

# A Preliminary Study of Italy and Spain's Informal Settlements: Beyond the Numbers



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This article summarizes the research conducted by  
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San Marcelino, Valencia

## Abstract

The following work delves into the complex issue of informal settlements in Italy and Spain, revealing significant findings and drawing key conclusions. The research indicates that these settlements, far from being confined to low-income countries, are also prevalent in high-income nations, with the conditions of inhabitants exacerbated by recent global events. Notably, the study uncovers that current figures vastly exceed previous estimates by UN-Habitat, with at least 25,000 individuals in Spain and 11,000 in Italy residing in such environments, contrary to the earlier reported figures of 1,740 and 2,160, respectively.

In Spain, the research highlights the need for more comprehensive data and the focus of governmental efforts, such as the recent National Plan for Housing, predominantly on the Roma population. Andalucía's I Strategic Plan is noted for its emphasis on migrant populations in agricultural areas, revealing a targeted approach to addressing informal settlements within specific sectors.

Italy's situation is characterized by the stringent immigration policies that have heightened the vulnerability of migrants to homelessness. Despite efforts like the Ministry of Labor-ANCI report shedding light on migrant housing conditions in the agri-food sector, the research suggests a potential underestimation of the actual scenario, with only 150 out of thousands of municipalities acknowledging informal settlements.

This initial examination of informal settlements in Italy and Spain underscores the pressing need for more detailed data collection and a nuanced understanding of the socio-economic dynamics at play. The report's conclusions call for inclusive and comprehensive strategies beyond current sector-specific or demographic-specific approaches, advocating for policies that facilitate social inclusion and integration for all residents of informal settlements.

Key takeaways include:

- 1. Underestimation of Population Figures: The research highlights a significant discrepancy between previous estimates and current findings, revealing a much larger population living in informal settlements than previously acknowledged. This underscores the necessity for updated and accurate data collection to inform policy and intervention strategies.*
- 2. Sector-Specific and Demographic-Specific Approaches: While initiatives like Andalucía's strategic plan in Spain and Italy's Ministry of Labor-ANCI report represent steps toward addressing the issue, they focus on specific sectors or demographics. The conclusions suggest that a broader approach is needed to encompass the diverse populations residing in these settlements.*
- 3. Policy and Integration Challenges: The study points out the challenges posed by stringent immigration policies in Italy and the targeted nature of Spain's housing programs, which may not fully address the broader issues of social exclusion and integration faced by inhabitants of informal settlements.*
- 4. Call for Comprehensive Strategies: The research calls for inclusive policies considering the unique socio-economic dynamics of informal settlements in high-income European contexts. It advocates for interventions that provide immediate relief and facilitate long-term social integration and inclusion.*



“Evicting Glories, Barcelona”<sup>1</sup>

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1. <https://www.lavanguardia.com/local/barcelona/20180724/451084430794/desalojan-un-asentamiento-cercano-a-la-plaza-glories-de-barcelona-donde-vivian-60-personas.html>

# **A Preliminary Study of Italy and Spain's Informal Settlements: Beyond the Numbers**

Informal settlements, a global phenomenon in diverse settings ranging from the outskirts of small towns to the peripheries of sprawling cities, represent a critical issue in urban and territorial policies, specifically social justice. Although most informal settlements are located worldwide in low and middle-income countries (LMICs) <sup>2</sup>, it is still a problem that needs to be addressed in high-income countries (HICs) <sup>3</sup>. UN-Habitat (2003) estimated that only 6% of the slum population in the world is located in LMIC countries, while 94% in HIC countries <sup>4</sup>. These numbers keep growing, and the pandemic has only worsened the conditions of slum dwellers.

This article aims to provide a data driven overview for mapping and classification of informal settlements in Spain and Italy. There is no precise and updated database of informal settlements in Europe (Kuffer, 2023), and even some international statistics assume that slums do not exist in most European countries, specifically in Spain and Italy (UN, 2021). This is partly due to the need for coordination between local, national, and international organizations and the complexity of mapping and monitoring these territories. UN-Habitat (2003) considered a population of slum areas in Spain of 1,740 people (0,04% of the Spanish population) and in Italy of 2.160 (0,04% of the Italian Population), while today, according to our present study, we amounted to a minimum of 25000 people in Spain and 11000 in Italy. These data are an estimated reference since the reality seems much higher. These reported numbers seem to be very low, if we compared them with other countries as Ethiopia (99.4% of urban population), Chad (99.4%), or to the world average of urban population living in slums (23,9%) (UN-Habitat, 2018), but we cannot neglect this situation, simply because a statistical approach.

## **Spain and Italy's strategic plans for the eradication of informal settlements: the lack of mapping the real scenario.**

The Spanish subsidy program for the eradication of shanty towns and substandard housing, included in the recent National Plan for Housing (2022), recognizes only one reference study for the mapping of informal settlements in Spain (Fundación Secretariado Gitano y Daleph, 2015). Nevertheless, this mapping is focused exclusively on the Roma population living in informal settlements, which is the most populated but not the only one. Recently, the regional community of Andalucía has launched the I Strategic Plan for eradicating informal settlements and social inclusion of residents living in agricultural areas in Andalucía formed by migrant population (EASEN), (BOJA, 2023). The Plan recognizes the necessity of mapping these informal settlements and the lack of an updated database. Although this Plan is a significant step for eradicating informal settlements, it includes only those located in the agri-food sector and only for the migrant population.

In the case of Italy, there are certain similarities with the case of the agri-food sector in Andalucía. The Ministry of Labor-ANCI report (Giovannetti, 2022), focusing on migrant housing conditions in the agri-food sector, shows a discrepancy, suggesting a potential underestimation of the actual scenario, given

the voluntary nature of the survey. Moreover, the report does not represent the whole scenario of informal settlements in Italy since it focuses on the agri-food sector. Out of the thousands of municipalities surveyed, a mere 150 acknowledged the existence of informal settlements, with detailed data available for only 94. For instance, Rome alone is estimated to house about 100 settlements with roughly 7,700 inhabitants. We've chosen to rely on the Ministry's figures for consistency, yet it's essential to recognize that the true scope of these settlements is likely more extensive<sup>5</sup>. In Italy, the dynamic and complex landscape of informal settlements, particularly those involving refugees and migrants, has been significantly influenced by evolving policies and socio-economic factors. Although some common issues exist between informal settlements and refugee camps, we have yet to include the latter in the present study<sup>6</sup>. Sometimes, informal settlements are the default option for migrants when they leave refugee camps. In response to the issue of informal settlements, local Italian authorities have utilized EU funding to construct temporary housing camps known as "foresterie." These prefabricated plastic housing modules are often isolated and lack proper facilities. However, such arrangements have been criticized for being ineffective and failing to address the fundamental rights and social integration of migrant workers. This transfer between refugee camps and informal settlements requires independent research to understand the challenges and complexities behind it.

Recently, 200 million euros from the Italian National Program for Recovery and Resilience (Gazzetta Ufficiale, 2021) were allocated to local municipalities to address the issue of informal settlements. This funding is intended to provide definitive and dignified housing solutions, emphasizing the promotion of social inclusion and integration of migrant workers rather than the creation of more temporary housing camps. This overview sets the stage for understanding the complex interplay of policies, socio-economic factors, and the living conditions within Italy's informal settlements. It underscores the need for comprehensive and humane solutions that address immediate housing needs and facilitate vulnerable populations' long-term integration and welfare.

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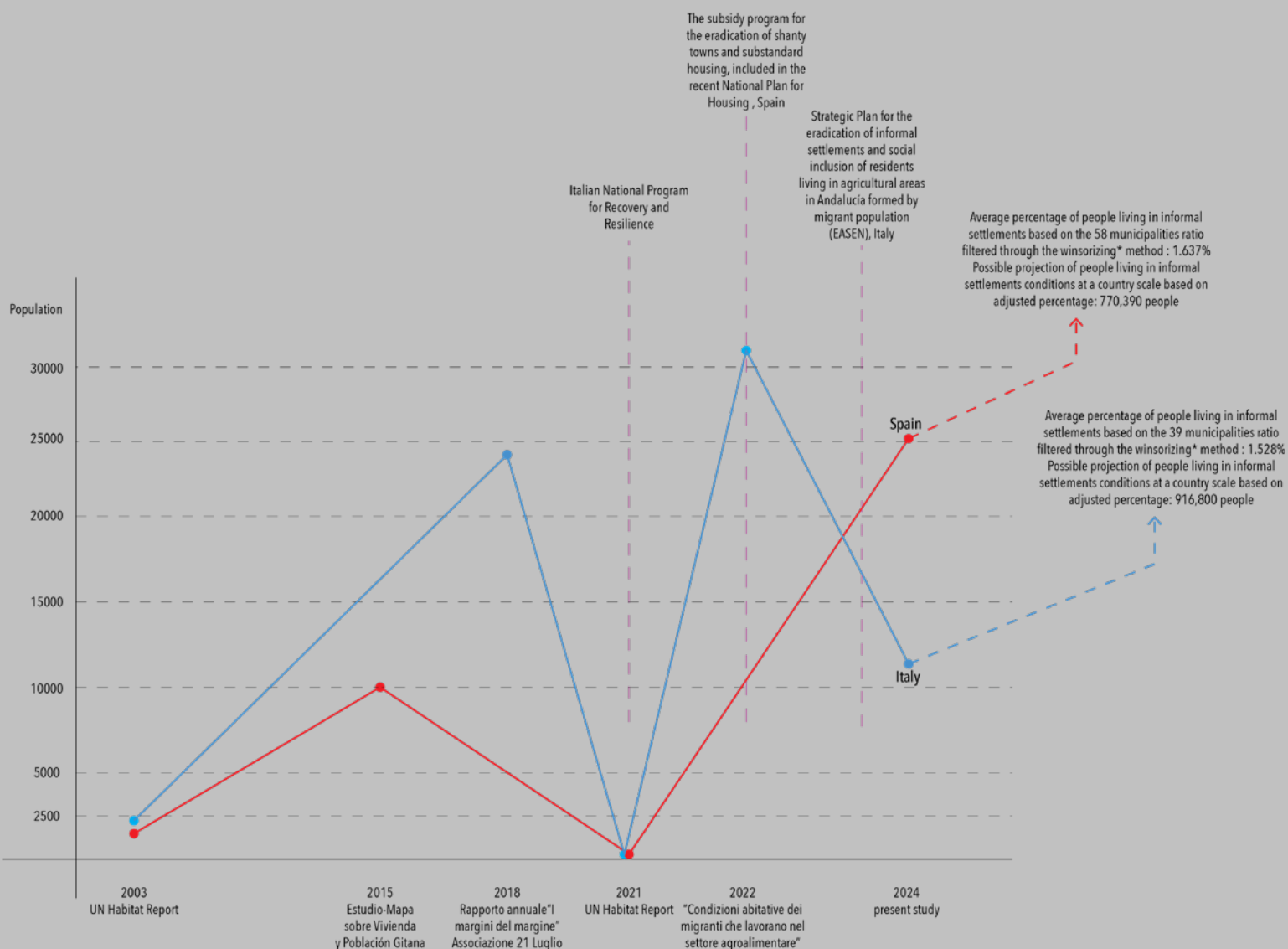
2. There are multiple definitions to classify countries with different incomes and resources (Khan, 2022). Recognizing that most of these categorizations are a simplification of complex realities, we have adopted an economic dichotomy as LMICs and HICs. Nevertheless, we want to avoid any hierarchy, racist or colonialist construct.

3. According to UN (2018), there are more than 1 billion of people living in slums or informal settlements, concentrated in three regions: Eastern and South-Eastern Asia (370 million), sub-Saharan Africa (238 million) and Central and Southern Asia (227 million). These numbers are far from declining and are still growing.

4. A later slum estimation (UN-HABITAT, 2018) did not include any data for Europe.

5. In cases like Ispica and Poggio Imperiale, municipalities reported numerous informal settlements but, lacking detailed information for each indicated area, they opted to summarize the available data by aggregating it into a single form instead of completing a separate form for each settlement.

6. Report by Médecins Sans Frontières (MSF), *Rapporti Fuori Campo, 2016-2018*, highlights that approximately 10,000 migrants and refugees live in inhumane conditions in Italy, largely due to inadequate reception policies. These individuals often face limited access to necessities such as medical care, shelter, food, and clean water. MSF has called on national and local authorities to ensure that all migrants and refugees in Italy, regardless of their legal status, have access to these fundamental services. <https://www.medicisenzafrontiere.it/cosa-facciamo/progetti-in-italia/fuori-campo/>



*Diagram showing the evolution of informal settlements in Spain (red) and Italy (blue) for the last 20 years, according to existing data bases. The graph does not reveal any pattern since there isn't any accurate information, and the data available suggests an underestimation of the real scenario. Furthermore, Italian and Spanish authorities are showing a commitment for the eradication of informal settlements, by launching different strategic plans at national and regional level. The first step of the any plan for addressing the challenges of informal settlements must be an analysis of the current situation, including location, population compositions, number of dwellings, construction situation, environment.<sup>7</sup>*

7. <https://www.wired.it/attualita/politica/2019/04/08/campi-rom-italia-dati-insediamenti/>  
<https://www.21luglio.org/rapporto-annuale-2018-i-margini-del-margine/>



El Nijar, Almeria<sup>8</sup>

## Bureaucratic labyrinths

Immigration laws and integration policies are important factors for the emergence of informal settlements. Italian immigration laws, which condition the validity or renewal of residence permits on employment contracts, exacerbate the risk of homelessness and poverty among migrants. Discriminatory practices in renting and housing support further increase this risk, leaving many migrants in a precarious state. Most of the times, renting an apartment through traditional ways is not an option for informal settlement dwellers. The upfront payment is something that they cannot afford. They are forced to find alternative solutions, which are not only more expensive while discriminatory, as sharing a bedroom for a couple of persons for the price of a full apartment.

The absence of a formal address often prevents migrants living in informal settlements from obtaining the necessary documentation for residency, healthcare, and welfare support. This lack of documentation exacerbates their vulnerabilities and creates significant barriers to their integration into society.

One example is Nora E.'s journey (Muñoz, 2022), which reflects a harrowing quest for a stable life far from her homeland, Morocco. Three years ago, she embarked on a life-altering journey to Níjar, Spain, driven by the hope for a better future. Her story takes place against the backdrop of the Atochaes settlement within Níjar, where she resides in a humble shack, emblematic of the precarious living

conditions many immigrants endure. Nora's narrative is not just a personal account but a testament to the systemic hurdles immigrants face in their pursuit of regularizing their administrative status.

Nora's struggle revolves around the regularization process, a bureaucratic labyrinth that immigrants must navigate to obtain residency permits. This process is contingent upon satisfying various bureaucratic prerequisites, often seemingly insurmountable. A pivotal obstacle in Nora's path was municipal registration, a prerequisite for obtaining a residency permit. The registration serves as reliable proof of one's stay in the country, yet Nora's attempts to register her dwelling were met with repeated denials by the Níjar municipality. Despite presenting all required documentation and navigating legal avenues to assert her rights, Nora encountered a lack of cooperation from municipal officials, exacerbating her plight.

Nora's predicament highlights a broader issue of systemic barriers that disproportionately affect immigrants, particularly those from marginalized communities. The denial of municipal registration hinders their ability to regularize their status and restricts access to essential services and rights, such as healthcare, education, and housing assistance. This bureaucratic impasse reflects a concerning trend of institutional obstacles that effectively marginalize immigrant populations, leaving them in a state of vulnerability and uncertainty.

In response to these challenges, Nora has had to resort to desperate measures, such as purchasing her municipal registration for 300 euros, a practice indicative of the exploitative conditions that arise from stringent immigration laws and bureaucratic inefficiencies. The financial burden of maintaining legal status, which can escalate to several thousand euros, significantly strains immigrants, often leading to debt and exacerbating their precarious living conditions.

Nora's story is a poignant reminder of the resilience and determination of immigrants in the face of adversity. It also calls attention to the role of local municipalities in facilitating or hindering the integration of immigrant populations into their communities. It is a stark illustration of the human cost of bureaucratic inertia and the urgent need for reforms that uphold the dignity and rights of all individuals, regardless of their origin.

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8. <https://elpais.com/espana/2023-01-30/el-ayuntamiento-de-nijar-acomete-la-demolicion-del-asentamiento-de-el-walili-con-450-inmigrantes.html>

# Definitions of informal settlements

Often characterized by their unplanned nature and lack of formal infrastructure, informal settlements are not merely a consequence of urbanization but a multifaceted response to socio-economic challenges and policy gaps. Most of these settlements result from bidirectional urban-rural migration from local to international scale. This urban-rural migration, coupled with the inadequacy of urban and territorial planning, lack of affordable housing, and social inclusion policies, among many other factors, contributes significantly to the rise of informal settlements. These areas often become the default option for irregular migrants and new city dwellers, especially without viable housing alternatives. Although informal settlements are a global challenge, the solutions and strategies must be addressed locally and internationally. The challenges and solutions differ radically from informal settlements in HICs to LMICs.

According to UN-Habitat (2003), a “slum household” or “slum dweller” is considered when the inhabitants suffer one or more of the following “household deprivations”:

*Lack of access to improved water sources.*

*Lack of access to improved sanitation facilities.*

*Lack of sufficient living area.*

*Lack of housing durability and,*

*Lack of security of tenure.*

These indicators, mainly focused on the dwelling, do not include other factors related to the surrounding urban environment, such as the standard of health, risk of natural catastrophes, or access to social infrastructure. The degree and complexity of informal activity changes between and within countries (Dovey, 2013) in terms of the settlements’ size, location, and population or the reasons for living in them. For the case of informal settlements located in Spain and Italy, we consider that UN-Habitat classification must include not only “household deprivations” but also “urban and environment deprivations” as:

Standard of urban health, such as air contamination, polluted landscape, or proximity to toxic sources.

Risk of natural catastrophes such as avalanches, flooding, or epidemics.

Social exclusion and marginalization.

Risk of violence and insecurity.

Lack of social and public infrastructure.

Social and economic factors often push certain groups to the peripheries, both geographically and socially. Informal settlements thus become physical spaces and symbols of broader societal issues, including inequality, exclusion, insecurity, or unhealthiness.

The challenge for mapping and monitoring informal settlements relies on the difficulties of getting previous indicators only through geospatial information. Additional information must be obtained through household survey data to ensure the correct classification (UN-Habitat, 2003). Nevertheless, geospatial information and household survey data have some data limitations that require collaboration with the local administration. In fact, the term “informal”<sup>9</sup> refers to the activities that take place outside the framework of the public administration. For this reason, collaboration with official institutions is a crucial factor in determining the level of informality of a settlement. Another term related to informality is “illegal,”

which refers to invading land and not being part of the traditional forms of urban planning. However, this term cannot be applied to all informal settlements. In some cases, “pirate urbanizations” occur as a land invasion, while some emerge as land division, building construction, or remodeling outside urban regulations. Rakesh Mohan (1994) referred to these settlements as “extra-legal” rather than illegal. These examples show the complexity of mapping and classification of informal settlements.

Fueled by the search for better employment opportunities, bidirectional rural-urban migration, at local and international scales, often results in the influx of individuals and families into cities, towns, and productive landscapes. Some authors (Davis, 2006) consider that urbanization must avoid the dichotomy between urban and rural and be redefined as a structural transformation of the urban-rural continuum. In fact, in some cases, the people do not migrate to the city, while the city migrates to them (Guldin, 2001). Some urban factors emerge in rural areas, while some rural factors are applied in urban areas.

However, economic vulnerability and the prevalence of low-wage employment or informal economy limit their housing options, pushing them towards informal settlements. These communities, therefore, become spaces where the economically disadvantaged seek shelter and a sense of community.

Governance, or the lack thereof, is another critical factor. In many cases, strong governance structures and adequate urban policies fail to provide for an expanding population’s housing and resource needs. This shortfall in governance leads to the unchecked growth of informal settlements, often in areas that are not earmarked for residential development.

Recognizing the gravity of these issues, public institutions, from local to central government and non-governmental organizations (NGOs), have been actively working to improve these neighborhoods’ living conditions. Strategies deployed include providing below-market-rate public housing, establishing special educational and health services, programs focused on housing adaptation, dispersing rehousing initiatives across multiple municipalities, and launching health protection and hygiene education campaigns.

The need for comprehensive and inclusive urban and territorial policies becomes increasingly apparent as we look toward the future. Without intervention, the number of people living in informal settlements could keep growing, posing significant challenges to sustainable urban development and social equity. This global overview sets the stage for a deeper exploration into the diverse realities of informal settlements and the strategies needed to address this critical issue effectively.

## **Data gathering and methodology**

To get a glimpse into the realities of informal settlements, we begin our data collection process for our study on informal settlements in Spain and Italy. Our approach involved a comprehensive analysis of various sources, although it is essential to note that this only covers some of the available reports and articles on the subject.

For Italy, our primary source was the Ministry of Labor-ANCI report, “Housing Conditions of Migrants Working in the Agri-food Sector,” which provided data

on informal settlements across 2965 Italian municipalities. However, only 150 settlements reported data, with complete forms for 94. These numbers show that the actual number of settlements might be higher. Additional sources, including various articles, offered insights into settlements in major cities like Rome, Milan, Turin, and Naples.

In Spain, due to the absence of a comprehensive single document, we relied on various sources, including news articles from national and regional outlets, reports by local authorities, and university research projects. This approach was necessary to gather data across the 17 Autonomous Communities, with varying levels of information availability.

The research methodology also considered the media coverage of informal settlements in both countries, revealing a more extensive coverage in Spain with diverse perspectives ranging from criticism of governmental handling to reporting on initiatives for improving living conditions.

Our study provides a rough analysis of informal settlements in Italy and Spain, reflecting the complexities and challenges in accurately quantifying, mapping, and understanding this phenomenon.

Based on what we gathered, we made rough maps regarding mentions of settlements, their population (which in most cases was undocumented), and, when this information was available, the materials used to build these settlements.

## Objective

This article is the first step of more extended research for mapping and analyzing the informal settlements in Italy and Spain. Drawing from various sources, this exploration sheds light on the intricate realities that define these settlements. It's essential to bear in mind, however, that this is a selective overview and not an exhaustive account of every study or report available on the topic. Hence, our insights should be viewed as a snapshot, offering a glimpse into a broader and more complex picture.

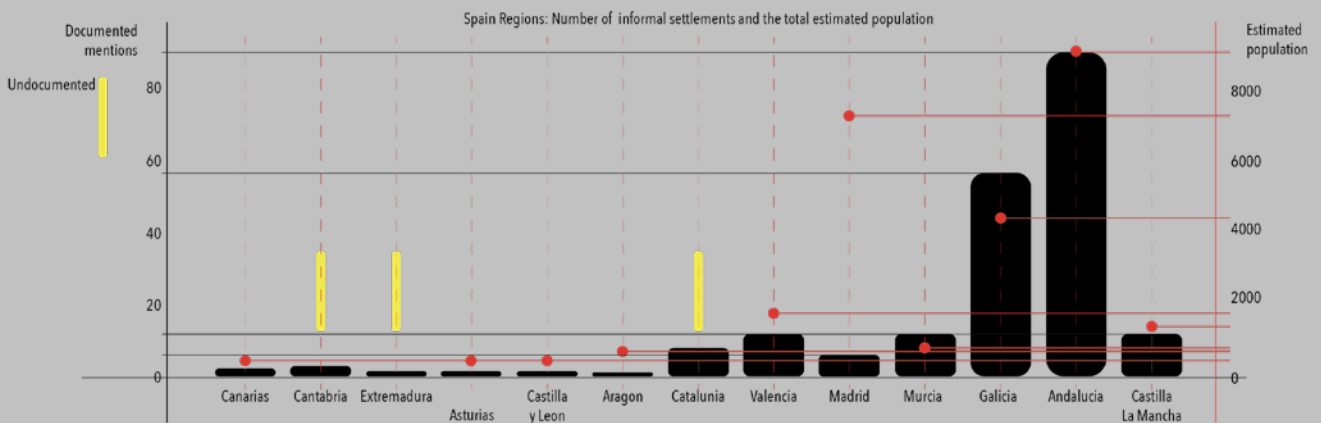
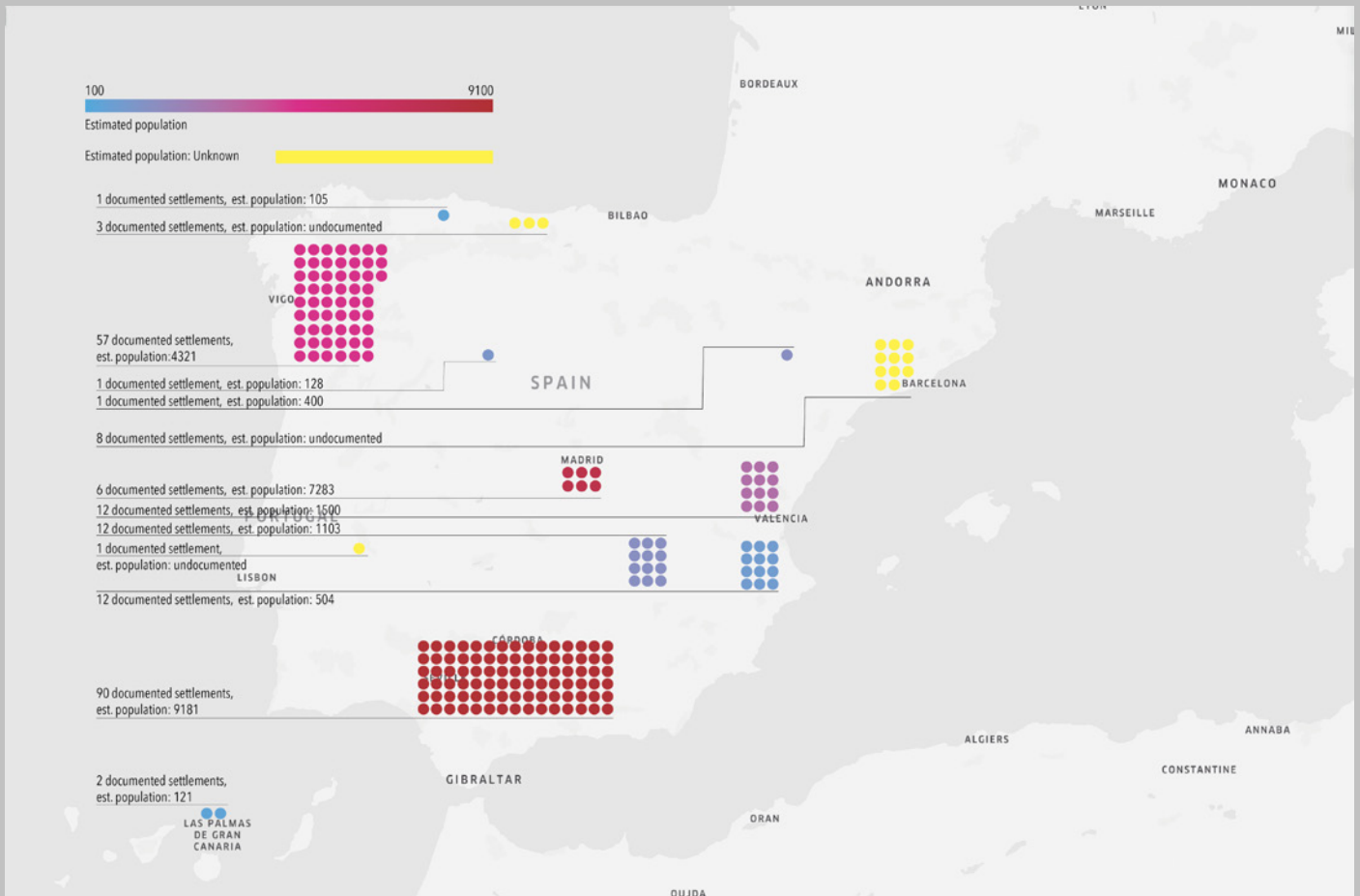
The present study is focused on mapping the information available on the location, population, and number of informal settlements in Italy and Spain. However, the numbers show an underestimation of the actual scenario. The lack of an extensive analysis of the current situation indicates the necessity of expanding present research through collaboration with public authorities at the local and national levels.

This lack of information contrasts with the data available about materials and construction of informal dwellings. We have included some diagrams showing the typology of data available to the public after extensive research.

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9. The term informal or informality emerged from the work developed by Keith Hart (1973) about “informal economy” in Ghana. It was used as a classification for economic activities that occurred outside the framework of public administration or official institutions. It gradually replaced terms as “hidden”, “underground” or “black” economy.

# Location, population and number of settlements



The map depicted herein illustrates the frequency of mentions regarding informal settlements across various autonomous regions in Spain, as derived from an aggregation of reports from non-governmental organizations, governmental records, and media coverage. The density of points on the map correlates directly with the volume of documentation, where a greater concentration signifies a higher prevalence of mentions. The color scheme employed on the map indicates the total population within these settlements, with a spectrum ranging from blue, denoting the minimal figure of 100 individuals, to red, signifying the peak count of 9,100 inhabitants. We use yellow to represent areas where informal settlements are acknowledged without specific population figures attached. Notably, Andalusia emerges as a region with the highest documented population within informal

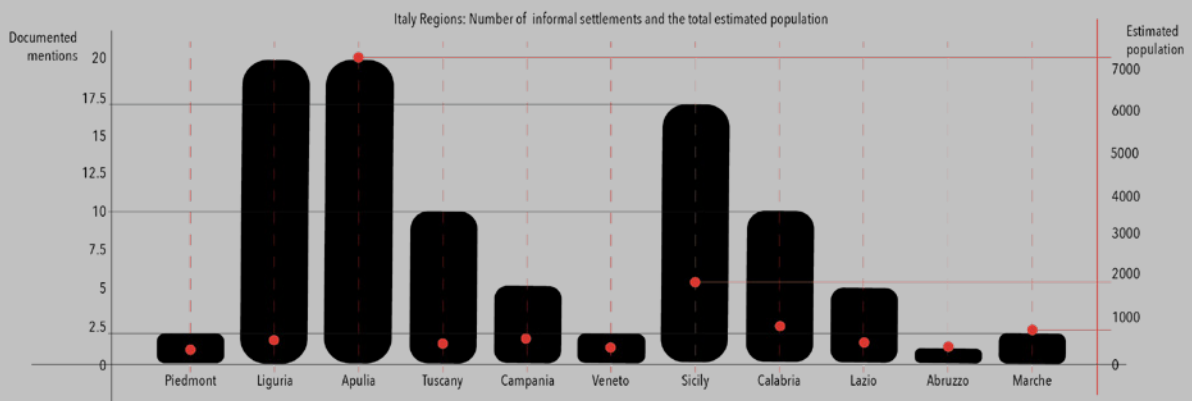
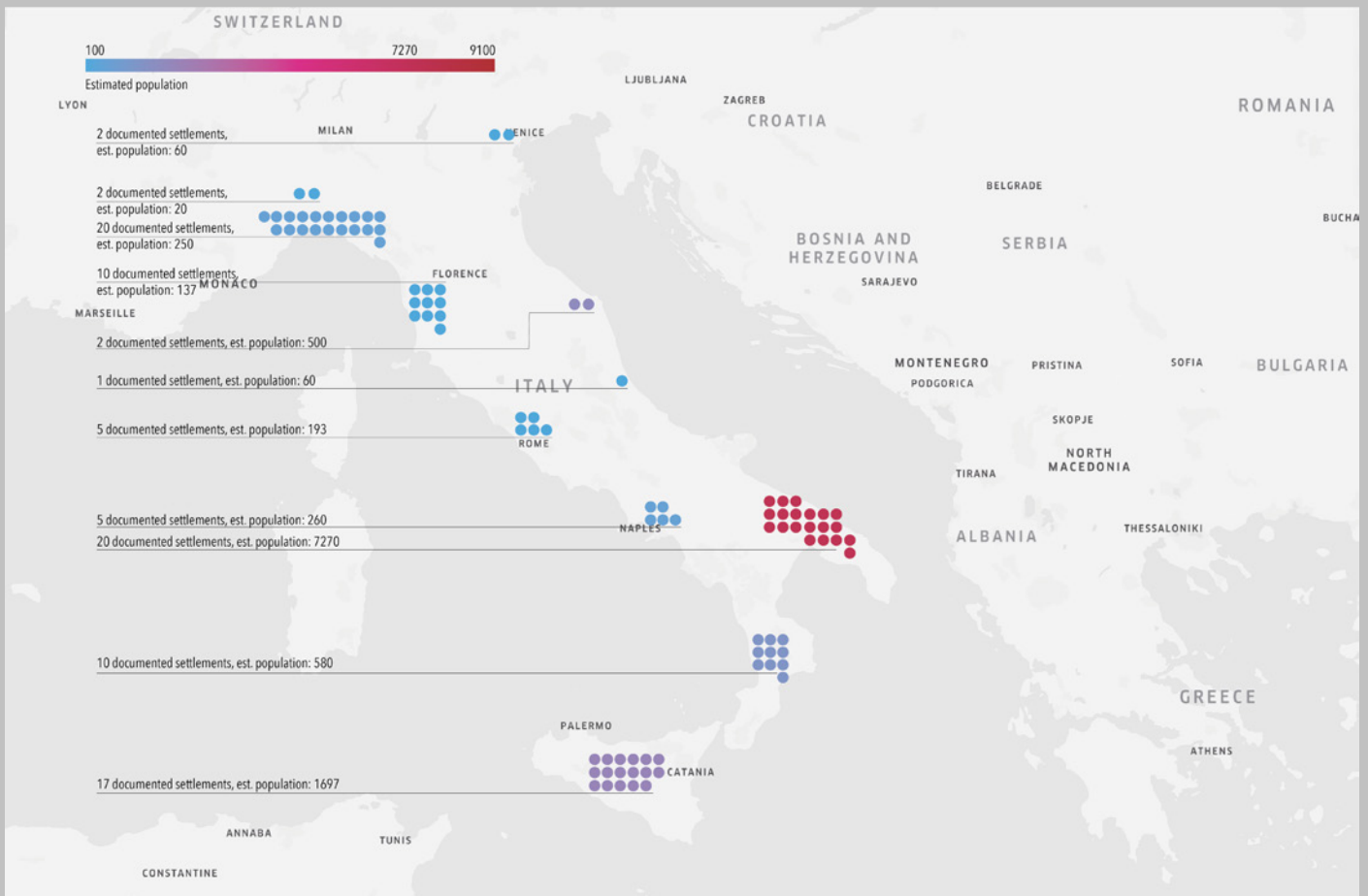
settlements and the most extensive body of associated documentation. In contrast, Catalonia is marked by a significant volume of documentation acknowledging the presence of such settlements, albeit with a conspicuous absence of population estimates.

The subsequent diagram offers a comprehensive visualization, encapsulating population figures derived from the collated documentation and facilitating a comparative analysis across Spain's regions. Andalusia and Galicia are prominent for their substantial populations residing in informal settlements, underscored by the information available regarding these communities. Conversely, regions such as Catalonia, Cantabria, and Extremadura are characterized by a notable absence of population mapping despite acknowledging informal settlements within their confines.

These marginalized neighborhoods in Spain exhibit a striking diversity in their locations and living conditions. They can be found on the city outskirts, in urban voids devoid of basic infrastructure, or hidden within city centers, camouflaged among parks and buildings, or close to agricultural centers. Predominantly inhabited by families of Roma ethnicity, who constitute a high percentage of the population in traditional shanty towns, a host of socioeconomic issues characterizes these areas. Nevertheless, the population composition changes radically in informal settlements in the agri-food sector, with a more diverse ethnicity composition.



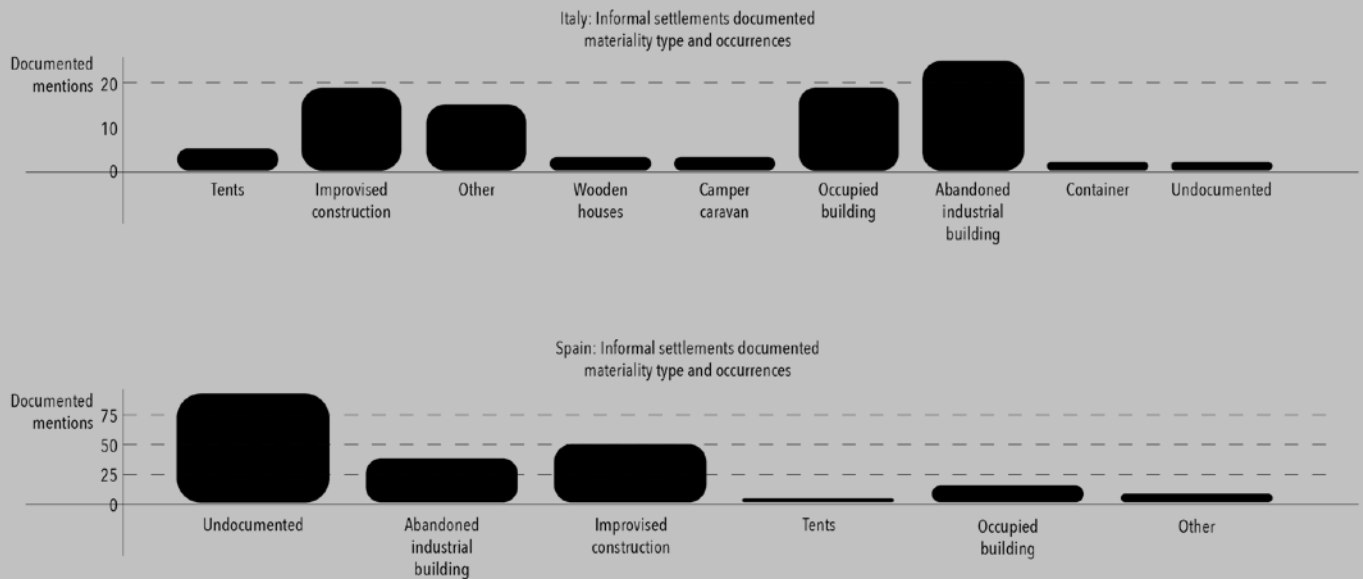
“Evicting Glories, Barcelona”<sup>1</sup>



The map presented showcases the distribution of informal settlements across Italy's autonomous regions, synthesized from a collection of data sourced from non-governmental organizations, government archives, and press reports. The map's point density reflects the relative frequency of references to these settlements, with denser areas indicating more frequent mentions. The chosen color palette on the map serves to quantify the populations within these settlements, transitioning from blue for areas with a minimum population of 100 to red for those with a maximum population of 9,100. Contrary to the situation in Spain, Italian data appears less voluminous but more detailed, consistently providing population estimates. Apulia is highlighted for having the highest recorded population in informal settlements and a substantial amount of related documentation.

Below the map, a diagram offers a comparative analysis of population figures and the frequency of mentions across the regions under review. Liguria, Apulia, and Sicily are noted for their significant populations in informal settlements, each region estimated to host over 6,000 individuals living under such conditions.

# Construction materials



The above graph sheds light on the nature and characteristics of informal settlements, focusing mainly on their construction typologies and materials despite the limited data on the populations and demographics residing within these settlements. The analysis draws from a diverse range of documents, highlighting notable distinctions in the depth of documentation between Italy and Spain. Italy's approach to documenting informal settlements is characterized by its comprehensiveness, with minimal settlements left unexamined. The most prevalent form of informal dwelling in Italy is identified as occupied buildings, primarily of an industrial nature, with a secondary prevalence of makeshift shelters constructed from a variety of materials. Conversely, most mapped informal settlements in Spain need more detailed information regarding their construction typologies. Nonetheless, the available data mirrors the Italian trend to some extent, with makeshift shelters emerging as the most common form of dwelling, followed by the occupation of existing buildings.

# Media narratives: eviction, demolition, criticism, relocation, social housing, and integration

The narrative diverges when we consider media coverage in the two countries. Spanish media frequently spotlight the issue, with stories of demolitions and relocations. In Italy, however, the coverage is sparser and often entangled with the broader discourse on immigration and labor exploitation, particularly in the agricultural sector in the south. Personal stories from residents of these settlements offer a poignant counterpoint to the statistical data, bringing human faces to the forefront of the discussion.

This comparative study peels back the layers of informal settlements in Italy and Spain, revealing a rich tapestry of human experiences and administrative challenges. While the data provides valuable insights, it also highlights the limitations of current research and the need for more in-depth, systematic studies. The contrast in media attention further underscores the differing societal attitudes towards these communities in each country. Therefore, this article is an analysis and a call to look deeper and better understand the lives hidden behind the numbers.

In Spain, the urban, peri-urban, and productive landscapes are marked by a distinct and often overlooked phenomenon: the emergence of marginalized neighborhoods, colloquially known as “barrios de chabolas” (shanty towns). These areas, referred to as “asentamiento informal or irregular,” present a complex tapestry of socioeconomic challenges and urban planning issues.

Most of the news analyzed about informal settlements include eviction, demolition, criticism, relocation, social housing, and integration. Shanty towns are relevant for the media when some of the actions, including previous words, happen. Only a few articles describe the everyday life of informal settlements, which haven't any risk of eviction or demolition. Furthermore, previous words represent a linear structure of correlated actions. Eviction is the prior state of demolition. When any of both happens, local communities and NGOs raise criticism for the lack of relocation, social housing, and integration programs. These six words summarize the challenge of informal settlements. If one word is not included in the linear structure, the system for eradicating informal settlements fails. The media coverage does not gather any case where the six works were addressed. In fact, some cases showed best relocation practices and social housing but a lack of social integration (La Voz de Galicia, 2016; La Voz de Galicia, 2012; La Region, 2014).

The main challenge is that when eviction and demolition happen, the later steps of relocation, social housing, and integration must be addressed together. Integration cannot be solved only after relocation. The formation of ghettos by relocating all shanty town dwellers to the same building or area is the biggest challenge for integration. Relocation policies must avoid previous situations. Other social housing alternatives include purchasing second-hand homes in popular neighborhoods and renting them for relocation (La Opinión de Málaga, 2023).

Italian urban policies have undergone a significant transformation, starting with the “decreto Maroni” in 2008 and further intensified by the “decreto Minniti-Orlando” of 2017 and the “decreto Salvini” of 2018. This shift towards more

restrictive measures, particularly evident in the “decreto Salvini,” has prioritized the eviction of unauthorized occupations. This policy change has led to the stigmatization of informal settlements, often overshadowing their role as social safety nets for both migrants and local inhabitants.

In cities like Rome, the implementation of eviction policies has frequently occurred without considering the availability of alternative housing solutions for those displaced. As a result, evicted individuals often resort to finding shelter in more hidden or precarious conditions, such as abandoned buildings. These evictions have further scattered migrant populations, complicating their access to essential social services and healthcare.

The media coverage of informal settlements in Italy shows a different perspective than in Spain. The challenges are similar, but the approach to the situation is different. In general, the news is not focused on a particular problem or location, while a more general approach to the matter.

Lepe, Huelva



## Conclusions

Informal settlements are a challenge only for low- and middle-income countries (LMICs), while they are an invisible reality for high-income countries (HICs). The present study confirms the hidden situation of shanty towns in Spain and Italy since there isn't any research or reports that gather the actual scenario and situation of informal settlements. Although public administration at national and regional levels have recently launched strategic plans to eradicate informal settlements in Spain and Italy, there is no comprehensive information and mapping of these settlements.

The media coverage of informal settlements shows a different perspective in Italy and Spain. While the media approaches this topic from a general perspective in Italy, specific situations are more relevant in Spain. Notwithstanding the above, the challenges are similar for both countries, and they can be summarized in the six words used in the media narrative: eviction, demolition, criticism, relocation, social housing, and integration. These words represent a linear structure that pictures the main challenges of informal settlements.

The present study gathers the information available through different data sources for mapping the location, number of settlements, and population of informal settlements. The results show a potential underestimation of the current scenario, and the number of people living in shanty towns seems much higher. For this reason, in-depth research coordinated between local, regional, and national public administration, together with research centers and academic institutions, is urgently needed.

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