**Contribution to the country report of the Special Rapporteur of the United Nations about extreme poverty and human rights**

**Arrels Fundació** is an NGO thatsince 1987 has joined more than 13,000 homeless people on their way to independence, offering housing, food, and social and medical attention. Arrels Fundació has about 60 working people, around 400 volunteers, and more than 4,700 associates and donors who collaborate to make possible the goal: **#nobodysleepingonthestreet**.

**Our mission**

* We **accompany and look after homeless people** who find themselves in an extreme phase of exclusion towards a situation in which they can be as independent as possible.
* We **awake awareness** **citizens** regarding poverty issues in our surroundings.
* We **report unfair situations and present solutions** to administrations and civil society.

**How do you end up on the street?**

A person doesn’t end up on the street from one day to the next. Their situation gets worse from day to day and can include a range of causes; some of them have to do with the people themselves and others stem from the society that we live in.

* **Structural causes.** Linked to their economic situation (like loss of work), the housing market (price of rent, evictions), migratory movements and the workings of public administration.
* **Institutional causes.** Related to the rigidity of social services, the mechanisms of assistance, and institutional processes.
* **Discrimination or absence of legal status.** Related to individual situations that people who have immigrated can face as well as some minorities, such as the gypsy community.
* **Relational causes.** Linked to the family situation and to social support network of each individual (a divorce, for example, or the death of a family member).
* **Personal reasons.** Related to education, age, addiction, and health.

**Numbers and situation of people living on the street**

Generally speaking, there are neither exact nor updated numbers available that allow us to establish how many people are sleeping on the street and to delimit the extent of the problem. The reasons for this are different according to the different territories involved.

* In the **European Union** there is no common set of criteria between countries by which to account for how many people are sleeping on the street and who do not have a home, nor is there a total number.
* The **Spanish state** obtains information, every two years, from the National Institute of Statistics. However, this information only takes into account the people who use housing and food resources and excludes other people who sleep on the streets and do not access these services. It is also necessary to take into account the fact that these counts are not carried out in all municipalities.
* In **Catalonia,** we do not have an up to date number of how many people are sleeping rough. The latest figures are from 2014, provided by the Housing Agency of Catalonia (Agència de l’Habitatge de Catalunya), which estimate that there are some 5,433 people living on the street or in low maintenance resource spaces. These statistics only span people who have received public services. It is also important to take into account that there are not counts carried out in all the municipalities.
* In **Barcelona** we do know how many people are sleeping rough in the city, as there are counts carried out regularly. In the [last count](https://www.arrelsfundacio.org/en/resultscensus2019/), in June 2019, 1,995 people were counted as sleeping on the street.

The night of June 12, 2019, during the 4th census of homeless people, we located almost 1,200 people sleeping on the street in Barcelona and 347 wanted to speak to us. **The number of people located has increased 27% in four years**, from 941 people in 2016 in the count conducted by the Homeless Network to nearly 1,200 people this year. This are the main conclusions:

1. **More time living on the street**



The average amount of time spent on the street rose to 3 years and 9 months among people interviewed during the census, **five months more than the average in 2018.** Also notable is the **increase in people who have been victims of physical and/or verbal abuse**: from 30% in 2018 to 38% in 2019 (43% among women).

1. **More specialized social intervention is need**



78% of homeless people suffer a **situation of elevated or moderate vulnerability**, a number that increases (71% in 2018) and indicates that they need social intervention from specialized services (those of average vulnerability, 61%) or priority (those of high vulnerability, 17%). **41%** said they had been **assisted by a social worker** in the last six months, a slight increase from 2017 (in 2018 it was 35% and in 2017 it was 45.5%).

1. **What level of vulnerability do they face?**



The 347 homeless people who participated in this year’s census answered questions about their health, how long they’ve lived on the street, their age, if they have suffered abuse or not, etc. The combination of these answers allows us to learn the level of vulnerability the person faces.

* 17% face a situation of high vulnerability, which means that they need priority social intervention. If we include people in a situation of moderate vulnerability, this figure increases to 78%.
* **83% are men, 11% are women** and 6% identify otherwise.
* **The average age is 42.3 years**; more than half (57%) are between 25 and 49 years old and the range of people between 50 and 64 years old increased to 28%.
* The 347 people interviewed came from **49 different countries.** The most common **countries of origin** are Spain (25%), Romania (16.1%), Morocco (12.1%), Italy (4.6%) and Poland (3.7%).
1. **What is their situation?**
* The people we interviewed spent **3 years and 9 months living on the street**, on average. **59.4% had spent a year or more sleeping in the street.**
* 44% had difficulty accessing housing because they were not registered.
* **73% of people interviewed had neither income,** nor social benefits, nor inheritance, nor do they work illegally. That’s 7% fewer than in 2018.
* In the case of 18% of people interviewed, **consumption of alcohol or drugs has made it difficult to remain in housing** or has been the reason that the person has had to leave their housing. 11% of people with physical health problems are in the same situation.

**5- Do they have social support?**

* 44% of people interviewed said they have not been assisted by a social worker or similar person in the last six months.
* The percentage of people interviewed who said they have used **emergency social services** in the last six months increased to 21%.

**6- Can they go to the doctor?**

* 46% of people said they have **physical health problems.**
* Almost three out of every ten people interviewed said they suffer from a **chronic illness.**
* More than half of the people surveyed (53%) said they have a **health card.** 39% said they do not have a health card and the rest did not know or did not answer.
* The results of the census show a concerning statistic: **the use of emergency health services has increased compared to last year.** Many people said they had received **emergency medical care (35.4%)**, more people have stayed in the hospital (21.9%) and more have needed an **ambulance** (17.8%).

**7- Do they feel safe?**



* 38% of people interviewed said they have been a **victim of physical and/or verbal abuse**; this is 8% more than last year. For women, the number rises to 43%.
* 17.58% of the people interviewed said that they had pending legal cases and 19% said that they had been detained at some point in a police station.
* **6% of the people interviewed said they have been forced**, cheated or pressured to do something against their will, a figure slightly higher than in previous years.

People living in the street live in constant violation of rights.

* The **right to housing**, because in Barcelona the average of public and social housing is less than 2%, and there is no specific housing for homeless people.

* The **right to privacy**, because living on the street means that a person is exposed.
* The **right to rest**, because when you live on the street, you are on alert and sleep with the lights and noise of the city.
* The **right to mobility**, because most people who live on the street cannot use public transport and have to walk from one resource to another, in both cold and hot weather.
* The **right to the city** and to enjoy the spaces and social and cultural resources that there are, because the almost 1,200 people who live on the street in Barcelona are also members of the community.
* The **right to public space**, because a local regulation banishes sleeping on the street and punishes practices like making noise, washing in a fountain, urinating, etc. When you do not have a home and there are not enough public resources, it becomes difficult to accomplish the regulations.
* The **right to hygiene,** as there are not enough resources for laundry and hygienic services to change clothes and shower, and some close in summer.
* The **right to health**, because living in the street harms health shorten 20 years off your life.
* The **right to physical integrity**, because when you live on the street, you are not protected and are more exposed to be assaulted.
* The **right to private property**, so that a person cannot save their belongings and documentation in a safe place. Currently, Barcelona has no public storage for homeless people.

**Political proposals for #nobodylivingonthestreets**

**1. More public housing for people who sleep on the street**

What do we propose? Homeless people cannot be left out of public housing. We request the right to access to public housing, more specific promotions of public housing that take homeless people into account and promote collaboration between the administration and NGO.

**2. Less shelters and more low-requirement resources**

What do we propose? Open a low-requirement resources in each neighborhood so that people who sleep in the street do not have to move long distances, find a place where to spend the night safely, they can enter with all their belongings and stay the time they need. The proposal can be carried out in collaboration between the administration and the NGO.

**3. Look beyond the thermometer**

What do we propose? Stop focusing efforts on the cold operation and focus on an operation that looks at the problem of homelessness in its entirety. This change contributes to motivate stable housing and, in the meantime, for the opening of more low demand spaces in the different neighborhoods of the city.

**4. Local regulations about the use of public spaces that respect homeless people**

What do we propose? It is necessary stop looking at the situation of the homeless as a problem of bad use of public space in the city or object of sanctions and criminalization.

**5. Less police action against homeless people and more social action**

What do we propose? Moving by force people who sleep on the street is not the solution: the problem does not disappear, it only moves. The social action must be intensified. Local police should be trained in the specific situation of homeless people and work in a more coordinated way with social services and with NGO that know this reality.