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Profile: Most Active Organisations Dealing with Poverty in Spain



Cáritas

Cáritas Española was founded half way through the last century as the official organization of the Catholic Church in Spain for charitable and social action. Its governing body is the Bishops' Conference and it is structured as a confederation of 68 Dioceses which, in turn, group 6.000 parishes. It is presided since 2005 by Rafael del Río, a senior retired police officer. Based on the principle that charity is a Christian duty, this Catholic NGO has always found pressing fields of action to provide assistance to people and groups struck by poverty and various forms of exclusion and inequality, offering basic help, social integration and job training.

Today, in a country hit by the Great Recession, with an unprecedented 26% unemployment rate, Cáritas' 60.000 volunteer workers and staff are not enough to cater for the nearly two million people devastated by the current crisis, especially women, children, junior and senior citizens, and immigrants. Its international cooperation programme, however, continues to capture the bulk of the funds available. These funds come from tax-deductible donations from partners and private citizens –for instance, in 2012 Amancio Ortega (Zara), the richest man in Spain, made an unprecedented donation of 20 million Euros. Public administrations contribute to a much lesser extent. The Bishops' Conference itself provides only a fraction of the funding (five million, less than 2%) and last year its president, Cardinal Rouco Varela, warned that the Church could reduce its contribution to Cáritas if the Government insists on claiming the payment of the local property tax.

Web: <http://www.caritas.es/>



Spanish Federation of Food Banks (*FESBAL: Federación Española de Bancos de Alimentos*)

To the general public, before the start of the crisis, such a basic need as food for survival was a hardship restricted to a very small group of citizens, such as beggars and marginals. However, the non-profit operation of food banks since several years before in all Spanish provinces (the first to appear was in Barcelona in 1987) showed how wrong this perception was and how hunger was not an alien phenomenon to a fully-developed country such as Spain.

FESBAL was born in 1996 as a federation of the 54 existing food banks in Spain. Today these organizations, endowed with legal status and full operational autonomy, enjoy a public visibility they had never had before as demand for food has

soared and citizens in their thousands, not a few formerly middle-class --whose meager income (salary or pension) is consumed by debt (mortgages) or rent-- cannot make ends meet. Food is not delivered directly to the petitioner, but through the welfare institutions adhering to the network. In 2011, 104,000 tons of food were donated, reaching over 1.3 million beneficiaries. In 2012 FESBAL increased its efforts to secure the disinterested collaboration of private companies which supply surplus food products and supermarket leftovers (7.7 million tons of edible food are thrown away every year in Spain), as well as private donations.

Web: <http://www.fesbal.org/>



Affected Mortgage Holders Platform (PAH: Plataforma de Afectados por la Hipoteca)

Since 2007, when the property bubble burst, to the first half-year in 2012, in Spain there were nearly 400,000 foreclosures for unpaid mortgages, most of them ending up in evictions. As a result, more than 600,000 people lost their (usually owned) homes, after seeing their purchasing power crumble as a result of jobinsecurity or being made redundant. The Platform appeared in 2009 in Barcelona on the initiative of a group of activists who were denouncing the inordinate rise of housing prices in Spain well before the recession. In 2011, the PAH gained media attention in the context of the social protests of the 15-M Movement (the *Indignados*). In 2012, the daily drama of evictions, which prompted a variety of Platform-led actions, meant that the PAH proved to be the most dynamic civic organization that has emerged from the crisis.

The Platform acts and mobilizes at different levels: first, it advises affected mortgage holders on how to negotiate with banks claiming debts; if the eviction order is given, it then passes on to direct action on the field with the civil disobedience campaign *Stop Evictions*, and eventually favors the re-occupation of empty houses. Ada Colau, spokesperson for the PAH, explains that, beyond giving an immediate response to a “social emergency problem”, its underlying purpose is to put up pressure to change “an anachronistic mortgage legislation” and the “housing commodification model” in Spain. The PAH’s three “minimum demands” are: general application of the retroactive payment in kind, moratorium on all main home evictions, and social rent for housing in the hands of banks.

Web: <http://afectadosporlahipoteca.com/>

Ansel Cambra and Acabaconlacrisis (Finishoffthecrisis)

Ansel Cambra, a Galician chef living in Madrid, manages the successful solidarity web *Acabaconlacrisis*, a meeting place for people (often desperate, in extreme situations) who ask for practical help, material or economic, and other people who are ready to help selflessly, giving objects or offering their time. The site, designed as an online chain of favors, puts them in direct contact (no intermediaries), encourages barter, collects personal testimonies, and offers saving and crisis-bearing tips. Given his professional skills, Cambra has launched the *Nightmare In The Fridge* campaign, which consists in the sponsoring by restaurants, hotels and catering firms of people in need of food rations.

Web: <http://www.acabaconlacrisis.es/>