspaper reported that Barcelona City Council had censored a performance at a contemporary art exhibition that raised the issue of the homeless. The newspaper indicates that sources of the district of Ciutat Vella – the neighbourhood in which the performance was to take place – suggested that the artists take their performance to a museum or elsewhere, but not to Ciutat Vella, because “the neighbourhood is full of homeless people and it would be an insult... as if to say, look, I’m an artist but I’m acting like a homeless person”.

### ***Ordinance on Measures to Promote and Guarantee Social Harmony in the City***

On 9th of November, Barcelona City Council commission passed the draft bill of the Ordinance on Measures to Promote and Guarantee Social Harmony in the City (the definitive approval of the plenary session is still required). The purpose of this ordinance is to regulate the use of public space. For example, Section II – Regulations for conduct in public space, infractions, penalties and specific intervention – contains twelve chapters on the types of conduct that can have an impact on social harmony and are hence prohibited, along with a series of penalties applicable if they are carried out. These conducts are:

- Attacks on personal dignity
- Visual degradation of the urban environment (graffiti, slogans, posters, etc.)
- Games involving betting with money or assets
- Games (ball games, skateboarding, etc.)
- Other conduct (begging, prostitution)

- Physiological needs
- Consumption of alcoholic beverages
- Unauthorised street trading of food, beverages and other products
- Unauthorised activities and services
- Inappropriate use of the public space
- Vandalism affecting urban furniture
- Other conducts perturbing social harmony

Conducts typified as “inappropriate use of the public space”, which are prohibited and subject to fines of 500 Euros, include:

- Sleeping during the day or night in the public space, although the ordinance specifies that individuals in a situation of social exclusion will be taken by the municipal services to an appropriate facility for help. Therefore, the Guàrdia Urbana will have free reign for removing the homeless from the streets.
- The use of public benches and seats for uses other than those for which they were intended.
- Washing or bathing in fountains, ponds or similar.
- Washing of clothes in fountains, ponds, showers or similar.

Alarm bells are ringing in organisations that work with homeless people, since the ordinance lumps situations requiring police intervention together with those requiring social intervention. Such a strategy can only seek to stigmatise and criminalise the poor and those who suffer from social exclusion. Not only this, but fines will be handed out to those living on the streets when there are not even enough social resources to care for them and attempt to set up social reinsertion processes.

Joan Subirats, Professor of Political Science of the Autonomous University of Barcelona, explains this point clearly when he refers to the contents of the ordinance: “Not one word about real-estate harassment. Not a single comment about the abusive use of public space by cars, nor the problems caused by labour-market insecurity and its impact on social and community articulation [...] We are limited to managing the waste we come across on the street with end-of-pipe policies. We penalise insecurity and marginality, brandishing an iron fist that accompanies the “invisible hand” which we cannot and do not want to be bothered with. One example of this is that the ordinance prioritises fines for processes or spaces for education or social reintegration”.

### **3. TO FINISH OFF: SEVERE RESIDENTIAL EXCLUSION**

The last population census of 2001 revealed that over 18,000 dwellings (10,404 buildings) in Catalonia were in ruins, almost 45,000 were in poor condition and 176,000 were in deficient conditions, this of a total of two million primary housing units. Thus, the collapse of houses in old quarters is becoming the norm in Catalan towns. The last occurred on 20th of November in Lleida, while there were six during October, resulting in the deaths of five people. These

tragic events have shown that certain groups (immigrants and the elderly, in particular) suffer from severe residential exclusion. They have also revealed that the housing in these old quarters is in very poor condition.

### ***Production-line housing***

According to Barcelona City Council, there are 640,000 dwellings in the city, of which 20,274 are occupied by six to sixty people. Moreover, during the plenary session of the City Council held on 14th of October, the deputy mayor, Xavier Casas, acknowledged that 166 dwellings had been detected in the city in which at least 5,823 individuals were resident – counting only those figuring on the electoral poll. In addition, the Councillor for Social Welfare, Ricard Gomà, admitted that the Council had calculated a total of 18,302 individuals living on the streets in the Catalan capital.

The high rents in Barcelona – in the first quarter of 2005, the average rent in the Catalan capital was 746€ – and the lack of purchasing power among immigrants means that they have to group together in a single flat in order to pay the rent. This has led to the rise of “hot beds”, where a minimum of 100 Euros is paid for the simple fact of sleeping in a bed.

### ***Real-estate harassment and dispossession***

It is not surprising in the least to see certain people, particularly the elderly, being harassed by the owners of the property to get them out of a flat, as a result of the business expectations caused by the exaggerated increase in housing costs. In parallel to this situation and as a result of the price increase, the number of dispossessions is on the rise. For instance, in 2002, ten dwellings were dispossessed every day in Barcelona.

### ***Resident racism***

Immigrants face increasing problems to be able to rent a flat. For the simple fact of being an immigrant, they are refused housing and, when they are not refused, the conditions imposed are heavy: open-ended employment contract (their last two payslips are required), payment of the first month's rent, a bond, and a banker's guarantee for the sum of one year's income.

### ***Elderly people living in precarious housing conditions***

In Catalonia, there are one million elderly people, of whom over 8,000 live in dwellings considered by the census to be in ruins, 6,600 do not have running water, and 16,000 have no bathroom, according to the *Envelliment i habitatge* (Ageing and housing) study by the architect, Jordi Bosch. The study also indicates that one thousand elderly people have difficulty paying their rent and a further 30,000 are in danger of dispossession. Moreover, 75% of Catalan old-age pensioners live in inaccessible dwellings (without a lift, for instance).