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Barcelona Societat

Journal on social Knowledge analysis

Take Stand

The Covid-19 social crisis in the city of Barcelona, responses and lessons learned after the pandemic

In Depth

Impact of the coronavirus pandemic on health in **Barcelona**
Supporting people with disabilities in the fight against labour market exclusion in the context of Covid-19
Childhood and adolescence in Barcelona in times of pandemic
The effects of the pandemic on spaces and projects that promote community management of culture
Roots, mobilities and collective action during the pandemic and the **post-pandemic**: the right to the territory
Cities and non-discrimination. Theoretical, regulatory and practical considerations



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Sònia Fuertes

Commissioner for Social Action

The eruption of Covid-19 caused an unprecedented social crisis in the City of Barcelona.

As stated on various occasions, insecurity placed many people in extremely difficult situations, especially in terms of housing and covering basic rights, such as nutrition. The interruption of economic activity, as a measure to prevent the propagation of the illness, caused a major loss of employment, in an economy that was still suffering from the effects of the 2008 financial crisis. Activities linked to the informal economy were also interrupted, with the corresponding negative effects.

The impact of the pandemic made it clear that we required social protection policies in order to guarantee income or to tackle the situation of migrants who are in an illegal administrative situation. Many people lost their source of income, had their temporary lay-off (ERTO) payments delayed, were no longer able to pay their rent, or even lost their sublet rooms.

The health and social emergency highlighted the key role played by local administrations in responding to emergency situations, as local bodies that know the territory and the needs of the community. In the case of Barcelona, the tensions caused to the system revealed the city's weaknesses, but also its strengths.

Barcelona's municipal response was markedly proactive, anticipating the Royal Decree of 14 March, which declared the state of emergency, by creating the Coordination and Monitoring Committee for the Covid-19 Contingency Plan on 26 February, and approving the Mayoral Decree on 11 March. The response to the challenges caused by the pandemic also involved reorganisation and the creation of new public services that combined covering the needs of the people being attended to and protection for the workers providing these services. From the outset, the aim was to limit the spread of the contagion, but also to provide the corresponding care for the sectors of society that had suffered most from the impact of pandemic control measures or who were in a situation where even lockdown was something beyond their means. At a time of great initial uncertainty, the City Council was on the frontline, offering an empathetic, understanding response to the general public's insecurity and fears.

As essential services, municipal social services played an essential part in this response, reorganising their operations through contingency plans that allowed the uninterrupted continuation of on-site activity, while also incorporating online and telephone support services. There was a notable adaptation of services at each turn, which underlined their dynamism and commitment.

It is also necessary to emphasise the increase in care and demands received by municipal social services: in the four months after the start of the pandemic, a total of 44,453 people were attended to by municipal social services.

This figure was half of the total number of people attended to during the previous year. Furthermore, 20% of the people attended to had never been to municipal social services before, or had not required assistance in over a year, which makes the social crisis that accompanied the health crisis even more evident.

Meanwhile, in 2020, in order to respond to the increase in needs, Barcelona City Council's Social Services distributed a total of €46.5 million in financial aid for people affected by the impact of Covid-19, most of which was allocated to food and housing, both to maintaining housing (help to pay the rent) and to meet the costs of temporary emergency accommodation.

On detecting an increase in food needs, the meals-delivery service was also expanded from the start of the pandemic; this meant over 80% more meals delivered in comparison to pre-pandemic levels, either served at home, in social soup kitchens, facilities for homeless people or picnics. The Home Assistance Service ensured 100% of its services continued running for people in a vulnerable situation, including positive Covid-19 cases.

It should also be noted that the pandemic accelerated the creation of temporary-accommodation facilities for people living on the street or who had lost their home. Various operations were launched during the first four weeks after the state of alert was declared: a centre with 58 places for responding to meteorological emergencies, a women's emergency accommodation centre with 59 places, a centre with 30 places in individual rooms for homeless people with mild Covid-19 symptoms, two centres with a maximum capacity of 225 places in Fira de Barcelona pavilions, a centre with 75 lockdown places for homeless people addicted to alcohol or drugs, and a shelter for 42 young homeless people.

However, it should be noted that the response to the pandemic's challenges came from the city as a whole. From the very beginning, solidarity initiatives sprang up at a community level, mutual support networks in the districts and neighbourhoods, in which the prior existence of social movements, organisations, local-resident associations and volunteers played a key role. They organised to respond to everyday needs at a local level and made it possible to channel resources and the humanitarian work of people who wished to show solidarity by helping to overcome the crisis. The City Council provided support to the city's social and community network, with financial aid as well as making municipal facilities and networks available, given their contribution to keeping extraordinary operations running.

The crisis caused by Covid-19 also led to the emergence of global risks, complex crises due to their unpredictability, with causes and consequences at a global level that had a prolonged impact over time, and which also required agile and flexible emergency management, and a more continuous recovery process.

These challenges not only require dynamic, well-connected multi-level governance, but also a local aspect: the response cannot be limited to the activation of emergency services; it is necessary to combine them with transformative initiatives.

The consequences of Covid-19 also led to the opening of a window of opportunity, generating and accelerating the municipal government's processes of innovation and their policies, reinforcing the City Council's agility and response capacity, experimentation with new solutions and their scalability, and promoting collaboration with various city stakeholders in order to overcome common challenges.

In this issue, the *Barcelona Societat* magazine provides a multifaceted view of the changes that the Covid-19 pandemic caused in the city. With a list of authors from various disciplines and affiliations, we open a space for reflection on the changes and challenges resulting from an unprecedented crisis, providing continuity to N°. 26, produced in April 2020, during the lockdown.

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Foreword

Bru Laín and Albert Sales

This time a little over two and a half years ago, the central Spanish government was declaring a state of alert and a total lockdown for the whole population. We spent almost three months cooped up at home, before experiencing considerable restrictions on mobility, capacity in public places, and interpersonal contact. One of the most significant things the pandemic has taught us is to calculate, and not just in terms of time ('years' of pandemic, 'months' of lockdown, 'days' of quarantine), which is always a relative, experience-based dimension, but also in the categorical magnitude of absolute quantities: 13 million cases, almost 130,000 deaths, 4 million people unemployed, and so on. The fact that this is one of the main lessons we have learnt from the pandemic is an indication of its impact on the macroeconomic, labour, social, psychological, cultural, and of course, personal spheres.

On cities and the socio-economic and socio-political ecosystems they shape, the pandemic has had enormous repercussions, though they are hard to quantify in precise terms. Is there such a thing as a **post-pandemic Barcelona**? Cities and urban environments have been at the epicentre of tension, problems, and disruption caused by Covid-19, and they are the spaces where these issues have been the most visible. But they have also become forced laboratories for innovation, for strengthening and creating new policies and citizens' initiatives, which have had to be implemented quickly to mitigate the most immediate consequences of the pandemic and the lockdown.

For that reason, issue 29 of *Barcelona Societat. A journal on social knowledge and analysis* aims to look back and analyse what has happened in the last two and a half years, who the protagonists of this period have been, what tasks they have faced, and how they have approached them. First, we look at how municipal social services – undoubtedly one of the key players in this pandemic – were impacted and their response. Specifically, the first article in this issue offers a retrospective on how the city's most vulnerable groups were assisted and asks what municipal social services have learnt from the pandemic. The article argues that these lessons must prepare us and bolster our resilience for future crises.

In a similar vein, the second article in this issue of *Barcelona Societat* deals with the impacts of the pandemic on health in the city and how the Administration has responded. According to the text, the pandemic has highlighted the need to tackle health from an intersectoral perspective that, beyond mortality figures, also considers social inequalities and the various impacts on the economy, mental health, and access to healthcare, among other areas. A proper assessment of how this comprehensive approach to health has been deployed will help us to be better prepared for potential future emergencies.

Though health is the sphere on which the pandemic has had the clearest impact, other sectors have been turned upside down, too: take the labour market for people with disabilities, for example.

Predictably, the pandemic has brought about an unprecedented jump in unemployment among this group, a general fall in numbers being hired, and important changes to the proportion of workers with a contract, in both the protected and the ordinary labour markets. The third article in this issue describes these changes and explains how the support network for people with disabilities in Barcelona has intervened to counteract these negative effects and offer alternatives to employment through the ordinary labour market. The article ends by recommending a consolidation of the measures developed during the pandemic so that the city can offer employment alternatives to people with disabilities.

In the fourth article, the spotlight is shone on another of the groups most affected by the pandemic: children and teenagers. By analysing the most noteworthy aspects of the report 'Key data on childhood and adolescence in Barcelona', such as the demographic and educational situation, uses of time, health, poverty, protection, and violence, the article seeks to answer a question that is key for the present and future of urban society: are the changes to children's and teenagers' lives temporary and a mere product of the exceptional context created by the pandemic? Or should we see them as changes that are becoming consolidated that will characterise or structure future generations?

Other aspects of the impact of Covid-19 are not as measurable or quantifiable. The pandemic has also had a serious influence on relationships and communities, especially in terms of cultural management, promotion, and consumption. With this in mind, the fifth article examines the participatory nature of community cultural management spaces and their key role as frameworks for promoting a kind of governance of local ecosystems that favours economic democratisation, community resilience, and ecosocial education. Based on contributions from various debate groups, the article describes the impacts of Covid-19 on this community ecosystem, from the most immediate effects – like spaces closing and cultural projects being put on hold – to more long-term consequences on self-organisation and governance dynamics in these spaces, like the proposals linked to the Network of Community Spaces (XEC, by its initials in Catalan).

Our sixth article investigates one of the other dimensions most affected by the pandemic: mobility, travel, residential ties, and housing. Is it true, like many say, that part of the urban population chose to move to towns and villages outside the big cities or to second homes? The article analyses these mobility patterns, studying cities like Madrid, São Paulo, Mexico City, Buenos Aires, and Barcelona, and reveals the importance of certain factors, like collective action and community initiatives to ensure well-being and provide mutual support, in these residential relocation processes. In particular, the article asks to what extent the pandemic alone can explain changes in residential and urban mobility trends, without other processes that were developing long before Covid-19 (financialisation, gentrification) being taken into account.

Finally, in the seventh article, the author explores the different theoretical, regulatory, and practical implications of the discrimination experienced by various groups in the urban space and the relationship between the right to non-discrimination and local policies. The focus is on analysing the roles played by municipal governments and citizens themselves in the quest to achieve truly inclusive urban spaces. Discrimination, the article explains, is a multifaceted concept that manifests itself in multiple ways in areas like gender, sexual orientation, ethnic origin, religion, migration status, socio-economic situation, age, and state of health. It is a practice led by various agents and institutions and is present in many spaces, though it can also take on a systemic or structural form. The article scrutinises various standpoints and occurrences relating to the right to the city and the principle of non-discrimination included in regulations and international case law and evaluates how these concepts can be applied on a municipal level through local governments.

To achieve this goal, the text looks at some examples of municipal initiatives and provides recommendations based on accumulated experience in local spheres and spaces.

It is impossible to provide an exhaustive analysis of all the repercussions of Covid-19 on the city through seven articles. Nonetheless, these contributions do offer useful data and reflections on some of the spaces, groups, areas, and policies that have been most affected. Accurately predicting the long-term consequences of the pandemic on the world and the city is a difficult task. The supposedly temporary impacts on labour markets and the economy, cultural production and consumption, relationships with and approaches to gender, social policies, and the role of municipal governments, to cite just a few examples, have now become structural and even permanent in many instances. The Covid-19 virus may have been fleeting, but its consequences are here to stay. The articles that make up issue 29 of *Barcelona Societat* represent an invaluable tool both for understanding this fallout and for preparing for similar crises that cities might face in the future.

Take Stand



December 2022

Key words: social services, emergencies,
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The Covid-19 social crisis in the city of Barcelona, responses and lessons learned after the pandemic

Laia Claverol Torres^a

The state of alarm due to Covid-19 was declared in March 2020. How did Barcelona City Council's municipal social services approach the situation? What were the responses from the perspective of the most vulnerable groups (families, homeless people and the elderly)? What lessons have we learned about managing future potential crises? This article explores the response of Barcelona City Council and, more specifically, of the Municipal Institute of Social Services to the social needs arising from the Covid-19 crisis. Needs as diverse as covering the food requirements of thousands of people who had been left with no income from one day to the next, providing a roof for people living on the streets who could not confine themselves, and the care of dependant people living alone in homes across the city; and a response to the immediate effects of a social crisis linked to the Covid-19 health crisis, which struck the city's most vulnerable groups the hardest. Furthermore, we will outline the lessons learned and the resources that have remained in the city on a stable basis and that must enable us to be more prepared and, above all, more resilient, vis-à-vis future crises.

Introduction

The FOESSA¹ report was published a few days ago, confirming some truly alarming post-COVID figures: almost 30% of the Catalan population lives in a situation of social exclusion. Among the main factors highlighted in the report, this inequality is illustrated from a woman's point of view, given that the social exclusion of households headed by women rose from 18% in 2018 to 26% in 2021 (while over the same period those headed by men rose from 15% to 18%).

In parallel, in February, Barcelona City Council's Commissioner for Social Action, Sònia Fuertes, presented the Social Services Balance Sheet 2021, highlighting a 22% increase in the number of people assisted compared to 2020, and showing that the total number of people receiving support stood at more than 97,000. Of these, 63% were women and 24% were being assisted to for the first time or had not required support within the previous year.

This is the post-pandemic reality we are facing in the city. To this effect, we analyse what responses and improvements have been incorporated since the pandemic peaked in March 2020 to the present day to be able to respond at close hand to the needs of the population of the city of Barcelona.

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1. <https://www.foessa.es/blog/foessa-muestra-un-deterioro-sin-precedentes-de-la-exclusion-social-en-cataluna-por-la-crisis-del-covid-19/>

The response is tackled from four perspectives which, without being exhaustive or the only ones we have dealt with, help us to approach the complexity of the event in relation to the operational difficulties and the impact the pandemic has had on some specific groups in the city. To this end, this article first outlines the basic social care services' reaction to the pandemic, focusing on how the population is guaranteed access to them.

The second section analyses the impact of the pandemic on household economies and their most basic needs, focusing particularly on food coverage. If we look at the FOESSA report, we can see that the lockdown that began in March 2020 was a turning point that highlighted the precariousness and fragility of the city's household economies and has led to the current figures of social exclusion of almost 30% of the population.

The third section of this article explains the immense response put in place by the city to care for homeless people and the post-pandemic lessons learned, which have left us with more and better residential resources, despite the structural problems that affect this group (lack of housing, lack of economic resources and, to an increasing extent, lack of residence and work permits) remaining unresolved.

Last, the fourth block reviews the specific response to public policies aimed at the elderly, ranging from preventive actions such as tele-assistance to residential care homes, the areas most affected by the pandemic. An additional chapter is rightly dedicated to reflections on such invisible groups as the women victims of gender violence who lived alongside their aggressors during the lockdown; the children and adolescents completely forgotten in the lockdown protocols and who now need specific responses to deal with the emotional toll; the people with disabilities who suffered as much if not more than the elderly from the residential care and home lockdown protocols; and the many other groups to whom we have devoted effort, time and resources during the pandemic and to whom we provide daily care from the various services of the Area for Social Rights. Let this snapshot, then, serve to recognise the work of all the people who were managing the municipal social services during the months of pandemic.

1. Social Services Centres. A true citizen response network

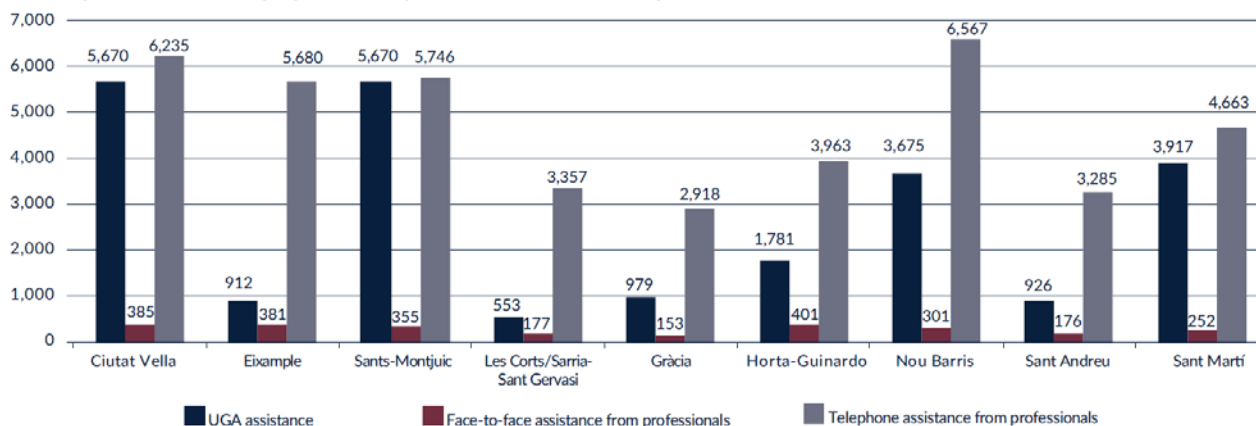
On Saturday 14 March, the Government of Spain declared a state of alarm due to Covid-19. I particularly and intensely remember the days immediately prior to the pandemic, but I would never have imagined the possibility of a state of alarm. This situation, which was completely unprecedented, was to be a temporary scenario of a fortnight (the first state of alarm was to be in force for just two weeks!), although it was already obvious that it was going to last longer. In Barcelona City Council, the immediate decision following the start of the state of alarm was the declaration by mayoral decree of basic services, some of which were already established by the state (for the first time, social services appeared as basic services) and others the result of municipal decision, since they were considered necessary for the functioning of the city's services. All the services provided by the Municipal Institute of Social Services were declared basic services and their employees basic service workers, making it necessary to prepare the response and organisation of the services vis-à-vis this new reality.

Decisions had to be taken with urgency (in less than 48 hours), so at the close of the week ending on Friday 13 March we had 39 social services centres (hereafter, CSS) in operation, and by Monday 16 March ten centres remained operational, but with 100% of the staff active. The aims of the reorganisation were threefold: 1) ensure care for the city's entire population; 2) protect the professional teams; and 3) ensure accessibility to services via remote means.

This new organisational structure made it possible to arrange weekly shifts on-site and double shifts off-site, thus guaranteeing the two weeks' confinement needed in the event of contagion of staff or teams. To this effect, care was able to be provided to the population from the very first Monday of the pandemic. While other services were shut down, the social services in the city of Barcelona remained on the front line. Managing human resources, timetabling and incident management was an immense task. To cope with it, we introduced what has surely been the most groundbreaking addition to social care: remote care.

Telephone care, in the first instance, and thereafter online care, have consequently become essential in ensuring contact with users' families, attending to new users approaching the social services for the first time, and enabling follow up while avoiding unnecessary journeys and the risk of our professionals being infected. The telephone played a key role in this process. Meeting the need to adapt computer systems, increase the number of social service telephone lines and operators and adapt our centres was at times a hugely complex task, but right from the start these difficulties were dwarfed by our sense of responsibility and public service. And it was made possible thanks to the response of all the city council's services involved (IT, citizen services, facilities, logistics and general services and economic services).

Graph 1. Number of total people assisted by the Social Services Centres by district. Barcelona, 2020



The Social Services balance for 2020 presented the following data, which accurately show what we explained above:

"During the year 2020, Barcelona City Social Services provided assistance to a total of 88,375 people, an increase of 11% compared to the 79,575 people the previous year. Of these, 32% of the people who were assisted from March onwards, when the pandemic began, had never been to the municipal social services before or had not needed to for more than a year. This figure includes different types of assistance, which required major restructuring following the emergence of Covid-19 and the associated home lockdown. More specifically, and to highlight the need for the social services to adapt, the figures show that between January and April a total of 19,161 face-to-face and home visits were made, whereas over the rest of the year there were 28,373 face-to-face visits, 201,957 telephone visits and 1,969 home visits".

This immense task of accompanying the most vulnerable among the population at a time of such uncertainty and need has been recognised with the medal of honour of the city in 2021 in recognition of the work carried out by the social services during the Covid-19 pandemic.

Today, in March 2022, telephone and online monitoring has been incorporated into the CSS as a form of provision of services and is combined with face-to-face visits. Even group assistance is provided by means of video-call systems. Notably, the pandemic has lasted two years and the criteria on maximum occupancy, travel, on-site and off-site work, etc., have been changing on an ongoing basis. To this effect, the incorporation of means that do not require on-site attendance has introduced a flexibility in assisting people that would have been impossible prior to the pandemic.

One of the latest novelties is the Trinitat Vella Community Life Centre, inaugurated a few days ago. The Social Innovation Department of the Area for Social Rights will also incorporate an OVAC (Virtual Social Services Office) in this centre via the creation of an assisted space for remote connection with social services professional, which will mean that users do not need to travel from La Trinitat to the Social Services Centre and, at the same time, will also improve their digital learning.

2. The response to the most basic needs, the right to food in a pandemic context

Linked to the previous section, the vast majority of the assistance provided at the CSS during the pandemic and likewise in the post-pandemic period is related to the coverage of basic needs. When we talk about the coverage of basic needs in social services, we are primarily referring to the coverage of expenses related to food, hygiene, clothing, housing, pharmaceuticals, etc., which with the pandemic have become centralised, and especially food.

On Monday 16 March 2020, as has already been explained, ten CSS opened in the city of Barcelona. On the Monday and the Tuesday of that week, we visited most of the open CSS to check the needs of our professionals and, above all, to find out what citizens were telling them. The centres were actually very quiet in terms of the volume of assistance being sought. It was the calm before the storm. I clearly remember what the director said to me: "There is enough rice for two weeks in families' pantries", and that in a fortnight's time the situation would change radically. And she was not wrong. In the first few days, assistance and consultations were very much linked to issues of dependency and housing moratoriums, and some people asked how social monitoring would be carried out. Meanwhile, the contagion figures were increasing, and the total lockdown had left hundreds of people unemployed. The entire informal economy had suddenly collapsed: 'llauners' (unlicensed canned-drink sellers), kitchen helpers, informal care workers, etc., were left with no income and, as we had foreseen, in two weeks the rice ran out and the so-called "hunger queues" began.

In anticipation of this situation, we worked to reorganise the entire system of economic aid, prioritising the *Barcelona Solidarity* card, which allowed us to pre-subsidise food aid for families who were already receiving assistance from the social services. However, this response was not enough vis-à-vis the avalanche of new requests, especially from families and people who had never been to social services or whose relationship with their centre has ceased more than a year beforehand. This increase meant that in 2020, more than 28,000 financial subsidies for food would be granted, compared to 7,000 in 2019.

The second line of work involved the soup kitchens. In the first week of the declaration of the state of alarm, a two-pronged response was coordinated with the organisations managing the soup kitchens: first, their format was changed from on-site to packed lunch (guaranteeing the quality of the food) and their production capacity was increased as far as was possible. The complexity of dispensing the food and the referral of users are other aspects that need to be highlighted. Priority was given to ensuring that families had a cash card to be able to go shopping and cook at home, while individuals (in most cases, men living in shared flats) were given priority attention via the soup kitchens. At that moment of the pandemic, the shared use of kitchens was forbidden, and we were receiving requests from both social organisations and users to be able to take ready-cooked meals away to avoid the need for shared kitchens. The response capacity in figures was significant: the eighteen social soup kitchens went from distributing 479,000 meals in 2019 to more than 557,000 in 2020 (almost 80,000 more between March and December).

The third line of work was home delivered meals and accompanied meals. Accompanied meals are those prescribed for elderly people who live alone, making mealtimes a space for socialising while also guaranteeing that they are eating an adequate diet. Accompanied meals were suspended from the outset, because the elderly population was the first target of Covid-19, although we realised that the social function they fulfilled could not be forfeited. To this effect, and since the people receiving this service are independent elderly people, we turned the meals into a packed lunch format, with the elderly people collecting them themselves, which also gave them contact with the social educator at their soup kitchen. This functionality allowed us to monitor and detect the needs of this population and, in cases of isolation, the home delivered meals meant that we were able to ensure that the elderly person was in good condition.

In fact, the fourth and most important line would be these home delivered meals. This service, also provided by the CSS on an occasional basis in cases of dependency and vulnerability at home, became one of the main systems for feeding vulnerable households in the city.

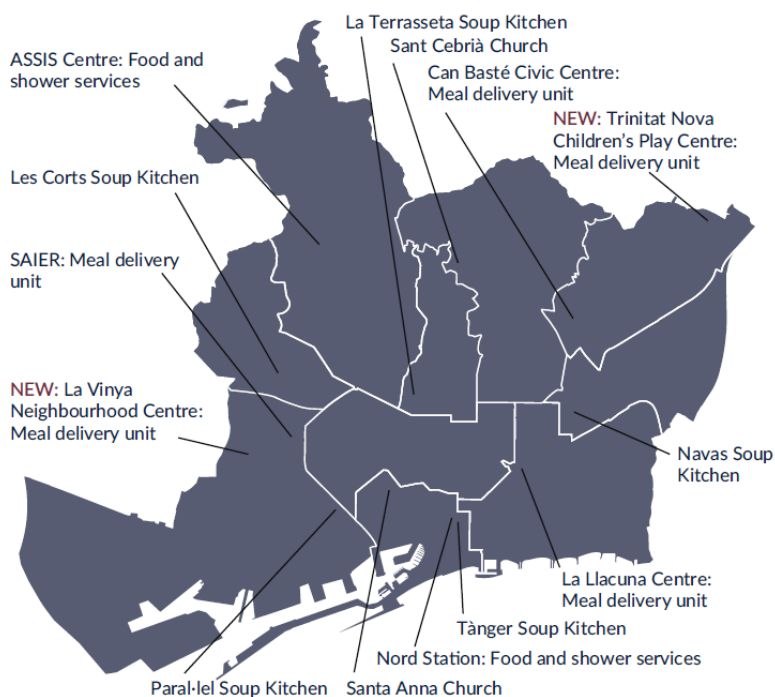
The reality is that the compulsory home isolation due to Covid-19 increased the need to provide this resource to ensure the food supply of hundreds of people in the city. We went from assisting 1,700 people in 2019 to more than 3,800 in 2020, delivering over a million home meals in the city.

Nonetheless, the maximum capacity of all the municipal food services was not enough to respond to the drop in household income, the difficulty of accessing the kitchens in shared flats, and the difficulty in receiving money through the furlough scheme, etc., and so we had to resort to providing assistance by delivering meals directly. There was intense debate as a management team on how to respond to this overwhelming need and, once we had assessed the forces we had at our disposal (with the expansion of the capacities of all the municipal food service contracts), we concluded that we needed a non-technical but very pragmatic response.

During the first weeks of March, the precarious situation of the homes was compounded by the drop in volunteering among many of the city's social organisations that also work for the right to food. Most of the volunteers are older people, who at the time were worried about the impact that Covid-19 could have. Consequently, the Food Bank and some of the city's social organisations suggested the possibility of setting up a "humanitarian crisis" food response with direct food distribution points. We went from providing around 3,500 direct daily meals to more than 11,500. This growth was made possible thanks to the Chef José Andrés's *World Central Kitchen* initiative, and the Food Bank, which produced more than 11,500 meals a day in the kitchens at the Fòrum, distributed throughout the city in coordination with social organisations and voluntary workers from the City Council. The team led by José Andrés provided the food response in the Hurricane Katrina crisis and has a food production methodology that guarantees that in one meal you can ingest all the calories you need to get through the day. Overnight, the kitchens at the Fòrum, which are used to providing food for large financial events, became the centre for guaranteeing food for vulnerable families.

This pandemic response to the food crisis lasted until July, when certain normality began to be restored following the reopening and recovery of economic activity. With these systems for feeding the city, more than 420,000 meals were distributed between April and October, after which the direct meals system was definitively phased out.

Figure 1. Distribution points of meals and direct access soup kitchens during the Covid-19 crisis



The most important lesson we learned from this crisis was the need for both the social organisations and the City Council to strengthen their systems should the city need to respond in a similar way again at some point in the future. From this reflection and the joint work with Caritas, the Red Cross, the Food Bank and our technical teams, Projecte Alimenta [the Feed the People project] was born. This project promotes the right to food and at the same time empowers people with a vision of community inclusion. Two community kitchens have already been set up, which work on the autonomy of people to prepare their own meals, while also empowering them and linking them to the community. Projecte Alimenta aims to promote a new model of social care in the city which, while guaranteeing access to food at all times, also promotes actions to destigmatise situations of economic or housing poverty (such as, for example, renting a room without the right to a kitchen) and, through both social entities and the business network, fights against food wastage and promotes local consumption. The project aims to replace the traditional welfare approach for one that encourages personal autonomy and self-organisation in the acquisition of food (such as, for example, collective purchasing), and in the use of the Food Spaces for cooking, eating, bettering and educating oneself, socialising and establishing social links, and finding one's way in the world of work.

We have therefore made the right to food the starting point and anchor for improving people's integration, having learned that everything we invest in people's empowerment in the area of food will help us to be better positioned in times of crisis.

3. The homeless, from invisible to the only inhabitants of public spaces

The city of Barcelona has the most extensive care network for homeless people in Catalonia, with more than 40 organisations which, in cooperation with the City Council, respond to the needs of this group. In 2018, the network had 2,130 residential places for the homeless. The “big city effect” means Barcelona is not immune to urban phenomena common to large European capitals such as Paris, London, Rome, etc., and its favourable climate, combined with very difficult access to housing, means that the phenomenon of homelessness is present in the city.

The declaration of the state of alarm establishes that one of the obligations of the population is home confinement. There has been great debate about the legal limits of this ban on people's right to freedom of movement, but little has been said about how people without a home can comply with it and, therefore, how all those who were on the streets or in the city's suburbs could shelter and protect themselves from Covid-19. The homeless person count for 2020 was scheduled for the month of May, but based on the data for 2019, we knew that around 900 people were living on the streets at the time of the outbreak of the pandemic².

The proposed action in March 2020 in response to this situation had two objectives: first, to increase the number of places to guarantee support and the right to confinement for people who had been sleeping rough; and second, to adapt the municipal centres to cope with the impact of Covid-19 on the users of the city's homelessness facilities. Furthermore, it was decided that the situation would be tackled by guaranteeing the specific needs of each group of homeless people for their confinement.

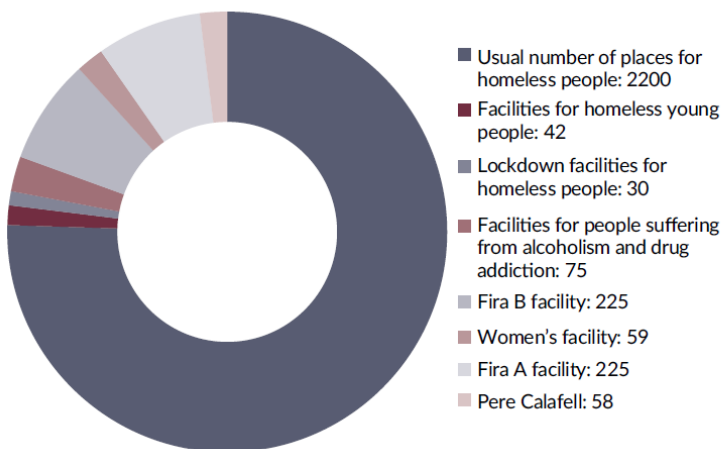
On this basis, a total of 700 new places were opened in the city. In the midst of the confinement, with no resources for the most vulnerable people, we set up various facilities where this group could live temporarily for the duration of the state of alarm. The organisation of these new residential places and their management was led by the social emergency teams, especially CUESB (Barcelona Emergency and Social Emergency Centre), and the public space teams trained to respond with a more civil defence-oriented approach.

The different emergency accommodation facilities were:

2. Monthly reports by the Social Support Service for Homelessness in Public Spaces (SASSEP).

- The Pere Calafell facility, which was open between 20 March and 27 May, managed by the Red Cross and providing 60 places for men. The men staying there when it closed were transferred to the Barcelona Trade Fair halls, which at that time had available places.
- The Women's Support Facility (EAD), which offered 62 places only for women, following the municipal strategy for the prevention of female homelessness and the introduction of the gender perspective in the municipal programme for the care of homeless people, and was managed by Progress.
- The Barcelona Montjuïc Fair, opened on 25 March with a total of 450 places (225 each for men and women) and managed by the Red Cross and the Health and Community Foundation. Once the state of alarm was over, at the end of June the two halls of the Barcelona Trade Fair began to offer night shelter, lunch and snacks, but due to the upsurge of new outbreaks during the month of July and the new recommendations and restrictions issued by the Government of Catalonia this 24-hour service was withdrawn. The de-escalation of this facility took place with the declaration of the state of alarm in November 2020, and its users were transferred to hostels and similar lodgings around the city.
- The Pere Tarrés facility, attached to the Barcelona Public Health Agency and opened on 3 April, cared for people living on the streets with alcohol or drug addiction problems, and was a facility aimed at reducing harm, managed by the Welfare and Development Association.
- A youth facility, located in a summer camp house in Montgat, opened on 16 April and offering 40 places for young migrants with no family aged between 18 and 23 years, and was managed by the Superacció association.

Graph 2. Distribution of residential and temporary accommodation places for homeless people. Barcelona. May 2020



As the above list shows, a segmented response was made according to the needs of the groups, which enabled the many and often invisible realities existing within homelessness, including women, young people and people with addictions, to be dealt with. During 2021, analysis and study of the profile of the people who passed through the facilities led us to conclude that 40% of the people housed were in a situation of bad or substandard housing prior to Covid-19, but not in a situation of homelessness, and that 32% had been forced to sleep on the streets as a result of the health crisis. Precarious work is also an explanatory factor of the profile of the people assisted, with almost half of all those who passed through the facilities (some 1,324) either in an irregular situation or with a residence permit, but with no work permit. This profile is linked to the introduction of this article: the pandemic has shown how being in an irregular legal situation is a key factor that explains the vulnerability of thousands of families and individuals in the city.

Being able to carry out a confinement in proper conditions to control the transmission of the virus, guaranteeing health and adequate hygiene, produced very good results in terms of the impact that Covid-19 had on these facilities. Of the more than 1,300 people who were registered in these emergency units, a total of 31 had positive PCR tests, 2.3% of the total. From the very first moment, additional places were created on top of the existing ones to guarantee isolation, especially for the city's residential care facilities, which did not have their own areas or rooms to accommodate this need. Thus, in March, a 30-place temporary isolation centre managed by Sant Joan de Déu Social Services was set up in the Hort de la Vila Residential Inclusion Centre. And from May onwards, in coordination with the Barcelona Health Consortium, a health hotel was set up in the Sagrada Família neighbourhood to allow people who were positive but with a favourable prognosis to be isolated and monitored by a doctor. In total, 78 people from both emergency resources and the city's residential care homes were assisted there.

At the same time, the municipal team from the Care for the Homeless Programme designed an initiative in residential care centres, coordinated with the Public Health Agency, which made it necessary to reorganise overnight stays to guarantee the two-metre distance.

Hygiene and food services were also reorganised to avoid increased flows between the resident population and the street population, and contingency plans were drawn up for the running of the facilities. The main and most radical change is that they went from being overnight shelters to 24-hour residential care facilities. The result of this complex task was that during the crisis, 922 PCR tests were carried out on users and there were 135 positive results among residents. The situation of the professionals was very similar to that of the nursing home professionals. Two weeks before the declaration of the state of alarm and in anticipation of the fact that residential care homes could be heavily impacted by Covid-19, we brought together all the companies and organisations providing services in residential facilities to prepare contingency plans and take preventive measures to guarantee the provision of services. This advanced planning task, carried out jointly by the City Council, the institutions and companies, ensured that at no time did the impact of Covid-19 force any of the city's residential care centres to be closed. Of the 544 PCR tests administered among the professionals in these residential care facilities only 29 tested positive, so it could also be said that there was good control of the pandemic in the residential care centres, despite the fact that their physical organisation and operation were ill-prepared to take on the management of Covid-19.

The block imposed by the residential care centres on access to new people was resolved by opening emergency places. Meanwhile, some resources such as food were covered by new food resources, including those explained in the previous section, but there was still the need to guarantee hygiene and clean clothes for all the people who remained on the streets. Together with the city's care team for homeless people, direct access points for hygiene (shower facilities) and clean clothes were set up, and a symptomatology control was put in place by taking everyone's temperature and asking control questions. The first points were opened in March/April, with 120 daily visits, one managed by Assis in its own residential care area, and a second one at a sports centre at Nord Station converted into a hygiene and food point, managed by the Training and Work Foundation. Last, in May, a third point was opened at the Gimnàs Sant Pau in Ciutat Vella, providing 90 daily meals and also serving as a packed lunch area for homeless people.

I think it is safe to say that the response to the needs of homeless people in the city of Barcelona was, without doubt, the most comprehensive in the whole of Spain, not only because of the speed of the response, but also because of the unique way in which it was dealt with. The chance to address the problems of homeless people in a segmented way has allowed municipal teams to be in a position to support and propose the continuity of many of these facilities.

For those of us who were at the forefront of the management of this crisis, one of our greatest achievements is the possibility of having stabilised and definitively sustained a large number of the places created during the pandemic, meaning that this figure has risen from 2,130 places prior to the pandemic to the approximately 3,000 that we now have in the city.

This consolidation of new places has made a particular difference to women, who had no reference spaces within the city's homeless resources network, and who have emerged from the pandemic with two Residential Inclusion Centres (CRI), La Llabor and La Violeta, and the reconversion of one of Sarrià's Primary Homeless Shelters (CPA) into facilities exclusively for women. La Llabor opened in October 2020, with capacity for 40 women and managed by Sant Joan de Déu Social Services with the collaboration of the Ared Foundation and funding from the City Council. La Violeta opened in April 2021, with a capacity for another 26 women and managed by the Assís Shelter Centre, with shared funding from the City Council and the Ministry of Labour, Social Affairs and Families of the Government of Catalonia. The consolidation of these facilities confirms that the City Council's Government Measure for Women's Homelessness is the benchmark from which to project innovation and commitment projects with this group.

There is also the Llar d'Oportunitats (Home of Opportunities), a facility for young people living on the streets as a transition from the Montgat summer camp house, where the Covid-19 confinement was organised. And last, the centre for the care of people with addictions, which opened its 75 places at the end of March 2020 and is dedicated to the care of homeless people with alcohol and toxic substance abuse problems. The centre has become a benchmark in Catalonia for the rehabilitation of this group of people, a place where they can recover and treat their addictions with a focus on individual recovery.

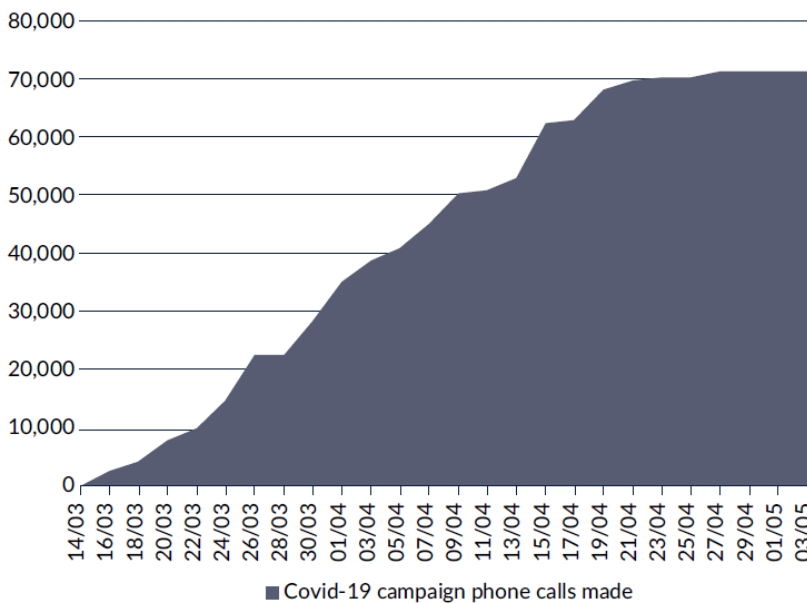
4. Vulnerable elderly people, the target of Covid-19

Barcelona City Council owns four municipal residential care homes and manages the Home Care Service, which serves 24,000 city residents with varying degrees of dependency. It also manages the Teleassistance service, which provides a service to more than 100,000 elderly people in the city. Based on these data, it is already clear that the City Council has played a major role in providing assistance to the elderly during the management of Covid-19.

Starting with the first level preventive service in the city of Barcelona, Teleassistance has become a key element in preventive and informative actions for the elderly population who live alone or who have become housebound. Between 14 and 20 March, the 061 telephone line collapsed due to the flood of calls from a large number of people who, with symptoms, were trying to get information and medical advice. During the first crisis committee organised by the Government of Catalonia, both the Department of Health and Civil Defence asked the City Council about the possibility of creating a system to avoid the collapse of the 061 emergency telephone number, and this is where we proposed that Teleassistance could play a fundamental role. Consequently, in March 2020, the Teleassistance Service operators received specific training from the Public Health Agency and the SEM to identify, by means of the calls it received or could make, whether there was a situation of risk at the caller's home.

Using the Teleassistance operators, more than 100,000 users in 74,000 homes were called and asked not to use 061 to make enquiries or obtain information on how to manage Covid-19 at home. At the same time, the operators were able to carry out a screening questionnaire of the symptoms of the elderly population at home and, where any symptomatology was detected, they could directly activate 061. In a second phase, more than 350 operators were added to the service to be able to monitor people confined to their homes and thereby be able to activate additional resources: cleaners, rubbish collection, extraordinary cleaning, etc. In each of the waves of Covid-19, or when important information such as vaccination or preventive measures at home during Christmas 2020/21 has been issued, the Teleassistance telephone has been the link between elderly people living alone and the social care systems. It has therefore become a service which, based on its mission of prevention, has assisted elderly people living alone during the most critical moments of the pandemic and, above all, has helped to provide a rapid and guaranteed channel of access for many users who were alone and isolated at home at times of great uncertainty.

Graph 3. Number of calls made during the Teleassistance campaign between 14 March and 3 May 2020. Barcelona



The largest service managed by the City Council for elderly dependants is the Home Care Service. It has been the one that has suffered the most and has had to most adapt to the changes and impacts that Covid-19 has had on the city's homes. The first organisational decision we took in March 2020 had a twofold focus: first, to guarantee 100% of the service in homes where people lived alone; and second, to guarantee the overall sustainability of the service by preserving and protecting the teams from contagion. The service providers, together with the City Council, set up a crisis committee that met on a daily basis to review the data on the number of professionals infected, the effects on the service and the number of people leaving and joining it, to monitor the overall situation in the city. Of all the services I will refer to in this article, this is without doubt the one that has required the most coordination, the most complexity and the most flexibility. The Home Care Service (SAD) provides care services for dependant people at home (more than 90% of elderly people, but also people with disabilities), including support for food and small purchases, getting in and out of bed, personal hygiene and cleaning, and general cleaning and hygiene around the home.

The first thing we decided was that in all homes where there was a family member who could care for their elderly relatives, a remote follow-up would be proposed, and the service of home-cooked meals would be modified to meals in packed lunch format delivered to the home. The challenge was to ensure that some 2,000 homes in the city where dependant elderly people without a network lived alone could receive the daily care they needed, guaranteeing hygiene and care services, as well as food. The 4,000 professionals of SAD, and the social services began to work with direct and telephone assistance teams to monitor cases and, at the same time, preserve the health status of this group. Two weeks after the start of the state of alarm, and with the widespread situation of Covid-19 infections in all the city's neighbourhoods, we proposed to the companies providing the service that a team should be sent to homes where Covid-19 was suspected, or which were in isolation. In short, in the case of vulnerable people living on their own who had Covid-19 and who the health system had isolated in their homes, the SAD workers had to continue to provide care for them. This team, with specific protocols drawn up by the ASPB in coordination with the service providers, was able to provide the service to the "red" (confirmed cases of Covid-19) and "orange" (suspected cases of Covid-19) homes, while the rest of the teams worked in the green homes.

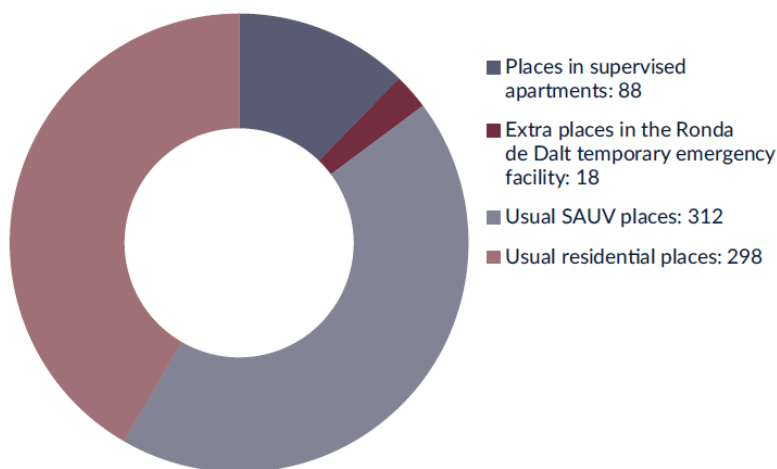
In this article, special recognition must be given to the immense care and support task that these professionals carried out in the most difficult moments of the pandemic in the most vulnerable homes in the city. The healthcare workers have often been explicitly recognised, while these brave women who, with the utmost professionalism, cared for the elderly and frail people who remained in their homes of our great city have not received the same.

I could speak at length about the technical aspects of the Home Care Service, but I will highlight just two elements: the mainstreaming of the work carried out by all the service providers and the extremely high level of commitment to public service with which the municipal and company management teams adapted the service to make what we did possible under such adverse circumstances. The best lesson learned from Covid-19 is that, despite the fragility and dependence of the people in their own homes, the impact of Covid-19 on them was much less than on those in the residential care homes. This lesson learned must lead to the future development of social and health integration strategies in the cities' homes to ensure that elderly and dependant people can stay in theirs for as long as possible. The City Council is currently working on an experiment to incorporate artificial intelligence into the homes of dependant people in the city, in a pilot project that was due to begin just when the pandemic broke out but has been carried out this year with the incorporation of the ARI and ARI II robots into homes to assess how AI can help us to monitor and take care of our elderly people.

The developments that we will be able to promote in the coming years with the NextGenerationEU Funds could be an opportunity to increase resources in the city's neighbourhoods and thus guarantee a higher quality environment in our cities.

Last, the greatest impact on the elderly was to be found in the residential care homes. Despite owning four public residences, Barcelona City Council is a minor actor in relation to the more than 14,000 residential care places in the city, most of which are private. It is in the residential care sphere that Covid-19 has wreaked the most havoc and has had the biggest impact. Although the City Council has no authority or direct management of its residential care homes beyond the paces it provides, we requested the Government of Catalonia to set up a coordinating body for the city's residential care homes, combining the efforts of the two administrations to tackle the problem.

Graph 4. Distribution of Barcelona City Council's residential care places for the elderly. Barcelona. May 2020



Thus, at the end of March, the Barcelona Residential Care Office was set up³. It is a residential care crisis management office made up of the Department of Social Services, the Department of Health, the Barcelona Health Consortium, the Barcelona Social Services Consortium, the Barcelona Public Health Agency, and the City Council. The main objective was for each institution with sectorial responsibilities in residential care management to have a single coordinating body that could take operational decisions.

3. Barcelona City Council has developed specialised technical offices to work with professionals from different fields and institutions with a specific objective, creating the Residential Care Homes Office, the Halls Office, the Quarantine Office, etc., using a model of organisational innovation that was published by Martí-Costa, Barres i Termes (2020).

This office was therefore responsible for the first census of places in the city, coordinating cleaning (carried out by companies, the fire brigade, the UME, etc.) and transfers to hospitals or between residential care homes (with the SEM, the fire brigade, etc.); designing and implementing contingency plans and sectorisation (with the ASPB, the CSB, the fire brigade, etc.); and organising and implementing the plans and programmes as the administration of the Government of Catalonia approved them. This social and health coordination body, which experienced moments of extreme tension, has been maintained beyond the state of alarm and has enabled the provision of an integrated team to continue monitoring the Covid-19 situation during all its waves, to roll out the vaccination and to coordinate all the contingency plans that have been approved.

There are many lessons to be learned from the residential care home crisis, but in my opinion, one of the main improvements that has already been made is the monitoring of residents' health status by Primary Care. The disconnection prior to Covid-19, which in many cases meant a lack of knowledge of residents' health status when the pandemic struck the old people's homes, must not be allowed to happen again. Another lesson is the importance of the role and work of the health and hygiene staff, who are responsible for guaranteeing the hygiene and sanitation protocols in the residential care homes, whether vis-à-vis Covid-19 or any other pandemic, and the importance of the professionalism of the residential care teams. A second reflection is the shortage of staff in the residential care system, with obsolete staffing levels that were set many years ago and which are far from being able to cope with the complexity of the cases that currently exist among the residents of the city's residential care homes. We must therefore reflect on the residential care model, which must surely aim not only to improve the skills acquisition and recognition of care professionals, but also to simultaneously invest in both integrated social and health care and residential care homes, so that people can be guaranteed the care they need and, at the same time, can enjoy staying in what is their own home.

Although the City Council had a small impact on the number of places, how the pandemic was managed in the four municipal residential care homes meant that the professionals of the municipal team for the elderly had to work harder than ever before. We also set up a crisis management team for the residential care area with the four managing bodies to coordinate joint responses for the four residential care homes (and the 284 places) and meet their needs in a cooperative manner. One of the first needs was to be able to have an "isolation residential care home", a place to move the people who had tested positive but could not stay in their own care home, either due to lack of space or because a sectorisation needed to be guaranteed that could only be achieved by moving them. We therefore opened a "temporary residential care home for Covid-19" with eight places on the Ronda de Dalt to facilitate the transfer of residents, which allowed us to guarantee transfers for those who did not require hospitalisation. The monitoring of Covid-19 and the management of the pandemic is still present in the residential care homes, and to this day contingency plans remain activated that require us to modify the regulations for the use of common areas, visits, and the ordinary running of the facilities.

With the aim of recovering and improving the impact that the pandemic has had on isolating our municipal residential care homes, at the end of July 2020 we launched a pilot plan with Apropa Cultura and the Pascual Maragall Foundation to recover and improve the cognitive abilities of the residents. One year on, in July 2021, an assessment was conducted of the programme, which encompasses over 600 actions in four lines of work:

- The Museums visit: The Museu de Ciències Naturals de Barcelona, the Barcelona Centre for Contemporary Culture, the Picasso Museum and the Catalan National Art Museum have organised 300 sessions in four municipalities, presenting objects and exhibits to residents, with the aim of transmitting the sensations and emotions that encourage the cognitive exercise of recognition, memory, record and conversation. Bringing museums closer to the residents, following all the health and safety measures and without leaving the facilities, has had a very positive impact.

- Music therapy: Thanks to the Singular Music & Alzheimer's project, the four municipal residential care homes have held more than 300 music therapy sessions, in small groups of around five people each, respecting the group social bubbles and with voluntary workers. The experience has been very positive not only for the total of 75 residents who have taken part, but also for the music therapists.
- Ageless cycling: Thanks to the work of the project's voluntary workers, and although this activity had already been carried out previously, there have been several rides on adapted bicycles over the last few months, allowing residents to take to the streets. The psychological and social benefits have been evident, with an observed improvement in mood and a reduction in anxiety, among other benefits. So far, around forty people have taken part in each of the four municipal residential care homes.
- Pasqual Maragall Foundation: As many as 133 professionals have received training from the Pasqual Maragall Foundation to learn new concepts in the cognitive, emotional and functional areas. They have been able to develop new activities and methodologies among the residents, such as dancing, plant care, object recognition, socialising and reminiscing.

From the lessons learned in the residential care area, we can make an in-depth reflection on a model that has been declared a failure due to the lack of public control and the difficulty of access, and which, once based on degree of dependency, makes the reality of residential care centres a highly complex one. The model needs to be revised, with a look towards other countries that for some time have been proposing alternatives to the classic residential care model: cohabitation, flats with services, home automation and all the responses that can be given within the framework of active and full involvement in the family homes of elderly people. And, on a final note, we must never again repeat the lack of participation of elderly people themselves in the decisions that affect them. This group has suffered most from the effects of the pandemic and the measures to contain contagion, and at the same time they are the ones who have had the least say in deciding how to respond to their own needs. A future residential care model must also include the empowerment of elderly people, who must be the main actors in the decisions taken concerning the quality of their lives.

5. Conclusions

This article aims to highlight the fragility and difficulties of the social care system, the fourth pillar of the welfare state, which is historically the one where the least investment has been made. While health, education and social security have had specific budgets and political options that have defended them, demanding sufficient economic allocations, the social care system has always been underfunded and undersized.

This fact has become very evident not only in the crisis of the residential care model, but also in the difficulties of families to survive such a huge economic impact as that of Covid-19, which has served to highlight the weaknesses of a precarious guaranteed income system.

Attempts to provide families with more resources via such important steps as the Minimum Basic Income get bogged down in bureaucratic tangles that make it extremely difficult for eligible city residents to access them. The Administration, once again in its typical nineteenth century style, places the process before citizens' rights, generating a series of guarantees designed from within that make little provision for the difficulties faced by those at whom the public policy is aimed. A few days ago, the Table of the Third Sector published the study "The impact of administrative procedures on access to social benefits. A behavioural analysis"⁴, which compared the administrative obstacles of four benefits:

4. https://www.tercersector.cat/sites/default/files/2022-03/t3s_2022-03-17_limpacte_del_tramits_administratiu_en_laccess_a_les_prestacions_socials.pdf

- Minimum Basic Income (Spanish Government)
- Citizen's Guaranteed Income (Catalan Government)
- Benefit for the payment of rent debts (local administrations)
- Emergency social assistance for families with children aged 0-16 years old (Barcelona City Council)

Despite the fact that of the four programmes analysed, the one with the highest score is the one run by Barcelona City Council, the conclusions and, above all, the proposals for improvement include such simple things as, for example, eliminating obscure texts and designs that hinder applicants' right to understand; promoting a strategy to fight against the stigmatisation of people in situations of poverty and exclusion; simplifying the application system for and the processing of benefits and providing different channels for communication and access; avoiding complex and exclusive requirements that are inconsistent with the purpose of the benefits; and enforcing the right not to present documentation that can be obtained by the Administration. Are we capable of doing this? We, the public administration professionals who promote these programmes, are obliged to continuously improve them, to ask ourselves time and again how we can facilitate and improve citizens' access to their rights. Only with an ongoing attitude of improvement and by applying innovation in management can we ensure that public services in the social sphere can be made universal.

The responsibility lies in the exercise of our public powers, in making sure that the economic resources we have, even if they are scarce, maximise the benefit for the people for whom they are intended. Furthermore, and in terms of the capacity to generate spaces for shared governance with the city's social agents, responding through co-creation and co-production is already a reality that we must accept. This pandemic has shown us that working together with the city's entities has enabled us to provide a more streamlined response, so we need to consolidate the spaces with the entities and take advantage of the very rich associative network we have. In this line, the publication of the *DEC Index*⁵ and the *DEC_Local Index* by the State Association of Social Services Directors and Managers serves as an indirect system for evaluating the investment in social services made by Spanish Town Councils. Barcelona is once again recognised as the Spanish capital with the highest level of public investment per capita, and for the first time it is reaping the rewards of its good investment not only in quantitative but also in qualitative terms, and is now recognised as the city with the "best social investment" from among the 37 large Spanish cities analysed.

I cannot finish without calling for a more central role for local administrations in the design and implementation of responses to citizens' social needs. Without proper and competent administrations, it will be difficult to find adequate and well thought out solutions so that city residents' living conditions can be improved. The management of the NextGenerationEU funds, the new framework for the fight against child poverty that the new European Social Fund aims to promote, and the regional and state budgets for dependency and housing must be based on the principle of subsidiarity as one of the keys to improving the indicators of the FOESSA report. Only through a more coordinated and less hierarchical response structure will we be able to overcome the difficulties at a given moment. But in fact, we have already done this, with the offices of the pandemic in the city of Barcelona as proof. Now all that is needed is for social policies to also generate the institutional frameworks to facilitate it. It seems that crises have come to stay: the energy crisis, the inflation and price crisis, the crisis in Ukraine, and so on.

The good management of the pandemic and the lessons learned from Covid-19 must be the basis for new solutions.

5. <https://directoressociales.com/indice-dec/>

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In Depth



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Key words: Covid-19, social factors,
public policies, urban areas

Impact of the coronavirus pandemic on health in Barcelona

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The response to Covid-19 has imposed a huge challenge for public health, the economy and for the citizens' well-being. At the same time, it has brought to light structural problems such as the precariousness of the health system, the limitations in addressing communicable diseases, the situation of nursing homes, social inequalities, limitations in communication to the general population and the erosion of public confidence in public administrations.

This article reviews the action taken by public health in Barcelona with a view to the future and the lessons learned. The pandemic has highlighted the need for intersectional approaches that take into account social inequalities and the impact that goes beyond the incidence and mortality from Covid-19 and affects economy, mental health and access to healthcare, among other areas. The assessment of what has occurred should enable better preparedness for future large-scale emergencies.

Introduction

Up to 28 March 2022, the day on which the epidemiological surveillance system for Covid-19 in Spain switched its focus onto people and areas in vulnerable health situations, almost 500,000 cases of Covid-19 had been diagnosed in Barcelona, with excess mortality of approximately 6,000 people (Agència de Salut Pública de Barcelona, 2022).

The pandemic response has posed an unprecedented challenge, both in scale and depth, to public health, the economy and the wellbeing of citizens. At the same time, it has shone a light on structural problems such as the precariousness of the health system, the situation of nursing homes, social inequalities, limitations in communication with the general population and the erosion of trust in public administrations.

To respond to these challenges, Barcelona City Council deployed unprecedented human, financial and technical resources very quickly. It mobilised practically all its areas (health, social services, education, urban planning, cleaning, security, mobility, etc.) through the creation of multiple working groups, and also made progress in the widespread adoption of new technologies.

a. Agència de Salut Pública de Barcelona (ASPB). Barcelona.

b. CIBER Epidemiología y Salud Pública (CIBERESP), Spain.

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Moreover, following the city's long tradition of public health policies that are highly sensitive to social inequalities, inequalities in terms of Covid-19 infection—which was initially more frequent among the most disadvantaged groups—were quickly detected. These were later replicated in vaccination coverage, which required an equitable approach.

During the pandemic, decisions had to be taken very quickly in a context of uncertainty and lack of knowledge: some of which turned out to be the right decisions, and some turned out to be wrong. It is now necessary to reflect on past experiences in order to improve the response to future large-scale emergencies, like the current one.

This article aims to review the public health measures taken in the city of Barcelona, focusing on what we have learned and how this can help us to shape future responses. First, we will describe the evolution of the Covid-19 pandemic up until April 2022. Then, we will comment on the general population health response and the situation in three areas of particular interest: residential care for the elderly, schools and paid work. This will be followed by a section on vaccination in the city, communication strategies, a reflection on the pandemic as a complex issue that goes beyond Covid-19 infection, and then a series of conclusions.

1. Evolution of the pandemic

The first case of Covid-19 in Barcelona was detected on 25 February 2020. Then, on 11 March, the World Health Organization (WHO) declared Covid-19 to be a pandemic. On 14 March, just three days later, the Spanish government declared a state of alarm and introduced a series of confinement measures that applied to the whole population, with the exception of individuals considered to be key workers.

Between 25 February 2020 and 27 March 2022, 484,409 cases of Covid-19 were diagnosed in the city of Barcelona (29% of the city's population). Overall, the majority of cases occurred among people aged 35-64 years (42%), followed by people aged 15-34 years (31%). The number of cases was always slightly higher in women (53%) than in men. The cumulative incidence was somewhat higher in men aged 0-14, 65-74 and 74 years and older. In terms of socio-economic status, disadvantaged groups were disproportionately affected in all waves but the sixth (both sexes) and third (men). During this period excess mortality of 5,748 deaths was recorded, with these fatalities being primarily concentrated on people aged 75 and over and with a higher rate among men (Agència de Salut Pública de Barcelona, 2022). A more detailed description of the different waves follows below.

Barcelona had undergone six waves of Covid-19 by April 2021, during which time measures such as the total confinement of the population, partial restrictions on mobility, the provision of diagnostic tests and the vaccination strategy of the moment were implemented. This response determined different characteristics in terms of the distribution of cases according to sex, age and neighbourhood in which the citizens lived (see graph 1). A brief description of the different waves follows below.

The first wave (25/02/2020 - 04/07/2020) of Covid-19 was characterised by the confinement of the population, the unavailability of diagnostic tests (which led to an under-reporting of cases) and a high number of cases in nursing homes. It primarily affected older people, among whom the incidence was higher in women. The highest incidence was found in the districts of Sants-Montjuïc, Horta-Guinardó, Sant Andreu, Sant Martí and Nou Barris. During the first wave, 42.6% of the cases (6,834) required hospitalisation. In later waves, the proportion of hospitalised cases did not exceed 5% of the total cases in the wave. This is partly explained by the fact that diagnostic tests were more readily available after the first wave, which meant that they could also be used for mild cases.

During the first wave excess mortality of 3,439 deaths was recorded, making it the wave with the highest number of deaths.

The second wave (01/10/2020 - 06/12/2020) saw a resumption of activity in the workplace and schools. While there was no total confinement of the population, partial restrictions on mobility and a night-time curfew were implemented.

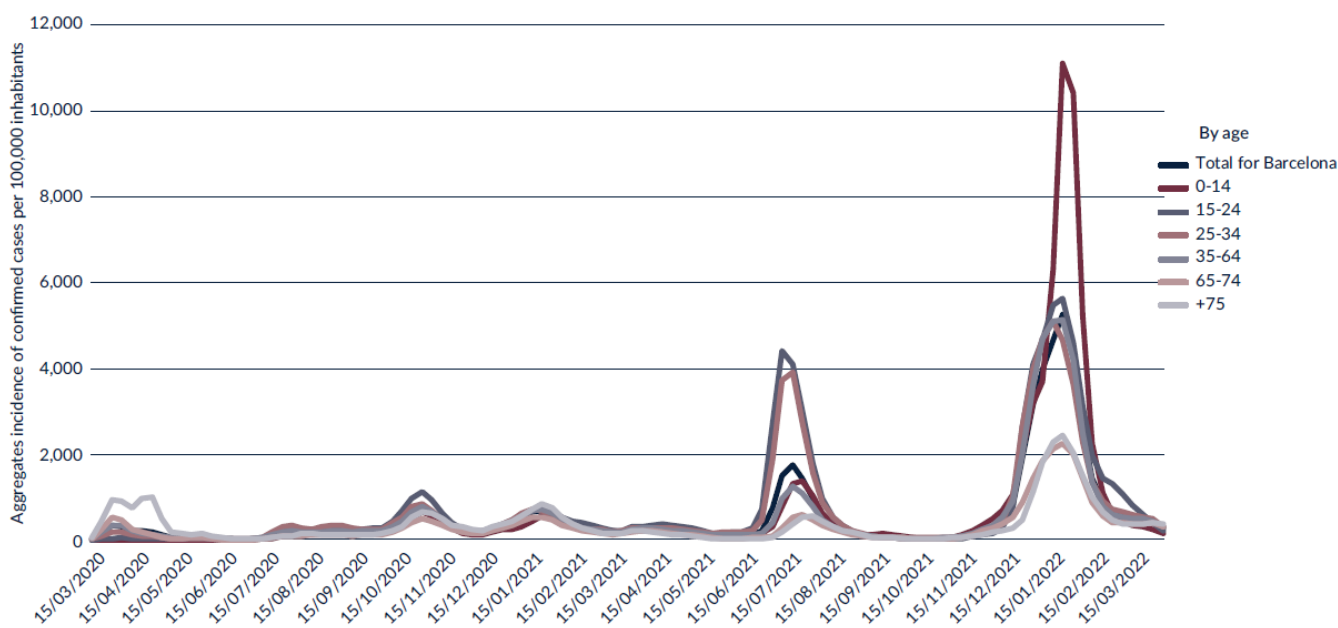
In this wave, the group with the highest incidence was people aged 15-34 years and women aged 65 years and over. The districts with the highest incidence were Sant Martí, Sant Andreu and Nou Barris. On a neighbourhood level, meanwhile, incidence was higher in the most deprived neighbourhoods of the city. In this wave excess mortality of 573 deaths was recorded.

The third wave (07/12/2020 - 14/03/2021) coincided with the beginning of the vaccination roll-out, which began with older people and those with more risk factors. However, it was yet to have a clear impact. The groups with the highest incidence were men aged 75 years and above and women aged 15-34 years. The districts with the highest incidence were Eixample, Sants-Montjuïc, Sarrià-Sant Gervasi, Horta-Guinardó, Nou Barris and Sant Martí. In this wave excess mortality of 499 deaths was recorded.

In the fourth wave (15/03/2021 - 12/06/2021), with no mobility restrictions in place, the impact of the vaccination started to be felt. The highest incidence was found in people aged 15-34 years, with slightly higher incidence in men. The districts with highest incidence were Eixample, Sants-Montjuïc, Sarrià-Sant Gervasi, Nou Barris and Sant Andreu. Excess mortality of 245 deaths was recorded, marking a reduction of 44% compared to the previous wave. The decrease in deaths and incidence in people aged 65 years and older could be due to the vaccine first being rolled out in this age group in late December 2020.

The fifth wave (13/06/2021 - 01/11/2021) saw the highest incidence in people aged 15-34 years, with similar incidence rates being found in men and women. The districts with the highest incidence were Ciutat Vella, Eixample, Sarrià-Sant Gervasi and Nou Barris. In this wave there were 516 more deaths compared to the previous wave, which were concentrated in people aged 75 and over.

Graph 1. Daily evolution of the cumulative number of people with a confirmed diagnosis of Covid-19 per 100,000 inhabitants, by age. Barcelona, 2020-2022



Source: Barcelona Public Health Agency, data from the website #COVID19aldiaBCN (shinyapps.io).

In the sixth wave (02/11/2021 - 27/03/2022), the highest incidence was found in people aged between 15 and 34 years old, with no differences noted between men and women. The districts with the highest incidence were Gràcia, Sarrià-Sant Gervasi, Sant Andreu and Nou Barris. In this wave excess mortality of 174 deaths was recorded.

Social inequalities shifted with the different waves of Covid-19. During the first and second waves, a higher incidence was observed in men and women from the most deprived social classes (highest deprivation quintile).

In the third wave, the highest incidence was found in men from more privileged social classes and women from disadvantaged social classes. In the fourth and fifth waves, meanwhile, there was a higher incidence among men and women from more disadvantaged social classes. Finally, in the sixth wave, incidence was higher among men and women from more privileged social classes.

2. Public health and health care system response

It is important to distinguish between public health and public health care. The first refers to the set of actions taken by public administrations and society to protect and promote people's health and prevent disease. Therefore, the focus of public health is the health of the whole population and not just that of sick people. Public health care, meanwhile, is the care that each person receives from public health services to treat their disease or health problem. In Spain, this is provided through the National Health System.

The Covid-19 pandemic was a public health problem that clearly affected the ability of health care services to treat people when they became ill. The very sudden onset of the pandemic in early 2020, and the significant impact felt by the population, constituted a huge public health shock. We cannot lose sight of the fact that public health has historically been underfunded in Spain, with less than 2% of the total budget being allocated to health (Aboal-Viñas, 2010). Furthermore, the cuts that occurred in the wake of the 2008 financial crisis left both public health and the National Health System in an even more vulnerable situation.

As a public health crisis, efforts were made to tackle the Covid-19 pandemic from a perspective of prevention, disease monitoring, the treatment of sick people and a consideration of the economic and social consequences. The main tasks undertaken from a public health perspective were: a) the definition of prevention measures, such as social distancing, face masks, ventilation, vaccinations, quarantines, etc., b) the surveillance of the disease with daily indicators, c) the elaboration of action protocols when cases of disease and outbreaks were detected, d) contact tracing, or following-up on people who were contacts of people who had tested positive, and e) the control and follow-up of preventive measures in centres such as nursing homes or schools. And we must not forget that Covid-19 has had an unequal impact on society, as it is the most disadvantaged people who have suffered the most from the disease and its economic and social consequences, particularly in terms of job losses. For this reason, it was necessary to implement specific actions to help these populations cope with the disease or manage its prevention.

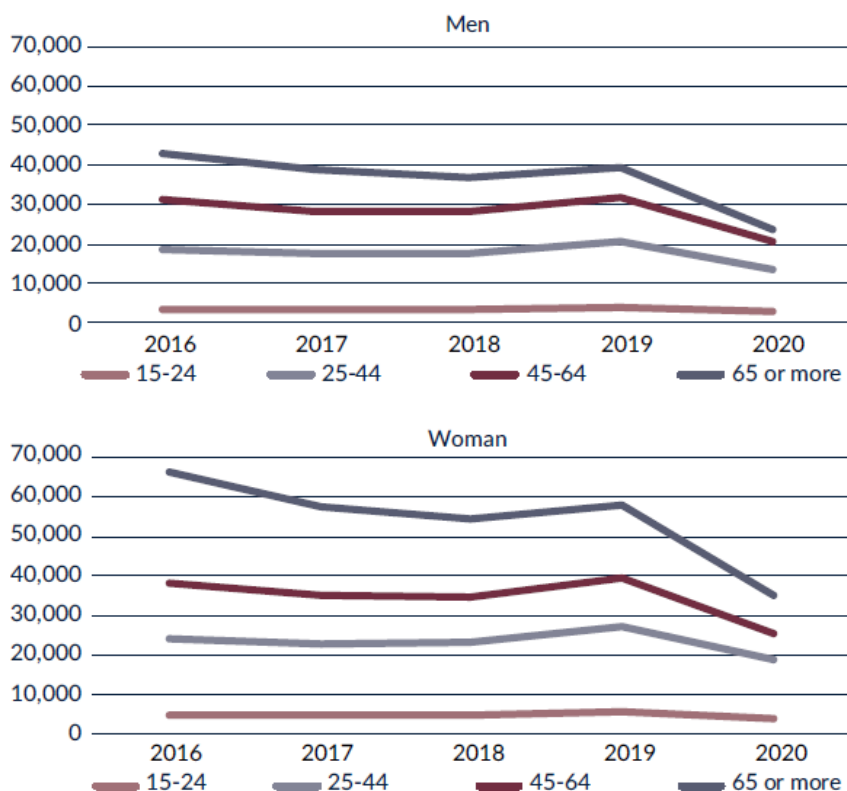
In Barcelona, with the arrival of Covid-19, the Barcelona Public Health Agency (ASPB) had to get to work in order to respond to the pandemic. This response varied from wave to wave. At the beginning, we were not sufficiently prepared and did not have the means to respond adequately. We were able to improve our response going forward because more human resources were made available: to both monitor and control the disease and to carry out screening. The pandemic highlighted the serious limitations of communicable disease reporting systems around the world.

In Spain, progress was made in the information systems for Covid-19 surveillance, with a system providing daily information on new cases based on data from multiple health system information sources being set up within a matter of weeks. Technological developments made this easier. In Barcelona, the Covid-19 data website was launched in early April 2020 and was updated on a daily basis (Marí-dell’Olmo et al., 2020).

It is worth noting that, during this pandemic, we made great strides in working on a cross-sectoral basis with professionals from other disciplines and institutions. Four work groups were created for this purpose: a) Public Health Office, b) Nursing home Office, c) School Office and d) Vaccination Office. These groups were made up of professionals from the Barcelona Health Consortium (CSB), health care services, public health and also education (School Office) and personal care (Residence Office). They were useful for following the different guidelines, topics and incidences over the course of the pandemic. This intersectoral collaboration will probably also bear fruits in the future.

With regard to the public health system, it should be noted that both primary care and hospital services were severely strained during the pandemic. These centres had to put many of their usual tasks to one side in order to devote themselves entirely to Covid-19. This led to other diseases being neglected. For example, as evidenced in the Barcelona Health Report released in late 2021 (Agència de Salut Pública de Barcelona, 2022), in 2020 there was a 36% reduction in new diagnoses of chronic diseases (graph 2). There was also a decrease in the number of communicable diseases being reported, partly due to a real reduction in incidence as a result of social distancing measures, but probably also due to under-diagnosis and under-reporting. The return to normal activity is essential in managing this exceptional situation.

Graph 2. Number of newly diagnosed cases of chronic diseases in men and women by age. Barcelona, 2016-2020



Source: Barcelona Health Report released in late 2020 (ASPB).

3. Areas of special impact

This section is dedicated to three areas where Covid-19 had a particular impact: nursing homes, schools and the labour market.

3.1. Nursing homes in Barcelona

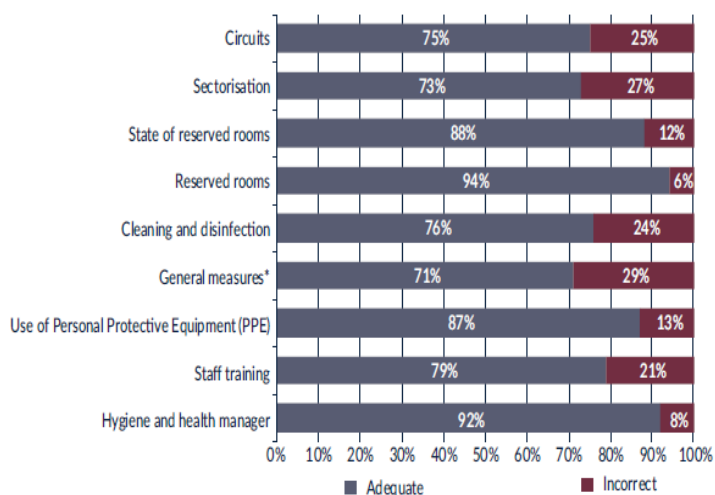
Residents in nursing homes are considered a vulnerable group due to the health problems most commonly associated with advancing age, such as the multi-pathology of chronic diseases and the progressive deterioration of the immune system. In addition, an intrinsic aspect of life in nursing homes is the continuous contact between residents and caregivers in a closed environment, which facilitates the transmission of infectious diseases and makes it difficult to implement prevention and control measures.

During the pandemic, 8,664 cases of Covid-19 were detected in nursing homes in Barcelona among residents and workers. In the first wave there were 3,600 cases; the majority of which (64%) were among female residents or employees. This first wave was characterised by a lack of knowledge about the disease, a lack of diagnostic tests and severe limitations in the provision of personal protective equipment (PPE) for professionals, which had a major impact on homes for the elderly and highlighted the fact that most of the city's centres were not prepared to deal with the pandemic.

Tough restrictions on visits by loved ones for months at a time, as well as various contingency plans, contributed to the prevention and control of the pandemic in this area (Behrens & Naylor, 2020). Finally, the vaccination greatly reduced the severity of cases and mortality (Domi et al., 2021). In addition to these measures, which were implemented throughout Catalonia, the ASPB introduced various interventions on a local scale.

In the ASPB, a working group on nursing homes was commissioned in April 2020 with people from various services. One of the first things that this group did was draw up a series of contingency plans, which began with a scheduled joint visit by the ASPB and the Barcelona Firefighting force to ascertain the health and epidemiological situation at the centre, as well as the prevention and control measures that were adopted. The centres were informed about the importance and need to have a contingency plan and about prevention and control measures. The visits also helped to identify needs for resident transfers and site disinfections. In this first intervention, around 300 ASPB-validated contingency plans were drawn up between June and August 2020. At the same time, the ASPB promoted training for staff at homes for the elderly.

Graph 3. Percentage of shortcomings identified in the second scheduled on-site visit in nursing homes. Barcelona, 2021



Source: ASPB

*General measures: Use of face mask, social distancing, hand hygiene, sufficient sanitary equipment, single-use equipment, the entry of people and objects from outside, outside visits and excursions and ventilation.

In August 2020, the Technical Nursing Home Office was set up with staff from various sectors of the City Council, the ASPB and the Barcelona Health Consortium (CSB) to coordinate all the institutions involved in actions in homes for the elderly. In 2021, the ASPB carried out 244 on-site visits to 272 homes for the elderly in Barcelona, representing 89% of the centres. Graph 3 shows the shortcomings identified in the visits.

The pandemic has served to shine a light on the precarious nature of many nursing homes, both for residents and members of staff who work there, which calls for a reflection on residential models for elderly people. This is likely to involve increasing home support, promoting serviced housing and reducing the number but improving the quality of nursing homes, as in other European countries (Bofill-Poch, 2018; Deusdad et al., 2016).

3.2. Schools

The closure of schools was one of the measures that had the greatest impact, in terms of the health of children and teenagers as well as their parents. For example, the closure of schools was reported to have negative short to medium-term effects on well-being, mental health, sleep quality and other indicators in children and teenagers (Dooley et al., 2022). It also contributed to increased gender inequalities, with mothers being disproportionately responsible for overseeing and supporting their children's education (Ahrendt et al., 2020). The impact was also greater in countries where schools were closed for longer. Closure was associated with a decline in the school's role with regard to child protection monitoring systems, with teachers being key actors in the detection of problems. Although rarely studied, it has been shown that more disadvantaged socio-economic groups feel the impact of school closures more greatly (Viner et al., 2022).

In accordance with what we know about social determinants and social inequalities in health, in Barcelona we argued against extending the closure of schools in the 2021-22 academic year from the perspective of public health and other areas. Although the pandemic was far from under control, when we weighed up the risks and benefits, we deemed it necessary for schools to open. It was necessary to weigh up what the resources for surveillance and pandemic control activities (case detection, contact tracing, recommendations according to protocols and advice to the schools, which carried out an important and difficult task in controlling the pandemic) meant for the health fields, especially public health and primary care. At the same time, it was necessary to evaluate the importance of the educational function, the socialisation of children and the work-family balance of mothers and fathers.

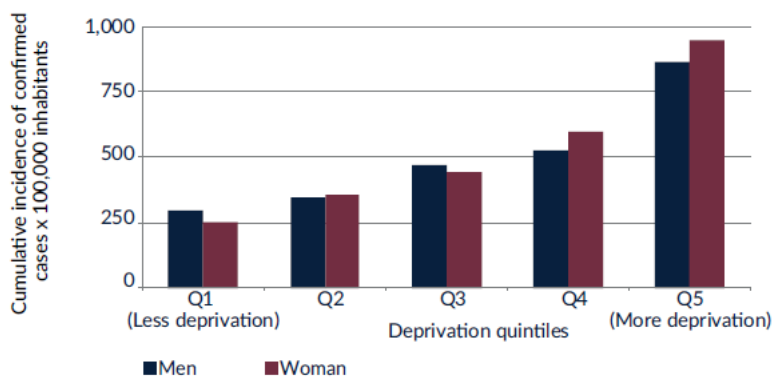
As mentioned above, in the city of Barcelona it was agreed to create a space of co-governance for managing the pandemic in the school setting, involving people with maximum managerial and executive responsibility from the spheres of education (Barcelona Education Consortium, CEB; and Barcelona Municipal Institute of Education, IMEB) and health (ASPB; Catalan Health Institute, ICS; and CSB), accompanied by a technical commission with the same inter-institutional representation. The development of the action protocol for the control and surveillance of Covid-19 required the mobilisation of resources in the five areas involved. Co-governance was also highly necessary in order to meet the different needs requiring a response at various points of the pandemic. School staff played a crucial role in keeping schools open. They oversaw the application of the protocol, which is something that must be considered for possible future situations that may arise. In order to determine a protocol, among other criteria, one must consider what is involved in its implementation and analyse its feasibility. Covid-19, as a new disease, required many adaptations of the action protocol. It could be argued that the last of the school protocols was not well managed by the centres due to its complexity.

However, experience and data reinforce the fact that the decision to open schools, with consensual and evidence-based protocols, was indeed the right one. Graph 4 shows the cumulative incidence in the 0-14 age group, in three periods. In the first period (25 February - 7 September 2020) there were no open schools and face-to-face summer activities were also highly restricted; in the second and third periods (2020-21 and part of 2021-22, respectively), schools were open (Agència de Salut Pública de Barcelona, 2022). Relative inequalities are more pronounced in the first period.

They are also present in the second period, albeit with a lower relative inequality, and absent in the third period. Although analyses that take into account different variables in such complex phenomena as health and inequalities are necessary, a simple graph such as the one below shows that schools are a public service that must be preserved as far as possible. This is because the impacts are felt beyond the student-teacher interaction, since the life offered by a school that is open covers other aspects that promote health and ensure equity.

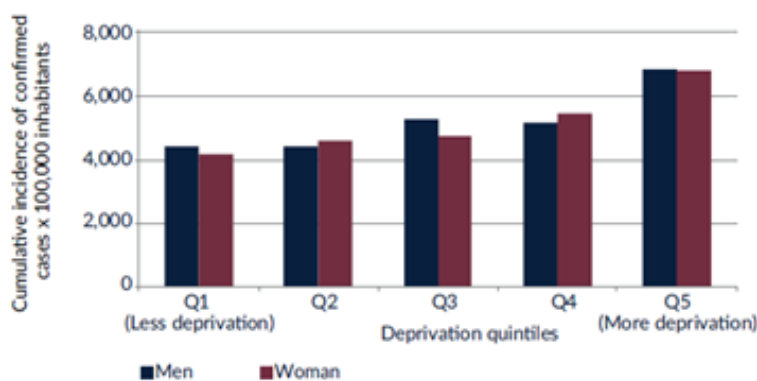
Graph 4. Cumulative incidence of Covid-19 in the 0-14 age group by level of deprivation in the periods indicated above each graph

Period from 25 February - 7 September 2020 (period when schools were closed)

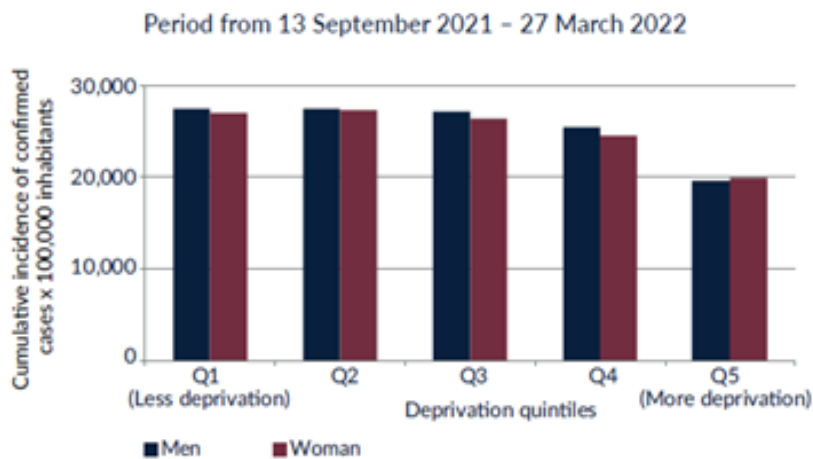


Source: Covid-19 Register, Department of Health, Generalitat de Catalunya.

Period from 14 September 2020 - 22 June 2021



Source: Covid-19 Register. Department of Health. Generalitat de Catalunya.



Source: Covid-19 Register. Department of Health. Generalitat de Catalunya.

3.3. Labour market

Covid-19 has had a major impact in the field of work. Firstly, with regard to the infection of employees, but also with regard to the job market and working conditions. This includes issues such as company closures, with the subsequent rise in unemployment and fall in employment; the high number of temporary layoffs (ERTOs); and the rapid growth of teleworking and, with it, the increased use of digital technologies. Secondly, it has had a major impact with regard to inequalities. During the first wave in Spain, besides the increased psychosocial hazards, working and employment conditions were particularly poor for female essential workers (which include the fields of health care, social-health care, cleaning and food retail, among others). These are characterised by a high proportion of jobs that have little social recognition and which are significantly invisible (Utzet et al., 2022).

Unpaid care and domestic work were also impacted by the pandemic, including increased care for the sick, increased childcare during school closures and increased domestic work due to the increased presence of people at home.

- The impact of Covid-19.** Between July 2020 and May 2021, 8,022 cases were reported in 4,836 different workplaces of people who were working face-to-face when they were diagnosed with Covid-19 and could therefore transmit the disease to their work colleagues. 228 workplace outbreaks (excluding nursing homes, formal education institutions, health and social care institutions and other types of special institutions)⁶ were also reported. The sector most affected by the infection was health and social work. The trade and repair sector was the most affected in terms of unemployment and ERTOs. While measures to mitigate the negative effects of Covid-19, such as ERTOs, served to partially maintain incomes and employment, they have not been able to eliminate uncertainty about the future of employment. Uncertainty which, like unemployment, is a factor associated with mental health problems.

The 2020 data indicate a significant effect on working women, both in relation to those who test positive for Covid-19 and the increase in the amount of unpaid care and domestic work (Cortès Franch et al., 2021)

- Public health action.** From the beginning of the pandemic, health authorities emphasised the role to be played by Occupational Health Services (SPRL) in the surveillance and control of the pandemic. The procedures indicated the need to coordinate their action with public health services.

⁶ Geriatric residences, regulated education centers, health and social health centers and other types of special centers are excluded.

This coordination has hardly been developed, with some notable exceptions such as the Basque Country (Guisasola Yeregui & Ibañez Vallejo, 2021). Barcelona was another such exception. The ASPB deployed a series of actions aimed at supporting the city's SPRLs in dealing with an exceptional situation marked by immediacy, constantly changing information and a lack of epidemic management experience. Coordination with the Labour Inspectorate, which sought to direct its inspection work towards workplaces that fail to comply with preventive measures, was another experience of cross-sectoral work beyond the SPRL and companies (Agència de Salut Pública de Barcelona, 2021).

As in so many other areas, Covid-19 has also highlighted constraints and opportunities in the field of employment. It has highlighted the need for intersectoral work between all stakeholders, the improvement of information systems (which should include, among others, the SPRL) and the involvement and mobilisation of all the resources available in the field of occupational health (in addition to the SPRL, the mutual insurance companies that collaborate with Spanish Social Security). Apart from aspects specifically related to the surveillance and control of Covid-19, the field of labour has to face new challenges that the epidemic has brought to light. These include the rapid growth of teleworking, the importance of care work (both paid and unpaid) and the impact of the pandemic on the mental health of working people.

4. Vaccines

One notable aspect of the response to the crisis was the rapid development of Covid-19 vaccines. However, due to the time required for vaccine production and limited scientific knowledge at the start of the pandemic, vaccination strategies based on prioritisation were established worldwide. The main objectives were to reduce mortality and morbidity in the most at-risk populations and to improve the resilience of health systems. In a short amount of time, vaccines reduced the incidence and severity of Covid-19 in countries that had access to them, while exposing persistent inequities in terms of distribution.

In the initial stages, the prioritised groups included elderly people, those living and working in nursing homes, health and essential public service workers and those deemed to be in vulnerable groups. The vaccination was later expanded to younger age groups. Subsequently, once vaccines were approved for these age groups, teenagers and children aged five and above were included.

Vaccination coordinating boards were established at national and regional levels to ensure that evidence is properly translated into policy and practice. In Catalonia, the organisation of the early phases of the vaccination—in which workers from essential services, health services and nursing homes were all vaccinated—fell to the city hospitals. Vaccination was subsequently reoriented towards primary care, while mass vaccination points were set up to administer most of the vaccines to the public. The logistics and distribution of vaccines in the city were strained, with a five-fold increase in the number of doses distributed compared to the previous year.

In Barcelona, by 20 April 2022, 1,402,438 people had received the first dose of the vaccine and 1,368,412 people had received the full initial vaccination. Cumulative coverage in the population aged five years and above had reached 88.5% for the first dose alone, while 86.4% were fully vaccinated. For the additional dose, coverage was 88.6% in people aged 75 years and above and 77.4% in people aged 65-74 years.

Despite the overall good outcomes, social inequalities were anticipated, as these exist in most human health indicators. In order to ascertain possible inequalities, the health services and the Department of Health were asked for coverage by Basic Health Area (BHA) according to sex, neighbourhood of residence, age and nationality.

To address this, interventions were designed and implemented in neighbourhoods with low coverage. 26 municipal points which offered support in securing appointments online were established. 1,865 people (53% male, 55% ≤ 49 years, 37% from Ciutat Vella, 27% Spanish nationals) attended. 32% obtained a vaccination appointment, 43% had their questions answered and the remaining 25% were referred to other services. 18 community days were also held where 1,960 people were vaccinated without an appointment (63% men, 58% aged 18-39 years, 76% residents of Barcelona, 41% Spanish nationals).

During 2021, the total difference between the BHAs with the best and worst coverage in people aged 60-69 years narrowed considerably, from a difference of 31.3% in May to a difference of 13% in November.

5. Communication

During the pandemic there was a huge information from a wide range of sources, sometimes not sufficiently qualified (Ioannidis et al., 2021), with an abundance of fake news and no clear public health leadership which contributed to mistrust among the population. Communicating the necessary messages to deal with the uncertainties brought about by crisis situations in a timely, assertive and transparent manner, as well as to facilitate trust, acceptability and compliance with the corresponding individual and collective prevention measures, is of utmost importance (Gragera et al., 2022).

Since the beginning of the pandemic, one of the ASPB's main roles has been to generate knowledge about Covid-19 in order to meet the information needs of decision-makers and professionals, as well as those of the media and the general population. For this reason, several communication actions were developed with new content related to Covid-19. These contained up-to-date, informative and accessible information that was adapted to different audiences, tackling fake news to help build trust (Hyland-Wood et al., 2021). There has been a large increase in visits to the website and a significant increase in the number of people following ASPB's profiles on social media, which shows the benefits of a strategy based on transparency and continuous information (Pulido-Polo et al., 2021). The relationship with the media was also strengthened and ASPB's presence in the press, radio and TV also increased. However, the appearance of public health professionals was minor (Rebolledo et al., 2021).

The first communication action was the launch of a website with Covid-19 FAQs for professionals and the general population, which was kept up-to-date as new information became available. Between 18 February 2020 and 31 December 2021, it was visited around 375,000 times. In addition, the interactive data website #COVID19aldiaBCN (Marí-dell'Olmo et al., 2020) was published with daily information on cases and incidence of Covid-19 and excess mortality in Barcelona according to sex, age, territory and socio-economic level, which proved very useful for surveillance and planning. The #COVID19aldiaBCN website had almost 222,000 visits between 21 June 2020 and 31 December 2021 (Agència de Salut Pública de Barcelona, 2020). Subsequently, a daily informative report was produced with a selection of the main monitoring indicators for Covid-19 in the city, which had nearly 7,000 visits between 8 January 2021 and 31 December 2021. This was followed by the launch of a new online portal called 'Web Covid-19', where wide-ranging information on Covid-19 and related issues was presented, including:

- Information on areas of public health with regards to Covid-19, such as environmental health, food safety, health, work and community health.
- Other communication actions developed, which are available on the ASPB YouTube channel, included the professional training sessions and scientific sessions. One of the Art and Health exhibitions was also dedicated to the ASPB's Covid-19 approach.

Finally, it is worth highlighting the reinforcement of the Covid-19 preventive measures and risk communication initiatives in the neighbourhoods, considering socio-economic vulnerability and the language and/or cultural barriers of the residents. Simple messages and formats were designed and translated into the languages of the largest international communities residing in the city. Various community-based communication initiatives were carried out involving street information workers and neighbourhood organisations and representatives, as well as cultural mediation and translation teams, through face-to-face information sessions and communication channels such as WhatsApp.

All this new information led to a significant number of new visits to the ASPB's official channels. Thus, more than 740,000 visits were made in 2020 and more than 1,251,000 in 2021, compared to 300,000 visits in 2019. The number of people following ASPB on social media also increased; by the end of 2021 there were 8,882 followers on Twitter (up from 5,312 in 2019), 2,526 followers on LinkedIn (up from 1,308 in 2019) and 1,185 followers on Facebook (up from 1,047 in 2019).

ASPB also became another source of reference for the media on matters relating to Covid-19 in the city of Barcelona. In 2020 and 2021, 42 press releases were written and 14 press conferences were held (most of them jointly with the Barcelona City Council), which led to the ASPB appearing more than 300 times in the press and several times in TV and radio interviews. BTV, Barcelona's local TV channel, also published data from the #COVID19aldiaBCN website on a daily basis.

6. Covid-19, a complex issue

From an ethical point of view, public health policies seek to maximise the common good, striving to preserve individual rights from a perspective of equity. During the first wave of the pandemic, there was a strong consensus on the need for very strict confinement measures in order to reduce transmission, morbidity and mortality in the short term and to avoid the collapse of the health system in a context of uncertainty and lack of knowledge.

Subsequently, measures such as stay-at-home orders, mandatory restrictions on certain activity sectors, the compulsory use of face masks and pressure for vaccination sparked a debate on the restrictions of freedom and individual rights. Many of these measures were perceived as disproportionate, contradictory or incoherent and often made up as they went along.

Thus, after the first wave of the pandemic, it became clear that the response could not be strictly biomedical, focusing on preventing infection. Rather, it was apparent that Covid-19 was a complex issue that required an intersectoral approach (Angeli et al., 2021). Complex issues are characterised by being difficult to define; by having multiple interdependencies and interactions; and by solutions that can generate unexpected problems for which there are no clear solutions. They are socially complex; may require behavioural changes and cross-sectoral approaches; and are seemingly intractable, with consistent errors in the approaches taken.

For a complex issue such as a pandemic, the common good should not only be formulated in the short term, such as reducing the incidence and number of Covid-19-related deaths at a given point in time. Rather, it should take into account the medium and long-term future, as well as the side effects of measures focused on the prevention of Covid-19. With a view to future responses, the pandemic highlighted the need to address at least three consequences of Covid-19 and interventions aimed at preventing it: the reduced access to health care services for problems other than Covid-19; mental health; and the economic consequences. This means that the response cannot be solely health-related, but that it must involve, as seen throughout the chapter, other sectors and disciplines as well as community participation (Angeli et al., 2021).

The impact on health care went far beyond the treatment of Covid-19 patients. As mentioned above, access to health care services for problems other than Covid-19 (such as chronic health disorders, cardiovascular problems and cancer) was reduced during the pandemic. This is because professionals had to deal with the high numbers of Covid-19 patients, and also because some people were afraid of going to the health centres out of fear of infection. A substantial part of health care was also provided online, which also reduced access - especially for the most disadvantaged groups (Davies et al., 2021).

Mental health problems also increased significantly as a result of the pandemic. This is explained by the direct effects of the infection itself and the indirect effects related to the loss of loved ones and the widespread application of strict infection control measures, resulting in isolation, restrictions on accompanying loved ones in their final days/hours or visits to homes for the elderly, fear and economic problems, among others (Philip Rajkumar, 2021). Resources for mental health care have been insufficient for many years. However, even if these are increased, care alone is not enough to reduce and prevent mental health problems which, in general, have social causes.

The pandemic had a major impact on the economy around the world. However, its consequences were particularly noticeable in Spain where the productive system is overly dependent on sectors which are vulnerable to the pandemic, such as tourism, construction, the food industry and the catering trade (Pinilla et al., 2021). The impact on people's health and wellbeing would have been even greater had measures such as the ERTOs not been strongly promoted as an instrument to maintain employment and household incomes, and thus consumption and domestic demand (Ruesga et al., 2021).

7. Conclusions

The Covid-19 pandemic has had an enormous impact on the health and wellbeing of citizens and on the economy. However, it has also allowed for the development—in record time—of new tools and ways of working that will help societies cope better with crises in the future.

In terms of information, the pandemic has highlighted the serious limitations of communicable disease and vaccine information systems. However, it has also opened our eyes to ways of improving them and turning them into agile systems with daily, up-to-date data. Social inequalities in terms of incidence and vaccination coverage highlight the importance of including data on social determinants and inequalities, in addition to biomedical information.

Widespread vaccination, in a country that relies on vaccines and the health care system, reduced Covid-19-related hospitalisation and deaths. The establishment of inter-institutional work groups helped to include equity in Barcelona's vaccination strategy.

During the pandemic there was excess information from a wide variety of sources, which were often contradictory and sometimes fake. Clearer public health leadership with accurate, verified and rapid information is required in order to build public trust and facilitate decision-making and evaluation.

Covid-19 has shown that individual interventions, based exclusively on health care or the tracking of cases, are not sufficient. Rather, these must be complemented by a population-based approach with intersectoral actions that address the complexity of such a pandemic.

Finally, Covid-19 demonstrates the need to increase research on social determinants and inequalities in communicable diseases and to assess the impact of interventions—whether promoted by the health sector or not—on various health outcomes, including from an equity perspective.

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Supporting people with disabilities in the fight against labour market exclusion in the context of Covid-19

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The pandemic has affected the labour market for people with disabilities. It has led to higher unemployment, a general drop in hiring and changes in the proportion of people employed in the protected and ordinary labour market. The support network for people with disabilities in Barcelona has intervened to counteract negative trends while offering alternatives to hiring in the ordinary labour market. It is necessary to consolidate some of the measures carried out to offer employment alternatives to people with disabilities.

The precariousness and financial insecurity already suffered by many people was exacerbated by the declaration of the state of alert due to the Covid-19 pandemic and the lockdown measures decreed by the Government of Spain in March 2020. People with disabilities were no exception. The inclusion of this group in the general job market already had weak foundations built on a poor adaptation of jobs and employers' ignorance of the pertinent skills and opportunities. The outcome of the existing barriers to the labour market for people with disabilities is an employment rate of 37.1%, half that of the general population which, according to the Employment and Productive Model Observatory, stood at 79.7% in 2021. In other words, on average only slightly more than one in three people of working age with a disability is employed. The rate for women, at 34.7%, is particularly low.

The economic crisis caused by the health emergency has jeopardised the job placement of people with disabilities, who were the last to enter the labour market and practically the first to be forced to leave it.

The obstacles to job retention have been particularly significant in the case of people with disabilities, increasing job losses for this group and hindering their career progress.

According to the report "Observatory on Disability and the Labour Market in Spain", published by Odismet in response to the Covid-19 crisis, 60% of employed people with disabilities were at risk of losing their jobs due to the pandemic. Closing the doors to work inclusion is a problem for everybody in this group. In this context, job placement services had to significantly increase their legal advice and support work.

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The employment of people with disabilities has a dual dimension: the protected market and the general labour market. The protected market is made up of the Special Employment Centres (CETs). These centres were designed to facilitate the transition to the labour market for the job placement of people with intellectual disabilities or disabilities stemming from a mental disorder of a degree of 33% or more, and people with physical or sensory disabilities with a degree of 65% or more⁷. CETs provide assistance in many different ways, including but not limited to encouraging employers to hire people with disabilities (subsidising employment and social security costs), promoting the creation or expansion of centres, maintaining jobs (discounts on employers' social security contributions and salary cost subsidises of up to 50% of the minimum wage), and workplace adaptations⁸. A total of 75% of contracts specifically designed for people with disabilities are concluded by CETs⁹, with salaries that are rarely far above the minimum wage. There is also the CET-derived concept of supported employment ("*enclavament laboral*"), referring to the contracts between an ordinary employer in the general labour market - the partner company - and a special employment centre (CET) for the provision of works or services directly related to the company's activities. This is known as an "alternative measure" and is available to companies with 50 employees or more who have not directly hired the minimum percentage of people with disabilities provided by law. In supported employment, a group of workers with disabilities employed at a CET work at a partner company's site on a temporary basis¹⁰, although the work itself is arranged by the CET with whom the workers have signed their employment contracts.

Oppositely to the protected employment provided through CETs, people with disabilities also work in the general market, playing an active role alongside their colleagues. Both the protected and general markets have been particularly hard hit by the pandemic.

In Catalonia just prior to the pandemic, CETs were already in a position of underfunding due to a 35% increase in wages in three years, the lack of funding caused by increases in the minimum wage between 2017 and 2019. Special employment centres were particularly hard hit by the pandemic due to this weak starting position. Entities such as AMMFEINA, the members of which are social initiative entities that promote the inclusion of people with mental health problems and fight against the exclusion of this group from the labour market, and Dincat, which represents the intellectual disability sector in Catalonia, have highlighted the problems suffered by CETs due to the pandemic¹¹. According to a survey carried out among its member entities, 77.6% of CETs closed 2020 with losses and below forecasts, with a drop in turnover of around 25%. This has led several entities to call for a shock plan for the protected market involving specific items of public spending.

7. CETs have often been accused of having a segregating effect. They were originally based on the belief that people with disabilities, and particularly intellectual disabilities, were unable to work in the general labour market (Parmenter, 2011). CETs initially offered people with disabilities employment for a salary that covered only their accommodation. The employment of CET workers and their employment contracts has only started to be regulated relatively recently, and workers are usually paid at the minimum wage.

8. <https://www.sepe.es/HomeSepe/Personas/encontrar-trabajo/empleo-para-personas-con-discapacidad/centros-especiales-empleo.html>.

9. Contracts designed specifically for people with disabilities do not account for all contracts in this group, but between 30% and 40% per year out of the whole contracts of labour market, both protected and ordinary, depending on the year (Odismet, 2022).

10. Following the publication of the Act on the Social Integration of People with Disabilities, supported employment was promoted as an alternative measure for employers that had failed to meet the 2% quota under Royal Decree 364/2005, of 8 April, regulating exceptional alternative compliance with the quota in favour of workers with disabilities.

11. According to Dincat and AMMFEINA, the 205 CETs operating in Catalonia in 2018 employed 16,333 people with disabilities. Of these, 9,500 had mental health disorders or intellectual disabilities, the two groups with the lowest global employment rates.

The inclusion situation in the general market has been no better. The Barcelona Labour Inclusion Network (XIB), which is led by the Municipal Institute for Persons with Disabilities (IMPD) and includes the entities working for inclusion in Barcelona's general market, monitored a thousand people with disabilities who were in employment in March and April 2020. A total of 90% of them originally retained their contract with their employer, but this figure changed on a daily basis. Of these, 27% continued working in essential services, 11.6% started teleworking, and 24% were included in temporary layoffs (ERTOs)¹². In this situation of change and adaptation, the labour inclusion support services actively provided companies with legal advice and increased the remote monitoring and support provided to working people. Support was provided to both people who provided essential services and those who remained in employment but had to adapt to working remotely. In both cases, professional support and assistance were key to adapting to the restrictions in place, complying with the health rules and helping a group of people who are particularly affected by the digital gap with the transition to teleworking¹³.

In short, Covid-19 had an impact on an already complicated reality brought about by CETs' economic difficulties and the barriers to the open labour market. In view of this situation, in 2020 the Municipal Institute for People with Disabilities implemented an emergency action through the IMPD's Employment Advisory Team for the labour inclusion of people with disabilities and the provision of job placement support through all the Barcelona Labour Inclusion Network member entities.

The labour market data comparison shown below provides additional information about the pre-existing situation, what happened, and how the Municipal Institute for People with Disabilities has adapted public policies on job placement support in view of the pandemic.

1. Employment and the labour market for people with disabilities in a Covid-19 context

The pandemic has increased the unemployment rate of people with disabilities, with a general fall in contracts and a higher proportion of contracts being drawn up through special employment centres.

First, the stagnation and crisis resulting from Covid-19 is reflected in the unemployment and labour market data provided by the Employment and Productive Model Observatory of the Ministry of Enterprise and Employment¹⁴.

- There were 14,506 unemployed people with disabilities in Barcelona province on 31 December 2021, accounting for 67% of all unemployed people with disabilities in Catalonia.
- At 2021 year-end, there were a further 8,364 people with disabilities registered as unemployed in Catalonia (136.2% more than in 2020).
- Most of the people registered as unemployed - 55% of the total annual average at metropolitan level in 2021- were female.
- There were 25,405 job seekers with disabilities in the metropolitan area in 2021.

Second, the general fall in new employment contracts must also be considered. Prior to the pandemic, between 2014 and 2019 there was a cumulative increase in new contracts both at special employment centres and in the general market.

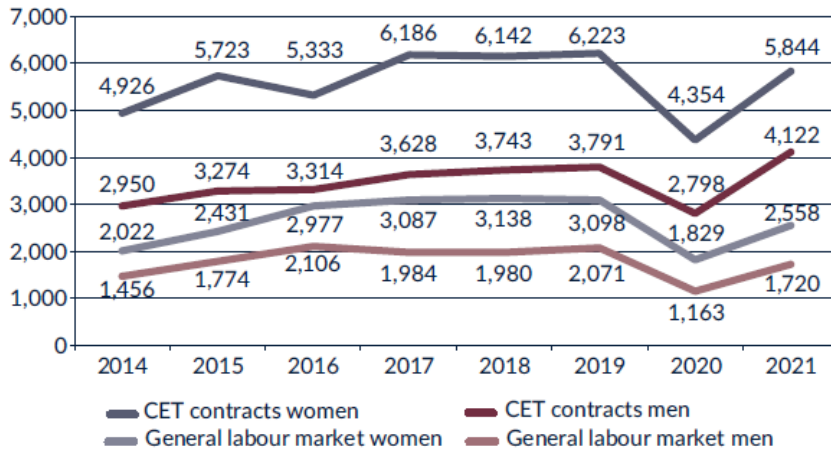
12. ERTOs enable companies to suspend employment contracts or temporarily reduce employees' working days for economic, technical, organisational or productive reasons or due to events of force majeure. When a company applies an ERTO, the affected employees become unemployed and receive unemployment benefit. The employer, for their part, undertakes to allow the workers to go back to their jobs when the ERTO has come to an end, and it can benefit from exemptions from employers' social security contributions.

13. See "The digital gap in the city of Barcelona 2020" a <https://bithabitat.barcelona/bretxadigitalbarcelona/ca/>

14. Data not available for the City of Barcelona.

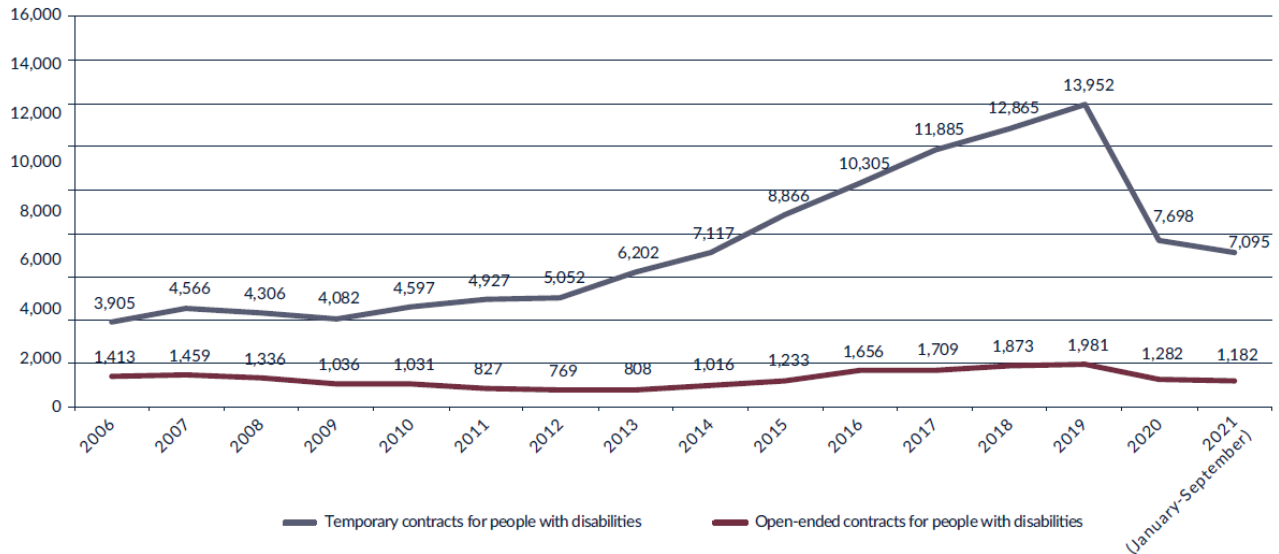
There was a gender imbalance in the increase in new contracts, with more men than women were being hired. The rise in the number of new contracts for women was slower, particularly in the general market. In contrast, the number of new contracts in Catalonia in 2020 fell by 33.65%.

Graph 1. Evolution of employment contracts concluded with people with disabilities in special employment centres and the general market in Catalonia by gender, 2014-2021



Source: Employment and Productive Model Observatory, Ministry of Enterprise and Employment, 2021.

Graph 2. Evolution of employment contracts concluded with people with disabilities by typology. Barcelona, 2006-2021



Source: Barcelona National Public Employment Service Observatory, 2021.

In Barcelona, people with disabilities account for around 1% of all employment contracts, and there is a significant margin for increasing hiring¹⁵. The activity tax —the relationship between of those active and the population of working age— was 37,1 % for population with disabilities and of 60,3% for the general population in 2020. In this regard, the hiring figures for people with disabilities are very low and public actions could have a significant effect.

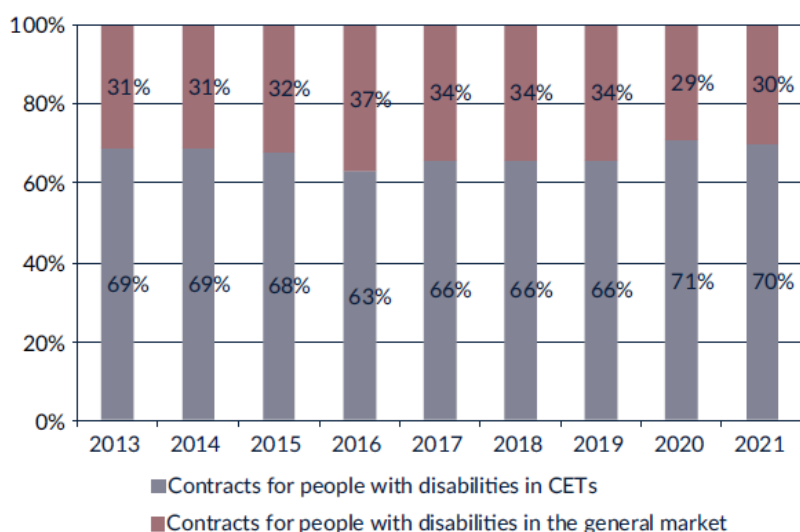
All the above explains why the Employment Advisory Team and the Barcelona Employment Inclusion Network continued their efforts to provide assistance and employment to people with disabilities during the following years of the pandemic, while also carrying out important support and stability work.

15. The city's hiring figures show that a total of 824,220 contracts were concluded in 2021.

Third, the increase in the proportion of contracts concluded in special employment centres must also be mentioned. The number of contracts concluded with people with disabilities at special employment centres in Barcelona had previously stood at around 66% of all contracts with people with disabilities concluded in the city in 2019 (SEPE, 2019). The number of contracts in the protected market had risen by around 17 percentage points in ten years, a significant proportion of which were temporary contracts¹⁶.

Despite this context of an increasing number of contracts with special employment centres, the proportion of this type of contract fell slightly to around 66% in the five years leading to the pandemic due to increased inclusion efforts in the general market. This trend was reversed during the pandemic: in 2020, 70% of contracts in Barcelona were concluded at special employment centres. The proportion of contracts concluded at special employment centres (CETs) has thus risen significantly because of the pandemic in a context, as mentioned above, of an overall fall in the hiring of people with disabilities.

Graph 3. Percentage of contracts concluded at special employment centres and in the general market in Catalonia, 2013-2021



Source: Employment and Productive Model Observatory, Ministry of Enterprise and Employment, 2021.

2. Labour inclusion support in the context of Covid-19

2.1. The Employment Advisory Team of the Municipal Institute for People with Disabilities

The Employment Advisory Team (EAL) of Barcelona City Council's Municipal Institute for People with Disabilities (IMPD) significantly increased its legal and other support during lockdown.

The Employment Advisory Team strives to increase the labour inclusion of people with disabilities by providing reception services, training, individual plans and employment law advice to people with disabilities. The legal advice provided usually relates to the rights of people with disabilities, the law, the assistance available and, above all, the compatibility between employment and the benefits system.

The matter of compatibility between employment and the benefit system is a complex one. Furthermore, there is the counterproductive or deterring effect of employment due to the high proportion of temporary job offers, in addition to the relative sluggishness of the benefits system regarding registering and de-registering for benefits, which often leads people with disabilities to reject a job opportunity for fear of losing their benefits for several months as a result of accepting a job offer lasting only a few weeks.

16. 72% of employment contracts with people with disabilities are temporary. This trend is sharper in the case of special employment centres (88%) than in the general market (46%).

There are many significant cases of people receiving non-contribution-based disability benefits refusing to work because accepting paid work could result in the loss of their benefits¹⁷. And then there are people with what is classified as total disability often deciding not to work for fear of having their classification, and its applicable benefits, reviewed. This is an unwanted effect of the benefits system that discourages people from working and does not balance the financial suffering of people with disabilities¹⁸. This is certainly an undesirable effect on the rise in the low employment rates of people with disabilities.

The EAL also advises companies, the public administration and any institutions that approach them on matters of legal compliance.

Since 14 March 2020, the day when the Government of Spain declared the state of alert and lockdown for most of the population due to the pandemic, the demand for employment law advice rose due to people struggling to understand their employment, personal and family situation and the nature of the measures ordered by the government for the entire population, and how to implement them.

During that time, the Employment Advisory Team was unable to carry out its usual legal advice work in person, so non-face-to-face alternatives were sought instead. These included phone calls, online messages and/or video calls, which became the way to remain in close contact during the strictest moments of lockdown and restrictions on social interaction.

A significant number of enquiries were made by people who had been temporarily laid off under an ERTO, who expressed their great concern and feelings of insecurity given the situation that was gravely affecting their personal and/or family life. Many people lost their jobs, and many others saw a reduction in their household income due to temporary layoffs (ERTO). Some people were already in a situation of vulnerability pre-pandemic and, vis-à-vis the new labour market circumstances, were reconsidering their situation and contacting the Employment Advisory Team to see whether they were eligible for more stable financial benefits, such as early retirement or permanent disability. Consequently, they needed to check whether they met the necessary requirements, as they felt this was the only way to ensure they would have the necessary income to live relatively worry-free.

In view of the situation caused by the pandemic, efforts were increased at all Employment Advisory Team services to provide support and assistance (assessment and/or guidance, training, employment, monitoring and support, and legal advice), in addition to the usual personal assistance service. Furthermore, the added complexity of the rise in online procedures for people with disabilities, who are particularly affected by the digital gap, must be considered. To this effect, the Employment Advisory Team's services were adapted, going beyond simply providing legal advice by adding technological support to procedures and to the assistance provided to people in relation to their personal situation.

The members of the Employment Advisory Team were thus instructed to be proactive with all the cases assigned to them to ensure that everyone with an active file was attended to. To this

17. Although paid work can be undertaken while in receipt of benefits for four years after starting work, it depends on whether the income from work exceeds the Government of Spain's Public Income Indicator with Multiple Effects (IPREM) plus the maximum non-contribution-based benefit (PNC) in force. For more information on the limits and conditions applicable to non-contribution-based benefits, see:

https://dretssocials.gencat.cat/web/.content/03ambits_tematics/11discapacitat/ajuts_i_prestacions_economicques/columna_dreta/documents/triptic_pensio_no_contributiva.pdf

18. The study "El greuge econòmic de les persones amb discapacitat de la ciutat de Barcelona" [The economic inequality of people with disabilities in Barcelona] measures the additional financial cost of disability, which is not taken into account in the design of income and support policies for people with disabilities <https://ajuntament.barcelona.cat/dretssocials/sites/default/files/arxiu-documents/greuge-economic-persones-discapacitat-barcelona-ca.pdf>.

end, a telephone support service was provided, and e-mail support channels were boosted to meet new demand.

To this effect, the social and family data of around 250 people with active files were collected during the strictest part of lockdown, and the workers included in the Parks and Gardens supported work project and the members of Diverscoop, the project for the recovery of disused kiosks in the city, were monitored. Some of the adaptations made during this time, such as using channels and time slots requiring prior appointment, have now become part of the Employment Advisory Team's standard operation and are still in place two years on.

Table 1. Type of action taken by the Employment Advisory Team during the first state of alert (March, April and May 2020)

Response	Marzo	Abril	Mayo
Emotional	84	182	85
Training	40	104	38
Employment	161	371	418
Health	53	74	63
Social and family	26	83	72

Source: author's own elaboration with data from IMPD, 2021.

These adaptations, the increase in legal advice provided, the rise in the number of people looking for work and the drop in new cases handled by the reception and recruitment service are reflected in the annual data on the work carried out by the Employment Advisory Team in 2020. In a qualitative sense, the complexity of the cases handled and the exclusion of members of this group from the labour market during the pandemic are notable. The restrictions prompted by the pandemic on holding on-site job placement-related group training sessions must also be mentioned, given that their interruption has been an added barrier to inclusion.

Table 2. Work carried out by the Employment Advisory Team

	2019	2020	2021
People assisted by the reception service	326	191	244
Course enrolments	245	118	182
Contracts	245	148	153
People looking for work, attending training and in job placement processes	407	481	454
Legal advice consultations	203	235	171

Source: author's own elaboration with data from IMPD, 2021.

Last, and notably, the Employment Advisory Team has carried out two specific projects, mainly in the last quarter of 2020 and throughout most of 2021. In 2020, as a shock plan against the Covid-19 crisis, an Employment Plan was drawn up to hire up to 50 people with disabilities for data collection work to assess the accessibility of children's play areas. The hiring of the 48 best-rated applicants started in January 2021, covering vacancies for assistant coordination experts, data collectors and data collection assistants¹⁹.

19. The outcome is that the city now has an accessibility analysis of 891 play areas, an analysis of 60 communication accessibility plans for the city's municipal public spaces and facilities and an inventory of the operating status of Barcelona's acoustic traffic lights.

The Employment Advisory Team has also been involved in the design, selection and training of professionals to realise Barcelona City Council's first public call specifically for people with intellectual disabilities. This pioneering offer provides the basis for people with intellectual disabilities to join the public sector. The tasks involved have included identifying jobs, making contact with all the municipal departments wanting to hire an ancillary service assistant and, above all, helping Barcelona City Council's HR department to set out the duties involved in the 27 positions available in 2021.

3. The Barcelona Labour Inclusion Network

The Barcelona Labour Inclusion Network (XIB) was created in 2014 to promote the labour inclusion of people with disabilities and/or mental health disorders in the general labour market. This strategy is promoted by the Municipal Institute for Persons with Disabilities (IMPD) in partnership with ten entities specialising in employment and disability in the city²⁰. It helps people with different types and degrees of functional diversity and/or mental health disorders who are looking for work, as well as providing support and assistance to companies in Barcelona through the Inclou Futur service.

The XIB's goals and lines of action revolve around a key pillar: the creation of a management model common to Barcelona City Council (through the IMPD) and the social entities involved in labour inclusion that specialise in this area.

Its working method is based on the active involvement of the professionals from the entities working for the inclusion of people with all kinds of disabilities. Each professional and service can thus contribute and share its inclusion processes, constraints, roles, responsibilities, and opportunities for people with disabilities in the labour market, creating and adding to a body of knowledge or collective knowledge. The collaborative work carried out has allowed a relational space to be built from which work synergies emerge and relationships of mutual respect, trust and recognition are formed, thus opening pathways, easing tensions, and designing plans to improve intervention processes and ensure that everyone's contribution is useful²¹. Notably in this regard, maintaining the network and the exchange of information on the advice provided in the context of Covid-19 were both very helpful in supporting all services in their activities.

Companies play a key role in this process as active agents in the inclusion process. New forms of cooperation between the world of business and the social, public and private sectors are needed. This collaboration is vital for ensuring that shared responsibility and the joint creation of new corporate social responsibility scenarios are fully effective for all parties.

The above data on the behaviour of the labour market in the last few years and the above-mentioned impact of Covid-19 suggest the need for an active policy to increase inclusion in the general labour market. The resulting actions must ensure that the business sector is involved and committed to labour inclusion as a process that generally involves three types of agents: companies with vacancies that wish to add value to their business activities; people with functional diversity or mental health issues searching for work; and last, the labour inclusion support and assistance services. It is vital that this support and assistance for companies is provided by a specialist and experienced team that is a leader in the field of open labour market inclusion and is able to respond to employers' needs.

20. It is made up of the following entities: Catalan Association for the Promotion of Deaf People (ACAPPS), Catalan Association for Integration and Human Development (AcidH), Association for the Rehabilitation of People with Mental Health Problems (AREP), Associació Centre d'Higiene Mental de les Corts [Les Corts Centre of Mental Hygiene], AURA Foundation, Fundació Catalana Síndrome de Down [Catalan Down Syndrome Foundation], ECOM Foundation, Els Tres Turons Foundation, Multiple Sclerosis Foundation (FEM), Joia Foundation, and the Employment Advisory Team of the Municipal Institute for People with Disabilities.

21. *Governanza colaborativa para la inclusión social*. Ed Catarata, 2019.

Notably regarding the working method decided by the XIB, it always includes "monitoring and support in the workplace" for both workers and employers, taking both party's needs into account. This monitoring sometimes requires an adjustment to the working method with support used, which has specific characteristics aimed at particular needs and a certain context. It also sometimes requires other types of action based on the needs of the people being assisted by the XIB and the circumstances of the labour market.

The consensus reached on the XIB's working method thus aims to ensure the provision of effective support in the inclusion process. It would therefore be more appropriate to state that the network method includes "monitoring and support for the inclusion process before, during and after hiring". This "support for the inclusion process" is not a rigid method but one that must be constantly under review and adaptable to circumstances, while always at the service of the needs of people and employers and suited to the relevant work circumstances.

3.1. Networking and knowledge exchange

The following table sets out the total activity figures for the members of the XIB. The addition of three new services in 2020 is particularly noteworthy. However, the drop in actions in 2020 caused downturns of 11% in the number of people assisted, 40% in the number of employment contracts and 34% in the number of new recruits. For the 11 services as a whole, the figures show an increase in people attended to and a sharp fall in the number of people hired.

Table 3. Evolution of the XIB activity indicators

	2019	2020	2021
People assisted	1,903	2,261	2,286
People hired	815	650	804

Source: author's own elaboration with data from IMPD, 2021.

4. Conclusions

Covid-19 has increased the employment instability and precariousness of people with disabilities, for whom market access barriers were previously offset by employment protection measures.

With a view to improving the future situation, the proposal involves deploying a set of support policies for the labour inclusion of people with disabilities that apply both to public administrations and to companies and work inclusion services.

1. Promoting a set of laws and regulations that enable people to receive benefits while working, either through universal basic income policies or by offsetting the financial harm suffered by people with disabilities.
2. Ensuring that direct hiring quotas for people with disabilities are fully met in the public administrations.
3. Implementing specific public offers for people with intellectual disabilities.
4. Promoting specific employment plans for people with disabilities in the various administrations.
5. Including social clauses in public procurement contracts for the job placement of people with disabilities in companies that conclude contracts with the administration, while ensuring that such companies meet the 2% quota of people with disabilities in their workforces, by excluding those companies that fail to do so.

6. Promoting job placement services for people with disabilities in the general labour market through subsidies.

7. Consolidating the network of general market inclusion services to exchange knowledge, improve the exchange of information on the employment of people with disabilities and provide better support. Working together to achieve better employment and disability figures so that specific employment situations can be identified and employment policies can be put in place in accordance with each type of disability.

8. Fighting the digital gap that particularly affects people with disabilities, and providing technology skills training as a basic skill for the development of career paths.

9. Developing policies specifically aimed at helping women with disabilities to join the labour market.

10. Working to break the rigid habits of the protected and general markets, reducing the number of temporary and precarious jobs, and focusing on the career paths of people with disabilities and on improving their skills and professional development.

In short, we need to offset the effects of Covid-19 by means of policies aimed at complying with the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities in the field of work and employment²² and ensuring that people with disabilities can live independently by including them in the labour market.

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December 2022

Key words: Childhood, adolescence, demographic context, education, time, health, poverty, protection and violence

Childhood and adolescence in Barcelona in times of pandemic

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Throughout this paper we review the situation of children and adolescents in the city and highlight the most important aspects of the Key Data on Children and Adolescents in Barcelona report (IIAB, 2021), which analyses the main indicators in relation to the demographic context, education, time, health, poverty and protection and violence. Although we will have to wait and see whether or not the trends become consolidated in the coming years, the latest available data already reflect the impact of the crisis triggered by Covid-19 on the lives of children and adolescents in the city.

Introduction

This paper is based on the most relevant aspects of the Key Data on Childhood and Adolescence in Barcelona report (IIAB, 2021); an annual report that presents and analyses the data from the Integrated System of Indicators of Childhood and Adolescence in Barcelona (SIIIAB) of the 0-17 BCN Observatory, and which allows the follow-up of the diagnosis of the Barcelona Children's Plan 2021-2030. The SIIIAB was devised in 2017 and its current format contains more than 150 indicators organised into six key areas of children's lives (demographic context, education, time, health, poverty, protection and violence), which have been sourced from seventeen administrative registers and eleven surveys.

In times of crisis like the present, it is when the value of having systematised data over the last four years becomes more evident, given that without having a starting point it would not be possible to measure the extent of the crisis caused by Covid-19 in any great depth. It is worth remembering that the SIIIAB collects registration data on a yearly basis and survey data as often as they are produced. Therefore, the Key Data report 2021 shows the data for 2020, which begins to reflect the impact of the crisis caused by Covid-19 on the lives of children and adolescents in our city. For example, as was the case last year, it is still difficult to interpret the economic and child poverty-related results. We will therefore have to wait and see whether or not the trends observed in the 2020 data will become consolidated in the coming years.

A perspective that will take on special relevance next year, as we will have new editions of four of the SIIIAB's main surveys: The Survey of Subjective Well-being of Children in the city of Barcelona (EBSIB 2021), the Survey of Risk Factors in Secondary School Students (FRESC 2021)²³, the new Barcelona Health Survey (ESB 2021) and the second edition of the Barcelona Socio-demographic Survey (ESD 2020).

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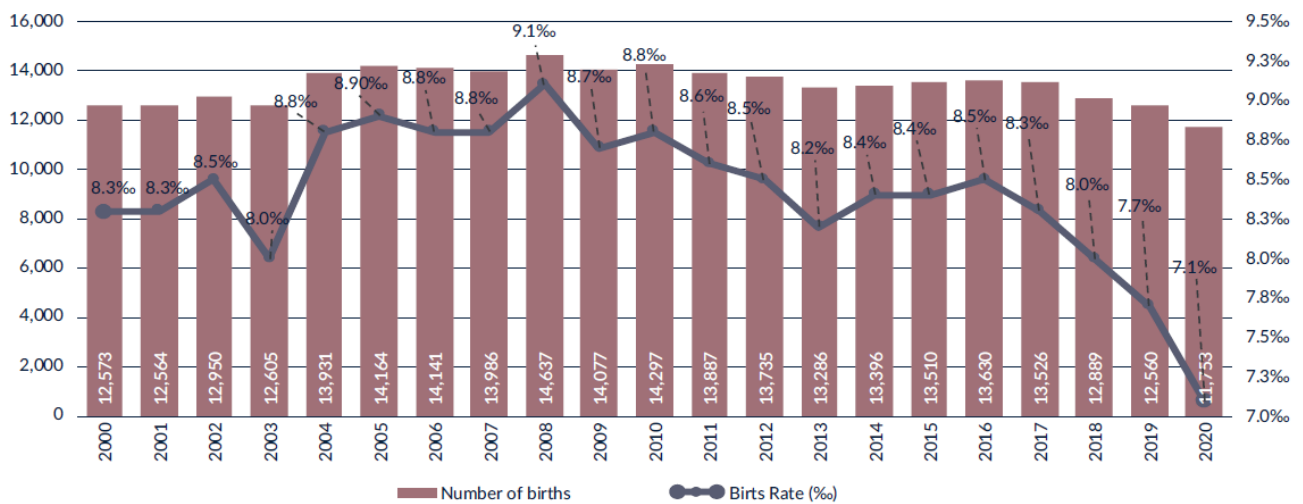
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23. Some of the 2021 data have already been included in this article, although all of them will be included in the next Key Data report for 2022.

1. Demographic, social and regional context of childhood and adolescence

In 2021, the city of Barcelona was home to 241,954 children and adolescents aged between 0 and 17 (representing 14.6% of the total population). They are unevenly distributed throughout the different districts and neighbourhoods of the city, mostly concentrated in the districts of Sant Martí and l'Eixample (29% of the total number of children and adolescents in the city). The main demographic trends in the child and adolescent population are the sustained fall in the birth rate since 2008, and even more so since 2016. In the last five years there has been a 13.8% drop in the birth rate, which has become even more pronounced since the outbreak of the Covid-19 pandemic (in 2020 it reached the second lowest level in the last fifty years). Out of the 73 neighbourhoods in the city, 63 have seen a decrease in the population aged 0-17 in the last year and only in ten has the population remained the same or increased. Furthermore, and in addition to the fall in the birth rate, the migratory movement is reinforcing the negative demographic trend in the 0-17 age group and is exacerbating the traits of a population pyramid that is showing an increasingly older society, to the point that in 2021 we have already reached the projected demographic scenario that had been envisaged for 2031, i.e., ten years early (Municipal Data Office, 2021).

Graph 1. Changes in the birth rate and the number of births. Barcelona, trend 2000-2020



Source: Prepared by the IIAB based on data from the registration and deregistration movements in the municipal population register. Department of Statistics and Data Dissemination. Barcelona City Council.

It is also worth highlighting the existence of a structural gap between the number of children had and the number of wanted children, with the result that the Spanish fertility rate is among the lowest in the world (1.23 children per woman). According to the latest studies on births and family models in Spain (Castro-Martín et al., 2021; OECD, 2022), the main barriers that make it difficult for many people to make their life and family project a reality are job insecurity and uncertainty about the future (which cause many young couples to postpone having children), the lack of institutional support for care responsibilities (with insufficient family policies) and gender inequality in the work and family spheres, in which the full integration of men in caregiving is still an unresolved issue.

In Barcelona, the majority of households with children are single-child families (54.4%) and/or families headed by two adults (possibly two-parent families). The number of single-parent families has remained very stable (12.8%), while the group "Other types of families" has grown steadily, a sign of the diversification of the types of families children and adolescents are born into and raised.

At present, different forms of cohabitation (other than the traditional two-parent or single-parent model) are already present in three out of every ten households with children and adolescents (Municipal Data Office, 2021).

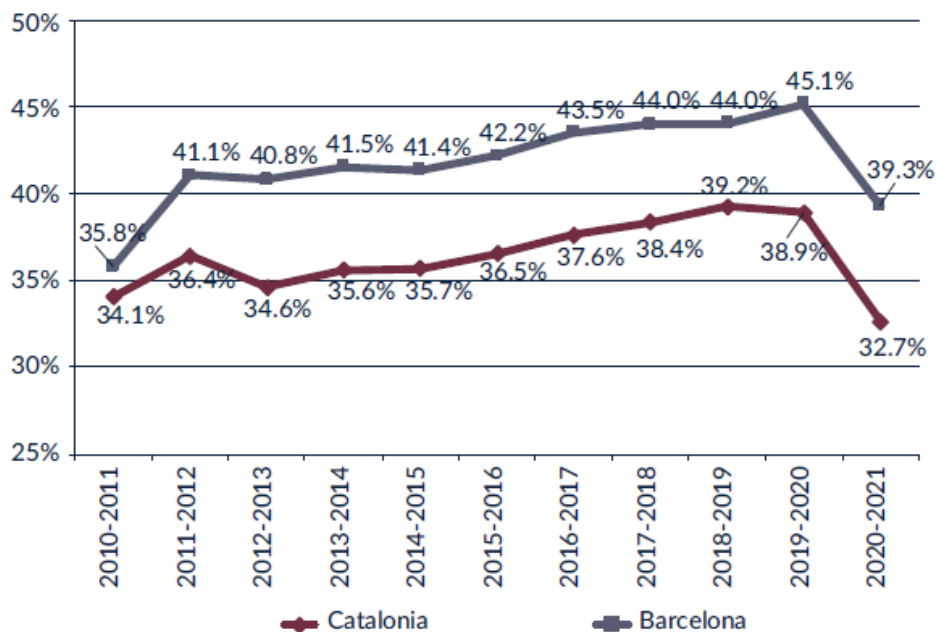
Despite the demographic decline of the 0-17 age group, as we like to point out, the reality of childhood and adolescence is not only of concern to children and adolescents themselves, but is also a major concern for all the people who care for them and live with them (23.8% of adults in the city). From this perspective, therefore, even today, four out of every ten residents in the city of Barcelona are children, adolescents or adults who live with them, care for them and share their daily lives, concerns and expectations with them (Municipal Data Office, 2021).

2. Education: early childhood and transitions to post-compulsory education

The challenges in the formal education of children and adolescents are clearly concentrated at the beginning and end of the educational path, with special emphasis on children in situations of economic and/or educational vulnerability.

Despite specific measures to support families with fewer economic resources, there has been a sharp change in the upward trend of the last ten years, with a drop in the enrolment of young children (0-2 years) of 5.8 percentage points in just one school year, representing an unprecedented drop (Barcelona Education Consortium and the Department of Education, 2010-2011 to 2020-2021). The demand for public nursery schools has increased in the last academic year (66.8%), but it still falls short of covering all the families who apply for public places (Barcelona Municipal Institute of Education, 2020-2021). It is worth noting, however, the various public policy measures that are moving towards recognising the 0-2 stage as a strategic educational stage and which should guarantee better coverage as of the next school year (European Child Guarantee, the Generalitat de Catalunya's measure for universal coverage of schooling from P2 and the Plan for early childhood education and care in Barcelona).

Graph 2. Rate of school attendance 0-2 (%). Catalonia and Barcelona, academic years 2010-2011 to 2020-2021



Source: Prepared by the IIAB based on data from the records of the Barcelona Education Consortium and the Department of Education. Indicators and Statistics Service. Statistics from Education, academic years 2010-2011 to 2020-2021.

With regard to continuity of studies once the compulsory schooling stage has ended, although the rates of school abandonment (AEP) have not broken the positive trend of recent years and a slight improvement can be observed, the focus should be placed on educational discontinuities. These discontinuities mean that, even today, one out of every ten adolescents does not graduate at the end of ESO [Compulsory Secondary Education] (with significant territorial differences) (Department of Education, 2019-2020) and that of the eight out of every ten who go on to post-compulsory studies without interruption (if we refer to the studies of the cohort of students born in 2001), only between five and six adolescents out of every ten finish their A-levels or equivalent studies at the ideal or expected age (Barcelona Education Consortium, 2021).

Studies and educational intervention programmes focused on understanding the "whys" for prematurely abandoning school and educational discontinuities (Tarabini, Jacovkis, Montes and Llos, 2021) consider educational guidance and the prevention of school disaffection (which must begin at the primary school stage) to be key to optimising the results and continuity of this educational stage. A better coverage of places in the Middle Level Educational Cycle (CFGM) is also key so that all students are guaranteed a place in their desired studies.

3. Children's time, out-of-school activities, public space and citizenship

Time is an issue that worries children a lot, both for the amount of time available and what use to make of it. Both aspects are among the least well valued in children's lives. The data indicate that children spend much more time on homework than on free play in the street, and that they have little time to relax, talk and have fun with the family, and little time to spend with friends after school (EBSIB²⁴, 2017).

The city's leisure infrastructure for promoting play and spending more time outdoors is well covered throughout the city, both in terms of proximity to homes and educational centres, but there is still a long way to go in terms of quality: improvements are needed in the diversification of leisure activities in play areas, in size, in naturalness and in accessibility. The Barcelona Public Space Play Plan is a pioneering public policy measure to promote and guarantee children's right to play, and should show improvements by 2030.

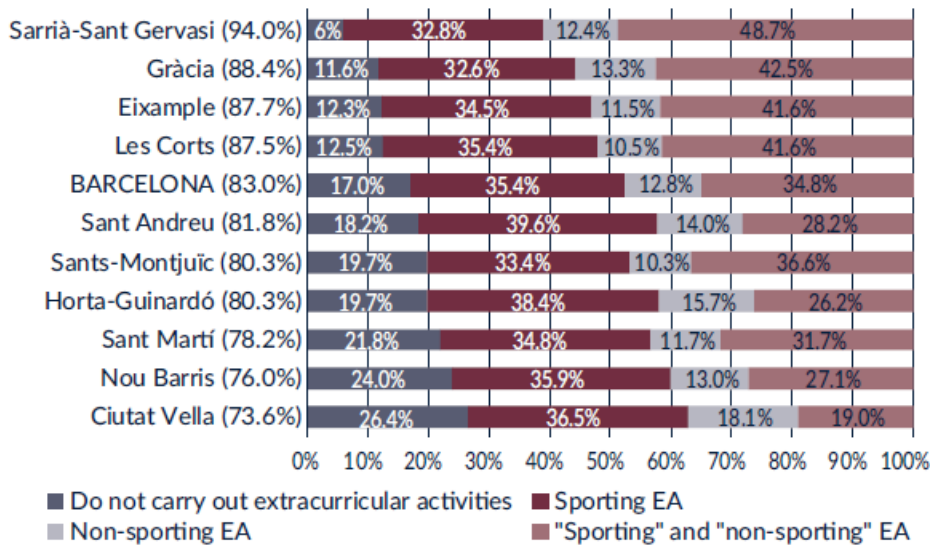
It should be borne in mind that having an open-air place to play safely close to home is one of the elements that most enhances children's satisfaction with the neighbourhood and also one of the elements that most contributes to children's well-being (IIAB, 2019). In addition, children in the city state that the feeling of safety in the neighbourhood needs to be improved and that the perception of friendliness and help from neighbours in the event of a problem has significant room for improvement, which would certainly translate into more children on the street (EBSIB, 2017).

On the other hand, the pandemic has made the role that public space can play in children's lives as an equaliser of opportunities more evident than ever (Cortés and Curcoll, 2020). The total lockdown at the beginning of Covid-19, as well as the reduced presence in the street and in social activities as measures to cope with the pandemic and, therefore, the greater amount of time spent at home, have made us more aware that there are many children and adolescents who live in small flats and/or without outdoor space, in poor living conditions and/or in situations of over-occupancy. For these three indicators, in which children are in a worse position than other population groups in the city, the importance for these children to have a friendly and safe public space where they can meet, play and interact with their peers, emphasises its potential to have an impact on their health and well-being.

As far as educational time outside school is concerned, most children take part in some kind of extracurricular activity (eight out of every ten do some kind of sporting and/or cultural activity), but with significant differences depending on the income of the area: in Ciutat Vella, three out of every ten do not do any, compared to one out of every ten in Sarrià-Sant Gervasi (Study of Sports Habits of the School-age Population of Barcelona City, Barcelona Institute of Sports, 2018). Unfortunately, the educational leisure opportunities in schools and associations are very unevenly distributed throughout the city and the lowest-income neighbourhoods are very deprived, because their existence is more a result of the social tradition of the neighbourhoods than of educational planning. Having said that, it is important to recognise the public effort in the availability of grants both in the field of sport and educational leisure, during the summer holidays and, more recently, with the new measure to support the provision of at least two extracurricular activities a week, which should guarantee access to children in vulnerable situations.

24. Subjective well-being survey for children in Barcelona (Institute for Children and Teenagers).

Graph 3. Children and adolescents (6-16 years) who take part in extracurricular sporting and non-sporting activities (%). Barcelona and districts, 2018



Source: Prepared by the IIAB based on a study of the sporting habits of the school-age population of the city of Barcelona. Barcelona City Council and Barcelona Institute of Sports (IBE).

Note: the grey label refers to children and adolescents who do both sporting and non-sporting extracurricular activities.

Knowledge of rights and having adults listening to them can be considered two interesting proxies for children to exercise their citizenship. The data show significant margins of improvement in both aspects: only half of the children say they know what their rights are, and three out of ten say that there are significant margins of improvement with regard to adults listening to them (EBSIB, 2017). Adults' listening to children's opinions and interests can be considered a practical step towards the exercise of citizenship, as children can only feel they are an active part of the society in which they live if adults listen to them and take into account what they say to them.

4. Physical, mental and emotional health of children and adolescents

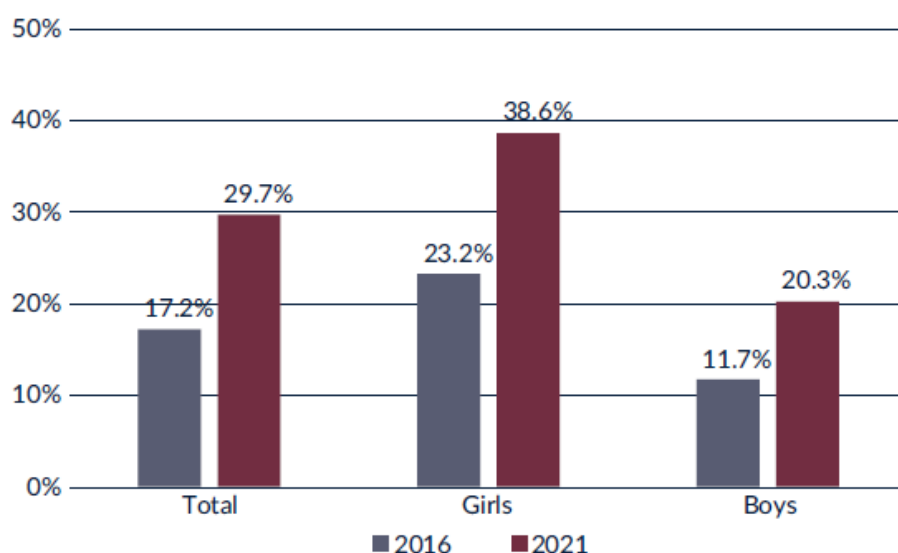
Health is one of the aspects of life most highly valued by children: 85% say they are very satisfied and only 4% say they are not very or not at all satisfied (EBSIB, 2017). Childhood is a stage of life in which good health is most common and to be expected, and a stage in which levels of mortality and illness are lower compared to other stages of life. However, the subjective experience of health or the best health indicators in childhood should not confuse us as to the importance of giving priority attention to the prevention and promotion of health in the first years of life. This is because many health problems in adulthood, whether physical or mental, develop throughout childhood and adolescence.

Hence the need to give the necessary importance to children's health habits: hygiene, rest, good nutrition and physical exercise. The available data show significant room for improvement, and one of the most worrying indicators in this first stage of life is the 26% of overweight children and adolescents (Department of Health, 2018). With regard to mental health, international research indicates that 50% of mental health problems in adulthood start before the age of 14 and 70% before the age of 18, as well as the fact that diagnosis and treatment of children is often delayed (WHO, 2003; Mental Health Foundation, 2015).

Specific studies conducted throughout the pandemic show a notable deterioration in mental health indicators: symptoms of depression and anxiety have increased among children and there has been a steady increase in eating disorders, temptation to self-harm and clinical decompensation among adolescents (Faros Sant Joan de Déu and UNICEF, 2021).

In this sense, the new data from the 2021 FRESC²⁵ survey show that the percentages of emotional distress and the risk of suffering a mental health problem have almost doubled compared to the 2016 edition, especially among girls and in the most disadvantaged socio-economic neighbourhoods. Specifically, two out of every ten girls surveyed are at risk of suffering from a mental health problem and four out of every ten show emotional distress. It is worth remembering that, in order to alleviate the emotional impact of Covid-19, Barcelona City Council set up the Mental Health Action Plan, included in the Mental Health Plan 2016-2022, with specific actions for the younger population.

Graph 4. Degree of emotional distress of adolescents, total and by gender (%). Barcelona, 2016 and 2021



Source: Prepared by the IIAB based on the FRESC survey (2016 and 2021), Barcelona Public Health Agency.

One of the new lines of analysis in childhood and health concerns the impact of environmental pollution, a particularly critical issue in densely populated and busy cities such as Barcelona. Exposure to air pollutants early in life (intrauterine and postnatal periods) and during childhood is a threat to neurodevelopment and an obstacle to children reaching their full cognitive potential. According to data from the latest report by the Barcelona Public Health Agency (ASPB, 2021), 35% of the city's population is exposed to levels of nitrogen dioxide (NO₂) above the legal limit (40 µg/m³) and 100% to an excess of fine particulate matter (PM 2.5). The districts of Eixample and Sant Martí (which are the second and first districts with the highest concentration of children and adolescents respectively) are among the most affected. In the same report, air pollution has been linked to 19% of new cases of childhood asthma and 5% of new cases of lung cancer in children in the city. The overall reduction of traffic is seen as the most efficient way to breathe clean air and avoid negative effects on the health of children and the population in general.

5. Poverty, exclusion and inequalities in childhood and adolescence

At the present time, inequalities and poverty in childhood in the city are not easy to interpret with the available data, given that the latest survey data available for Barcelona (EMCV²⁶, 2019-2020) only partially capture the crisis due to the pandemic and, therefore, it is necessary to interpret them in an adjusted and cautious manner²⁷. However, we have an unequivocal historical perspective that alerts us to a trend towards a worsening of children's living conditions, the result of a traditionally weak welfare state model in terms of family policies and low investment in children (Martínez-Celorrío and Marín-Saldo to IIAB, 2018).

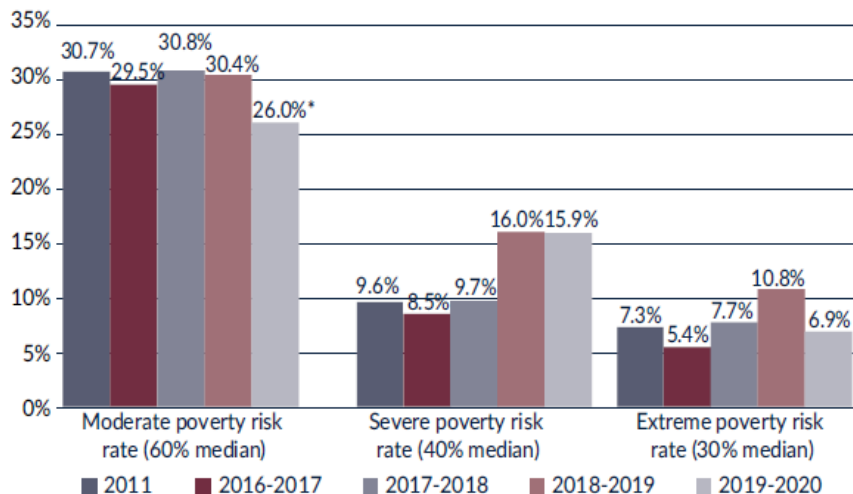
25. Survey of risk factors among secondary school students (Barcelona Public Health Agency).

26. Metropolitan statistics on living conditions (Barcelona Institute of Regional and Metropolitan Studies).

27. The scale of Covid-19 and the economic impact of a major health and social crisis will not be reflected in the EMCV until the 2020-2021 data (available at the end of 2022).

The percentage of severe child poverty stagnated at 16% in 2019-2020, income inequality among children has continued to widen (especially in the highest decile), and most indicators of material deprivation have worsened, especially in the area of housing, a factor that continues to be critical in the city of Barcelona (EMCV, 2019-2020). The imminent roll-out of the European Child Guarantee in Spain demonstrates the need to make a strong and definitive commitment to reverse the trend towards a worsening of the living conditions of children and adolescents in our country and our cities, a trend that has been going on for a long time and which we have still not recovered from since the great recession of 2008.

Graph 5. Risk of moderate, severe and extreme poverty among children and adolescents (%). Barcelona, 2011 and 2016-2017 to 2019-2020



Source: Prepared by IIAB based on the Survey of Living Conditions and Habits of the Population (ECVHP) - IERMB (2011) and Metropolitan Statistics on Living Conditions (EMCV) - IERMB (2016-2017, 2017-2018, 2018-2019 and 2019-2020).

*Note: the sharp jump in moderate poverty (4.4 percentage points) in just one year makes it necessary to treat this data with caution and wait for the data for the years 2020-2021 and 2021-2022 to confirm whether this is really the trend of the indicator.

Furthermore, last November 2020, the child poverty estimation model developed to address the lack of statistical data (Porcel, Navarro-Varas and Cruz, 2020) alerted us to the impact that the crisis caused by Covid-19 could have on increasing child poverty rates. According to this estimate, the moderate poverty risk rate could grow by between five and seven percentage points in just one year (from 30.4% in 2018-2019 to 35% or 37% in 2020). Meanwhile, emergency food aid to homes with dependent children and adolescents has sky-rocketed in the most vulnerable districts and is rising in districts of the city that have traditionally been more stable (Municipal Institute of Social Services, 2020). A scenario that would have made us think, from the outset, that a new crisis was just beginning in 2020.

Without having been able to obtain new child-specific data (neither from the poverty estimation model nor from the emergency food aid), we know that the social services of the city of Barcelona will serve 10.36% more people in 2021 than in 2020 and 22.56% more than in 2019 (the year before the Covid-19 pandemic). Among the total number of people attended in 2021, 24% were being attended for the first time or had not required assistance within the last year. Even so, it indicates the situation is getting worse. Although the €41.3 million in direct aid that Barcelona's social services managed in 2021 represents an exponential increase compared to 2019, it is also certain that this item has experienced a slight decrease compared to 2020, meaning that the reduction could be attributed to the termination of the extraordinary COVID Fund that Barcelona City Council launched in 2020, at the height of the pandemic; the improvement in the city's economic situation with an increase in Gross Domestic Product (GDP), in parallel with a reduction in unemployment to 2008 levels; and also the extension of the Guaranteed Citizen's Income and the Minimum Vital Income to more of the city's citizens. In 2021, the 0-16 Fund will be renewed and will be assigned to 17,323 children between 0 and 16 years old (Municipal Institute of Social Services, 2021).

The various measures in place to combat child poverty (the 0-16 Fund, Guaranteed Citizens' Income, Minimum Vital Income and the new European Child Guarantee in Spain) require maximum commitment from all the administrations involved in order to reverse the under-investment in children and to improve, at once for all, the situations of poverty and deprivation in which thousands of children grow up in the city, which limit their maximum development and condition their paths not only during childhood, but also in adult life, in accordance with the dynamics of social reproduction of poverty: "child poverty is the main route of intergenerational reproduction of poverty: whoever has grown up in poverty will probably be poor as an adult" (Government of Spain, 2020:1).

6. Interpersonal relations, safety, violence and the protection of children and adolescents

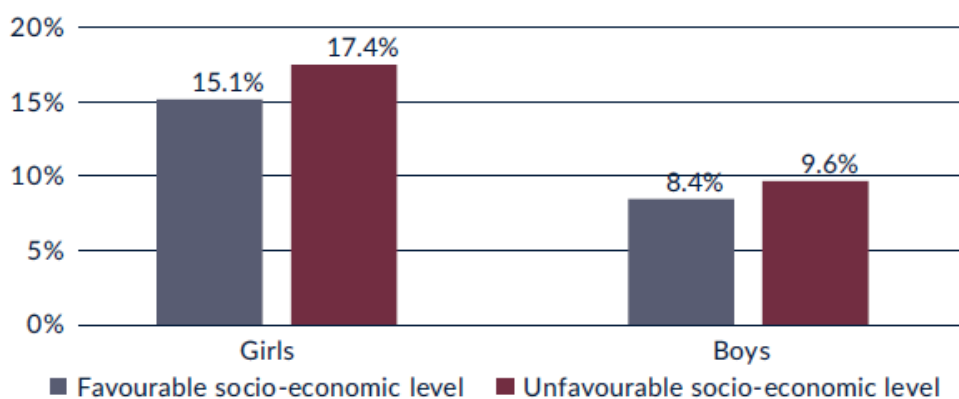
2021 has left us with two very important measures in the field of relationships, violence and safety: the approval of the LOPIVI, the new law for the protection of children against violence, and a measure by the municipal government of Barcelona to tackle unwanted loneliness that includes a specific focus on children and adolescents.

Lack of playmates, situations of school bullying, cyberbullying or peer group rejection are risk factors for loneliness during childhood, a phenomenon to which attention should be paid.

The Barcelona City Council's government measure to combat unwanted loneliness in 2020 has strengthened two important statistical operations (EBSIB and FRESC) in order to measure this problem to which, contrary to the social perception, children and, above all, adolescents are particularly vulnerable.

The results of the 2021 FRESC survey indicate that 17.4 % of teenage girls from low socioeconomic backgrounds feel lonely and of this figure 9.6 % are teenage boys. It is found that this feeling of loneliness in girls is almost twice as high as in boys and is higher in disadvantaged neighbourhoods.

Graph 6. Degree of loneliness of adolescents, by sex and socioeconomic level (%). Barcelona, 2021



Source: Prepared by IIAB based on the FRESC survey (2021), Barcelona Public Health Agency.

With the Framework Act on the Comprehensive Protection of Children and Adolescents against violence. (LOPIVI) (Government of Spain, 2021), the definition of violence against children as an object of the law has been granted and a significant step has been taken in the proactive approach to violence; in addition, the concept of good treatment (which is a legal obligation) has been defined and the notion of safe spaces has been introduced. In our city, we do not have any specific survey on violence during childhood and adolescence, but we do have different statistical operations that allow us to approximate the physical, emotional, sexual, psychological or, more recently, digital violence suffered by children.

The Youth Survey 2020 module on sexual violence in childhood is a good example, and we now know that one in ten children and adolescents have been sexually abused during childhood, more by adults known to them than not, and that girls are much more at risk than boys (of the 7.9%, 11.5% are girls compared to 4.4% boys). It has also allowed us to highlight the amount of sexual abuse suffered at the hands of peers (schoolmates, partners or boyfriends/girlfriends with whom they have dated, or even siblings). Although we cannot know whether this is due to the effects of stress factors deriving from the pandemic or whether it is due to greater social awareness of the need to report cases of abuse, in 2020, 333 reports of violence against children in the home were reported, the highest figure since 2011, marking a turning point in the improving trend of recent years (Department of the Interior, 2020). The 1,200 cases assessed and evaluated by Specialised Child and Adolescent Care Teams (EAIA) in 2020 also mark a peak in the upward trend since 2017 (932 cases) (IMSS, 2017 to 2020).

With regard to the monitoring of social risk and joblessness, a situation that makes children extremely vulnerable is that of children living in urban settlements (warehouses and plots) or in premises and other substandard housing of a settlement nature. In 2020, the Social Intervention Service for Families with Minors (SISFAM) provided assistance to 318 children and adolescents between 0 and 17 years of age in situations of substandard housing (Municipal Institute of Social Services, 2020).

With regard to children under 18 migrating alone, 2021 confirms a change in the trend that began in 2016, in which the proportion of these children migrating alone (mostly aged between 14 and 17) is gradually decreasing in relation to the proportion of young people migrating alone who are over 18 when they arrive in the city. For example, in 2018, only migrants under the age of 18 accounted for 83.8% of the total number of children receiving assistance (the majority), while in 2021, these migrants without family members accounted for only 31.9% of the total (the minority) (Municipal Institute of Social Services, 2018-2021).

7. Conclusions

Throughout the paper we have reviewed the situation of children and adolescents in the city and highlighted the most important aspects of the report Key Data on Children and Adolescents in Barcelona (IIAB, 2021), which analyses the main indicators in relation to the demographic context, education, time, health, poverty and protection and violence. Although we will have to continue observing whether or not the trends become consolidated in the coming years, the latest available data begin to reflect the impact of the crisis triggered by Covid-19 on the lives of children and adolescents in the city. The main areas affected by the Covid-19 crisis and the accompanying measures are the following:

- The slowdown in the population growth trend over the last five years has mainly been due to the falling birth rate: in the last five years there has been a 13.8% drop in the birth rate, even more pronounced since the outbreak of the Covid-19 pandemic (2020 marked the second lowest figure in the last fifty years), to which must be added the halt on the arrival of new immigrants to the city.
- In the field of education, there has been a sharp change in the school enrolment rate, with an unprecedented drop in school enrolment for young children (0-2 years) of 5.8 percentage points in just one year, reversing the upward trend of the last two years, probably due to the fall in family income and the risk of contagion.
- With regard to out-of-school educational time, although we do not have new data, the generalised increase in inequality could worsen the different dynamics according to the income of the area observed before the pandemic: in Ciutat Vella three out of every ten children do not do any extracurricular activity, compared to one out of every ten children in Sarrià-Sant Gervasi.

- In relation to health, there has been an increase in both emotional distress and the risk of suffering a mental health problem, especially among the most disadvantaged girls and in the most disadvantaged socio-economic neighbourhoods: two out of every ten girls surveyed are at risk of suffering a mental health problem and four out of every ten exhibit emotional distress, according to the new FRESC 2021. Both indicators have doubled compared to the data for 2016.
- While the inequalities are not easy to interpret with the available data, the percentage of severe child poverty stagnates at 16% in 2019-2020, income inequality among children has continued to rise (especially in the highest decile) and most indicators for material deprivation have worsened, especially in housing.
- As far as interpersonal relationships are concerned, the feelings of loneliness during adolescence, which are more present among girls and in disadvantaged neighbourhoods, should be highlighted. Although we cannot compare data with 2016, data for 2021 indicate that 17.4% of teenage girls from disadvantaged socio-economic backgrounds feel lonely, and this figure is 9.6% for teenage boys.
- As far as violence and social protection are concerned, although we cannot know whether this is due to the effects of the stress factors deriving from the pandemic or whether it is due to the increased social awareness of the need to report cases of abuse, 2020 saw the highest number of reports of violence against children in recent years (333 reports), and there was also a spike in the number of cases investigated and assessed by EIAs (1,200 in 2020), 14% more than the previous year.
- Finally, it should be pointed out that, although the number of children and young people migrating alone continues to grow (after the decline in 2020 due to all the confinement measures and mobility restrictions), a change of trend is confirmed in the ages of young migrants without family members, of which those aged between 14 and 17 are the minority (31.9%), and those over 18 are the vast majority (68.1%).

In light of these trends, we must continue to develop more and better policies to improve the lives and rights of children and adolescents in the city. And this should be done from the different spheres of government, in accordance with the competences and, as stated in Article 4 of the Convention on the Rights of the Child, "to the maximum extent of the resources available to [the States]". Many of the necessary actions are aligned with municipal strategies and actions (included in the recently approved Barcelona Childhood Plan 2021-2030) such as the Plan for Early Childhood Education and Childcare, the new measure to support at least two extracurricular activities per week, the Mental Health Plan, the 0-16 Children's Fund and the recent government measure to combat unwanted loneliness.

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The effects of the pandemic on spaces and projects that promote community management of culture

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The spaces for community management of culture are a particular form of urban cultural commons aimed at promoting a participatory approach to cultural emancipation, but they are also very active environments with regard to the governance of local ecosystems in favour of economic democratisation, community resilience and eco-social education. In this article, based on the analysis of content from different discussion groups held during the 2021, we will try to grasp how the Barcelona ecosystem of community cooperation projects related to the management of culture has suffered the effects of the crisis triggered by the Covid-19 pandemic. The proposals that this sector is articulating can have impacts on cultural policies, and they seek the construction of a normative framework that recognises community management legally and also appeals to other areas of public policy.

Introduction

We can regard many different elements as cultural commons, for example, customs, laws, ways of dressing, architectural style, social standards, religious beliefs or traditions. They are social practices or symbolic elements, which have a pragmatic aspect but, at the same time, a heavy ideological burden, which can act as common assets that are not owned by anyone yet, at the same time, are the heritage of everyone who recognises them as such. Assets that are protected and reproduced to the extent that people who use or practise them particularly value and protect them by grouping around organisations and institutions for this purpose. Commons are defended and vindicated through collective self-organisation.

Among the cultural commons, nowadays, especially in the urban context, community management cultural spaces and projects represent a very heterogeneous and rich system in terms of the use of material resources and infrastructures in the service of access and equity in the right to local culture. But not only that as evidenced by the consolidation of the Network of Community Spaces (XEC)²⁸.

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28. This article compiles knowledge and observations framed in a project promoted by the Training and Publications Commission and the Network of Community Spaces of the Solidarity Economy Network of Catalonia. The project culminates with a collectively authored book, edited by Eizaguirre, S. and Rodrigo, J. (2022) and published by the Icaria publishing house. "Perquè tot és de tothom. Gestió comunitària de la cultura i economia solidària". [Because everything belongs to everyone. Community management of culture and the solidarity economy].

Culture community management spaces have a heavy ideological burden because, at the same time, they invoke their environments to articulate a sociopolitical movement that defends very specific values and resources, within the reach of everyone and, especially, in contact with the territory, which respond to an ideology of economic democratisation, eco-social transition and defence of the right to life and the city.

Thus, we can say that culture community management spaces and projects represent, on the one hand, a model of participatory management of cultural facilities, resources and services, but, much more than that, they are conceived as a pro-commons sociopolitical movement in a sense that goes beyond the strictly cultural sphere. It is in this sense that beyond representing a breakthrough with regard to public procurement in the management of local cultural facilities and services, the community management spaces of culture can be regarded as nodes of democratic empowerment that are vital in addressing the multiple eco-social crises we face.

1. The impact of the pandemic on participatory cultural intervention practices

In research sponsored by the Barcelona Institute of Culture and coordinated by the cooperatives La Hidra and ArtiBarri in 2018, under the direction of Javier Rodrigo and Mauro Castro, a delimitation of the community management of culture in Barcelona was developed that explored four broad areas of attention: community culture, so-called new community management spaces, local facilities in culture, and popular and community festivals. In this article, in order to grasp how the pandemic has impacted community culture projects in the city, we think it is useful to look at the first two types or categories identified by this reference study, taking into account that they mention two groups of players that are very closely interrelated and, at the same time, complementary. On the one hand, the professionals of the sociocultural and community sector, including participatory projects of artistic intervention, and on the other hand, the citizen platforms that promote the community management of culture, which, in many ways, are nourished by the former, but, at the same time, have their own logic of operation.

For the "community culture" category, which would be the one that mainly speaks of professional players in the socio-educational, cultural and community field, this research carried out in 2018 included as examples art projects with a participatory perspective, such as the "Barris en dansa" [Dancing neighbourhoods] programme. It also included in this section community culture initiatives developed through cultural groups or associations, such as, for example, Comunitària and Riborchestra, in the Ribera neighbourhood. Many of these are experiences that respond to a community-type artistic model according to collective authorship models in which district technical reference figures directly intervene, especially in the areas of participation, youth or education. The third sector initiatives in the field of sociocultural practices and community arts, as well as the grassroots community culture spaces, with strong roots in the territories, would be part of this first type of experience reported by Castro and Rodrigo (2018): The Forn de teatre Pa'tot'hom, in the Raval, or L'automàtica, in Gràcia, would be examples. Also included in this group of structures would be the culture and citizenship laboratories that work in the framework of local facilities and which develop community mediation programmes in the territory and which respond to their own needs of generating a social return, such as the Bon Viver de les Arts programme, in Bon Pastor²⁹.

29. Castro and Rodrigo (2018) characterise these initiatives as microenterprises supporting the burden of many different activities. They work with the timing of specific programmes in which networking with different players and co-design with comprehensive neighbourhood, community health or educational-type plans are highly variable and have a high degree of adaptability, resilience, and integration in the contexts in which they take place. They are experiences found in different fields of work, ranging from expanded or informal education, community action, gender issues, youth, culture or participation in a very focused way where rooting in the context and specific practices mean they do not respond to a single model nor can they be transferred universally. Moreover, from a creative perspective, it is hard to present them as products and they go beyond the existence of a target audience. They are, therefore, more often community and creative processes that propose content, forms and relationships that can make sense and can generate dynamics around local cultural facilities or autonomously within them.

The way in which the lockdown associated with the pandemic has impacted on artistic, educational or cultural projects with a community outlook, especially with regard to participatory artistic intervention, is analogous to that of other sectors in which human contact intervenes as an essential element. The physical distance imposed by the lockdown measures implied that all the intervention activities that meant contact and physical proximity had to be suspended for a long period of time. There are many small festivals and cycles of artistic intervention that were organised before the spring of 2020 events but which have not started up again with the resumption of activities. One example could be the experimental “Cranc” cinema cycle that had gathered an audience and guest artists at L’Automàtica de Gràcia in an intimate conversation around avant-garde film projections. In this example, we find that the conditioning factors of a small venue, in which all the small-format shows and cycles that were held there had to be cancelled and, in some cases, have not been resumed. This particular case would be the example of a periodic activity cycle in a small community-based cultural association and printing-press. L’Automàtica, as an entity promoting printed culture, the graphic arts and audio-visual experimentation, has recovered activity in many other ways, but on the way it has lost some of the reference cycles and activities that had been key to promoting it.

2. The recognition of community action professionals

Another way of thinking about the effects of the pandemic on the cultural and socio-community intervention sector is to observe how socio-community action, from a professional perspective, experienced lockdown and the consequent exceptional social-health situation. The associations organising workers in the community action sector were briefly in the public eye in June 2020, with the publication of the #AccioComunitariaARA Manifesto promoted by various associations of professionals in the socio-educational and socio-community sector³⁰. The warning issued by sector professionals, faced with the risk of a rise of xenophobic speech, gender violence and the violation of basic rights stemming from the physical isolation and health control measures of the pandemic was made clear. Also the demand for more public financial resources to fund programmes, actions and specific projects to deal with the consequences of the crisis and the need to mitigate deficits in terms of solidarity, mutual support networks, urban social cohesion or coexistence dynamics.

“(…) In order to alleviate this crisis, it is necessary to strengthen, expand and create actions and projects that facilitate awareness and collective commitment in order to continue to put into practice, now more than ever, solidarity, networks of emotional support and cohesion and coexistence, and thus draw a new framework of fairer and more significant relationships between everything public and common.”
(#AccióComunitariaAra Manifesto)

In November 2020, the Community Spaces Network organised an online working session between different professionals involved in neighbourhood centres that identified with the framework of community action. About 20 workers in environments identifiable as neighbourhood centres, Omnia points, but also representatives of neighbourhood community management entities, went online to discuss various issues that needed urgent attention. The regulatory context was one of an exceptional social health situation and the central point on the agenda for the session revolved around the limited action posed by PROCICAT in its daily action. One of the underlying problems of social cohesion governance of social in the city is the lack of clear references in the social and media field about the specific work of community workers. A serious problem with very specific manifestations in the form of precariousness and job vulnerability throughout the community action sector, conditioned by the fact that it is not organically framed within the public social services system.

30. This manifesto had a replica in Spain, promoted by *the Network of Spaces and Agents of Community Culture (2022)*, the “Manifesto in defence of the community culture, its people and its spaces”.

Community action is located in a grey area (or no man's land) between public services and resources (represented by social workers, public administration technicians or primary care centres), and the processes of self-organisation, mutual support and citizen resilience of neighbourhood movements. Workers in the socio-community sector are now used to having to combine sometimes contradictory actions: professional action carrying out public policy and the direct action of neighbourhood militancy. During the lockdown imposed due to the pandemic this complementarity was constrained.

(...) as if we had the feeling that we were replacing the role of the Administration, facilitating all this support, this help, by circulating the information, this ability to access places, elements that we could not access because the Administration was closing doors, everything that was accessing social workers was difficult, because everything required a prior appointment, through an application that was very complicated ... In that sense, we can say that the Administration has forgotten about the silenced population, and that's serious. (Amanda Canals, worker of the Community Adult Training School - La Troca - XES Summer School, June 2021).

During the months that followed the toughest lockdown, and as local cultural facilities progressively opened their doors, returning to normal more slowly than other sectors, the professional sphere of community action which, in terms of working conditions, is closer to the third sector than to the public administration, experienced the dilemmas of a lack of clear references more sharply. Technical issues, linked to the urgency of the moment, on how it was possible to get round physical distancing restrictions by taking advantage of some administrative silences, emerged in the everyday action of community workers.

"[...] Many activities, we discussed them with the district and they said no... [...] Then you realise that perhaps it's better if we prefer to apologise than ask for permission (...) why is it possible to do federated but not socio-community or cultural activities?" (Discussion group between community workers – November 2020.)

It was also during the state of emergency that this difference emerged between working conditions in the public social services network and work outsourced to the third sector based on community action plans. The lack of coordination between social workers and community workers, and the fact that socially (politically and in the media) there is a profound ignorance of what community action is and the role it plays in strengthening the local social fabric. The identification of this need in the political sphere was highlighted in December 2020 when the Parliament of Catalonia approved a new Strategic Plan for Social Services (2020-2024), with a budget provision that the Catalan Minister of Labour, Social Action and Family described as "more preventive and more social" (ACN, 2020). For the period 2021–2022, this plan allocates €62M to actions that correspond to this more community-based approach to social services.

(...) call to tender for non-profit entities to develop projects in areas such as attention to child and adolescent care, voluntary associations, immigrant support, the fight against sexist violence, equal rights, education in leisure, support for vulnerable families, the homeless or the elderly, among others. (Catalan News Agency, 2020)

It is also important to point out the role of this group of professionals as barometers of the increase in social inequalities and detecting problems relating to equity and access to public services. Based on direct contact with those sectors of the population that have been left behind in the accelerated digitisation process associated with the pandemic, many workers at the OMNIA points programme for access to new technologies, for example, emphasise that during the state of emergency, educational programmes aimed at schools were prioritised by this network of local facilities run by the Generalitat, and other population groups were left aside in a situation of exclusion, thus broadening the digital gap.

3. The reaction of the movement in favour of the community management of culture

The visibility of the movement in favour of the community management of culture can be situated between two moments. Between the years of crystallisation of many social and neighbourhood struggles exacerbated by the 2008 crisis, expressed in collective unrest around the 15-M movement, and the impact of the socio-economic and ecological crisis, yet to be assumed in many ways, uncovered by the syndemic³¹ as of 2020. We find ourselves in a context that is more or less clearly related to the limits of capitalist economic growth, the climate crisis and the scarcity of energy resources. It is in this framework that, at a very local level, several self-organised neighbourhood projects to promote responses for overcoming inequality and social exclusion have also faced up to the multifaceted nature of contemporary challenges with cultural initiatives rooted in an uneven reality marked by uncertainty and volatility. Thus, we can understand spaces of community management around cultural projects as self-organising dynamics of collective rethinking in the face of a reality marked by a multiplicity of critical fronts. To summarise a common stance we can say that they are all cultural experiences linked to an ecological and feminist vision of economic development. Conceptual references with which we can synthesize the ideological lines of the sociopolitical movement around community management. A space that advocates creating degrowth alliances and which emphasises local autonomy and economic democratisation as central to cultural practices.

In the research sponsored by the ICUB, Hidra and ArtiBarri (2018) mentioned above, they stand out as the second group of activities included as references in the understanding of the community management of culture as “new spaces of community management”. Among these, neighbourhood centres such as the Casal de Barri de la Prosperitat; Casal Font d'en Fargues; Casa Orlandai, in Sarrià; Ateneu Harmonia, in Sant Andreu; Casal Pou de la Figuera, in the Sant Pere i Santa Caterina neighbourhood; Farinera del Clot; Can Batlló and La Lleialtat, in Sants, as well as others, have triggered a movement that has led the local authority to recognise grassroots citizen platforms as sovereign agents that provide a key added value in the leadership of cultural facilities. In that regard, the citizen management agreements for cultural facilities identify, in Barcelona, a way of doing local culture in which local communities are involved in the production and management of content by promoting the democratisation of cultural practices. Outside Barcelona experiences such as those of Coma-Cross, in Salt; Can Sempere, Premià de Mar or Ateneu Candela, in Terrassa, at different points of organisational maturity and with different degrees of institutionalisation, recognition and collaboration with the public sector, have also been mirrored in this type of agreement.

(...) community management must be understood as a political movement, never as a movement of management by delegation. Delegation management is done by companies through concessions or whatever, but the only reason for being in community management is precisely the fact that it reaches where the Administration can't. Here conflict, new frameworks, social transformation, are important, and I believe the problem – and I'm not so much gunning against the Administration, but rather the movement itself – is that there is a risk, and the pandemic has revealed it, that if there is no conflict, if there is no movement and there is no grassroots movement, community management loses its reason for being, and sometimes management, and citizen management in particular, can give a false sense of security. [...] I only understand community management as an emancipatory space for people and [...] for collectives, because, if not, we will become managers, and there will always be other managers that will do it cheaper and with fewer problems.(Oriol Barba – Centre Cívic Casa Orlandai)

31. According to Wikipedia, “a syndemic, or synergistic epidemic, is the aggregation of two or more concurrent or sequential epidemics in a population with biological interactions that exacerbate the prognosis and burden of the disease. Syndemics develop under health disparity, caused by poverty, stress or structural violence, and are studied by epidemiologists and medical anthropologists concerned with public health, community health and the effects of social conditions on health. The syndemic approach departs from the biomedical approach to diseases to diagnostically isolate, study, and treat diseases as distinct entities separate from other diseases and independent of social contexts” (Website consulted on April 13, 2022).

These spaces are defined as "new" because they dialogue with a previous experience of demanding facilities for the neighbourhoods. This previous wave was that of the spaces called for at the start of the 1980s, the result of local demands and aimed at offering diverse cultural facilities. Under different forms of management, La Flor de Mayo, La Sedeta, El Bon Pastor, the Ateneu Popular de 9 Barris, the Cotxeres de Sants, Can Felipa, La Bascula or l'Artesà de Gràcia can be placed chronologically as models of that wave prior to the current or "new" wave of demands for spaces for participatory cultural management. As Castro and Rodrigo (2018) point out, especially from 2011, we find initiatives throughout the city to reclaim spaces, with a collective outlook that is not restricted to the demand for the provision of facilities but rather seeks community involvement through neighbourhood platforms with community autonomy in setting up, managing and directing these spaces. Generally speaking, we are talking about initiatives based on an assembly model that works through commissions, which seeks to generate dynamics of democratic governance at an internal level that involve a high degree of local, militant or activist participation.

4. The need for proximity in relation to culture

The spaces promoting community management of activities and infrastructure for cultural empowerment all emphasise that development is not just something based on hardware, technology, or biomedicine, but that cultural emancipation, democratic governance and lifelong education are also key aspects of local development. However, there is no simple formula for participation in the management of cultural activities, even less one that is easy to replicate. The cities affected by the processes of commercialisation and fragmentation of social relations are extremely unequal in terms of popular involvement in participatory practices in culture. Civic capabilities and community involvement in cultural and grassroots projects can vary enormously from one neighbourhood to another (Barbieri, 2022). If the pandemic has revealed one thing as a cross-cutting phenomenon, despite the unequal living conditions in cities, it is the profound and long-term meaning spaces have that foster a close relationship between population and culture. Also its precariousness in the order of priorities taken for granted in an emergency situation.

[...] Well, of course, culture is not a sector, culture is not an industry, culture is public health, culture is community health, and during the pandemic here we have slipped up, we are sick, as a community, and we have to reverse this situation via the local facilities, and I think here we have a role to play, and calling for culture to be a basic service that must be guaranteed; at this time there are some facilities that are having problems, it is easy to cut this budget, and I understand that we must get the administration to see community culture through these capillary local facilities as essential and as basic. (Enric Capdevila – Barcelona Citizen Management Platform)

It is not always easy to build the associative and organisational balances that make cultural dynamics in favour of economic democratisation and community management of culture possible.

These balances are especially complex and difficult to maintain over time. The cycles of social mobilisation and those of citizen participation in culture come and go, marked by dynamics that are difficult to predict, such as expressions of collective discontent or the impact on the territory of overlapping systemic aggressions. In addition, citizen participation in cultural life is also conditioned by biographical processes, such as the moment in their life cycle people find themselves at. Many boards of cultural entities encounter problems with renewing positions and having social groups that are within the age-range for having children or professionally establishing themselves. These entities find they have to organise spokespersons and committees by relying mostly on the hours and activism of people in age groups other than those mentioned above. If the cycles of association participation are already marked by precariousness and instability, when we cross thresholds of exceptionality, the situation is amplified. Events such as those associated with the pandemic directly affect how popular

participation in culture or community forms of democratising ties at local level are manifested and reproduced.

Firstly, it is worth highlighting how the exceptional nature of the experience of lockdown led to personal and comprehensive rethinking of the reasons for it, and the centrality of activism in people's lives.

(...) yes, lockdown has affected ties. It has affected our ties with everything, our ties with school, with the Ateneu, with work, if you have been able to work remotely... Lockdown has affected the ties. It has also placed life much more centre stage than it was. I think many of us have been able to size up life with not being out at work for eight hours a day. What's happened is that life has taken on such a presence, that sometimes you had to work at home with the two children there, but it has balanced things out, so, above all, it has affected the ties. The social ties. In terms of social ties, the pandemic, obviously, has had an impact. If your physical presence diminishes, which is what makes you commit to someone, which is what makes you participate and be present, there is less commitment and there is less participation. So, we need to go back to generating collective experiences so we can connect with each other. And until we can open again without problems and without restrictions, without prior appointments, it will be difficult to recover this link. At the same time, there are many people who have connected virtually, which is curious, but people that did not have the availability to be present for many hours have connected much more in online meetings. (Mariona Soler - Working Group on the Solidarity Economy and Community Management at the Ateneu Popular de 9 Barris)

The way in which the community management spaces of culture have been overwhelmed by the pandemic can be characterised, in general terms, as very negative due to the centrality that close contact between people has in them. However, it must also be said that in some exceptional aspects it has served to rethink things. As we have seen, community culture practices have been negatively affected with regard to the loss of physical closeness, associated with body distancing measures and disruption of many of their regular activities based precisely on fostering the ties of close contact. In addition to the importance of physical proximity in consolidating neighbourhood alliances and feelings of belonging to spaces and projects, there is also the difficulty that many of the everyday activities have been suspended or postponed indefinitely. It should be noted that not all the spaces for community management of culture cover the same type of needs with regard to the population in their territory, and not all are as essential in guaranteeing the existence of non-commercialised meeting spaces for the population. The halt to face-to-face activity at Casal del Pou de la Figuera, in the Santa Caterina neighbourhood of Ciutat Vella, for example, considering the sociodemographic characteristics of the people that give meaning to it through activities, has had psychosocial effects that are not comparable to halting the activity of a civic centre in another neighbourhood in the city. In this particular framework, those outdoor activities that were able to sidestep physical distancing measures were strengthened, especially the activity around the urban allotments identified as green spaces especially coveted in the most dense urban centres, would be the paradigmatic exception.

(...) at the start of lockdown what happened? Just when we practically couldn't get out of the house or could just get out of the house to do certain things, little by little in a more regulated or more "alegal" way, the allotments were turning into something we couldn't have at the neighbourhood centre. That's to say, this meeting point, this point of support for these people who needed this link they couldn't find in person with practically nobody, was covered by the allotments, and increased participation drastically. You can check that using the WhatsApp group that they have but also in the day-to-day routine. More people were going there. People who said that they had been living in the neighbourhood for some time, and realised it was the green space they could access while living in the centre of Barcelona. So, it was this haven that allowed us, during the

pandemic, to safeguard these points of contact and relationships that we feel in the centre but, in fact, throughout 2020 and when the measures were relaxed a little, we still couldn't have the centre, because it was all so restricted. We don't work with inscriptions, this free movement, what I was what I was telling you about, so there was no such interaction between activities, those unlikely meetings I mentioned before. We're getting that back just now. At the end of last year and the beginning of this one...The things that happened before are starting to happen again. So, the allotments have been a bit of a salvation during all this time. They've grown with many things, sustained participation. Participation has increased and, from that point of view, of being able to meet one another, of being able to look after one another, it has been a treasure. (Aidà Almira – Casal del Barri del Pou de la Figuera)

Another positive effect that has been observed in the discussion groups we have taken part in has stemmed from the forced-march digitalisation of project management and coordination mechanisms and activities. In many civic or cultural associations, the paradox has been that online work commissions have led to the identification of obsolete routines such as the "presentialism" and "assembly-centrism" of many of these entities.

5. Networking to define community metrics

Literature on social innovation has promoted use of the expression "bottom-linked governance" to overcome the dichotomies of top-down urban social policies, or the simplistic approach of only evaluating social transformation initiatives as valid if they arise out of a genuine push from the ground. We could use the expression "bottom-linked" or democratising governance to identify many of the public, community and cooperative partnerships that have developed in the city of Barcelona during the last decade, where the central player has been the Citizen Management Platform (name in Catalan *Plataforma de Gestió Ciutadana*). The Citizen Management Platform was created in 2009 by local organisations involved in negotiations with the City Council to be recognised as awardees in the transfer of spaces with a status that recognised their crucial role as organisations that articulate urban social cohesion, rather than simply being regarded as providers of cultural animation services.

[...] We understand citizen management because civic management, the name used by the City Council, is a formula we left behind some time ago given its connotations with the civic order regulations. And the subject of citizen management is the management of a public service or facility by the citizens. (...) The City Council has a need to label these facilities. We would like these labels to be much more flexible; there are civic centres, creation factories, neighbourhood centres, youth centres, but there are also specific services, information points, schools for the elderly, and there are sectoral facilities such as youth, Torre Jussana, and so on; then again, it's true that civic or citizen management has been going on in Catalonia and Barcelona for many years, but regulated in some way by a normative framework. In Barcelona we've been lucky enough to have an umbrella, which we've had since 1992, which is the Citizen Charter and which has gradually developed. And since 2009 there has been the Citizen Management Platform, through which we entered into negotiations with the City Council that, over three or four years, achieved some progress in getting a regulatory framework which means that, at present, there are more than 90 city management services or facilities running some 60 neighbourhood entities. This is a precarious framework. On the one hand it is based on an element that is conceptualisation. We have a political document, then, a framework of terms and conditions and agreements for citizen management, enabling it to be developed. But, on the other hand, we need an administration that is sympathetic, and which every time we ask for it to vary slightly, instead of acting as our guardian or watchdog, accompanies us in this process. And we have to say that over the years we've dealt with different types of governments and citizen management is accepted by different [political] colours. Here, in the city, it is guaranteed; elsewhere in Spain, it is not the case, and this is a trend that can change, which always requires a demand, vigilance, and an assertion on the part the citizens of what they need. (Enric Capdevila – Citizen Management Platform)

With regard to the effects of the pandemic on these spaces, it should be noted that the exceptional situation has highlighted the importance of articulating self-organised, dynamic territories capable of adapting to changing scenarios. In this context, the role of community management spaces in the construction of these collaborative governance environments is strengthened. It can be said that the pandemic, despite in many ways boosting local participation within these institutions of the commons, has revealed the importance of articulating these second- and third-level entities as the associations that more often than not they represent.

[...] The challenge we have is to start working, not within the framework of the agreement or the limits set by the Administration, but on what the territory needs and wants. And to put at the service of the territory the resources and the personal infrastructures that we have at our disposal in the territory. And each territory has different dynamics and needs. [...] In this neighbourhood, for example, we have never had a community plan, because we do not deserve it. And then, well, as a result of Covid, we have set up a social roundtable that has served to bring together day centres, Students' Families Associations (AFAs), other dynamics, through which we must ensure this melting pot can be cohesive, be condensed. Each district, each neighbourhood has its dynamics, but it's true that we must succeed in strengthening the community, be more interdependent; we need to create structures regardless of the pace of the Administration, which has shown itself to be always on the wrong foot. (Enric Capdevila – Citizen Management Platform)

In that respect, the sector has long been exploring the socio-political articulation of the Network of Community Spaces, which has a Catalan vocation and brings together more entities than those strictly recognised as "civic managers" by Barcelona City Council. The role that the Network has played, even before the pandemic, in defining a useful tool for measuring the socio-community impact of cultural projects is worthy of study and attention.

The Community Balance Sheet³², developed by a working group from 2017 and 2020 as a battery of indicators following the model of the Solidarity Economy Network Social Balance Sheet, has been used a lot in sector networking following the resumption of face-to-face activities after the pandemic and could play a very practical role in consolidating public-community partnerships. In order to understand the usefulness of this measuring tool, it is also necessary to understand the history of governance between the Barcelona local authority and the aforementioned Barcelona Citizen Management Platform, a second level body that groups local platforms with a vocation for organisational autonomy and involved in community management of resources, public services and infrastructure.

(...) and then we set up the Network of Community Spaces, and there the heart of everything was: we need to define what the community management project is, based on what we already do. Because now the City Council is beginning to say it wants this-and-that, community management this-and-that, and going on about co-management this and collaborative management that..., and the essence of what we understand as the basis of autonomous management, and basing ourselves on the practices we defined for the community balance, is being lost. The community balance sheet is the final phase of indicators that enables you to self-evaluate if your practices have a community quality, okay? But before doing the balance sheet we compiled community practices from our projects. And this was very useful for us so we could conceptualise what we understood by community management. And then, through the Citizen Management Platform, we conceptualised the civic management agreement, which was the regulatory part that covered us, while, on the other hand, through the Network of Community Spaces, we related the discourse of community management practices. (MS)

32. The campaign to apply the Community Balance Sheet 2022 by the XES can be accessed at: <https://xes.cat/2022/05/17/arrenca-la-campanya-de-balanc-comunitari/>

It is in this regard that we can say, as Font, Ojeda and Urbano (2015) point out, that community management experiences in the culture environment offer a field for experimenting with spaces that goes beyond the institutions/market tandem. The Network of Community Spaces communication commission (2022) emphasises that in order to understand community management projects economically, it is necessary to step back from a view linked to private profit. Economic exchange is not the vehicle of many of the actions that take place in this type of space. However, that does not mean they are spaces free from the precarious dynamics typical of social capitalism and so ingrained within cultural industries. The way those environments relate to those dynamics – the "how" they take them into account to counteract them – the mechanisms they choose to establish selection criteria for suppliers or to promote certain working conditions, for example, is precisely what defines them.

On the other hand, the militant, activist or voluntary work that allows cultural community management spaces to function is very often invisible and, therefore, requires an effort to bring it out. With the intention of giving it meaning and highlighting its contribution, various initiatives that depend directly on it have attached a lot of importance to promoting tools such as the community balance sheet. The community balance sheet tool developed by the Community Spaces Network (XEC) has, in turn, been tested with the Barcelona Citizen Heritage Programme, coordinated by the La Hidra cooperative. Around initiatives such as the Can Batlló case, Laia Forné and Mauro Castro (2022) have explored impact metrics, which enable the contribution of community management agreements to be assessed and compared to public-private partnerships (PPPs). In that sense, they point to the importance of developing metrics that emphasise social and community impact as a key institutionalisation strategy for defending the commons, especially in the urban cultural field.

For the recovery and conservation of the commons, apart from merely having regulations capable of sustaining the regulation of private non-appropriation of the commons, which is a sensitive point, it is also necessary to support those regulations with mechanisms for measuring the positive and differential impacts of the governance agreements represented by the partnerships. This is what is at stake in the institutionalisation of metrics that highlight aspects such as the public use value of these organisational environments, and which separate management agency evaluation from the simple minimisation of costs.

6. Toward the construction of local ecosystems for economic democratisation

The link between community management and economic democratisation is not only summed up by the fact that many cultural community management spaces give rise to, and are based on, the articulation of community economies that avoid forms of capitalist stimulus based on private profit and seek to defend the common good. The movement around the solidarity economy and its link to these community frameworks of emancipatory culture is linked to the reflection on the complementarity between initiatives and the intersectionality between social struggles. As Ivan Miró emphasises, community-managed cultural projects are initiatives that connect and reactivate other models of developing the city, articulate forms of cooperative democracy, and also reinvent new community mutualities (Miró, 2018). The diversity of organisational uses and forms to which these types of initiatives can be put is one of their characteristic traits. They are spaces or projects of experiences that favour adaptation to a certain modularity of applications and that are accustomed to continuous transformation, a holistic outlook and associative co-construction. They bring together agents of change with multiple areas of activity, whose joint work results in the cultivation of popular empowerment, critical autonomy and community resilience. Work in common that can take different forms and organisational patterns.

And, if there is one common, cross-cutting public policy demand that has been shared by the different cultural sectors, and others besides, it is the demand for a universal and unconditional basic income. This pre-distributive public policy measure, which could cut across all areas of cultural activity, but which, as we were saying, goes far beyond them, emerged in the form of an outcry from the cultural sector at the hardest time of lockdown.

An example of this is the manifesto published in April 2020 and signed by more than 100 organisations and people working in culture on the Nativa website. From the perspective of cultural workers – in a much broader sense than that purely linked to participatory art or community action – a measure such as a universal basic income addresses underlying problems in the cultural and artistic sector and is perceived as a real policy for promoting culture.

Among those problems, it is worth mentioning the ambiguous and often very difficult position of differentiating between the position of a volunteer or political activist, on the one hand, and that of an entrepreneur or social entrepreneur in the artistic or cultural field, on the other. Many groups and people linked to community management of culture see it as a problem that their own personal economic sustainability revolves around commercial trade associated with cultural activity. The fact that many people working in these cultural community management environments often find themselves wearing different hats and mixing militancy with professional activity is, without a shadow of a doubt, one of the sources of headaches and misunderstandings that a measure such as Basic Universal Income (BUI) could help to tackle.

We need initiatives that imagine, express and promote horizons which go beyond the existing unjust and unsustainable system, as already expressed – and will be expressed again – by so many groups and places round the planet before the Covid-19 crisis and which, nevertheless, during lockdown exit, some seem to look as if it could be restored. Manifesto 2020 - People who work in culture, for a universal and unconditional basic income. Nativa.cat

At a time when emergencies are increasing at a faster rate, it is urgent to assess how community culture, spaces, projects and the people who facilitate them react to conditions of rights violations, increasing social inequalities and multiple crises typical of disaster capitalism. Our aim in this article has been to emphasise the need to accompany and stimulate community cultural processes so that, among many other things, urban resilience and economic democratisation initiatives can grow and enrich each other and serve as a lever for meeting the systemic challenges we face.

We believe that this increasingly involves the construction of mutual support networks and educational environments, as well as social self-organisation in the face of the problems, failures and emergencies that we are facing with increasing urgency. In addition, as we have tried to show, the pandemic has had a devastating impact on many of the collective learning programmes provided in environments linked to participatory art and community action.

We believe the presence in neighbourhoods and public spaces of creative community processes that decisively sustain and reproduce life, apart from facilities and economic resources, calls for a conceptual strengthening and firm commitment at the sociopolitical level in favour of community action as a form of preventive social policy that is absolutely necessary. For now, here, the approach to community action is purely palliative in contexts of conflict. It is in that regard that this proposes promoting basic autonomy and collective creativity as basic elements in the service of coexistence, social transformation and economic democracy. A commitment that must include stable and ongoing recognition in the form of improved working conditions for professionals in the community action and mediation sector who are in a situation of permanent exceptionality, affected by the precarious processes of outsourcing public policies and conditions of existence that do not correspond to their essential role in maintaining urban social cohesion and fostering the eco-social transition.

How public authorities recognise community management spaces and experiences, through local projects, maintenance and consolidation agreements or introducing the community dimension into participatory management agreements are key issues that various players in the sector have been critically discussing for some time.

In addition to guaranteeing and expanding the provision of economic resources for these spaces, we believe that value should be placed on the networking of existing players in the territory in which these experiences are developed, favouring the conceptualisation of a plural and transformative economy that questions the public/private dichotomy, with the introduction of community and cooperative dimensions in the consideration of socially transformative agents. The measurement instruments that the sector has developed to lend visibility to its importance, such as the community balance sheet or the political measures that go to the root of the problem, for example, the Universal Basic Income, are tools that must be considered for facing the immediate future.

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Roots, mobilities and collective action during the pandemic and the post-pandemic: the right to the territory

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Analysing the cities of Madrid, Barcelona, São Paulo, Mexico City and Buenos Aires, the aim of this article is to identify the impact of the pandemic on patterns of rootedness and residential mobility and the importance of collective action, community initiatives and mutual aid. The article proposes the convenience of making visible the social relevance of rootedness in local spaces and relative proximity as central socio-existential supports in the case of the most vulnerable neighbourhoods and social groups. The weakening of these roots during the pandemic seems to respond more to the reactivation of the processes of expulsion, gentrification and financiarization of cities than to the residential mobility resulting from the desire to move away from the densest urban areas. This work finally raises the need to consider the right to territory as part of the right to the city.

1. Thesis and proposals

Since the onset of the pandemic, the exceptional circumstances triggered by the crisis and, subsequently, the post-pandemic situation, has been accompanied by multiple forecasts about the social change it may lead to, including but not limited to the way in which territory is occupied and life in big cities. In particular in 2020, a number of these diagnoses depicted a significant shift resulting from the abandonment of large cities, considered hotspots for the spread of the virus, towards smaller hubs, where maintaining social distancing was easier. This decentralisation hypothesis was accompanied by others, in relation to the reduction of demand in urban centres or changes of preference as regards the location and type of dwelling, to the benefit of less populated, more dispersed options.

It was also suggested that there would be a drastic reduction in touristification and gentrification or, in general, the expulsion of local people due to urban processes like those mentioned, which had been intense in the years leading up to the pandemic, in particular in the central city areas. Likewise, there was often talk of the transformation that would be seen in the demand for provisions and services in relation to housing, as well as for adjacent spaces. Priority would now be given to larger-sized properties; the ability to perform paid work from home; the existence or proximity to outdoor spaces or green areas; or the availability of natural lighting and ventilation. Some descriptions celebrated these transformations, seen as unavoidable, while others were accompanied by a more sceptical tone or fear in relation to the uncertainty posed by a future that was difficult to predict (López-Villanueva, 2021).

In the meantime, other analyses focussed on different aspects, such as the impact of inequality and spacial segregation in the spread of the coronavirus (Franco, 2020), as had been the case historically with other pandemics (Barañano and Ariza, 2021). Or they emphasised the importance of collective action and community organisations, with different levels of institutionalisation deployed at a local level, like neighbourhoods, analysing their contribution in the context of the first two years of the new decade.

Following this initial period but straddling the successive waves of the pandemic that continue to plague society and the post-pandemic phase that has already started, a number of these initial predictions seem to have lost force. In particular, those predicting a turning point in the relocation of a large part of the urban population as a result of their abandoning major hubs (González Leonardo *et al.*, 2022a; 2022b). The scaling back of such predictions has largely gone hand in hand with the discovery that remote work, although now more extensive and coinciding with the repopulation of rural areas, has not been accompanied by a radical overhaul in the organisation of work that some authors predicted. Furthermore, the confirmation of its unequal distribution between different income sectors and areas of the city has placed a question mark over this theory (Barañano y Ariza, 2021), as it is much less the case in working-class neighbourhoods. These are home to manual workers whose access to such work is significantly more limited. Other trends, such as those in relation to the social and spacial inequality of the impact of the pandemic (Franco, 2020), or the centrality of collective action in overcoming its consequences, are currently being studied with a view to understanding their complexity.

This article focuses on two aspects that, in our opinion, have been overlooked. Firstly, the importance of roots in the context of the pandemic and the post-pandemic period, in terms of the manifestation of a broadly territorialised social life that is ever present in the cities of southern Europe and, more generally, across Ibero-America. Secondly, the association of this life “anchored”, much more extensively than has been recognised, in the predominance of collective or community practices or initiatives at a local level. This was probably twice as important in the context of the pandemic as, generally speaking, it happens in crisis situations (Bosi and Zamponi, 2019). The recent crisis generated by the impact of the coronavirus was also probably accompanied by a notable intensification in the mixing of these activities with those performed using digital means, leading to the reconfiguration, rather than elimination, in many cases, of proximity spaces and their social relevance.

The thesis proposed in relation to this rootedness, which includes both long periods of being enclosed in the home and short-distance trips to nearby locations, is that it not only represents a characteristic feature of many urban conglomerates in southern Europe and the Ibero-American world (Palomares-Linares, Duque and Susino, 2019; Barañano and Santiago, 2021; Barañano *et al.*, 2021; Domínguez, Leal and Barañano, 2021), but also that, in some aspects, it has been enhanced by the impact of the pandemic and the post-pandemic period. This has occurred, for example, with the unfolding of life in the neighbourhoods. Furthermore, the empirical evidence available seems to suggest that the main threat to these powerful roots in local spaces with a long history continues to come, mainly, from the processes that see locals forced out of cities (Sassen, 2013) rather than the pandemic. Some of these, such as gentrification or the monetisation of property, which intensified during the financial crisis that was unleashed during the first decade of the new millennium, seem to have reawakened in this post-pandemic period.

Secondly, thanks to research performed or under way, it has been possible to confirm that some of the formal and informal social initiatives, rolled out at a local level and geared towards promoting mutual support networks, emerged or were strengthened in the context of the pandemic. It is true that, at the same time, situations of isolation or difficulty in maintaining social contact have been noted, something that has even affected the mental health of different age groups. In short, this is a very complex aspect that continues to be plagued by ambivalence and paradoxes and, therefore, there is no one way of interpreting the situation given the variety of different circumstances.

However, that does not mean that the emergence of collective or community initiatives aimed at providing support or redefining social links between households or in nearby spaces, including their digital versions, should be downplayed (López Villanueva, Crespi, Barañano, Domínguez, 2021). Similarly, it should be noted that these practices and initiatives are not rolled out in isolation, nor are they separate compartments, rather, they form part of a mesh of vital and socio-existential supports (Castel, 2010; Castel y Haroche, 2001; Barañano, 2021; Barañano and Santiago, 2021; Barañano *et. al*, 2021; Santiago, ed., 2021), that together make up an essential part of public provisions and, on a less extensive basis, commodified provisions.

Furthermore, although the aim here is to focus on their local dimension, processes managed in other spacial spheres play a decisive role in their make-up, in particular those at a regional or national/State level, as well as those at a transnational or global level. Thus, public mediation at the regional, local or State level, rather than being on the margins of the practices rolled out at a local level, play a very important role in their facilitation or continuity. In the same vein, it is worth bearing in mind just how quickly the pandemic spread globally as well as the measures adopted to overcome it. The “top-down” intervention of transnational European institutions, driving a wide range of actions to that end, like those developed “bottom-up” by a series of transnational agents and groups (migrants, NGOs, etc.) that develop their way of life and actions in specific local spaces, are other examples of the multiscale dimension of these processes. Clearly, rather than collective local actions, we should be talking about collective initiatives or “glocal” or multiscale communities, although, as reiterated, what interests us in this work is how their multiscale configuration combines with the roots in specific urban territories.

The article concludes by outlining certain considerations about the sociopolitical considerations of processes drawn in the direction of what could be referred to as the right to territory, understood as a relevant part of the right to the city, in particular in contexts like those studied, that is, vulnerable urban spaces in Ibero-American cities. The proposed use of this notion is supported precisely by the importance in these environments of the two aspects previously studied, namely, social life in the context of roots and proximity spaces on the one hand, and the local nature of a notable part of mutual support networks on the other. Both social processes can be understood as forming part of what social movement scholars have dubbed as a characteristic feature of “bottom-up” social everyday mobilisation in southern Europe, in other words, the importance of this “direct collective action” in the “resistance” to the crises experienced in these contexts (Bosi and Zamponi, 2019). We would add here the local dimension and its link with remaining in the territory. For some time now, importance has been placed on local spaces and areas in the configuration of identities of resistance to the space of hegemonic flows (Castells, 1997). This gives rise to the hypothesis, to be considered in other works, regarding the double negative impact of forced expulsions (Abaunza, 2019; Sassen, 2013) in these environments.

This article is supported by two research works: GENREDAB, launched in 2019 and completed in December 2021, focussing on a comparative international analysis of the cities of Madrid, Barcelona, São Paulo, Mexico City and Buenos Aires, and COMURES, begun in 2020 and due to end in April 2023. The context of the pandemic and the post-pandemic period, although not decisively included in either of them, had a significant impact on both and redirected both their objectives and the design of the research itself. The following is inspired by a number of the findings of these works, especially in the case of Barcelona, and is illustrated with evidence taken from them.

2. Roots, mobilities and retreating to the neighbourhoods during the pandemic and the post-pandemic period

An initial estimate of the pandemic’s impact on major cities focussed on their abandonment by a growing sector of the population in favour of smaller population hubs. It was assumed then that the health crisis would see the process of deconcentration, dispersed urbanisation and repopulation of rural areas step up another gear, given the increased danger of living in major urban hubs.

In some cases, this situation was considered short-term. In others, it was presented as a point of no return in the deurbanisation process, combined with the strengthening of the repopulation of abandoned areas, outside even the major metropolitan regions. The switch to the digitalisation of life and work seen during the peak of the lockdown period fed this drastic change in the urbanisation model.

Two years later, there has been no sudden shift as a result of the pandemic, as had been predicted, although there has been a slight increase in relocation to other towns across Catalonia.

A total of 45,339 people left Barcelona during 2020 (1,866 more than in 2019), resulting in a negative balance of 19,536 individuals, according to the Residential Variation Statistics (EVR initials in Catalan). Emigration figures and the migratory balance with the rest of Catalonia in 2020 failed to surpass the average seen in the pre-Covid period (which saw significant suburbanising activity). The migratory balance in 2020 can be traced to a significant decrease in arrivals and a progressive increase in the departures first registered in 2017 (Table 1).

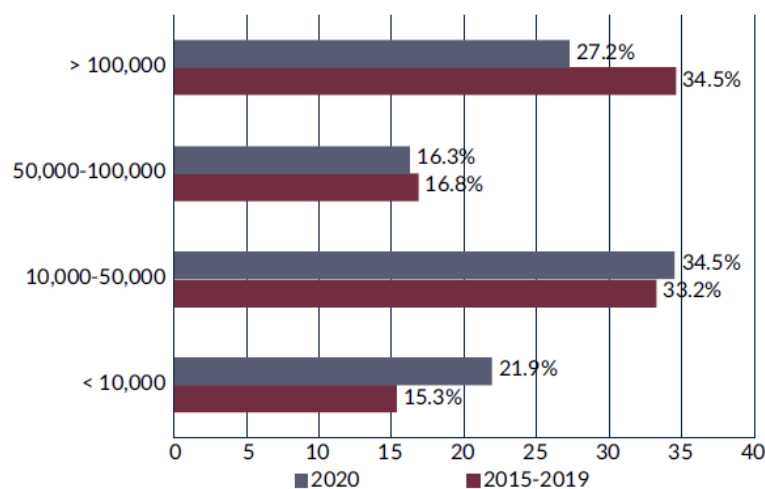
Table 1. Average annual internal migrations from Barcelona to the rest of Catalonia, 2008-2014, 2015-2019 and 2020

	Arrivals	Departures	Balance
2000-2007	24,987	47,381	-22,394
2008-2014	35,096	40,806	-5,710
2015-2019	29,890	38,842	-8,952
2020	25,803	45,339	-19,536

Source: IDESCAT based on residential variation statistics. IDESCAT based on data from the National Statistics Institute (INE).

In 2020, small towns took on a new appeal (Graph 1). The, the destination of 21.93% of people emigrating from Barcelona to other locations in Catalonia were to towns with a population of less than 10,000 inhabitants. The appeal of rural areas should be subject to analysis in the coming years to assess whether this is circumstantial or represents a change in trend. As indicated by certain works (Bayona-i-Carrasco, 2022; González Leonardo *et al.*, 2022a), patterns suggest that individuals have relocated to second residences.

Graph 1. Distribution of the target destination by size of the town chosen by internal emigrants relocating from Barcelona to elsewhere in Catalonia. 2015-2019 and 2020



Source: Author's compilation based on residential variation statistics. National Institute of Statistics (INE).

News articles published in the press in relation to this phenomenon have also turned in the same direction.

During the initial months of the pandemic, reference was often made to a decrease in demand for property in major cities, though this topic subsequently received less attention. Now, references often point in the opposite direction, that there has been an increase in demand and that prices have increased once again, in some cases, close to pre-pandemic levels³³ (Table 2).

Table 2. Property purchases registered and price €/m2 constructed. Barcelona 2015-2019, 2020, 2021

	Purchases			Price €/m2			
	Total	New free property	New protected property	Used property	Total	New property	Used property
2015-2019	13,874	1,082	62	12,730	3,615	4,045	3,564
2020	9,861	857	21	8,983	4,170	4,953	4,067
2021	13,803	1,261	58	12,484	4,120	4,369	4,084

Source: Association of Land and Mercantile Registrars of Spain Department of Statistics and Data Dissemination. Barcelona City Council.

The abandonment of major cities can be traced, in part, to the availability of housing and its price. There is a relationship between the location of new properties and territorial patterns of inter-municipal migration, which in the Barcelona metropolitan region are focussed on satellite towns³⁴, county capitals and coastal areas (Ruiz, Marco y Velasco, 2022).

Although the socio-economic conditions of the population residing within the first crown of metropolitan Barcelona (in relation to the city centre) is unequal, this situation can be traced in greater part to the social make-up in terms of class in both territories rather than the suburbanisation of poverty (Porcel, Navarro-Varas, Antón y Cruz, 2018). However, the dynamics of the property market, which are highly commercialised and strained on account of competition between demand for housing for residential use and as an investment, lead to a significant increase in prices that has widened the gap between Barcelona and its metropolitan region. After the shutdown triggered by the pandemic, processes such as touristification have returned to pre-Covid levels.

A second important aspect that contradicts the anticipated departure from major cities in the post-pandemic period in relation to daily mobility is the trajectory of mobility in this context. We have already seen that social life in neighbourhoods has retreated in the case of Madrid (Barañano and Ariza, 2021).

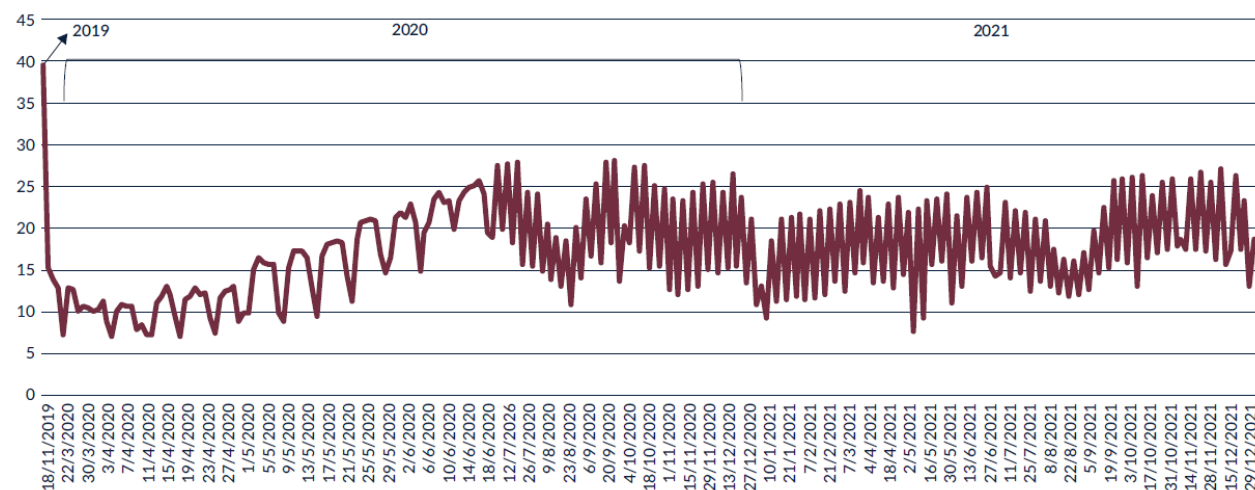
The data for Barcelona seems to suggest the same. Although in the latter the percentage of people leaving their neighbourhood on a daily basis recovered slightly once lockdown ended, the figures remain well below those recorded in 2019, as reflected in Graph 2. In other words, following the pandemic, the number of people who remain in their neighbourhood has increased considerably.

This demonstrates the strength with which social life has retreated to spaces of relative proximity in major cities like Madrid or Barcelona, which, in our opinion, represents a significant feature of the spacial system (McDowell, 2000) prevailing in them.

33. Consult, inter alia: <https://www.europapress.es/economia/noticia-demanda-vivienda-vuelve-centrarse-ciudades-pisoscom-20220210105204.html>.

34. In total, Barcelona is regarded as having 12 satellite towns. They are: El Prat de Llobregat, L'Hospitalet de Llobregat, Cornellà de Llobregat, Sant Joan Despí, Esplugues de Llobregat, Sant Just Desvern, Sant Feliu de Llobregat, Santa Coloma de Gramenet, Badalona, Sant Adrià del Besòs, Tiana and Montgat.

Graph 2. Evolution in the percentage number of people who leave their neighbourhood on a daily basis. Barcelona, 2019-2021



Source: Population mobility studies based on mobile phone, 2020-2021 National Institute of Statistics (INE).

3. Collective action, community initiatives, local wellbeing and cares during the pandemic and the post-pandemic period

From the outset of the pandemic, many predictions were also made about its impact on the shift in social links in multiple directions. Some, more dystopian, showed concern for their inevitable erosion. Others were more interested in anticipating the new types of links that would appear, in particular with regard to the hybridisation of face-to-face and remote formats. Almost all were concerned about the situation of single-person households, in particular those made up of the elderly. And many of these forecasts likewise alluded to the depth of the change and how there was no way back.

In light of the time that has elapsed, and also the contributions made by research on this topic (including COMURES and GENREDAB), we need to stress another aspect that, in our opinion, is of great importance when it comes to analysing the pandemic's impact on the future of major Ibero-American cities. This is the major role of social links between cohabitantes and between households linked by relationships of mutual exchange and support. The same goes for the role of collective and community practices at a local level in overcoming the consequences of the pandemic and, currently, the post-pandemic period. Have these links and practices been weakened? Should it be argued that, on the contrary, the impact of the situations we have experienced has been complex, including both the rethinking of their modalities and the configuration of new initiatives?

A definitive response to this question would surely require further applied research on the matter, which is necessary in order to understand the full complexity of the processes underway and to distinguish between the different impacts depending on the different social and urban contexts. Now, however, we need to illustrate the theses outlined by drawing on some of the conclusions reached. More specifically, the following is based on the analysis of the situation in two Barcelona neighbourhoods: Sant Antoni (district II), located in the centre, and Montbau (district VII) on the outskirts, both considered in the GENREDAB³⁵ research (López Villanueva and Crespi, 2021; López Villanueva, Crespi, Barañano and Domínguez 2021).

The analysis of the discourses of those interviewed in the neighbourhoods highlights, first and foremost, the extensive impact of the pandemic on the population.

35. This research sought to take a closer look at the issues raised, amongst other aspects, based on a quantitative and qualitative analysis. This included conducting in-depth, semi-structured interviews in neighbourhoods in Barcelona, Buenos Aires, Madrid, Mexico City and São Paulo. In the case of Barcelona, interviews were conducted with elderly and middle-aged people of different genders, with and without family duties, as well as individuals born abroad, based on the characteristics of the neighbourhood's population.

This may have combined with different impacts on different age groups, genders, types of household and family duties, in addition to other factors. Concern was central to many descriptions of the situation, in addition to fear as regards the uncertainty created. On the other hand, however, a number of interviewees downplayed the negative impacts, with some even mentioning unexpected positive impacts. This is the case, for example, of the perceived isolation of the elderly, with negative connotations often expressed more regularly amongst third parties than members of the collective itself, at least amongst those who continue to live at home. Some of the elderly population declared that they were used to the situation and the difficulty it represents, without there having been any major change. Obviously, this does not lessen its importance in terms of addressing its causal relationship with the Covid-19 crisis. This is also partly the case when looking at remote work or remote educational activities. Often, exposure to the negative consequences of the crisis, for example, in relation to an increase in social inequality, is accompanied by acknowledgement of the need for and usefulness of such measures in such exceptional circumstances.

One very interesting finding, in all cases, is the repeated reference, first, to how closer social links (family, neighbours and communities) are perceived as essential in overcoming the lockdown and post-pandemic crisis. This goes for both relationships within households and those between different households and at a community level. In terms of the former, mention is made, for example, of the extra help offered to young people to continue with their education from home. Not far behind is the fact that this represents an additional burden. Given the significance of this factor, it was assumed by families who, given their education or availability, were able to offer this support:

Obviously, those who had... who are structured families with a medium level, right? They will have continued because their parents will have been on top of them and they will have had the resources. The problem is when it comes to single-parent families. It depends on who. And with economic problems that mean they don't have access to tablets, nor mobile phones or systems and their parents don't know about some things either. The pandemic affects work however it affects it, as it affects the different social layers, [but] in this case it is much more serious, and what could happen is that the children, who are not to blame for the parents they have, depending on where they were born, it could have created for them... I think that has an impact on them! (SA004)

The importance of the household during the pandemic is also reflected in the activation of family regrouping processes, by no means exempt from conflict, that seek to reduce the impact of isolation:

My daughter would come to see me, we'd go to the square together. But when I saw that at home I couldn't... she would bring me lunch and dinner prepared, she made it for me. [...]. One day, I had a little of that thing that twists your mouth a bit, what's it called? [...] then all the medication and things they put me on [...] and they brought me here. I'm fine here, well taken care of. (SA009)

So it's been hard... it's been hard for her too, she works from home... we've been forced into living with one another... There have been hard times? More because of having to adapt to one another again... but given the circumstances it was unavoidable [...]. (M003)

In other cases, it shows how relationships between people from different households might have been maintained by recreating them at a distance, especially by telephone or digital means, and accompanying them, as far as possible, with physical exchanges in close proximity. This ranges from phone calls and daily or weekly catch-ups to doing shopping for a relative or acquaintance. All these examples are a testament to the importance placed on this constant supervision or guidance, especially in relation to those regarded as being most in need:

I have especially helped out a sister of mine who has been single for the past 24 years. I keep an eye on her to see if she is eating or not... Because she lives with you? Yes. (M004)

Beyond helping out in the home, or between homes, mention has often been made of the important role played by community networks developed in the neighbourhoods or local spaces. Including both formal and informal relationships, in the form of different types of associations or initiatives or those lacking such organisation:

[...] but here, both the association and neighbours, everybody offered to help, but I didn't need it... they gave people living by themselves free food, but I thought I could cook for myself and buy my groceries. I didn't do it because I was OK. Then a neighbour who lives opposite called [Júlia] would say "I've made vegetable paella" and give me a plate full now and again. (M010)

In any event, in the two Barcelona neighbourhoods included in the study, there were reports of an increase in neighbour support catalysed by different formal community networks.

It's true that there was a group of young people who got together and offered a phone to people who needed one. That was great, as then they would ring up and I'd say "I need this". So they would bring you what you needed, put it in the lift downstairs or come upstairs and put it by the door and leave. What I mean to say is that, yes, people have been able to help, they have done, over the phone too. Through a programme set up by Barcelona City Council called Radar. (M009)

The role assigned to these aid networks is reflects how highly the existing network of residents' associations are appreciated in these neighbourhoods, due to their strong involvement in sustaining the well-being of local residents, whether through solidarity or neighbourhood struggles over many years.

In that sense, having roots and living in the neighbourhood are other aspects viewed very positively, as they often helped to maintain these networks mutual support and welfare networks. We also believe it is significant, when addressing the threats facing these local roots and networks of relationships and help, that people did not cite the pandemic as the main cause but rather the possibility of locals being driven out of neighbourhoods due to the rise in property prices which, by the way, was a particular concern in Sant Antoni, where gentrification has had a bigger impact:

If people live here it's because we live well and we own our flat. If we didn't own them, we'd... Well, not everybody, obviously, but we'd be worried because, look, I've got friends who were paying 600 euros a month and now their rent has been put up to 1,200. And that was that, they've gone. [...]. Young people and the elderly now, poor things. I can't bear thinking about it. (SA006)

4. Some final considerations: the importance of roots and formal and informal "arrangements" in the context of the pandemic and post-pandemic period. Foundation of a right to the territory?

The pandemic that we have survived and the current post-pandemic period have not only placed a question mark over future changes but also fuelled the fear and uncertainty about the end of the world as we have known it until now (Wallerstein, 2002). Needless to say, the recent outbreak of war, involving a nuclear power on this occasion, has reinforced both issues. All this plus other worrying news items regarding the impact on supply chains or shortages of products and basic energy supplies, or in relation to more long-term problems, such as those related to climate change.

Concern about serious macrostructural problems has, since the pandemic, been compounded with concern about worsening living conditions in the context of Covid-19, in particular when it comes to the most vulnerable persons and groups.

Factors such as the “epidemic of loneliness” (Illouz, 2019) and its impact on mental health have been subject to special consideration. Likewise, there have been many disparate assessments about the growth in digitalisation, not only in the workplace, but in life in general, including the realm of social relationships, with even the closest relationships not exempt from this phenomenon.

Life in cities, as well as the urbanisation model and the relationship with the territory or home, are topics that have found themselves in the spotlight of debates on changes underway. Predictions have abounded in this field that have insisted on profound changes in housing preferences, ways of occupying the territory or staying in the same home, in contrast to what had prevailed previously. It has also been common for this major transformation to be interpreted in terms of an unstoppable exodus from major cities to smaller hubs, even rural areas, to achieve a healthier lifestyle closer to nature.

Without denying these shifts, in this article we have chosen to place the emphasis on other aspects of the complex processes under way which, by contrast, allow us, firstly, to highlight the maintenance of roots in households and nearby spaces. Secondly, something similar can be said of the important role played by social links both within households and networks that link households and other local neighbourhood spaces together (Blokland, 2018; 2017; 2003; Blokland and Savage, eds., 2008; Gastrignanò and Manella, 2011).

In relation to the former, it should be noted that now that more than two years have gone by since the lockdown measures were adopted, the data seems to confirm an exodus from major cities, although to a much lesser extent than hypothesised and forecast. Furthermore, everyday mobility data in Barcelona also shows that there has been a retreat to the neighbourhoods, as had previously been seen in Madrid (Barañano and Ariza, 2021).

The accumulated qualitative evidence has demonstrated that although there have been emergencies associated with isolation and loneliness, countless references have been made to the support offered or received in the three areas in question. This has happened by resorting, when necessary, to the hybridisation of relationships vis a vis other remote connection, including within the home. In other cases, support from relatives or acquaintances has been combined with support from other external networks or organisations, or formal and informal help, both from public authorities and community initiatives. The repeated allusion to the local nature of these networks is interesting, in particular in the case of vulnerable neighbourhoods and the importance of proximity spaces in the request for or provision of help.

Beyond the circumstantial dimension of these analyses, linked to a pandemic that has disrupted most forms of social life, in this article, we have sought to demonstrate the need to take the general context into consideration, in other words, the prevailing spacial system, to properly understand the processes to be studied. As we have pointed out in regard to other works (Barañano, 2021; Barañano and Ariza, 2021; Barañano *et al.*, 2021; Domínguez, Leal and Barañano, 2021), we believe that relative permanence, both in specific locations and in homes, combined with residential mobility in which short distances or daily journeys above all in nearby spaces such as neighbourhoods prevail (Bericat, 1994), represent one of the main features of this spacial system, at least in terms of the vulnerable areas of major cities. Without doubt, the predominance of property ownership, despite the recent increase in rentals, enhances this phenomenon, as is also the case with the welfare or care system (Allen *et al.*, 2004; Arbaci, 2019; Domínguez, Leal and Barañano, 2021). In this case, worth particular mention is the significant role played by family and social relationships, the limited intervention of public authorities, although this has increased in recent decades, and the notably selective nature of access to the market (Vega, Martínez Buján and Paredes, eds., 2018; Martínez Buján, 2014).

In all likelihood, various other economic, political, cultural, social and even emotional considerations should be added to these aspects, which go beyond the remit of this article. In any event, all this suggests that consideration should be given to the existence of what we have dubbed a spacial system, following the proposal of certain authors (McDowell, 2000), and in line with the predominant nature of these trends, at least at present.

With a view to posing a question to guide our research in the near future, rather than providing a response here, we cannot help but allude to the idea that we have summarised as the notion of the “right to space” (Mela, Belloni and Davico, 2006: 170) or the territory as part of the right to the city. On a positive note, in doing so, we allude to the relevance of territorial affiliation in the spacial system and the prevailing way of life in cities like Madrid or Barcelona and, in a wider context, those in southern Europe and Ibero-America, in particular in areas considered vulnerable, as we have studied in the cited research. We believe that this feature does not tend to be taken into consideration enough. Hence our intention has been to enhance its visibility and analyse it through our research. Secondly, we believe that this feature should be taken into consideration in relation to the processes of expelling people from cities. These may be leading not only to a deepening of spatial segregation or inequality in cities, but also to an erosion of many of the networks of relationships, support and exchange. This might be the case of some of the community organisations most frequently mentioned by residents interviewed who tend not to venture beyond relatively nearby areas. Their very configuration and maintenance seem to benefit, to a certain extent, from this relative proximity to homes, between homes and local spaces.

Social reproduction and care, which are critical elements of social life (Barañano, 2016), could be affected by processes such as gentrification or touristification or other expulsion processes with a similar effect (Luke and Kaika, 2019; Katz, 2001), at least while public cover in these areas is unable to take the necessary step forwards, in particular as regards care and access to housing. Furthermore, all of this is undoubtedly linked to an important gender perspective, as hindering the tasks in this field is tantamount to hampering the lives of many women who continue to assume the burden of these tasks (Martínez Buján, 2014; Vega, Martínez Buján and Paredes, eds., 2018). And, finally, there is an important sociocultural aspect, given that to a large extent, the roots and many of these relationship networks not only help to overcome social emergencies, but also represent important socio existential supports (Barañano and Santiago, 2021; Santiago, ed., 2021; Revilla *et al.*, 2018; Serrano *et al.*, 2019).

Finally, it is hardly necessary to highlight the important political dimension of the processes in question, such as the very notion of the right to the territory or a life with roots and a sense of belonging, in particular, with regard to forced expulsions, a dimension also supported by recognising that local and bottom-up “direct social action” (Bosi and Zamponi, 2019) constitutes a fundamental form of social mobility in major cities like Madrid and Barcelona or other Ibero-American cities. In these cities, resistance to the successive waves of the crisis has been fed specifically by this complex mesh of formal and informal initiatives and organisations at different institutional levels that have been deployed both in homes and beyond in collaboration with other external interventions, in particular, public interventions, and in spaces of relative proximity.

All this seems to have resulted in the desire to protect this right to the territory in the orientation of public policies with a view to facilitating, when desired, residential and territorial permanence in spaces that are sufficiently close enough to those in which support or exchange networks are maintained with a view to ensuring the facilitation of well-being and care and minimising the capacity to face day-to-day social emergencies.

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This text deals with discrimination in the urban space and the relationship between the right to non-discrimination (as a necessary ingredient in the right to the city) and local policies, with an emphasis on the specific roles of municipal governments and citizens in achieving truly inclusive urban spaces. First, discrimination is tackled on a more theoretical level, with a brief analysis of its polyhedral nature and its multiple manifestations in areas such as gender and sexual orientation, ethnic origin, religion, migratory and socio-economic status, age and state of health. These are areas that often overlap and reinforce each other within a framework of intersectionality. Then, different types of discrimination and of discriminating agents are explored: institutional, spatial, and systemic or structural discrimination. Next, different international approaches, regulations and case law regarding the right to the city and the principle of non-discrimination are examined, with a focus on the role assigned to cities and municipal governments. Finally, some specific initiatives for preventing and combatting discrimination at a municipal level are mentioned, and the conclusions section offers some recommendations.

Introduction

The principle of non-discrimination is an integral element in the right to the city (Harvey, 2013). The urban space becomes the stage for inequalities and discrimination, as it both reflects society's structure and dynamics and can reinforce and perpetuate them. Ultimately, the urban space is a product of social relations and, as such, it constitutes a physical or material expression of their dynamics and conflicts (Lefebvre, 2013). Following this premise, in a crisis context like that of the Covid-19 pandemic, inequalities in access to decent housing, to a clean, safe space, and to public services and facilities have become even more obvious. The solution to these shortcomings involves a collective call to transform cities and urbanisation processes in order to create spaces free from every kind of discrimination, in a constant battle that requires us to identify and combat the multiple forms it can take.

In parallel, cities have played a fundamental role as spaces where tools or experiences to fight discrimination can be developed. Just as the urban space reflects existing inequalities, intervention on this space can have an impact on these inequalities, at least partially. Cities are particularly predisposed to displaying new rationales that can later be extrapolated to other areas. In addition, from an institutional point of view, municipal administrations are the closest institutions to the public, and therefore are more able to make an impact than other institutions on a regional or state scale.

For these reasons, city councils are at the heart of regulations and actions within the local and international human rights systems designed to help to achieve discrimination-free cities. Some of these initiatives are detailed below, after an examination of the phenomenon of discrimination and its multiple facets.

1. Axes and forms of discrimination

Discrimination is the breakdown of the basic principle that states that all people must be treated equally, regardless of personal or social circumstances. A closer look at discrimination reveals that rights and freedoms have been recognised based on a hegemonic liberal model that persecutes, denies or devalues any expressions that do not fit into this model (Sousa Santos, 1997: 115-122). Within the framework of this hegemony, throughout history, groups like women, people with functional diversity, the LGBTQ+ community, migrants, minority ethnic groups and many more have experienced discrimination that translates as a lack of rights or as recognition based on devaluation, rejection or disdain (Young, 2011).

There are therefore many forms and axes of inequality and discrimination. For some of these axes – such as gender, skin colour and sexual diversity – social movements and struggles have made discrimination more visible and have forced the creation of new, more inclusive frameworks for action. For others, unequal relations in terms of power and resources mean that discrimination is still normalised and invisible, making it difficult for people to become more aware of it collectively and act. In Catalonia, the recent Law 19/2020 on Equal Treatment and Non-Discrimination includes nine axes of discrimination that had garnered little recognition until now. These include homelessness, incarceration, poverty (aporophobia is the rejection or hatred of people in poverty), and HIV status. All of these forms of exclusion reveal deep-rooted, concealed discrimination.

Caused by patriarchal social structures, gender-based discrimination is evident in women's lack of access to resources and decision-making power: in the field of urban planning, for instance. This form of discrimination – closely linked to the division of labour between productive and reproductive tasks, the feminisation of poverty, and the wage gap – makes it particularly difficult for women to access decent, adequate housing. In addition, in spheres like mobility and transport, women are more exposed to harassment and aggressions, and are therefore less likely to be able to travel safely (Col·lectiu Punt 6, 2019). As for orientation and sexual identity, the LGBTQ+ community is more likely to receive aggressions of all kinds – both verbal and physical – in public spaces.

Racialisation, or the construction of phenotypes or other differentiating elements based on the sociocultural category of *race*, is also linked in many cases to a lack of access to adequate housing: a dynamic that regularly leads to residential segregation. Racialised communities are often relegated to the peripheral areas of cities, with less infrastructure and fewer facilities, and face greater difficulties in satisfying their housing needs. Among other consequences, segregation also entails an expensive commute to the place of work or education and the aforementioned lack of adequate services, such as healthcare, with the resulting repercussions on health and other areas of life.

Often, these axes of inequality and discrimination overlap and intertwine, reinforcing each other, in a phenomenon known as intersectionality. In other words, people can belong to more than one marginalised group at the same time, which exacerbates the specific discrimination they experience. Therefore, acting exclusively within one area or on one axis is not enough: the cumulative effects of different types of discrimination must be considered. Initially theorised by the black feminist movement (Crenshaw, 1989), the concept of intersectionality has since been used in international case law, for example in the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (General Recommendations No. 25 and 32) and by the Inter-American Court of Human Rights, in cases such as *Gonzales Lluy et al. v. Ecuador*.

In line with this intersectionality and the complex, multi-faceted nature of the phenomenon, discrimination operates in different areas and takes different forms, which will be defined briefly below.

2. How does discrimination operate?

Discrimination can operate on an individual level, meaning that different expressions of inequality have an impact on a person, whether directly, indirectly, on a multiple basis or by association, among others. Nonetheless, the framework of discrimination also has collective effects that transcend an individual perspective. The roots and consequences of this collective dimension are deeper and often violent. In collective discrimination, unequal power relations boost the effects of the exclusion and result in a framework of action that normalises, legalises and perpetuates inequalities.

One of these forms is institutional discrimination, the framework of action for which is the power held by the state or institutions. This is the existence of regulations, policies and practices – implemented by both public and private entities – that harm certain groups in a situation of vulnerability. Examples of this would be:

- Statements by public authorities that incite or justify discrimination and criminalise certain uses of space attributed to vulnerable groups, such as homeless people or sex workers.
- The enactment of laws that deny these discriminated groups rights (civil, social and political), or only recognise them partially and subject to conditions, as in the case of immigration regulations.
- The design and implementation of policies that ignore the aforementioned groups or directly discriminate against them, such as education plans that pay no attention to gender or cultural diversity. This would include the paternalistic views and treatment promoted by certain public policies.

Another type of collective discrimination is spatial discrimination. Specifically, this is discrimination relating to the unequal territorial distribution of the resources and opportunities the city offers. It can materialise as a lack of access to an adequate public transport network, to green spaces, to a decent cultural and leisure offering, to quality public services or to affordable housing. In many cities, the best public services and spaces are concentrated in the higher-income areas, while more impoverished parts of the city are home to lower-quality, polluting infrastructures and services.

At the same time, spatial discrimination reinforces other types of associated inequalities, which leads to people experiencing discrimination just because they live in a certain location, in a phenomenon described as the “neighbourhood effect” (Nel-lo, 2021).

Finally, there is systemic or structural discrimination. It occurs when it is not a specific practice or law that is discriminating against a certain group, but rather a set of practices and norms that operate in various spheres (legal, social, political, economic, etc.), so that the group is put in a position of subordination and vulnerability. It is the manifestation of the power and oppression exercised by privileged groups (Young, 2011) over women, the LGBTQ+ community, Roma people, migrants, racialised people, older people, etc.

The existence of systemic discrimination is recognised by the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (ICESCR) adopted by the UN (General Comment No. 20, 2009) and by the Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination (General Recommendation No. 34, 2011).

3. Cities' role in protecting human rights and combatting discrimination

In the same way that discrimination committed by institutional powers is far-reaching and generalised, policies and measures adopted to combat discrimination rely on collective change and the transformation of these institutions. In this regard, the fight against discrimination has mainly focused on the actions and obligations of states within the framework of international human rights law, and the role played by cities has often been disregarded. As mentioned above, cities are predisposed to adopt new practices or policies that can subsequently be emulated by other spaces. They are also the setting where the repercussions and transformative capacity of social movements' struggles are at their strongest, given their proximity to power and their influence over it. In the vast majority of cases, the starting points for truly transformative actions or policies can be found in social demands at a municipal level, and city councils are the spaces where initiatives that constitute important steps forward in the fight against discrimination are adopted.

This perspective is reflected in the World Charter for the Right to the City, where the protagonists of social change are cities. Cities are where life is lived and developed, and where the most significant social transformations have taken place. The Charter begins, in Article 1, with the statement that "all persons have the Right to the City free of discrimination based on gender, age, health status, income, nationality, ethnicity, migratory condition, or political, religious or sexual orientation". In this same vein, the Global Charter-Agenda for Human Rights in the City orders municipal authorities to guarantee the exercise of the aforementioned rights without any kind of discrimination taking place. The New Urban Agenda also emphasises the challenge of achieving discrimination-free cities and lists a series of phenomena and groups that experience discrimination:

addressing multiple forms of discrimination faced by, inter alia, women and girls, children and youth, persons with disabilities, people living with HIV/AIDS, older persons, indigenous peoples and local communities, slum and informal-settlement dwellers, homeless people, workers, smallholder farmers and fishers, refugees, returnees, internally displaced persons and migrants, regardless of their migration status (New Urban Agenda, paragraph 20).

In cities all over the world, byelaws have been enacted to combat discriminatory action committed both by citizens themselves and by public and private agents, with a view to eliminating all kinds of discrimination from public spaces. Examples of this type of regulation include the byelaws passed in Lima (Peru) and Jackson (USA). Cities have also seen the use of affirmative action, or municipal laws that call for a certain percentage of staff hired, in both the public and the private sector, to belong to vulnerable minority groups. In South Africa, for example, the Employment Equity Act states that, in municipalities, the public sector and private companies with more than 50 employees must implement an equity plan to ensure that a certain proportion of the staff at all levels belongs to minority groups. Other similar instruments include the quotas for people with disabilities in effect in many municipalities. In Catalonia, a 2% quota for people with disabilities was introduced in 2015 and applied to companies with more than 50 employees.

The importance of cities in the fight against discrimination is also reflected in the International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination (ICERD), which expressly includes cities in its call to review all governmental policies and reform or remove any laws or regulations that generate or reinforce discrimination (Article 2.c). Specifically, municipal governments are ordered to make sure their activity does not and cannot have discriminatory effects by reviewing the design and implementation of their policies, including supposed neutrality or non-intervention, which can also lead to certain types of discrimination. An example of a clearly discriminatory policy applied by local governments is the prohibition or restriction of street trade through municipal regulations. These regulations are discriminatory because they develop a concept of the right to work that is closely linked to the formal job market.

By excluding other ways of exercising the right to work due to economic interests, these rules exacerbate the vulnerability and exclusion experienced by the groups who often turn to these forms of work – often, the migrant and racialised populations – and encourage exclusionary, criminalising discourses.

It is worth noting that, beyond the international documents that highlight the role cities must play in combatting discrimination, cities are also responsible for developing anti-discrimination tools and policies within the framework of obligations deriving from international law. Under both the ICCPR (International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights) and the ICESCR (International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights), cities must guarantee civil, political, economic, social and cultural rights through measures such as citizen participation in decisions and management of public infrastructures and services, including health and education. With this perspective of cities committed to the protection and development of human rights and the fight against discrimination, the reductionist view imposed by the delimitation of powers must be abandoned.

Even so, cities or municipal governments have not been considered directly responsible – but rather in an indirect, subsidiary way – for the agreements and commitments made by states. Cities must not only be in charge of management in the material areas indicated by the relevant regulation; on the contrary, the protection of human rights grants them universal power to act. In fact, many cities across the world have officially declared themselves “Human Rights Cities”, meaning they are committed to guaranteeing the principle of non-discrimination. In support of the argument put forward here, it is worth noting the position of the Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination in its recommendation to Slovakia (CERD/C/SVK9-10): it deems that local and regional autonomy must not be used as an excuse for discrimination and non-compliance with the international obligations signed by the state regarding provision of social housing for the population of Roma origin.

Following in the same vein, international courts have started to issue recommendations and statements that directly link cities to anti-discrimination obligations. Local authorities all over the world have been urged to implement international mandates regarding the non-discrimination of people of disabilities, including the decisions CRPD/C/15/D/11/2013 and CRPD/C/20/D/35/2016 adopted by the Committee on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities relating to accessibility plans and Australian municipal governments. On the subject of the prohibition of the use of racial profiling by local police in Spain, the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights issued decision CCPR/C/96/D/1493/2006 (the Inter-American Court of Human Rights Tribunal adopted a similar judgment in *Acosta Martínez et al. v. Argentina*). The CEDAW also issued a ruling in the *M.W. v. Denmark* case (CEDAW/C/63/D/46/2012), with a series of recommendations aimed at professionals in local authorities on the need to guarantee children’s rights and not to discriminate on the basis of characteristics such as gender and ethnicity in cases where custody is removed from foreign parents.

These decisions indicate an evolution towards a more central role for cities in guaranteeing the right to non-discrimination as part of the right to the city, along with recognition of the intersectionality of discrimination and municipal governments’ autonomy and capacity for action. For example, the CERD issued a ruling in the case *El Ayoubi v. Spain* (E/C.12/69/D/54/2018) highlighting local authorities’ obligation to guarantee that regulations governing access to social housing – or alternative accommodation – do not contribute towards the systemic discrimination and stigmatisation experienced by people in poverty. There are fewer occurrences of rulings and decisions defending city governments’ direct role in the protection of human rights and the right to the city. Nevertheless, some progress has been made, as seen in the commitment made by the municipal governments that have adopted the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development (UNDP) to offer services and develop policies that are free of discrimination, or the fact that one of the specific goals in the Agenda – the eleventh – is to “make cities and human settlements inclusive, safe, resilient and sustainable”. This calls for a more proactive role to be played by cities and local governments.

4. Some initiatives

Outside of the regulatory and legal sphere, networks and initiatives are developing the right to non-discrimination in a concrete way, as part of the right to the city. Initiatives such as the European Coalition of Cities Against Racism – part of the International Coalition of Inclusive and Sustainable Cities promoted by UNESCO since 2004 – include the creation of local anti-discrimination offices, among other tools, in their action plans. Another is the United Cities and Local Governments Committee on Social Inclusion, Participatory Democracy and Human Rights, which has been in place for 20 years.

It is also useful to examine some of the initiatives and policies developed by municipal governments worldwide to prevent and combat discrimination in their cities. These include the creation of specific units, offices and observatories to offer guidance and legal and social support to victims of discrimination. These entities can also assist in the task of raising awareness of discrimination and educating public employees and the general public, by publishing reports, participating in legal cases considered strategic and organising courses. In this regard, training courses focusing on non-discrimination have been developed for public employees and, specifically, for local police forces in cities like London and Buenos Aires.

Also relevant are the aforementioned specific byelaws that take action against all types of discrimination and seek to guarantee inclusive public spaces, as well as the affirmative action that aims to ensure equity in municipal public procurement. On a more symbolic level, city governments sometimes create memorial spaces, build statues and name streets to pay tribute to the victims of discrimination and to the defenders of the right to the city or of human rights, more generally. They also organise awareness-raising campaigns to promote a culture of non-discrimination. An example can be found in Barcelona, with the replacement of Plaça d'Antonio López (a slave trader) with Plaça d'Idrissa Diallo, an irregular migrant who died in an internment centre for foreigners as a result of a lack of medical care.

Regarding the specific axis of discrimination deriving from gender inequality, one recommendation is to involve women in the design of public spaces, making sure their experiences and needs are taken into account in order to make the spaces safer, more inclusive and more suitable for reproductive activities. In Catalonia, the policy implemented to combat gender inequalities specifically includes public spaces and women's particular perception of them, due to the way they use them and the violence they experience in some of them. This way, the gender perspective can be incorporated in the design and implementation of urban planning projects and in territorial planning more generally. A specific example of this can be found in Vilassar de Dalt (Barcelona), which implemented the Municipal Action Plan for Gender Equality 2011-2014.

As for spatial discrimination, it is important to encourage the construction of social housing outside the lowest-income neighbourhoods. With a view to combatting spatial discrimination and expanding the stock of affordable housing, and following pressure from social movements, a regulation has been introduced in Barcelona that requires 30% of the floor space in new apartment buildings and major building restoration projects on consolidated urban land to be reserved for this type of housing. Efforts are also being made to take action against discrimination committed by owners and estate agents against certain profiles of tenant: practices that often result in forms of spatial segregation.

Meanwhile, an example of action being taken against institutional and systemic discrimination is the aforementioned training being given to local police – alongside the ban on the use of racial or ethnic profiling during their activity – including specific training to combat stereotypes linked to phenotypes, ethnic origin and other characteristics, and the implementation of specific reporting and registering mechanisms for arbitrary arrests (in the city of Buenos Aires, for example). Other examples are the aforementioned equity plans for hiring staff in the public and private sectors.

With regard to institutional discrimination and the phenomenon of intersectionality, Terrassa City Council has incorporated this perspective in a more all-encompassing way, with the Igualtats Connectades project and the practical guide to promoting equality and non-discrimination in the city, published in 2019.

5. Conclusions

Evidently, the task of identifying and combatting discrimination entails certain difficulties, attributable to the fact that it often goes unnoticed, is connected to other types of discrimination, and gets reproduced and maintained by the design and execution of certain public policies. Even so, the local government sphere offers opportunities to make a difference in this area and have a positive impact, through use of the powers assigned to municipal authorities.

In light of the above, some recommendations would be to:

- Tackle discrimination in collaboration with people who experience situations of discrimination and are therefore more able to detect them. This requires incorporation of real participatory processes into urban planning, so that these groups can be involved in designing and implementing programmes. Furthermore, this participation must include grassroots movements and community organisers, who have already identified situations of discrimination and expressed specific demands to tackle them.
- Enact laws that prohibit discriminatory behaviour and provide for adequate monitoring and regular compliance checks, with sanctions and penalties as deterrents. In terms of institutional discrimination, institutions and government bodies must review their discourse, plans and public policies to assess the effect they may have on minority and vulnerable groups. They should also act more proactively to develop campaigns that highlight the inequalities and discrimination experienced by these groups, such as street vendors, and that explain and dignify their work and their social and cultural contributions.
- Establish a specific budget for non-discrimination policies, while creating specialist units and carrying out studies on public spaces, in order to identify the places where discriminatory dynamics take place in cities.

It is worth noting, finally, that many of the initiatives mentioned, which can be emulated and expanded, are not just administrative or legal in nature. Instead, they involve symbolic elements or tools for drawing attention to discrimination – such as observatories, byelaws, memorials, etc. – that do not require any great budgetary effort. These initiatives simply call for the political will to put them in place.

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