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ΠΕΡΙΦΕΡΕΙΑ ΚΡΗΤΗΣ
REGION OF CRETE

Good Practice in Homeless Support

Plan Primera Oportunidad: A Holistic Homeless Support Program in Zaragoza

04/2025



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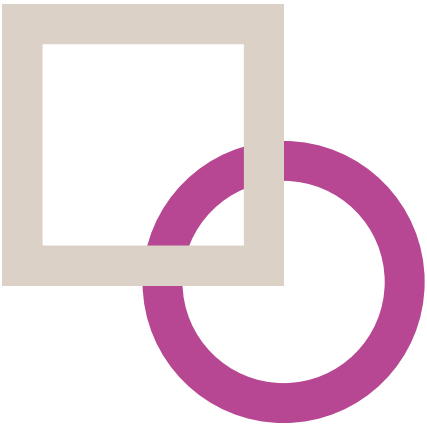
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Introduction



The "**Plan Primera Oportunidad**" (First Chance Plan) of Zaragoza's city is an innovative and integrated social initiative to address homelessness in the city. Its main objective is to support homeless people through direct access to housing, as well as social support, with the aim of their gradual social and professional reintegration.

The innovation of the plan lies in the integrated and person-centered approach it adopts. It is not limited to providing housing, but also combines support in health issues (physical and mental), education and vocational training, recognizing that homelessness is a multifaceted social problem that requires complex solutions.

Special attention is given to mental health issues faced by these people, as well as gender issues, ensuring that actions are adapted to the specific needs of each individual. The ultimate goal of the program is to restore dignity and the active inclusion of people experiencing social exclusion through empowerment and substantial support.

How is it applied?

In 2020, the Zaragoza city council launched a program called "Plan Primera Oportunidad", which **seeks to approach homelessness holistically**. Specifically, **from 2012 to 2016, the city had seen an increase in the number of homeless people from 347 to 470**. However, the percentage of people sleeping rough had decreased by 34%, while the percentage of homeless people accommodated in shelters had increased by 29%.

In this context, the main objective of the "Plan Primera Oportunidad" program was to **offer a "first chance" to people experiencing homelessness, enabling them to initially reintegrate into society through housing and then through vocational training and psychological support**.

The program's activities focus on **three main pillars**: securing housing, implementing a comprehensive training and integration plan, and guaranteeing easy access to healthcare. In this context, some of the program's key actions are the following:



▶▶▶ Housing provision

One of the key elements of the Municipality's social inclusion program is the implementation of the **Housing First** strategy, which promotes the immediate provision of housing to homeless people, without requiring prior conditions such as detoxification or participation in psychological treatment. The strategy is based on the idea that homeless people are able to deal with other aspects of their lives (e.g. health, work, social integration, etc.) once they have obtained a stable place to live.



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In this context, the Municipality has created the **Municipal Homeless Shelter**, providing reception and support to people experiencing homelessness, with minimal entry requirements, allowing access to everyone, regardless of financial situation or health. This service is also accessible to people who do not have a residence permit. It offers basic services, such as dormitories with private rooms and shared bathrooms, a canteen and social services when needed. Each user can stay in the shelter for six days every three months, but the stay can be extended. In fact, the internal rules easily allow for exceptions to be made according to individual needs. For example, the stay is extended until relevant procedures of the municipal social services are finalized.

In addition to the Municipal Shelter, the Municipality has proceeded to donate municipal housing-apartments to people who have recently secured employment. The houses are aimed at homeless people, refugees, individuals, couples, families, single mothers and others. People who face a mental or physical illness live in shared apartments where they are provided with a private room with common areas.

Psychological support

Psychological support is one of the main objectives of the Zaragoza Municipal Homeless Support Program. To this end, the City Council collaborated with Fundación La Caridad and created a **psychosocial rehabilitation center, which acts as a shelter for its users during the day**. The center provides individual monitoring by psychiatrists, psychologists, nurses, social workers and occupational therapists. The center also offers meals through a canteen, with breakfast, lunch and dinner as a package. As part of its activities, sports and artistic workshops are organized, as well as workshops for the development of cognitive and social skills.

A special aspect of this project is the intergenerational approach, as the center also hosts a school, allowing for joint activities and workshops between users and children. This enhances children's awareness of



mental health from an early age, while promoting communication and cooperation between generations, thus contributing to combating the stigma surrounding mental health.

Training and development of work skills

The Municipal Shelter organizes a series of **training workshops to support its users in developing work skills and their reintegration into the labor market or creating their own initiatives**. The need for such actions was particularly highlighted during the Covid-19 pandemic, when the shelter users participated in the distribution of personal protective masks to vulnerable residents of the Municipality.

One of the participation's results in the above workshops was the establishment of the Gambaru association. Gambaru was created by a user who attended the municipal shelter's cooking classes and is staffed by people who have experienced the reality of homelessness, offering a unique approach that other organizations do not have.


Gambaru's main activities include providing assistance and guidance to people wishing to re-integrate socially, organizing training workshops that help develop skills, and providing catering services for various events, thus creating employment opportunities for its members.

To date, Gambaru has created 46 jobs, of which 16 are direct and the rest through partnerships with catering companies. In 2024, Gambaru was awarded the Julio González Award by the City of Zaragoza, recognizing its innovative approach to the social integration of homeless people.

Collaboration with Social Agencies and NGOs

The City of Zaragoza collaborates with various local agencies, NGOs and social services to provide support to the participants of the program. These organizations provide assistance with daily care, healthcare, social and legal support, as well as strengthening social cohesion.





An example of such collaboration is the artistic, social and inclusive **program Caídos del Zielo**, which aims to integrate people at risk of social exclusion through theater. In 2024, Caídos del Zielo received the Award for Inclusion of Diversity in the Social Sector from the Government of Aragon and the First Julio González Award for the Promotion of Projects Related to Homelessness from the City of Zaragoza.

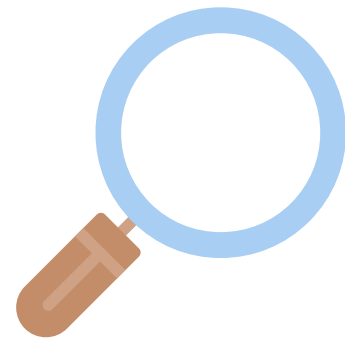
Gender-based support

The program also places special emphasis and attention on homeless women, who are less visible, and seeks to address issues they face, such as domestic violence. **The plan includes not only housing but also workshops for homeless women, such as cooking, computer and sewing, as well as activities such as crafts, sports and theater.**

Furthermore, in the case of **elderly women who experience chronic homelessness, they are given the opportunity to live in a space next to the shelter**, in order to have immediate and quick access to further services offered by the shelter.



Project summary



Scope

Homeless support program



Country / Region

Spain, Zaragoza



Where is it applied?

The Plan Primera Oportunidad program is addressed to homeless of Zaragoza's Municipality.



When did it applied?

The Plan Primera Oportunidad program began in 2020.



Results

The Plan Primera Oportunidad program in Zaragoza has shown significant results in enhancing the quality of life of homeless people and their social integration. Specifically, from 2020 to 2023, 68 people found work, while in 2022 approximately 160 users attended the program's courses. In this context, the Municipality is making new efforts to improve and increase the housing infrastructure (from 15 apartments in 2019 to 78 in 2023) and the services it offers in order to address existing needs.



Other information

The example of the Municipality of Zaragoza as a good practice for tackling homelessness and mental health was highlighted by the Eurocities Network: <https://inclusivecities4all.eu/good-practices/>



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