

50th COMPILATION
OF STUDIES

*EVOLUTION
OF SOCIAL
COHESION
AND*

**CONSEQUENCES
OF COVID-19
IN SPAIN**

CONCLUSIONS



FUNDACIÓN FOESSA
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Y DE SOCIOLOGÍA APLICADA

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Conclusions

In the last two years, the Spanish society has experienced an exceptional situation, marked, on the one hand, by the COVID-19 pandemic and, on the other hand, by the measures taken by public authorities to confront it, such as prolonged lockdowns, curfews, teleworking, school closures, bringing forward the closing time of businesses and changing their capacity, etc. In this exceptional health and social context, most of the media and academic attention has been directed to health, particularly at first, but also to this day. This is, of course, an essential approach, but after nearly two years since the start of the pandemic and once the most critical health emergency is over, it is time to focus on another crucial facet of reality: the impact of the pandemic on the social situation of people and households. As the common thread between the health crisis and its social effects, the analysis of transformations in the labour market and the reinforcement of social protection mechanisms allow us to delve deeper into the processes of causality (why some economic and social sectors have been more affected than others), as well as into the buffering elements of social exclusion that may have worked on this occasion.

1. The Impact on Employment When an Economy Shuts Down

The 2020 crisis has had very special characteristics compared to previous crises and, in particular, compared to the 2008-2013 one, due to the following: its origin, which is external to the economic system; the sectors that have been most affected (tourism, trade, artistic and cultural activities...); and a reduction in economic activity which was unprecedented since the Spanish Civil War (10,8% GDP drop) and which largely resulted from the political decision itself to restrict much of the activity in order to

fight against the pandemic. In the previous crisis, Spain stood out in Europe in terms of job losses, only behind Greece, despite the fact that the reduction in GDP was equivalent to that of many other countries. In 2020, Spain continues to stand out in terms of job losses, but the drop is now proportional to the reduction in economic activity. The vulnerability of an economy heavily dependent on tourism with high levels of inequality and a weaker public sector than that of other neighbouring countries continue to be factors that intensify the impact of economic crises here.

In any case, the reduction in employment was five times greater in the 2008-2013 crisis, even though the reduction in activity has been much greater now. The explanation has to do with the duration of the recession and is directly associated with the type of political response it has received, with a mix of expansionary taxation and monetary policies and the introduction of specific mechanisms to safeguard employment, such as temporary labour force adjustment plans (ERTEs, as per the Spanish acronym). These, which affected more than 3.5 million people, have made it possible to maintain the employment link with the company, thus facilitating the return to employment throughout the recovery period: 87% of the people who were subject to an ERTE in 2020 were working by spring 2021.

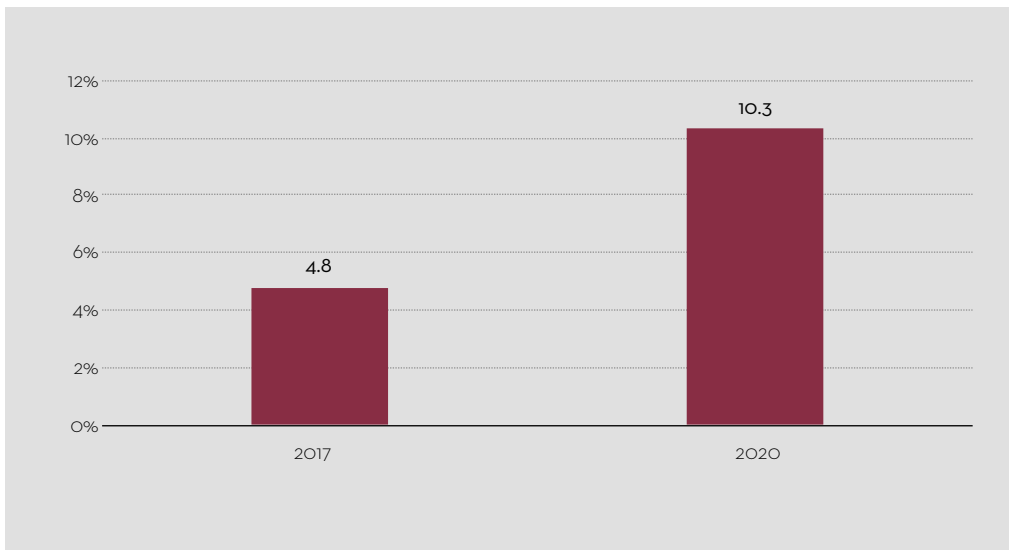
However, apart from the economic cycles, there are some underlying trends which have in some cases intensified with the crisis, but which were clearly pre-existing and can be expected to continue to operate if no corrective measures are introduced:

- An increasingly flexible (and thus more unstable and precarious) labour market dynamic that increases the likelihood of experiencing unemployment and, consequently, spreads the sense of uncertainty and insecurity, even in periods of expansion.
- The increasing difficulties for some unemployed people to return to work, which are creating a dangerous trend for these situations to become chronic, and which are influenced by various factors: from the construction crisis in the previous crisis, which has never recovered, to the transformation processes in various sectors to which not everyone can adapt. The long-standing technological change has intensified with the crisis and is intended to be further enhanced by a recovery model based on the digitalisation of economy, among other things. As a result, a significant share of the lower-skilled jobs that are lost are never recovered.

Worsening of Working Conditions

This crisis, like the previous one, has led to a sharp decrease in employment, which seems to have already been resolved (according to the Spanish Social Security) or to be well on the way to being resolved (according to the Spanish Labour Force Survey or EPA, as per the Spanish acronym) during the recovery period so far. Moreover, it has also led to a worsening of working conditions in the form of an intensification of the precariousness that already existed, and which could continue existing if appropriate measures are not taken, since the jobs that have been recovered are mainly temporary. “Severe job instability” **(1)** affected 4.8% of the main breadwinners in 2017; in 2020, this percentage had risen to 10.3%.

FIGURE 1. Percentage of main breadwinners affected by severe job instability



Source: Own elaboration based on EINSFOESSA 2021.

The structural trend towards labour market segmentation has increased with a crisis that has intensified its effects in terms of insecurity based on the greater vulnerability of different groups. The very exposure to the disease and its consequences, de-

(1) Proportion of main breadwinners with three or more contracts in a year, or who have worked in three or more enterprises or have been unemployed for three or more months in the year.

pending on the characteristics of the job, constitutes a new dimension of inequality in the labour market. Therefore, the higher-skilled sectors and State officials have experienced little or no impact in terms of reduced employment or income; have been less exposed to the disease thanks to teleworking, which is also more regulated nowadays; and even face an optimistic future, due to, for example, the expectation of enhanced stability in the Spanish State Public Administration. In a second segment, individuals belonging to intermediate- skilled sectors, but with stable jobs in the private sector, have been able to benefit from ERTes, in many cases under fairly acceptable conditions, and have gradually returned to work. However, the third segment, which includes unskilled sectors and where there is a higher number of young people with temporary and precarious jobs, is the one that has been most exposed to the disease and that has experienced the highest proportion of lay-offs (of which 72% had temporary contracts).

The effects of telework have also differed significantly among different sectors of the labour market. Some people have improved their autonomy, comfort, and flexibility in their jobs without major problems and are also more protected now by regulation. Others have been able to telework, thus protecting themselves from the disease, but have had to face increased monitoring by the company or, particularly in the case of women, who usually bear a greater burden of care work, have had to cope with difficulties in reconciling work and family life during their children's isolation periods, all of which has resulted in personal consequences in terms of anxiety, stress, and tension at home. However, other individuals have not even been able to consider teleworking, have been more exposed to the disease and/or have had to reduce their activity and income, or have directly lost their jobs.

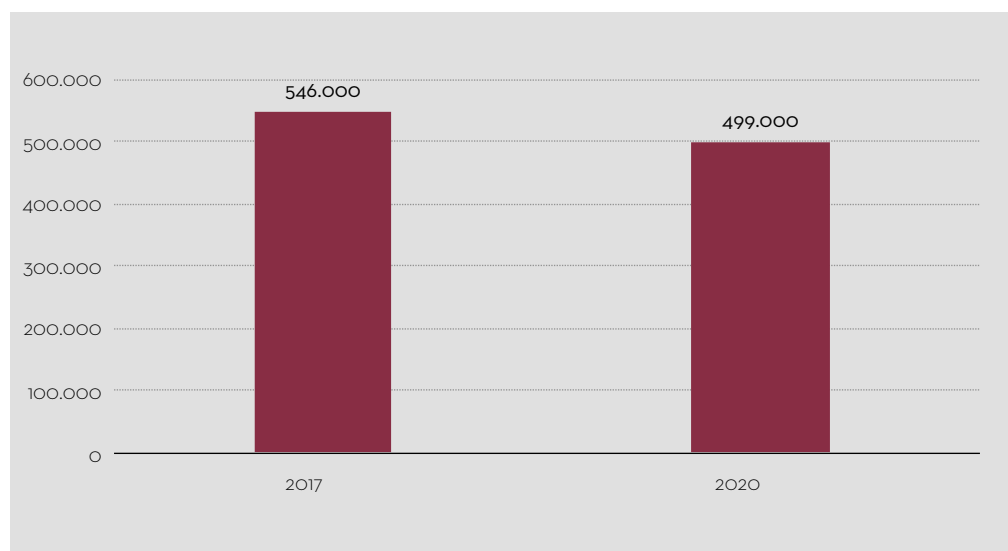
Greater Employment Impact on the Most Vulnerable Sectors

A crisis of this nature would be expected to have a greater effect on employment in excluded sectors, and this has been the case. Most people in a situation of severe exclusion have “normalised” jobs, but not quality jobs. They contribute considerable efforts to the overall production system and perform basic functions, which in many cases have been considered “essential” during the lockdown period. For example, the three most relevant occupations among people affected by severe exclusion (four out of ten jobs) are cleaning, catering, and agricultural work. The limitation of these jobs to serve as a driver for the social integration of the people

who perform them is not due to their marginalisation or lack of functionality for the economic system, but to the remuneration that is paid for them, partly because wages are lower, but, above all, because of the shorter duration of the employment (temporary jobs) and reduced working hours (part-time jobs). We are therefore talking about a labour exploitation logic based on a hyperflexibility model. This situation has increased with this health crisis, and the percentage of severely excluded people working less than 20 h a week has increased by 25 percentage points between 2017 and 2020. Strategies aimed at extending working hours beyond the usual standards as a way of supplementing poor wages, which have been commonplace for a few decades, are increasingly complicated and residual for low-wage workers.

Therefore, the increase in the minimum guaranteed interprofessional wage (SMI, as per the Spanish acronym) is a necessary measure to improve the working conditions of the most vulnerable people. This should be supplemented by measures that reduce the aforementioned *hyperflexibility*, improving the social organisation of working time in these jobs as well, and that put an end to irregular situations. Poor wages in these sectors should also be supplemented by other redistributive measures in the form of employment incentives, either by means of supplementary benefits for low-wage workers or by means of refundable tax deductions.

FIGURE 2. Estimated number of people employed in the informal economy



Source: Own elaboration based on EINSFOESSA 2018 and 2021.

Resorting to the underground economy as a last lifeline was already difficult during the Great Recession. Yet now it has been hit even harder than formal economy itself. Both the evidence of the social entities and the data from the EINSFOESSA 2021 Survey are in line with this statement, and so is the comparison between the EPA's and the Spanish Social Security's estimation of people employed. Irregular employment is said to have dropped by 8.5%, and so have marginal occupations (door-to-door vendors, itinerant trade, domestic workers, seasonal workers, cardboard or scrap metal collection, advertising distribution), which in many cases were particularly affected during lockdown, leaving those households that were dependent on them in desperate situations.

2. Social Inequality and Poverty before and during the Pandemic

The development of the pandemic and the adjustment measures put in place to fight against it led not only to the abrupt halt of the recovery process of the Spanish economy after the 2008 crisis, but also to the truncation of the trend towards the reduction of inequality in income distribution after its pronounced growth during said crisis. The new COVID-19 crisis has exposed the fragility of the main source of household income in Spain, i.e. labour income, and has widened the pay gap among workers with different skills.

On the one hand, the new downturn in economic activity has visibly shown the instability of the incomes of people entering the labour market without a formal contract or with a very short-term contract, with low wages and limited access to social benefits. A high percentage of working people is living on a day-to-day basis and has great difficulty coping with unforeseen expenses as well as severe problems in order to deal with housing-related expenses. On the other hand, access to teleworking was the only means of maintaining income for several months, with the inequalities in this respect already noted above.

Inequality Is on the Rise Again

Although data is still very limited and some of it comes from simulation exercises, the body of available evidence shows a negative portrayal of the impact of the pandemic

on the inequality in income distribution, although highly concentrated in the early months of the pandemic. According to different sources, first the lockdown and, later on, the restrictions on activity brought with them an increase in wage inequality.

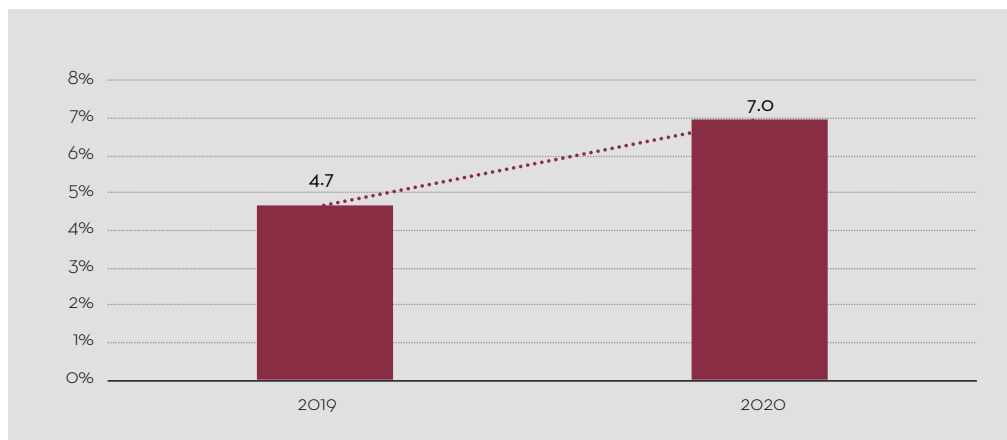
In contrast to previous crises, however, there has been a more rapid and comprehensive public policy response to contain the increase in social needs, which may have contributed to alleviating the impact of this new crisis. Nonetheless, this buffer effect has been limited by delays in the collection of some aid and difficulties in accessing to certain types of aid for the most vulnerable groups. In fact, some studies show that, in spite of this moderating effect, Spain would have been one of the countries with the highest increase in household disposable income inequality.

One of the greatest social risks of this new crisis is, as in previous recessions, that the growth in inequality, despite being highly concentrated over time, may result in indicators remaining at high levels for a prolonged period of time, even if employment returns to previous levels. The sluggishness of the economic recovery makes it difficult to anticipate growth in lower incomes, which will most likely deviate from the well-known *V-shaped* pattern forecasted for the Spanish economy. There are also other social dimensions of inequality which are closely linked to income inequality, such as the educational or technological dimensions, for which their evolution during the crisis makes it difficult to foresee a rapid return to the pre-pandemic scenario, as we will see below.

Increasing Poverty and Deprivation for Those Who Were Already Worse Off

Something similar can be said when the focus is placed on situations of poverty and economic vulnerability. The increase in poverty observed in the early months of the pandemic occurred when a significant segment of the vulnerable households had not yet completed the recovery process from the 2008 crisis and when many of them had exhausted their resources after several years of adjusting their spending and strategies to a prolonged precarious situation. There is a risk that this new shock will result in a higher percentage of households in which poverty becomes an increasingly persistent reality and for which job opportunities may not be forthcoming even in periods of employment expansion, as was the case in the years immediately preceding the pandemic.

FIGURE 3. Evolution of the percentage of the population in severe material deprivation between 2019 and 2020



Source: Living Conditions Survey, 2019 and 2020, INE

One of the most negative points is the worsening of monetary poverty indicators in what can be considered a short period of time, despite the fact that this crisis has so far not had such a negative impact on employment levels as the previous one had. Poverty has spread, and it has done so, almost without exception, across the majority of socio-demographic categories of the Spanish society. Its incidence has also increased in most territories, although more sharply in those where face-to-face activities have a greater weight.

It is not surprising that the different sources are also consistent in showing the increase in different forms of material deprivation, but their magnitude is. These are indicators relating to living conditions characterised by a certain inertia and, in principle, less sensitive to changes in the economic cycle. Situations of severe material deprivation increased quite rapidly over a very short period of time. Again, the increase was higher in those areas of the territory that are more sensitive to the imposition of restrictions on face-to-face activities. The percentage of the population in a situation of severe material deprivation increased by 50% in the first year of the pandemic, going from 4.7% to 7.0%.

Another negative feature is that the pandemic has hit hardest those households that were already more materially deprived, shaping a process of cumulative social disadvantage. In certain dimensions of material deprivation, there were structural problems that were already considered to be serious before this crisis began.

A multiplying factor of its health and economic effects is that, at the time of forced lockdown, a percentage of households which cannot be considered minor lived under housing conditions that were clearly inadequate.

The most direct indicator of household economic vulnerability, which is having no income, also reveals that, although the trend in recent quarters has been towards a reduction in the problem, the outbreak of the pandemic led to a very rapid increase in the most extreme poverty. By mid-2020, the number had increased by more than 100,000 households with regard to the pre-health crisis level. A significant upturn occurred when the level was well above the pre-2008 crisis level. Of particular concern is the increase in both material deprivation and the problem of the lack of income within households with minors. Having experienced such severe forms of poverty during one's childhood, even if only temporarily, can have adverse long-term effects in different areas and dimensions of life. There is evidence highlighting the increased likelihood of lower educational attainment and of experiencing poverty and material deprivation in adulthood.

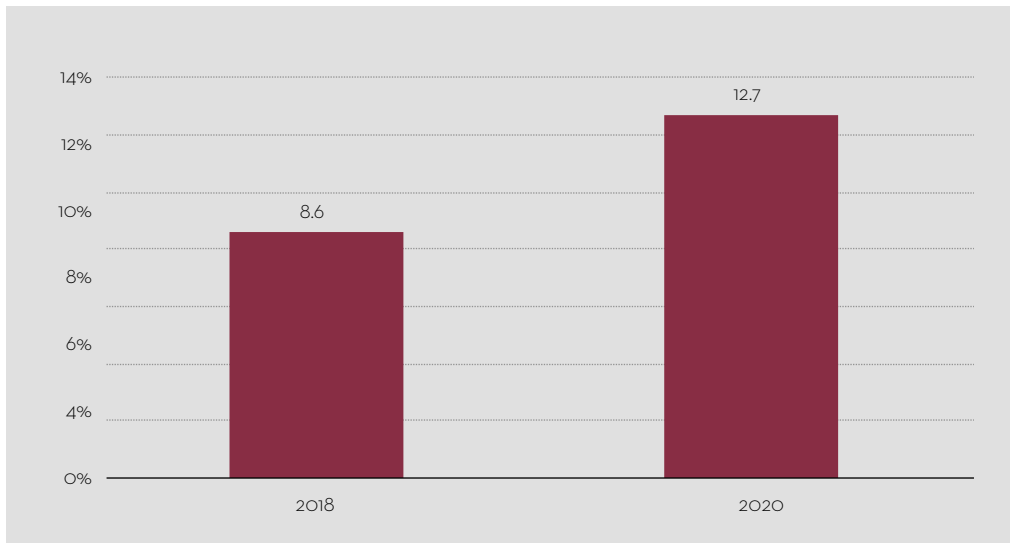
The data reviewed in the report show a situation that was already difficult for many households prior to the start of the pandemic and that has worsened as the pandemic has unfolded. Most worryingly, its effects have been very uneven, hitting hardest those who were already the most vulnerable before this new crisis. The main challenge for social intervention is to prevent these new situations of vulnerability from becoming chronic. The great challenge for intervention strategies is to ensure that, once the recovery of economic activity and employment levels takes hold, unlike in previous crisis, intervention also reaches families with lower incomes and worse living conditions.

3. The Area of Social Exclusion Is Widening and Problems Are Intensifying: A New Threat of Fracture

Despite the differences in the collective response to this social crisis of health origin, and specifically from public policies, social exclusion has increased very significantly, and, above all, the most severe situations of exclusion have increased, which have gone from 8.6% in its last measurement in 2018 to 12.7% of the population today. This means another two million people affected by an accumulation of social prob-

lems that seriously calls into question their participation in society as a whole. The incidence of the various indicators of exclusion has spread across large sections of the population and now less than half of the households are in a situation of full social integration, while the Spanish Total Index of Exclusion (ISES, as per the Spanish acronym) has increased by 31% for all households. The analysis shows that the severely excluded group is the one in which the various inequalities are multiplied and the one that is under the clear threat of fracture from the rest of society, which makes it a priority target for urgent right-based inclusion policies in all areas (education, employment, health, housing, etc.).

FIGURE 4. Evolution of the percentage of population in a situation of severe exclusion



Source: Own elaboration based on EINSFOESSA 2018 and 2021

In 2018, housing problems were the key feature of social exclusion processes, and they still remain important in 2021 (20.6% of households are affected by some kind of housing problem). In this area, the deterioration of housing conditions and situations of overcrowding stand out. However, in this year 2021, the problems with the highest incidence within households are employment ones (21.8%) and they are also the ones that explain exclusion situations the most in multivariate analyses (twice as much than in 2018). In this crisis, these employment problems have much less to do with situations of informal economy or exclusion jobs, which have been affected by the economic crisis even more than the rest of the economic activity and are plainly

and simply identified with situations of unemployment: total household unemployment affects six out of ten households in a situation of severe social exclusion. The increase in social protection has failed to compensate for this situation, and one third of these households lack any form of regular, predictable income, which increases uncertainty and, consequently, the intensity of social exclusion.

Dimensions related to access to consumption, education, or health have been proportionally less impacted, which points to the results of public policies in these areas, at least in terms of harm reduction. The accumulation of debt, for instance, has been reduced in proportionally excluded households, although the number of affected households has increased. However, there is an increased number of households which cannot afford to pay for health care (two thirds of the households in a situation of severe exclusion).

The lockdown does not appear to have increased social isolation as a whole. Thus, alternative means of contact and communication seem to have worked, although there has been an increase in the number of people who lack care to meet the needs of daily life.

Nevertheless, social relationships have become more problematic: indicators of conflict increased from 5.1% in 2018 to 8.3% in 2021, with more identified presence of abuse or poor relationships within the household.

A True Challenge for Multidimensional, Right-Based Inclusion Policies

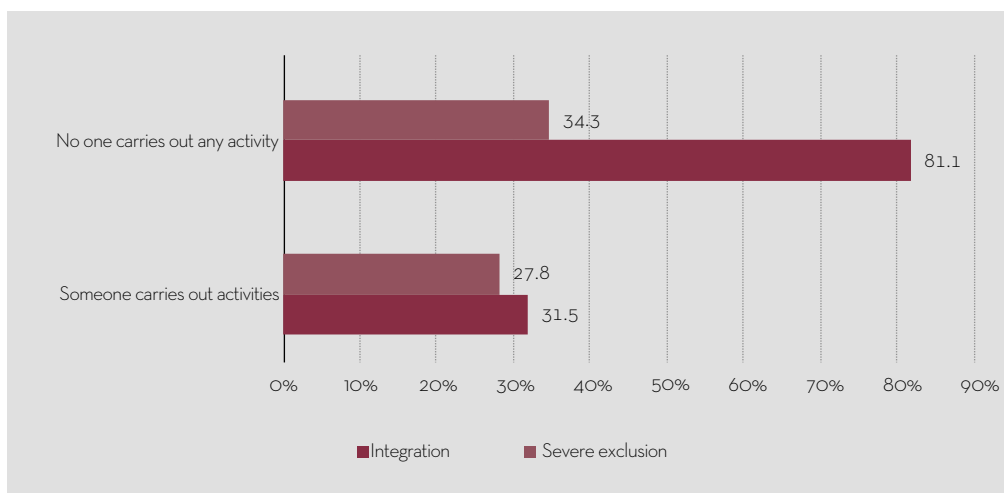
This scenario of increasing situations of severe exclusion, with a strongly multidimensional characterisation (including the accumulation of diverse problems), a strong heterogeneity in concrete situations, and a rise in the number of conflict situations within households, is a true challenge for inclusion policies in the coming years, which will have to be reinforced and thought over in depth. Social inclusion policies based on the guarantee of social rights should extend beyond the tool of social services. Both public and private social services have been assigned an excessive role in providing care for excluded sectors. It is important to align all public policies with the common objective of social inclusion, based on the guarantee of all social rights. The analyses carried out show that even protection systems that could be key to the inclusion strategy, such as the education or job training systems, are reaching the more

excluded sectors with less intensity than the rest of sectors, with an indirect effect of intensifying inequalities in these aspects.

The development of integrated interventions in which different social protection systems and administrations work together through various mechanisms is a need that is endorsed both by European recommendations and by the diagnosis on the area of social exclusion hereby carried out. Local administrations and social entities can play an important role in this integration of diverse interventions, introducing the necessary elements of flexibility and decentralisation in decision-making.

The diversity of situations also appears in terms of the level of activation of excluded sectors. There has been a significant amount of inclusion-oriented activity on their part, both in seeking employment and in carrying out educational and training activities, or participating in social services programmes. Paradoxically, in contrast to the picture of passivity, the level of “activation” is higher for the most disadvantaged population, including the part of the population who gets welfare benefits: higher participation in inclusion activities and an active and positive willingness to integrate themselves into the labour market among non-contributory benefit recipients, without any evidence of an alleged disincentivising effect of the benefit system.

FIGURE 5. Percentage of households in which integration activities are or are not carried out

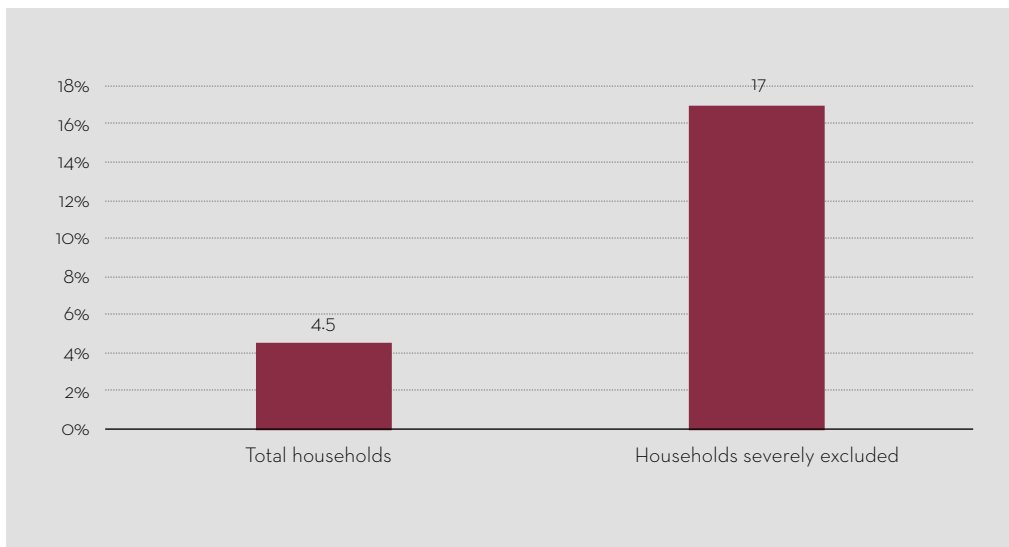


Source: Own elaboration based on EINSFOESSA 2021

The Digital Divide: A New Factor of Social Exclusion

Digital disconnection is the new illiteracy of the 21st century, which has become a major handicap for participation in the different areas of our society. This new social divide has been intensified by COVID-19 and the digitalisation process of social relationships that it has entailed. When interpersonal relationships, employment, or administrative procedures were mostly transferred to the Internet, a part of the population was left out of this new space of social interaction. The digital blackout affects 35% of the population, partly because it does not have the necessary devices, but above all because it lacks an adequate connection (21%) or the necessary skills to use them (29%). This new social divide could intensify in the future, if appropriate measures are not taken, with the recovery model that is intended to be followed, based precisely, among other things, on the digitalisation of economic and social life.

FIGURE 6. Percentage of households that have missed opportunities because they do not have access to the Internet



Source: Own elaboration based on EINSFOESSA 2021

The most excluded sectors have been particularly affected by this process, and the digital blackout has hit them especially hard: more than half of the households in severe social exclusion are affected by the digital blackout. As a result, the groups that most need to hold on to every opportunity have been most deprived of them: 17% of severely excluded households report that they have missed opportunities because they have not been able to connect to the Internet (compared to 4.5% of the population as a whole). These were opportunities for employment, for access to training, for access to rights mediated by public administrations, or for maintaining mutually supportive social relationships. If computer equipment, adequate access to the Internet, and the necessary skills to use them have already been established as conditions for social participation and access to social rights, public policies should guarantee the universalisation of these common goods in the future, also in terms of rights, both for people and territories. Likewise, these policies should provide the necessary means for all people to overcome the digital divide that currently affects them. Digitalisation should, therefore, be considered as a top priority for inclusion projects, especially in terms of cheap and quality access to the Internet and training in its use.

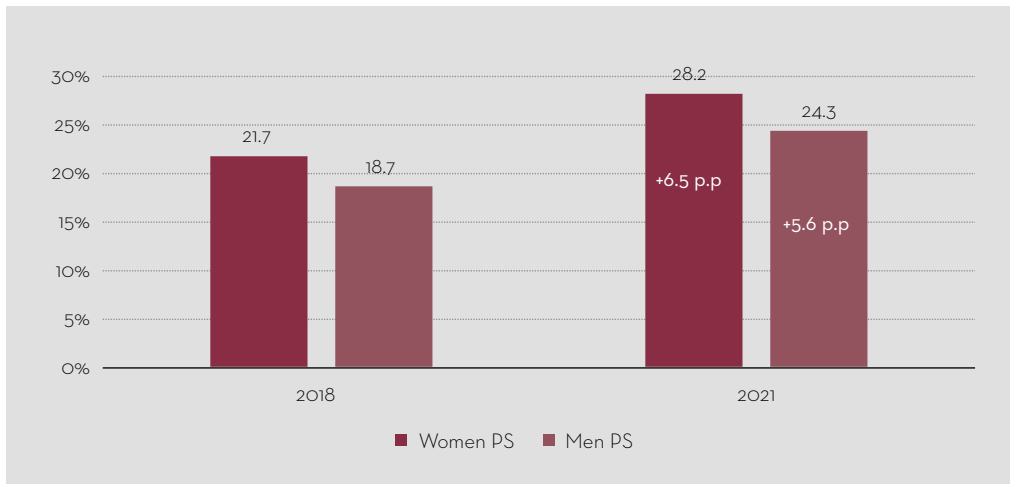
At the same time, access to rights requires today, and at least for some time to come, the need to guarantee the exercise of citizenship in person. For older people, there are fewer consequences, but they are also being affected, as age is a substantial factor in the use of new technologies. Therefore, for them and for other non-digitalised sectors, accessibility to the administration must also be ensured by face-to-face means.

The Gender Gap is Widening

The previous crisis entailed a process of “downward equalisation” due to the greater impact that labour shedding had on male-dominated sectors. However, in 2020, this crisis has had a greater impact on more feminised sectors, such as the trade and hospitality industries, which has led to a major setback for many women in terms of social integration. Those households in which the main breadwinner is a woman have experienced more than twice as much social exclusion as those in which the majority of income is provided by a man. As a result, severe social exclusion has reached 13.1% in the former case, almost twice as much than in the latter. Thus, the pre-existing differences that had already increased during the recovery period and which benefited males have widened. Single-part households, and especially those headed

by women, have experienced an even greater worsening, reaching 21% in a situation of severe social exclusion (and 40% with the total of exclusion).

FIGURE 7. Percentage of households in a situation of poverty according to the sex of the main breadwinner



Source: Own elaboration based on EINSFOESSA 2018 and 2021

Some indicators suggest that job recovery is occurring more rapidly for women: annual employment growth for women was of 7% for the second quarter of 2021, two percentage points higher than for men. This would resume the long-term trend towards an increased equalisation in access to employment, in which the gap in the volume of employment between men and women has been reduced by 57% compared to 2007. However, it remains to be seen how this translates into households in which women are the main breadwinner and whether greater equality in access to employment also results in less inequality in terms of income and social exclusion. It should be recalled that this has not always been so clear in the evolution over the last fifteen years.

Age Gradient of Social Exclusion

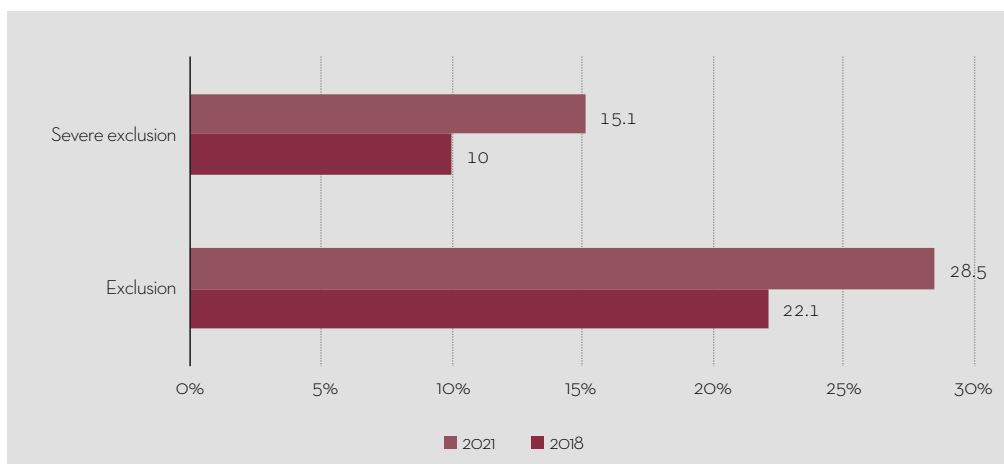
Age is a particularly significant variable when it comes to explaining the incidence of social exclusion in different social groups. Before the crisis, it was more severe for the younger age group, and the differences have increased with the crisis. 33.5% of

children under the age of 16 are affected by social exclusion (two thirds of them in a situation of severe exclusion).

There is a group of young people who have already experienced two major crises at a vital stage of their life projects, during which the transition to employment, adult life, emancipation, or the construction of new households is being considered: those who were 18 years old in 2008 have been hit by the 2020 crisis at the age of 30. Therefore, they have faced particular difficulties throughout this transition process, and it is foreseeable that this will have a permanent impact on their work and life paths. There are 2.7 million young people aged between 16 and 34 who are affected by social exclusion processes, half of which are in a situation of severe exclusion. This exclusion is more intense and more multidimensional (especially in terms of employment and housing), and it merges the difficulties arising from their original households and their own personal problems (lack of training resources or work experience, for example) in order to move forward in such a complicated context as the current one.

Regarding young people, the gender gap is even more pronounced, and young women have suffered a worsening of 8.5 percentage points in terms of exclusion (twice as much as men) in the 16-34 age group. This exclusion is strongly marked by the ethnic factor (almost half of the people are of foreign or Roma origin). This allows us to foresee the scenario of social exclusion in the coming decades.

FIGURE 8. Percentage of young people (16-35 years old) in a situation of exclusion and severe exclusion



Source: Own elaboration based on EINSFOESSA 2021

Young people have found it more difficult to keep their jobs (they have benefited from fewer ERTEs and they have suffered more lay-offs). Likewise, they have also had more difficulties in finding a new job: 79% of young people in a situation of severe exclusion is unemployed. The lack of work experience poses a handicap that lasts longer than expected in many cases, and one third of unemployed young people aged 25-29 have no work experience at all. There is undoubtedly one group that should be prioritised in social and labour inclusion programmes: the 56% of young people in a situation of severe social exclusion who are neither studying nor working.

This has continued to make emancipation even more difficult, although, in many cases, the alternative is to remain in a socially excluded household, which is thus overloaded by this. Nevertheless, even those emancipations that have already taken place face serious sustainability risks as a result of labour difficulties (23% of young main breadwinners is in a situation of serious job instability) and housing difficulties (22% of these households bear excessive housing costs, which place it below the severe poverty level).

The Double Social Buffer Provided by the Migrant Population, Which Reduces Their Opportunities and Increases Their Social Exclusion

The first area impacted by COVID-19 with regard to the migration phenomenon was precisely the very flow of people arriving in Spain. The closure of borders and the general mobility restrictions imposed worldwide caused the immigration flow in 2020 to fall by a third, to 413,000 migrants, compared to the previous year. The inflow of people from abroad had reached 666,000 in 2019, which represented a 2.7-fold increase from the lowest level in 2013, and showed a dynamic that was already comparable to the one in place before the financial crisis.

In this sense, the migratory flow has been more sensitive to the evolution of the economic cycle in Spain than in other European countries, where it presented a flatter profile in the years preceding the crisis, until 2013. Thus, the reduction in immigration (and the increase in emigration, largely by people of foreign origin) in Spain helped to alleviate labour market tensions then, and it may have also played the same role now to a certain extent (although the flow has still been significant in 2020). This is, therefore, the first buffer that migration has brought to the management of the em-

ployment crisis, at the cost of reducing opportunities for the population of foreign origin, who were often forced to restart their personal projects in other destinations.

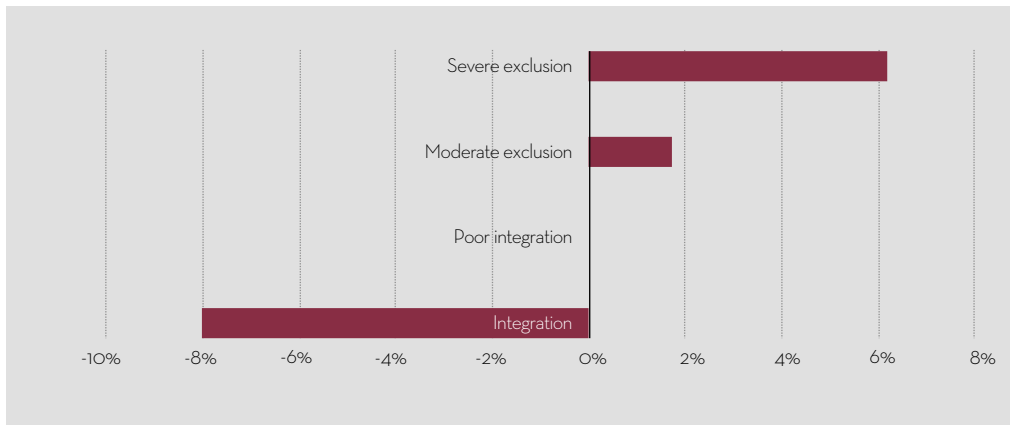
The point of departure that has shown the most flexibility in this respect (larger increases or decreases depending on the cycle) is Latin America. And it is precisely this component of the migratory flow which is becoming increasingly prominent. It is conceivable that in a scenario of recovery and progressive increase in international mobility, a heavy inflow of immigrant population will occur again, preferably from Central and South America, with a significant proportion of people who already have Spanish nationality. These can be positive elements with a view to integration and should undoubtedly be harnessed and complemented by accompaniment and inclusion policies.

The second important finding regarding COVID-19 in foreign population as a whole is the higher incidence of the disease among them: 10.7%, almost three percentage points higher than in the Spanish population by spring 2021. The reasons are clear: greater exposure due to their jobs; worse living conditions, with more overcrowded and poorly ventilated housing; and fewer resources to take preventive measures. This higher incidence of the disease did not translate into more hospitalisations due to a better overall status of the foreign population as a result of their younger age, but it was observed in the older foreign population, which was smaller in number.

However, without a doubt, the most worrying consequence of this health crisis for the foreign population has been the setback in the dynamic of progressive integration that had been taking place until the crisis began: one out of every three foreign nationals is in a situation of severe social exclusion, three times as many as the Spanish population, after a worsening of 6.2 percentage points (3.8 percentage points in the Spanish population). Again, the main problems in this regard lie in housing and, mostly, in employment: the jobs of many more have been affected in one way or another, especially by ERTes; but, above all, they have suffered twice as many lay-offs as the Spanish population. This represents the second social buffer of immigration. Thanks to it, the labour and social effects of crises are experienced to a lesser extent by nationals. This possibly explains why these crises do not give rise to excessive social tensions, despite their severity. This is a model of unequal distribution of the labour and social costs of the crisis, in which the immigrant population bears the brunt. A model that is unfair due to the lack of equity that it entails. This is not something new, as the immigrant population has systemically brought an added flexibility to the dynamics of the labour market at the cost of

suffering its effects in the form of unemployment and precariousness. At least until this inequality is corrected, public policies should act alternatively and correct these effects by providing more effective social protection and stronger inclusion policies for this population.

FIGURE 9. 2018/2021 percentage difference of the immigrant population according to the level of integration or social exclusion



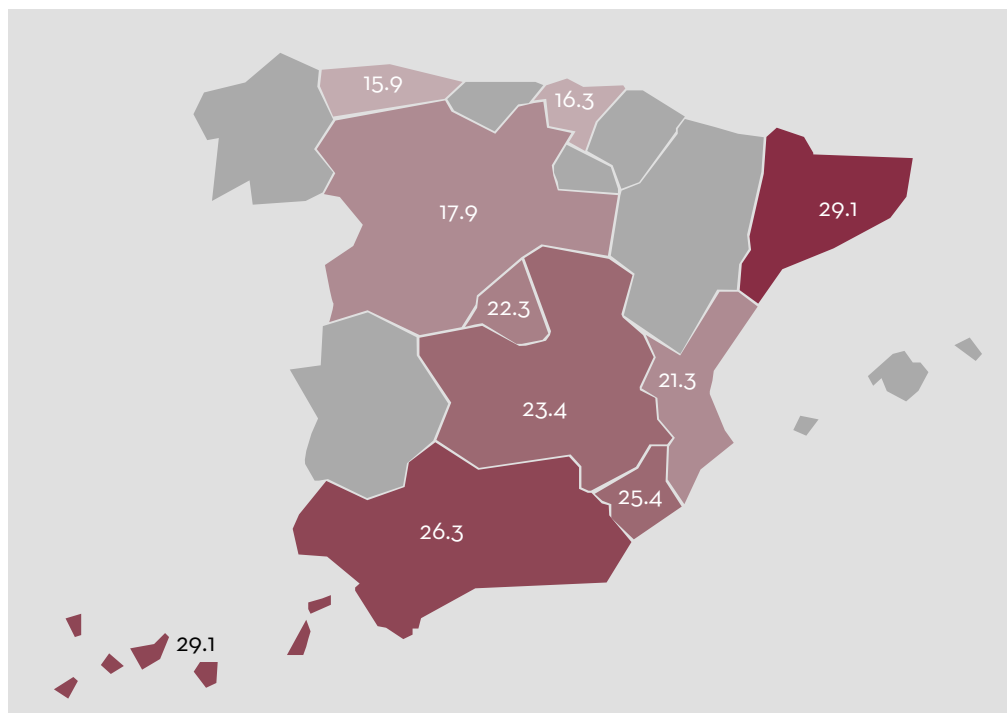
Source: Own elaboration based on EINSFOESSA 2018 and 2021

Meanwhile, social networks seem to have suffered even less in the foreign population than in the native population as part of a process of maturing of their own community networks and of increasing interaction with the native population.

Territorial Incidence

There are significant territorial differences in social exclusion in Spain and they have increased with this latest crisis. There are important differences in the incidence of the phenomenon in each place: around 16% in Asturias or the Basque Country; 29% in the Canary Islands or Catalonia. The evolution in 2021 compared to 2018 also shows major differences, ranging from slight improvements to a worsening of 12 percentage points. The highest rates are observed in the south and east, together with the Canary Islands. Thus, the trend that started to become evident earlier, as reported in previous FOESSA reports, continues.

FIGURE 10. Proportion of the population in a situation of social exclusion by Spanish autonomous communities (2021)



Source: Own elaboration based on EINSFOESSA 2021

Moreover, the dimensions of social exclusion that have each territory the most show very different patterns and dynamics. While exclusion from employment has been more prevalent in Murcia, Andalusia, or the Canary Islands, exclusion from consumption is more common in communities such as Madrid or Catalonia. Exclusion from the right to education stands out in Castile-La Mancha; exclusion from the right to health, in the Community of Valencia; exclusion from the right to housing, in the Canary Islands or Catalonia; and social isolation, in Castile-Leon or Murcia; while problematic social relationships are more associated with territories such as the Community of Valencia, Catalonia, or Madrid. Consequently, there are also differences in the most affected groups, comparatively speaking: single-parent households stand out in Andalusia; people aged over 65, in Castile-La Mancha; female-headed households, in the Canary Islands; foreign population, in Catalonia; and minors, in Madrid or Murcia.

Behind these differences, there are various factors related to the demographic structure, the production model of each community, its social protection model, and,

probably, also the specific impact of the health crisis in each of them. Therefore, this is why there is a need to modulate priorities and adapt the content of inclusion policies to the needs of each territory, which is something that does not seem difficult within a model that is decentralised in its main components.

4. Family Strategies and Social Relationships

Households' Defensive Strategies in the Face of the COVID-19 Crisis. A Greater Impact on Households in a Situation of Severe Exclusion

To cope with COVID-19, households, public administrations, and the organised civil society have had to mobilise significant material and intangible resources. The 2008 crisis also entailed an internal mobilisation of households and the civil society, but the Spanish State was almost absent, as it merely implemented financial adjustment policies at the expense of social protection and the quality of public services. Although it is less visible, partly because it is taken for granted, households have had to make a great economic and relational effort to maintain their internal cohesion and care for school-age children. This has been partly at the expense of the extent and quality of social relationships as well as defensive strategies, which in many cases have enhanced isolation and loneliness.

Households are people's basic safety net. Economic and social crises put this safety net to the test. This net either broadens their impact or reduces it. If recovery is slow, as it was between 2014 and 2019, this net will tend to see its capacity for protection and assistance progressively limited. Hence the importance of knowing what happened to this network in the year of the pandemic, in 2020, classified according to three lines of behaviour: drawing on one's own savings, seeking external assistance, or reducing usual expenses related to the different needs and activities of daily life.

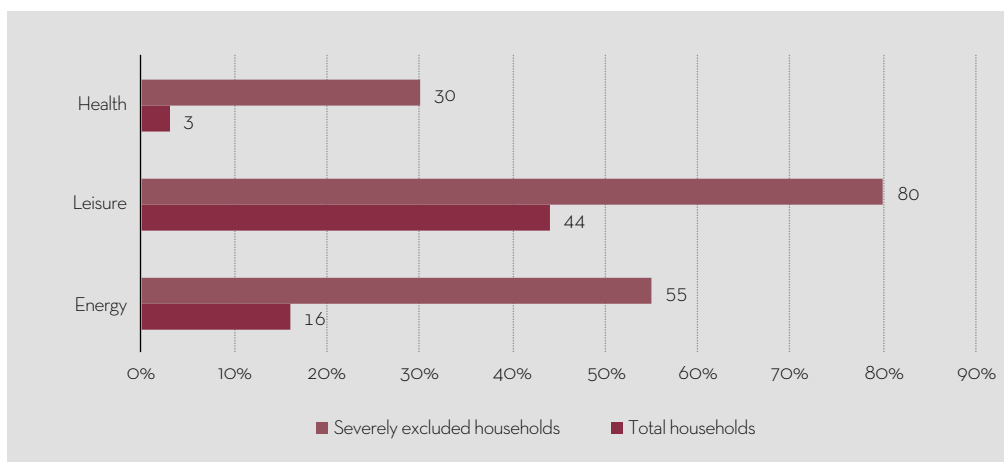
Thus, households in a situation of exclusion have resorted to a greater extent than other households to selling their homes in order to obtain resources. Furthermore, only 36.1% of households has money available to meet unforeseen expenses and has already paid for their property. Said percentage drops to 9% when it comes to so-

cially excluded households. Less than 20% of the general population seek assistance from friends and relatives, while more than 70% of the population in a situation of exclusion does so. The same is true in those cases where financial assistance is requested from a public or private institution, which is proof of the weakness of the social protection system.

The detailed analysis of the reduction in usual expenses shows the existing gap between the general population and the population in a situation of severe exclusion. Thus, the strategy of reducing usual spending on food, clothing, and footwear is more than twice as high in the case of socially excluded households (78%) than in the case of the general population (35%), reaching more than 89% of households in a situation of severe exclusion.

16% of households state that they have resorted to some strategy to reduce basic household energy consumption, which reaches 55% of the households in a situation of severe exclusion. The reduction in spending on leisure and social relationships is similar, which affects 44% of the population and 80% of the severely excluded households. Although health is a basic good, households have somewhat reduced their health expenditure (almost 3% of households), but there is a ten-fold increase in the case of poor households. The reduction in spending on education, as in health, is low for households as a whole (6.7%), but it presents more than a three-fold increase

FIGURE 11. Percentage of households that adopted strategies to cut back on spending on various needs



Source: Own elaboration based on EINSFOESSA 2021

(23%) in the case of severely excluded households, which will undoubtedly affect the educational process of the children in these households.

Finally, if 27% of households does not have the money to meet unforeseen expenses, a percentage that rises to 72% in severely excluded households.

The impact of the pandemic on access to housing has been significant: resorting to flat-sharing, moving back to the parents' homes, or renting a room from others has affected 4.9% of households and 15% of households in a situation of severe exclusion.

These strategies affect various types of households differently. Households with elderly pensioners cope much better with the adjustments of the crisis than those households with minors and single-parent households, mostly headed by women, and this is worse in households which are in a situation of severe exclusion. Hence the importance of reinforcing social protection programmes to reduce deficits and risks in the population as a whole, and especially in the most vulnerable groups.

Persistent Gender Inequality in Childcare

The pandemic has forced a reorganisation of care within households. School closures and the almost total limitation of extracurricular activities, teleworking, and company closures (ERTEs) have caused this reorganisation, which was major during the first wave of the pandemic. It has led to greater inequalities in society and within households on the basis of their socio-demographic characteristics.

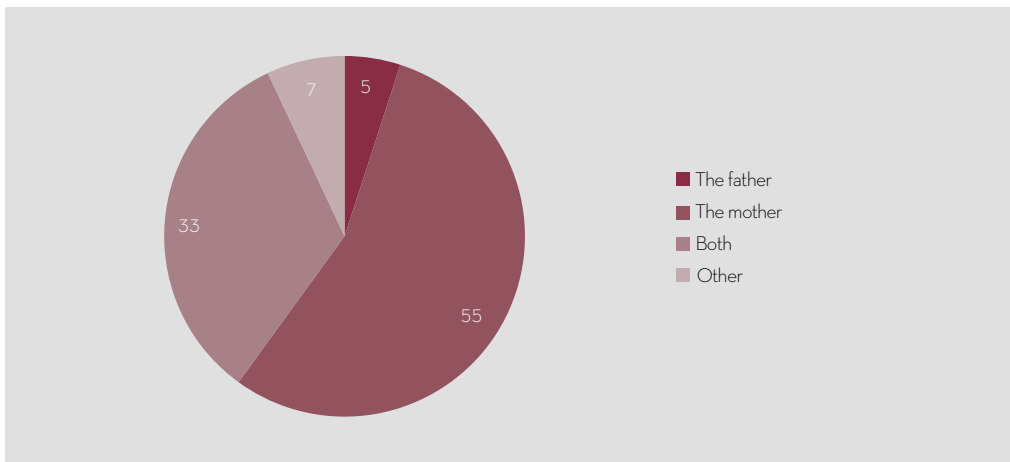
We have analysed the effect of maternity and paternity on employment between 2005 and 2021, considering the impact of the two economic crises of 2008 and 2020. Over these years, women's employment has increased, the employment gap between women with and without children has narrowed, and there are hardly any differences in employment rates between men with and without children. However, the traditional division of gender roles in care and family responsibilities afflicts women's employment in particular. The pandemic has exacerbated this inequality. Increased women's employability has not led to a reduction in the load of care that women bear. The increasing involvement of men in childcare is mainly due to benefits in the form of paid leaves. In contrast, it is mainly women who take unpaid leaves for care purposes.

The pandemic has given rise to greater difficulties in reconciling employment and care. In the absence of informal care networks, women have mostly borne the impact. Evidence suggests that the gender gap in the amount of time spent on domestic and care work appears to have widened compared to the pre-pandemic period. In other words, inequality in care work would have increased to the detriment of women. In two-parent households with children aged under six, there is a return to traditional practices in the sharing of care work. In the case of single-parent households with children aged under six, the overwhelming presence of the mother as the main caregiver, with the assistance of grandmothers, stands out. The temporary closure of schools and their subsequent reopening with modified timetables and limited services has particularly put a strain on single-parent households, in which one of the main resources has been family members.

It is worth noting the limited impact of the *MeCuida* Plan (in English, “It Takes Care of Me”), which has been successively extended and will be in force until 28th February 2022. This plan makes it possible to adapt working hours and modify working conditions in order to guarantee the effective exercise of care. This measure has been very limited among women and almost non-existent among men.

Remote work has been important, and 16% of parents in two-parent households and, to a much lesser extent, in single-parent households have resorted to it, although its

FIGURE 12. Percentage of households in which childcare during lockdown was primarily provided by one of the following options



Source: Own elaboration based on EINSFOESSA 2021

distribution has depended on the level of education. ERTes may have been an indirect mechanism that has facilitated childcare, especially at times of lockdown.

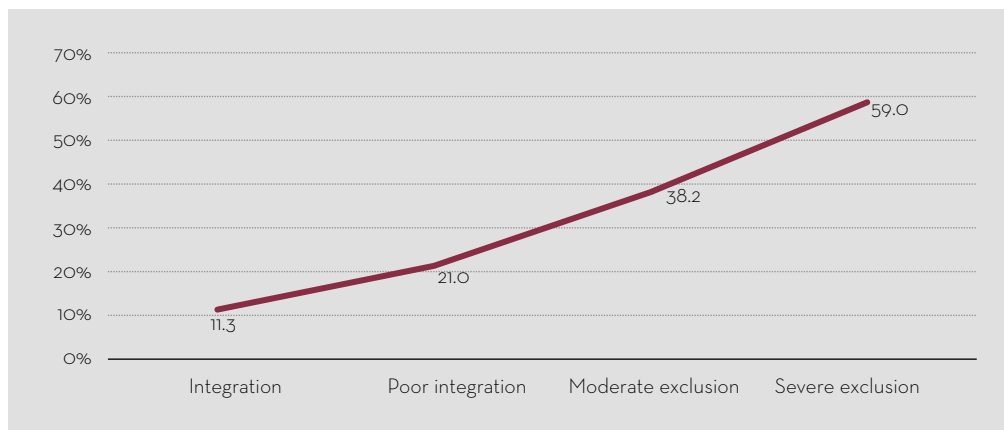
From all the above, it can be deduced that care strategies continue to be based on women, without sufficient support from public policies, which hinders their participation in the labour market on equal terms compared to men, as well as a jointly responsible sharing of care work.

Social Relationships During the Pandemic: Social Weakening, Reinforcement within Households, and Problems Related to Isolation and Social Conflict

The pandemic has brought the initial lockdown, social distancing, and social isolation over the past year and a half. The pace and quality of social relationships has been profoundly altered, alleviated in part by the use of landline phones, but especially of mobile phones and other digital devices. As society has progressively emerged from these exceptional situations, it has found out something that already existed: the fragmentation of social relationships, loneliness, and the lack of attention paid to mental health as social problems.

In the first place, the pandemic has reduced the frequency of social relationships with non-cohabiting family members and friends to a much greater extent in 2021 (more than two out of ten households report that their social relationships have broken off) than in 2013. But just as important as the frequency of relationships is their quality. The pandemic has generally deteriorated or weakened social relationships. Overall, those situations showing signs of deterioration almost reach 60% of people (one third reports lot or a fair amount of deterioration). This perception is very similar among men and women. There is a significant difference in the case of the young population aged under 30, where four out of ten people report that their social relationships have weakened significantly or greatly, compared to the population aged over 65, where said figure is of three out of ten. In the latter age group, social alienation may lead to isolation with a high impact on mental health. From the point of view of the areas of social exclusion, the greater the exclusion, the greater the severity of the deterioration of social relationships.

FIGURE 13. Percentage of households in which social relations have broken off for economic reasons according to the level of social integration-exclusion



Source: Own elaboration based on EINSFOESSA 2021

The weakening of social relationships affects friendships the most (22.5%), followed by relationships with non-cohabiting family members (16.8%), and neighbourly relationships (13.7%). Social relations within households have deteriorated in 6% of cases. In general, social relationships have kept pace with the evolution of the pandemic, but in a manner marked by their relative weakening.

Furthermore, there has been an increase in the number of people who do not have daily or almost daily contact with people outside the household, especially in households in a situation of exclusion. In contrast, relationships with people cohabiting in the household have slightly increased. The household remains the socialisation agency par excellence in all circumstances.

Inevitably, these changes in social relationships are not only marked by adaptation and cooperation, but also by conflict and imbalances in social relationships. Although social relationships in general have not worsened, it can be observed that the situation is relatively worse than in the previous crisis with regard to areas such as labour and neighbourly relationships. At the same time, there has been an increase in the number of people who claim that they have fewer good social relations between 2009 and 2021.

Changes in social relationships due to the pandemic have affected the structure of solidarity and collective aid by reducing the capacity to give aid to others and to re-

ceive aid from others. Thus, 34% of the households interviewed do not receive aid at times of need. Instead, the amount of aid given and received has been maintained and even enhanced, and there has been an increase in the number of forms of unilateral aid.

In short, the pandemic has not led to a deterioration of social relationships because this process was already underway. Therefore, it has simply aggravated it, although in different ways according to the level of social exclusion of households and people. As a result, trends towards isolation and latent, if not explicit, social conflict have been exacerbated. As far as this situation affects social cohesion, the challenge of preventing the deterioration of social relationships is crucial. Their strengthening is complex and interlinked with labour relationships and living conditions, but it is indispensable.

5. Public Policies against COVID-19: Nature, Impacts, and Limitations

To cope with the impact of the pandemic, in addition to civil society and households, the public sector has deployed an active intervention strategy, especially during the first wave of the pandemic. This strategy has two dimensions: the first one is the social protection strategy, while the second one relates to the strengthening of essential public services, such as health, education, dependency, and social services and support services for housing needs.

In general, the policies implemented have been a combination of new initiatives and adaptations of existing ones, considering that while social protection policies have been agreed and strongly centralised, public service policies depend to a large extent on the actions of the Spanish autonomous communities and local corporations, financially supported by the Central Administration of the Spanish State, which vary among them and sometimes give rise to cooperation problems among administrations.

Social Protection during the Pandemic. Positive Developments and Efficiency Burdens

Social protection policies, together with health policies, have been the most important protective element against the impact of the pandemic. In the case of Spain, this

is particularly important, as the social protection system has been characterised for decades by its limited spending and low protective effect and, therefore, for its low effectiveness in reducing and preventing poverty. Policies implemented between March 2020 and September 2021 have contributed to curbing the harshest impact of the social and labour crisis and are a learning experience on how to improve the social protection system for the future.

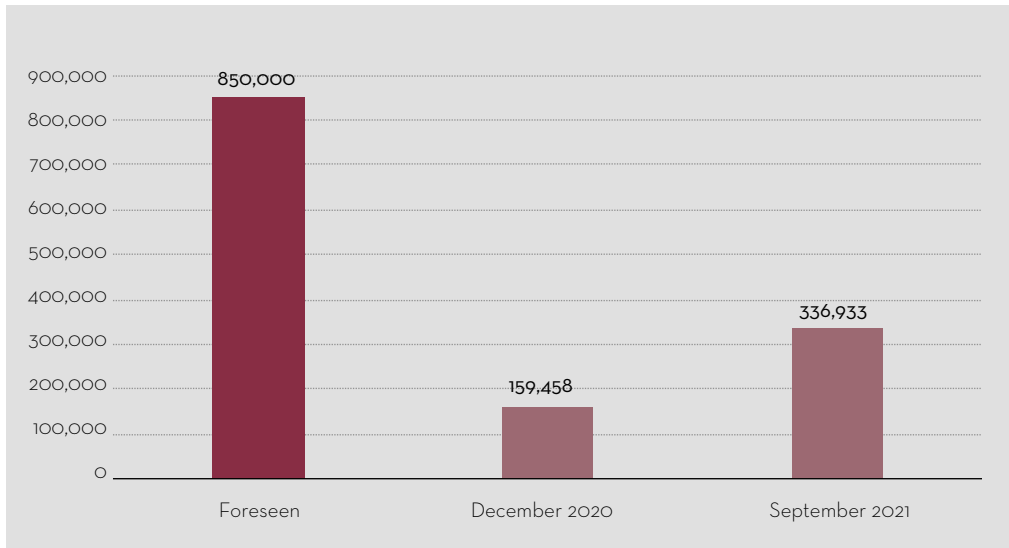
Social protection policies have been characterised by three features. Firstly, their adaptation to the reality of an abrupt social and labour crisis has been agreed by all social and economic players and by the Spanish government, taking up again a fruitful path that had already been forged in Spain for the extension and improvement of social protection. On the level of care protection and social services, the role of local administrations and that of the Third Sector for Social Action (TSSA) has been key to the protection of the most vulnerable and isolated groups in Spanish society.

Secondly, in terms of their scope, the policies implemented have been characterised by a combination of social and labour protection policies (such as ERTes and the extraordinary protection measures for self-employed workers who have ceased their activity) with social protection reforms, such as the Minimum Living Income (IMV, as per the Spanish acronym), and labour protection reforms, such as the protection for workers on digital platforms and the regulation of teleworking to prevent possible abuses relating to extended working hours. The scope of social protection has been modulated in line with the evolution of the pandemic and the situation of companies over the last year and a half. Thus, ERTes reached their maximum coverage in April 2020 (almost 3.6 million workers) and, in the case of self-employed workers, they reached a peak of almost 1.5 million people in June of the same year.

Extraordinary unemployment protection measures for groups that have exhausted their benefits or who have no coverage (such as the domestic and cultural workers sector) have had a smaller scope, showing the duality of the Spanish labour market.

The implementation of the IMV is proving difficult to achieve its initial objective of covering 850,000 households, due to the slow adaptation of the management system to the special characteristics of the potential beneficiary population, given that the Spanish Public Administration's unavoidable obligation to guarantee social rights by improving governance, with greater involvement of regional and local governments and of the TSSA in identifying social demands and supporting applications, is a nec-

FIGURE 14. Number of households benefiting from the IMV



Source: Spanish Ministry of Social Rights and Agenda 2030 (2021) and Press releases from the Spanish Ministry of Inclusion, Social Security, and Migration: <https://bit.ly/3wcCFzO>

essary way to rapidly develop a protective programme during its launch phase. But this is not the only necessary way, since said measure has insufficient coverage, it does not reach certain vulnerable groups, and it poses unfair access conditions that are difficult to meet for some of the families and individuals who need it most.

Although we do not know the final effect of the measures, it is reasonable to think that they have at least contributed to curbing the harshest impact of the crisis, even if they did so unevenly. The ongoing labour and social protection reforms are an opportunity to reverse a fragmented social protection model that is poorly endowed and has a low protective intensity.

A Great Effort in Health Care, but also an Inescapable Challenge to Guarantee a Good Quality Public Health System

On the health level, the pandemic has shown that, on the one hand, its impact has been more negative on vulnerable groups than on the Spanish population as a whole.

On the other hand, it has highlighted and aggravated the deficits that the Spanish national health system (SNHS) has been suffering for the last ten years as a consequence of the policies aimed at cutting back on public spending. The overwhelmed situation of the SNHS during the first waves of the pandemic has exposed the fragility of a system that, although critically, has the broad support of Spanish society. This double conclusion implies that it is necessary both to fight against health inequalities, which have deep social roots, and to strengthen the coverage and quality of the SNHS.

COVID-19 has affected the health of the Spanish population both extensively and intensely, but in differentiated manner. Overall, its impact has been significant in terms of increased mortality and morbidity. By the end of 2021, the number of confirmed infections exceeds five million people, and the excess mortality was of 88,000 deaths. The latter have mainly affected elderly people aged over 70, and dramatically during the first wave, elderly people living in nursing homes. During the first four months of the pandemic, 6% of people living in nursing homes and geriatric hospitals died, with variations among autonomous communities. Nursing homes were not prepared for a shock such as the coronavirus, and the policies implemented were generally late and insufficient, and, in many cases, bordered on abandonment, carrying out triages or prioritising patients and blocking access to the hospital network. As a result, the very model of residential care existing in Spain has been openly questioned.

COVID-19 has also had an impact on socially and occupationally vulnerable groups. Workers in essential and local services (such as trading, care, catering, etc.), most of whom systematically commute by public transport, have been particularly affected. As the EINSFOESSA 2021 report shows, the physical and emotional consequences have been major for groups which are in a situation of exclusion and precariousness. This impact raises questions of concern regarding the future implications of the pandemic for the health of the population under what are known as after-effects or increased morbidity: 22% of people who have suffered from coronavirus experience consequences. The impact of the pandemic on mental health has evidenced a problem in the health and social system when it comes to addressing the needs associated with mental health, which prior to the pandemic was partly invisible. The fact that it has been included in the public policy agenda is a very positive step forward.

At the same time, the SNHS has undergone an unprecedented stress test over the last year and a half in the face of increased demand when it was just beginning to recover from the past decade policies aimed at cutting back on public spending. The

SNHS has been overwhelmed and it has not returned to normal activity yet. The main impact, in addition to the overloading of hospital care, has been the deterioration of primary care, with wide differences among the autonomous communities.

Although investment in health from March 2020 to the present time has been extraordinary, the burden of the 2017-2020 Stability Plan has reduced health investment, both in terms of infrastructure and personnel, and has given rise to an increase in territorial inequalities regarding public health spending. The effects of past policies will not be recovered in one year. The impact of the cuts in public health spending has increased spending on private health policies by between 19% in 2009 to 23.3% in 2020.

Fully recovering investment in health care, improving quality, and specifically providing mental health assistance are necessary objectives to ensure equality and prevent social exclusion.

Care and Assistance to Dependent People and People in Need of a Caregiver. The Urgency of a Change of Strategy

Care for children and dependent people has been disrupted and under great stress during the pandemic, especially during the social lockdown phase, when a number of fragilities have become apparent. This frailty has increased the workload on households and, in particular, on women.

Care-oriented public policies have had to be adjusted to the circumstances by supplementing existing ordinary measures with extraordinary ones. Ordinary measures, such as parental leave for the care of children and dependent individuals have continued to operate, but they have been subject to health restrictions and their impact has varied according to the degree of integration and/or social exclusion. The restriction of access to education for 0-3-year-old children and the greater use of unpaid leave for care purposes by women compared to men, have had a negative impact on the living conditions of low- income households. The pandemic has once again highlighted the childcare gap between the end of paid childcare leave and the time when children aged 3-6 start school, the solution to which depends on the socio-economic situation of households and on family and social networks.

With regard to care for dependent people provided via the Autonomy and Dependency Care System (SAAD, as per the Spanish acronym), lockdown and fear of infection have strained access and coverage indicators, limited access to informal ways of support, services, and benefits, except for telecare and economic benefits such as the Financial Benefit for Care in the Family Environment (PECEF, as per the Spanish acronym). The approval of the Long-Term Care and Support Plan and the Dependency Shock Plan by the Central Administration of the Spanish State in January 2021 is the response to a glaring failure of the dependency system that had been dragging on since 2012 and which had begun a slow process of recovery in some autonomous communities since 2015 and from 2018 onwards at national level.

The new measures to support the care for children and dependent people have not been accompanied by income support, but rather by adaptations or reductions in the working hours, with a proportional cutback in salary (*MeCuida* Plan), or have been very limited in time, such as the Children's Nutritional Reinforcement Programmes. Only families with cohabiting minors or adults whose members were employed and were diagnosed with COVID-19 were entitled to paid leave for the duration of a few days of temporary incapacity for work due to COVID-19.

The pandemic has made it clear that all types of care are important and that there is a need for the implementation of public policies that are commensurate with their recognition as an essential service *sine die*, guided by the principles of universality, quality, and social inclusion. Comprehensive early childhood care and a change of model (reduction in the residential resource, dignification of this resource, de-commercialisation...), in the case of dependency, are challenges that must be met in the short- and medium-term.

Social Services: New Forms of Social Intervention for the 21st Century

Social services have gained visibility during the pandemic due to the crisis in residential care and the difficulty in running outpatient clinics and home-based care. Furthermore, the need for these services to respond to direct personal needs and the commitment of social services professionals, social workers and auxiliary and support personnel, have become apparent, revaluing their role in the future.

This context of crisis poses a challenge for the immediate future of social services if we additionally take into account the environment of the most important challenges that social policies are facing, such as the ageing of the population, the fight against social exclusion, the protection of vulnerable children and adolescents, and the integration of the immigrant population, among others.

This new context unfolds different scenarios in the development of a branch of social policy that shrinks and expands depending on its interrelation with other welfare services with which it sometimes competes and usually collaborates. Competition may lead to childcare responsibility being shifted to the education sector, or to care for elderly people aged over 65 becoming medicalised. It may also occur that social services take over functions from other services, as an endorsement of needs or cases undesired by other systems or sectors. However, the pandemic has taught the lesson that the collaboration among welfare services and among non-profit public and private social services is the cornerstone of a system or branch which, by its very institutional nature, has to flexibly adapt to people's needs and to the creation of spaces intended for community development.

The fact that social services are, in many senses, the “ultimate network” of welfare services, as well as the gateway to different services and economic benefits (such as the minimum incomes of the autonomous communities and the emergency aid of local councils) means that they are in a continuous process of adaptation, both in terms of the social work model and in terms of their organisational model.

The magnitude of severe exclusion not only calls for greater intervention by social services, but also predicts that there will be more tensions in the border areas of other services related to the need for personal assistance, such as education and health care. Besides, there will be tensions at its own core, due to the complexity of realising effective multipurpose social services to respond to multidimensional needs, the use of a digitalisation which tends to exclude the most vulnerable population, the dissatisfaction of complicated social demands, or the very difficulty to articulate networking with administrations and social actors.

If the uncertainties and threats that social services are facing are the aforementioned, it is also true that the opportunities for their development are wide-ranging and go beyond the inertias of the present time. They can be credible as providers of services and interventions aimed at protecting and promoting, caring for, and supplementing individual and community capacities for autonomous and interdependent living in homes and neighbourhoods. They are in a position, and sometimes in the

process, of reinventing those residential services that have proved to be as indispensable as they are inadequate, as well as of strengthening and renewing other forms of home-based, telematic, day-time, and outpatient clinical services.

The Challenge of Bridging the Education Gaps that the Pandemic has Exposed

Due to the onset of the state of emergency, face-to-face classes were replaced by remote learning. The new situation has had a negative impact on the education system, teachers, and students, although unevenly. Socially vulnerable children and adolescents have been the most affected.

The pandemic has intensified existing educational gaps in a context marked by high levels of inequality in access to education, learning conditions, and educational outcomes. To address this situation, education policies have been implemented, which, with relative success, have tried to curb the most negative impacts of the new education gaps.

The replacement of school-based education with home-based education during the state of emergency has accentuated an existing inequality, which in these exceptional circumstances takes on new forms: gaps in access to digital connection and in the use of technologies and, as a consequence, greater inequality of outcomes. In households with children of Roma origin, the lack of Internet access (44%) is four times higher than in the general population, and in households with children with disabilities, it is twice as high than in those which do not have it. In addition, housing conditions and adequate food, which for children without resources was guaranteed by means school canteens, should be taken into account. The social composition of schools is a factor that has had a markedly unequal impact on the learning processes and procedures during the pandemic.

School closures and the implementation of remote learning has led to a reduction in class and learning hours, which adds to the well-known phenomenon of “summer forgetfulness”. This can result in an increase in the segmentation of school failure rates. This loss affects students from low-income families to a greater extent. In households with children aged under 15, 15% report that their grades are worse than in 2019, a percentage that rises sharply in the most vulnerable households, particularly in those with people of Roma origin (30.6%) or of non-EU origin (20.6%). In general, it

is confirmed that there is a close relationship between the worsening of economic conditions in the household during the pandemic and school performance. Problems related to work-family balance and the availability of time and resources are factors that aggravate educational outcomes. The gap among households and the gap among education centres has widened due to the pandemic.

To address the widening of these gaps resulting from the impact of the pandemic, education policies have acted on several fronts. On the one hand, efforts have been made to shorten the periods of time of school closure and to reinforce online learning through forms of home-based learning supported by digital media, such as the Digital Education Plan in 2020. On the other hand, the return to classrooms has been characterised by flexibility in the management of class hours and forms of assessment, partly compromising the time of socialisation that education centres provide. The future evaluation of the use of education funds provided by the central Government for teacher recruitment, scholarships, and digitalisation, as well as the programme Reinforcement, Guidance, and Support Plan + 2020-2021 (PROA, as per the Spanish acronym) aimed at the most vulnerable students, will show to what extent the pandemic has decreased or increased territorial inequalities.

It can be concluded that there has been an accumulation of losses that require intensive compensatory and learning efforts for the most disadvantaged students. Reducing school segregation, facilitating access to spaces of interaction among students, and reducing social and territorial inequalities is a challenge for the education system that must be met without delay.

Policies against Residential Exclusion

The FOESSA reports of the past decade show how the interrelationship between low job quality and high housing costs is a combination that explains why a segment of households and individuals become socially excluded. Poor housing policies have so far failed to ensure access to adequate housing for socially excluded households, especially for groups such as young people with precarious employment contracts.

This situation has been aggravated by the COVID-19 crisis, which has had a particularly negative impact on vulnerable households. The indicators resulting from the EINSFOESSA 2021 Survey prove this. On the one hand, the most severe residential exclusion remains a significant factor: the percentage of households residing in

unhealthy housing has doubled between 2018 (3.2%) and 2021 (7.2%), and there has been an increase in the percentage of households residing in degraded housing (0.8% in 2018 and 1.8% in 2021) or in substandard housing (3.7% in 2018 and 4.3% in 2021). Overcrowding has doubled between 2018 (2.6%) and 2021 (4.6%). Moreover, the percentage of households lacking basic supplies such as running water and electricity has increased between 2018 and 2021. In 2021, 10% of households does not have heating, and 9% is unable to maintain an adequate temperature at home. A significant indicator of housing access conditions is the deterioration of the housing environment: the percentage of households residing in run-down neighbourhoods has increased between 2018 (5.3%) and 2021 (7.7%), as has, in general, that relating to degraded environments (0.8% in 2018 and 1.8% in 2021).

The EINSFOESSA 2021 Survey shows that, between 2018 (6.2%) and 2021 (11.3%), there was an increase in the number of households which were in arrears with the payment of any housing-related expenses, such as the rent or mortgage, or which did not have enough money to pay for them. The impact of energy poverty is worth noting: 6.5% of households received notices of cut-off of basic supplies due to a lack of resources. The threat of eviction from housing due to non-payment affected 2.3% of households in 2021. These situations are more prevalent in households which are in a situation of severe poverty, where, for instance, only 3.7% of households has paid for their own home, compared to 46.8% of households which are in a situation of full integration and 44.1% of households which are in a situation of poor integration. COVID-19 has only worsened or strained most indicators of access to and maintenance of housing.

Public policies on housing exclusion are structurally limited, and, as the *VIII FOESSA Report* of 2019 pointed out, so are those implemented to fight against COVID-19: the public sector does not have a strategy based on human rights. The efforts of the public anti-COVID-19 measures should be highlighted, although, in practice, they have not always been fulfilled or have done so too slowly, as in the case of the moratorium on the payment of mortgages regarding permanent housing; the debt moratorium, suspension, or cancellation concerning the rental of permanent housing; the mandatory extension of the rental contract with financial compensation for the owner; the suspension of forced eviction from permanent housing, and the inclusion in the 2018-2021 Spanish State Housing Plan of housing benefits for very vulnerable social groups and the prohibition of cutting off basic supplies to vulnerable consumers. A period of time is needed to assess their effectiveness.

The diversity of housing exclusion situations and the limited public policies require the development of combined strategies of public intervention to guarantee access to ade-

quate housing, with the assistance of the state and regional housing plans; the forthcoming state law on the right to housing; and the comprehensive state strategy on homelessness.

A Final Reflection

In short, the COVID-19 crisis has left us with a deep social imprint that has a bearing on the situation caused by the Great Recession of 2008-2013, which was not fully resolved in the subsequent recovery period. Said imprint takes the form of an increase in social inequalities, including gender inequalities and social exclusion, which threatens to widen and make chronic the social fracture with respect to the most vulnerable sectors. This new crisis has intensified ongoing processes of social transformation, such as the increase in labour instability, which has an impact on the insecurity of large sectors of the employed population, or massive digitalisation, which has shown a new exclusionary factor in the form of the digital divide.

In this sense, the effort made to respond to this situation by means of public policies has been notably greater than in the previous crisis, with an ongoing process of reinforcement and transformation of public policies, which has not always been able to keep pace with social needs. In some cases, temporary measures have been introduced (such as in the cases of health, housing, or social protection), but it remains to be seen how it would be possible to maintain them in a stable manner for the future by making reasonable modifications. In other cases, such as in the case of the Minimum Living Income, the measures have been insufficiently deployed, which has limited the intended effects. For all these reasons, an in-depth review of the whole welfare state model is needed, with a clear focus on access to rights as a channel for social inclusion and the “recovery” of the most excluded sectors.

