



# Stories of Unemployment

Exploring the experiences of the “Lost Generation” and the economic crisis in Spain

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## Overview

Spain is one of the countries in Europe most significantly affected by the 2008 economic crisis, with its impact still being acutely felt by people today. The term “Lost Generation” is one that is used to describe a huge proportion of Spain’s youth population who neither work nor study. Experts say that the archetypal young person from the “Lost Generation” is a product of an education that fails to adequately prepare them for the job market. However, the issue of unemployment is not one that just affects young people or those with limited education, and many people within Spanish society have felt the negative consequences of the crisis.

To gather user voice on this topic we collated stories from a group of participants from Valencia who have and are experiencing unemployment and the issues around it. Some of the people who shared their stories with us fall into “The Lost Generation” age demographic, and others are older. Their stories provide an understanding of the worries and concerns (i.e. issues around exploitation and retirement) that people in Valencia have about the on-going consequences of the financial crisis. The stories told also give an insight into what life is like for people who are unemployed (i.e. relying on soup kitchens) and how they feel about the situation that they and others are in (i.e. unfair). Although many of these stories depict a bleak reality for their storytellers, within some of the stories there is an air of optimism and hope for the future.

## An unfair system

In [David’s](#) story he describes how in 2005 he was studying technical architecture. He had started doing work placements arranged by the Polytechnic University of Valencia and at that point in time companies needed architects. He recalls receiving many calls offering him good roles at a good pay. However, when he finished his degree this scenario completely changed and he has not worked as an architect since 2009. Whilst there are opportunities for other kinds of work, they tend to be illegal, and with a 3-year-old child, David does not see this as a viable option.

[Antonio’s](#) story depicts a very similar situation. In his story, he describes how after 3 years of being unemployed he went to Toronto on a tourist visa but worked without a contract. After 6 months he returned to Valencia where he has worked in sporadic jobs but under bad conditions. He accepted these jobs and their conditions because he needed the work and if he didn’t take the job then someone else in a situation like his would. As [Juan Carlos](#) describes, after the crisis a lot of people with significant work experience were fired and young people like him and Antonio find it impossible to compete with them. This situation has left Juan Carlo feeling powerless. He worries that the time he has spent being unemployed will also affect his pension.

The exploitative conditions of the labour market are echoed in some people's stories about employment support services. In [Jorge's](#) story he accounts for how "*irresponsible acts [by] economic and political leaders*" has left a large number of people who were employed in construction industry, like him, without jobs. He describes how the support provided by employment services is disingenuous. He says that they offer "*false job experience schemes to avoid paying unemployment or other benefits*" and that "*very scant social protection offered by the system*". [Juan Carlos](#), who describes the unemployment support as "useless", echoes these sentiments and [Yolanda](#) says that society would be in "*harmony*" if there were not so much exploitation and social unfairness.

## Coping with unemployment

The people that shared their stories with us explained what life is like being unemployed in Spain. [David](#) talks about how his wife is opening up a second hand clothes shop, but realistically they need two incomes in order to pay the bills. He describes how he would need to move abroad to find work in his field. [Antonio](#) explains how he lives on 200€ a month and eats in soup kitchens. [Abu](#), an older man originally from Morocco, describes how he too survives by accessing soup kitchens. Since 2008, Abu has struggled financially. He initially coped by asking family for money, but he has now stopped relying on them. Although he doesn't currently get any kind of economic help, he was told by the local services that he would receive a non-contributive pension for the rest of his life. According to [Jorge](#), a lot of people in his situation are reliant on their families for support. He says that people like him survive because of "*help from the family, which is something that is rarely known or discussed*". With state interventions found lacking, people like Jorge and Abu have no alternative other than to turn to their families for support. In the UK 'User Voice' stories, [JL](#) expresses a similar reliance on family when social services' provision wasn't useful.

## There's still hope

Despite the negative situations described in these stories, the people telling them still have hope and ideas for the future. [Jorge](#), for example, finishes his story on an optimistic note, declaring, "*we still have time to change things around*". He describes how knowledge sharing initiatives may help pass down information from the older generations to the younger generations, so that the experience that people like he has can be put to use "*at the service of society*". In another story, [Juan Carlos](#) describes how he started volunteering at soup kitchen whilst unemployed. He was nervous about this at the start because he didn't know if he would be able to cope with the

sadness. However, he is now a coordinator on Friday afternoon and helps other people by accompanying them to talk to social services. Sharing his knowledge with others makes him happy, and he is also now studying social education which is good for him as he now has an objective to achieve.

[Click here](#) to view the extracts from these stories and [click here](#) to view the feature story.

## InnoSI Themes

The experiences of unemployment depicted in the stories suggest a strong need for social innovation in both the **design and implementation of social investment policies**. The people's stories indicate that much of the support provision being provided, particularly by the Government, is not necessarily meeting their needs. In his story, [Jorge](#) describes an idea about how society can better make use of people's skills to share knowledge via an association or through using digital tools. Engaging service users in collaboratively generating solutions and ideas for services (as the Stories of Co-design from Kainuu advocate) can play a key role in creating investment policies that address people's needs in more meaningful ways.

Projects or initiatives that meet the multiple needs of people often contain elements of social innovation. The soup kitchen that [Juan Carlos](#) describes seems to be offering this multifaceted support. The soup kitchen provides people experiencing poverty with food, but also through Juan Carlos's knowledge and support it could also assist them in overcoming issues in their lives. Similarly, in reference to a co-design initiative in Kainuu, [Markuu](#) describes how his volunteer IT tutor role helps to reduce other people's digital exclusion whilst also increasing his social inclusion.

## Summary of Insights

- The role of the family:** The pivotal role that families play in supporting people is highlighted in these stories. The insights in these stories suggest that the family is not just offering emotional and wellbeing support, but also financial support. Both [Jorge's](#) and [Abu's](#) stories identify how their families have assisted them financially and what is particularly interesting about their stories is their ages; neither of the storytellers fall into the 'youth' bracket.
- Sharing knowledge and supporting others:** Both [Juan Carlos's](#) and [Jorge's](#) stories advocate the need for individuals within society to share their knowledge to support others regardless of the adversities that they themselves are facing. Whilst needing support themselves, these individuals also want to give to other people. This reciprocal support culture is one that the social investment projects explored in Stories of Our Neighbourhood are also fostering.