

The economic crisis has worsened the hard lives of homeless people

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The economic crisis has worsened the hard lives of homeless people. Credit: Daniel Lobo

Until now, no large-scale scientific studies had been done into the impact of the economic crisis on homeless people. A study by the University of the Basque Country has explained how, between 2008 and 2012, the employment situation, together with cuts to certain state benefits, has put

the brakes on the reintegration of homeless people into society, especially if they are foreign.

The University of the Basque Country has analysed the impact of the economic crisis on [homeless people](#) as a group: those people who are suffering one of the harshest, most severe situations of [social exclusion](#).

In the study, the paper's main author, Gorka Moreno Márquez, presents the findings of two studies, one carried out before the crisis (2008) and the other in today's context, comparing the two. The paper is published in the *European Journal of Social Work*.

"We are observing a rise in the number of homeless people as a consequence of the crisis. Although some of the group's characteristics are stable, others have changed. Therefore, difficulties accessing the jobs market and the cuts to certain financial aid are causing increases to the duration of the process of integration into society", the scientist told Sinc.

The research was carried out using data from two studies in the historical territory of Biscay. "Although some of these conclusions could owe to the context and the particularities of this geographical area, the majority can be extrapolated to the country as a whole and to the phenomenon of homelessness in general" adds Moreno Márquez.

The launch pad to integration, ever further away

Before the [economic crisis](#), it was estimated that there were around 260 people in the historical territory of Biscay who spent their nights on the streets or at some service for homeless people.

To arrive at this figure, a register was first made of the homeless people who attended hostels, canteens or day centres. Around 220 people were

registered through this activity. Another 30 or 40 people were added to this figure according to an estimate made by the street team.

"The vast majority of these are men: 91.5% compared to 8.5% who are women. At the European level, it should be highlighted that although they are still a minority, the number of women in this group is always rising," said the researcher.

To take one example, in France in the late 90s, women made up 37% of homeless people aged under 25. The average age is 36; 30% are younger than 30, 31% are aged between 30 and 39 and people older than 40 make up 39%: a relatively young population.

In the second study period, carried out in 2012, the number of homeless people in Biscay was between 400 and 430. "This rise is largely due to relapses in the process of social insertion of people who had already been in this situation," he states.

Immigrants are hit the hardest

The paper corroborates the theory that extreme situations have not as a result of the crisis extended to people who were previously integrated into society. The study's authors attribute this to a social and family network, which is able to overcome the harshest conditions of social exclusion.

However, they state that there is an ever-rising number of foreign homeless people who suffer from individual problems. "These are particularly related to mental illness, and to a lesser extent to drug use," the scientist stresses.

This fact is a break from the pattern of the period before the crisis, and appears to indicate that the recession is creating a niche in this group of

people, particularly as a consequence of rising frustration with longer and more difficult social insertion processes.

"The process by which these insertion process are lengthening is being fed into by cuts to certain social aid such as income support, which used to reach some sectors of homeless people. Legal changes such as the requirement to have been registered as a resident for three years instead of one have made it more difficult to access aid; this especially affects the immigrant population" Moreno Márquez concludes.

More information: Gorka Moreno Márquez. "El impacto de la crisis sobre las personas sin hogar. rupturas y continuidades en un contexto de cambio. El caso de Bizkaia". *European Journal of Social Work*, 2016.

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