

newsletter on
social vulnerability

number 01 july 2009



THE CRISIS IMPACT

ON THE SITUATION OF THE MOST VULNERABLE PEOPLE



Cada vez más cerca de las personas



Cruz Roja Española

The launch of this first Newsletter on Social Vulnerability by the Spanish Red Cross takes place in the midst of one of the most powerful crises experienced by Spanish society in the past 20 years. It is precisely because of the severity of the problem and the institution's commitment to the most vulnerable people that the Red Cross has chosen to deepen its focus on the applied research that it began in 2006, with the first Annual Report on Social Vulnerability.

Now that the downturn in the financial markets has become a more complex crisis of greater dimensions, it is clear that those who directly face poverty, or are at risk of it, are being and will be affected strongly by the crisis in their immediate futures. In the past decades, the social programs, in part, have served to redistribute the wealth, in spite of the huge demographic growth that has occurred since the mid-nineties.¹ Despite the economic growth of the past 15 years, the existing poverty among 20 percent of the Spanish population has not been eradicated, while long-term unemployment is notable, so too is the chain of economic, social, personal, family and housing consequences that come hand-in-hand with such a context.

The unstoppable rise of unemployment in Greece and in Spain has led the Eurozone to report its greatest drop in employment since 1995 during this year's first trimester. Eurostat, the EU's statistical office, has determined that the rate of job cuts has increased 1.3 percent between January and March with respect to the same period in 2008, which means that 1.22 million people have stopped working during this period, of whom Spain accounts for 802,800.²

The rate of unemployment affects all working people, but added to this are the preexisting difficulties faced by women, youth and those over 45 years of age. Due to the job sectors and kinds of jobs that they have held since their entrance into the labor force, the rate of unemployment is higher among immigrants. Before the end of 2009, the government estimates that there will be more than 4.5 million people unemployed, among Spaniards and resident immigrants.³ **Once unemployment benefits are exhausted, if measures are not implemented to mitigate the time until a new job contract is secured, as well as productive measures to jumpstart the economy and generate jobs, these people will become the *new poor*.**



The social services managed from the town halls or municipal governments are not enough to lower the impact of this threat and decrease social risk. The social dining halls, shelters, reception centers and other services provided by non-governmental and non-profit, private organizations face a big increase in demand, while finding it more difficult to secure donations and grants. If they find themselves overwhelmed, the resulting situation could be tragic.

The housing situation is also worrisome. In recent months, unemployed people with past-due mortgage payments and tenants who cannot pay their rents are beginning to lose their homes. **Families and, in particular, children, who are already at social risk, are not covered by the traditional measures of “emergency social housing”.**⁴ One of the main problems is the lack of available social housing, which exists in other European countries, so that these affected families can have housing.⁵ There is a large number of irregular immigrants, approximately a million people (a figure that is derived from the difference between those who have a work and residency permit and those who are just registered with the town/city hall), some of whom are in the emergency housing measures. The lack of available housing resources for at-risk youth and low-income workers with their families, the lack of coordination and orientation of the public officers and those who provide the services with respect to integrative and shared strategies, are other important problems.

The psychosocial consequences that arise, like a higher rate of problems related to adjustment, psychosomatic illnesses, depression, isolation, stress, use of psychoactive substances and violence, are more difficult to quantify, as is the generalization of available data without representative studies. However, there is data from the Spanish Society of Family and Community Medicine (Semfyc, in its initials in Spanish), which indicate a rapid increase in these pathologies.⁶

The magnitude and severity of the aforementioned phenomena present major challenges, which the Red Cross has wanted to take on, as part of its **commitment to be increasingly closer to the people**. In accordance with this philosophy, the increase in direct, emergency assistance measures, along with the continuance of projects and programs oriented towards social inclusion, must be joined by inter-institutional debate and coordination.

- 1 The European average of spending in social protection with regard to the GNP is 26.9 percent, while in Spain it is six points less at 20.9 percent.
http://epp.eurostat.ec.europa.eu/cache/ITY_OFFPUB/KS-SF-09-046/EN/KS-SF-09-046-EN.PDF
- 2 http://epp.eurostat.ec.europa.eu/cache/ITY_PUBLIC/3-02062009-AP/EN/3-02062009-AP-EN.PDF
- 3 Unemployment rose by 802,800 people in the first trimester of 2009 (25 percent more than the year before). The total number of unemployed registers at 4,010,700 and the unemployment rate gained almost 3.5 point, reaching 17.36 percent, its highest level in 11 years, according to data from the Survey on the Active Population of April 2009 (EPA, in its initials in Spanish). The unemployment rate of men is 16.86 percent, which signifies 3.89 more points than in the fourth trimester of 2008. The rate of women rose 2.88 points and is at 18.01 percent.
- 4 In the majority of EU countries, children have a greater risk of poverty than the rest of the population. In almost half of EU countries, the risk of child poverty is higher than 20 percent, reaching the highest levels in Spain at 24 percent, Romania at 25 percent, Latvia at 27 percent and Portugal at 29 percent. Source: The Social Protection Committee (2008) Child Poverty and Well-Being in the EU. Current status and way forward.
http://ec.europa.eu/employment_social/spsi/docs/social_inclusion/2008/child_poverty_en.pdf
- 5 Spending in social housing in Spain has been under the EU-25 average. Data from Eurostat, available until 2005, http://epp.eurostat.ec.europa.eu/portal/page/portal/product_details/publication?p_product_code=KS-DC-08-001
- 6 Report by María Sahuquillo, “La crisis perjudica seriamente su salud. Los expertos advierten de que la recesión puede hacer mella en el bienestar físico y mental de los ciudadanos - La situación puede resultar catastrófica para los países menos desarrollados”, in *El País* print version, 15 June 2009, http://www.elpais.com/articulo/sociedad/crisis/perjudica/seriamente/salud/elpepisc/20090615elpepisc_1/Tes

In direct contact with the affected people

The results of this first round of the “Panel of Interviews with People in situations of Social Vulnerability, assisted by the Red Cross, to assess the impact of the crisis” sheds light on how the impact affects the most vulnerable sectors, which have fewer resources to develop their capacities to face the crisis. A comparative analysis with the results that come from the second round, which will take place during the month of September, will allow us to make comparisons and get a sense of how the process is evolving.

We think that this first Newsletter will be useful to improve awareness about the current situation of people in Spain who are experiencing the crisis more harshly, the people at higher social risk, within the overall vulnerable population that participates in Red Cross programs and projects. We aim to publicize this among public opinion with concrete facts, so that empathy and solidarity will regain their ethical meanings. We are especially concerned about providing this original and specific information to help guide the design of the most appropriate measures, which will have the greatest impact and be efficient and effective with regard to urgent social protection against the threat of disaster, generated by the crisis.



The Panel and the Methodology Used

In November 2008, the Red Cross decided to set up a Panel-type study in order to observe the rate of the economic crisis on people in situations of high risk, who participated in social programs throughout the country. To this end, a questionnaire was designed, which included questions on employment issues, available income, family situations, social situations, and bio-psycho-social and emotional conditions, with the aim of administering it through telephone interviews. To conduct this panel, a random sample was selected of 1437 registered individuals from the AIS, the Red Cross' social intervention database, which was stratified by programs and which used the concept of geometric variability.⁷

In this first Newsletter, we present the results of this Panel, based on the analysis of the responses of 615 people surveyed, who participated in six CRE programs, from which 174 new variables were measured. These variables are different from those studied in the Social Questionnaire,⁸ belonging to the AIS database.⁹ This new set of data is what has been called the "May-2009" sample. The information extracted prior from these same people under survey, taken from the AIS, is what has been called the "July-2008" sample.

The study consists of three parts. The first part presents a descriptive analysis of the impact of the crisis on people in situations of vulnerability, from May-2009. The second part analyzes the proximity of risk levels of the 615 people surveyed between the two periods of time: July 2008 and May 2009. The third part includes a comparison of these two scenarios for the most significant groups of people surveyed, who belong to the different risk levels.



- 7 From the CRE social questionnaire, belonging to the AIS database of 2008, 56 binary variables will be considered among a total of 23161 surveys, which are grouped together according to 11 CRE programs (1-Drug Dependency Assistance, 2-Fight against Poverty and Social Exclusion, 3-Women with Hardships, 4- Others (searches+other groups+health promotion), 5-people affected by AIDS, 6-Disabled people, 7-Immigrants and refugees, 8-Aged People, 9-Inmates, 10-Youth with Problems). In addition, there is a comprehensive risk, a measurement of the vulnerability of each individual (see the Annual Report on Social Vulnerability 2007, pp. 115-118). According to this measurement, four categories of risk are defined: (1-moderate, 2-high, 2-very high, 4-extreme).
- 8 The social questionnaire is administered to the people attended to by CRE, who are in situations of greater fragility. It measures their situation in regards to 5 fields: personal, familial, economic, social, and environmental/housing. Depending on the results, the participants interviewed are situated in ranges of moderate, high, very high or extreme risk. The average of these results is the comprehensive indicator of vulnerability, which has risen this year as compared to last year, since the situation of those who were in the highest ranges has worsened.
- 9 CRE's programs are: Drug Dependency Assistance, Fight against Poverty and Social Exclusion, Assistance for Disabled People, Immigrants and Refugees, Aged People, Inmates and former inmates.



Primary results

Short-term personal situation shows no changes; while medium-term indicates something between being at a standstill and getting better

Among the problems that the people surveyed have suffered in the past year, it's worth pointing out

those of an economic/financial nature and health problems, as well as work-related problems. That is, for people in vulnerable situations, there is a greater range of important problems as compared to the general population, despite the fact that unemployment and economic troubles stand out most predominantly. Their perspective with regard to the immediate future, in two to three months, is that they believe they will be at a standstill: 60 percent think that things are not

Out of a sample of 1437 people with different degrees of social risk, who are participants in the Red Cross' social intervention programs, 615 valid interviews were achieved; from each of these, 117 variables were analyzed. The average age of the people interviewed was approximately 53.6 years old; two age groups stood out, that of immigrants aged 33.5 years old and that of the aged, with an average age of 75.1 years old. 70.5 percent of the entire group is female, although males are predominant in approximately 70 percent of the people who pertain to the "drug dependency assistance" and "inmates" programs.



going to change and 17 percent think that it will get better, while 13 percent see themselves worse off than they are now. These projections, analyzed a year later, give us a somewhat different result: while 31 percent see themselves in the same situation, 27 percent think that things will get better; the pessimists maintain their results with figures at around 20 percent. These perceptions coincide with the outlook on the economic/financial situation of their households, that of the country and that of Europe ●

In the past 10 months, the situation of those who suffer from moderate risk has worsened

The data compared make it possible to see a greater similarity among the people interviewed with different risks, mainly because those who are in the moderate risk range have gotten closer to the other ranges ●

Half of the people feel affected by the crisis

Fifty-six percent of the people interviewed find that the crisis has influenced somewhat or a lot their economic/financial situation of the past year, while 37 percent believe that the degree of influence has been little or none at all ●



The majority is under the poverty threshold and almost 3 out of 10 have no income

The majority of the people are under the poverty threshold. Ninety percent of the people report incomes lower than 1000 euros. Average monthly incomes are 505.90 euros, and half of those interviewed make a maximum of 500 euros a month. Twenty percent of those surveyed report that they don't have any income and 29 percent have some kind of income, but less than 500 euros a month. That is, 49 percent – almost half – are in situations of extreme or absolute poverty ●

Serious housing problems: almost 3 out of 10

Twenty-eight percent of the people surveyed affirmed having had serious problems with respect to maintaining their homes, two of which were the most notable: not being able to pay rent and not being able to pay the electric, gas or telephone bills, or the building's common charges. They have asked for aid from the Red Cross and, to a lesser extent, from Social Services, but 29 percent of those who cannot afford their rents have not asked for aid ●

Unemployed and employed: Instability, insecurity and low income levels

Among those who are employed on a free-lance basis, many are employed in domestic jobs. Two groups on opposite ends of the spectrum stand out, those who have indefinite contracts, 35 percent, and those who don't have a contract, 20 percent. In this setting of instability, 26 percent have changed jobs in the past year.

Almost 7 out of 10 report that there have been job cuts recently in their jobs, an average of 18 workers per center, in the past year. In spite of this, half do not think that their jobs are in danger, while the other half does.

With regard to the people in situations of unemployment, it is notable that only 20 percent receive unemployment benefits and that, although 56 percent are actively looking for employment, only 13 percent of the unemployed have had a job offer in the past month (April 2009). The reasons



for unemployment are varied, with the most frequent ones being the termination of a contract (20 percent), family or personal reasons (15 percent), not having documents/papers (12 percent) and illness or health problems (12 percent) ●

Retirees with no income, in poverty

Seven out of 10 retirees don't have any income other than their pensions. Taking into consideration this fact with that of the income level mentioned above, i.e. incomes under 1000 euros, the panorama is that of aged people living under the poverty threshold ●



Without any space for free-time, social or study activities: there is only some sports and religion

The social lives of those surveyed is not very active, given that the majority of them (93 percent) go infrequently or never to the movies, theater or concerts. With regard to the day center for the aged, reception centers, shelters or social dining halls, only 9 percent frequent them quite a bit or a lot. Eighty-one percent go infrequently or never to adult classes, occupational or similar training centers or internet cafes. The trend begins to change with regard to playing sports, as 25 percent frequent the municipal sports centers, gyms or sports areas in parks on a regular or daily basis. With regard to cultural centers, 38 percent frequent them regularly ●

Loneliness is not the biggest problem

With regard to personal relationships, they are summarized as follows: few close friends (35 percent), some important acquaintances (51 percent), people who listen to their problems (46 percent), but few with resources for needy cases (19 percent).

The bigger problems have to do with serious

illnesses or the death of a family member, followed by fights over money. Sixty-four percent share a home with their families and only 19 percent live alone. Thirty-two percent live with minors under 16 years old, 14 percent of whom are under school-age. Thirty percent live with people over the age of 65. There are high percentage levels of those who live with people who are ill (28 percent) or disabled (19 percent) ●

Many worries, little happiness

“Optimism and enjoyment” appear in similar proportions to “pessimism and anguish”. However, those who report permanent and occasional anguish, both add up to 80 percent. With respect to personal care, 15 percent have become permanently neglectful, but there are various degrees of occasional neglect ●

The most notable situation of risk for immigrants is unemployment, as the majority of them don't receive benefits

While half have lost their jobs because of reasons that stem from the crisis, a bit more than half (54.6 percent) state personal or family circumstances, highlighting among them a lack of work-permits (14.1 percent), the difficulty of balancing family and job responsibilities (20.3 percent) and illness (7.8 percent). Eight of every 10 don't receive unemployment benefits ●



The greatest risk factor for aged people is poverty: 1 out of every 5 has no income and has no economic assistance

Scarce optimism about future life and economic expectations. The expectations mostly have to do with emotional, family and health issues ●

People with drug dependencies, disabilities, who got out of prison, share the problems of their personal circumstances, and in almost 100 percent of the cases, have worsened recently due to family problems

However, they maintain a predominant outlook of little hope for change and of improvement, in the face of 25 percent who are pessimistic with regard to the future.

Fifty-three percent of the people who experienced a high risk level in July 2008, today are unemployed (unemployment has increased 5 percent in this group in hardly 10 months) and don't receive unemployment benefits.

Despite the fact that 66.67 percent report to be looking for employment with quite a bit or a lot of intensity, only 18.4 percent have had some kind of job offer in the last month of the survey. With respect to the expectations

about their economic situation in the coming 12 months, 40.7 percent believe that it is going to stay the same, 23.1 percent think that it will get worse, 22 percent think that it will get better and 14.3 percent report that they don't know.

The problems of the people who were exposed to a high level of risk in 2008 have increased.

91.57 percent of the people from Group 4 report to have had family problems, the biggest of which are the fights over ●



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Este proyecto ha sido financiado por la Fundación Cruz Roja Española. La Fundación nació en 1993 con la participación de 23 de las principales empresas españolas, con un objetivo principal: ayudar a Cruz Roja Española a realizar su labor asistencial y de apoyo a los más vulnerables. Su fin principal es el de apoyar a Cruz Roja Española, colaborar con ella y contribuir a la consecución de sus fines benéficos, promoviendo y fomentando la cooperación entre empresas y particulares con las actividades desarrolladas por la misma, así como fomentar la aportación de recursos destinados a financiar sus actividades, de acuerdo con sus programas de actuación.

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Cada vez más cerca de las personas

Cruz Roja Española pertenece a la Federación Internacional de Sociedades de la Cruz Roja y de la Media Luna Roja, que promueve las actividades humanitarias de las Sociedades Nacionales en favor de las personas vulnerables.

Mediante la coordinación del socorro internacional en casos de desastre y el fomento de la asistencia para el desarrollo, se propone prevenir y aliviar el sufrimiento humano.

La Federación, las Sociedades Nacionales y el Comité Internacional de la Cruz Roja constituyen, juntos, el Movimiento Internacional de la Cruz Roja y de la Media Luna Roja.

Humanidad

El Movimiento de la Cruz Roja y de la Media Luna Roja, al que ha dado nacimiento la preocupación de prestar auxilio, sin discriminación, a todos los heridos en los campos de batalla, se esfuerza, bajo su aspecto internacional y nacional, en prevenir y aliviar el sufrimiento de los hombres en todas las circunstancias. Tiende a proteger la vida y la salud, así como a hacer respetar a la persona humana. Favorece la comprensión mutua, la amistad, la cooperación y una paz duradera entre todos los pueblos.

Imparcialidad

No hace ninguna distinción de nacionalidad, raza, religión, condición social ni credo político. Se dedica únicamente a socorrer a los individuos en proporción con los sufrimientos, remediando sus necesidades y dando prioridad a las más urgentes.

Neutralidad

Con el fin de conservar la confianza de todos, el Movimiento se abstiene de tomar parte en las hostilidades y, en todo tiempo, en las controversias de orden político, racial, religioso o ideológico.

Independencia

El Movimiento es independiente. Auxiliares de los poderes públicos en sus actividades humanitarias y sometidas a las leyes que rigen los países respectivos, las Sociedades Nacionales deben, sin embargo, conservar una autonomía que les permita actuar siempre de acuerdo con los principios del Movimiento.

Voluntariado

Es un movimiento de socorro voluntario y de carácter desinteresado.

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El Movimiento Internacional de la Cruz Roja y de la Media Luna Roja, en cuyo seno todas las Sociedades tienen los mismos derechos y el deber de ayudarse mutuamente, es universal.

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