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Senior Cohousing in Spain: Geographic Patterns, Deinstitutionalization and Long-term Care

RESEARCH

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ABSTRACT

Context: Spanish long-term care (LTC) is extensive, but is now striving to deinstitutionalize and provide care in the community. Covid seriously affected older Spaniards and many of them have housing problems and live alone. This has led to a growing interest in housing alternatives such as cohousing. Senior cohousing is expanding—a trend also seen internationally—but there is still little information about these alternatives.

Objective: To describe the distribution and characteristics of senior and intergenerational cohousing initiatives in Spain and their relationship with national and regional deinstitutionalization and LTC policies, and to explore whether their municipal distribution co-occurs with selected area-level indicators of population ageing, income vulnerability, older-person household structure, housing context and regional LTC-system pressure.

Methods: We conducted a multi-component descriptive study comprising a cross-sectional inventory of cohousing initiatives, by compiling information about Spanish senior and intergenerational cohousing initiatives from January 2025 to 31 March 2026 through specialist platforms, project websites, cooperative housing federation listings and by searching 'cohousing y vivienda colaborativa' in Google.es. Records were linked to official municipal statistics using National Statistics Institute (INE) municipality codes and other macroeconomic variables. We calculated counts, percentages and area-level descriptive summaries and produced maps in R version 4.5.1. We also conducted a document review of national and regional policy, and an exploratory ecological linkage between project municipalities and area-level indicators.

Results: We identified 274 project records (114 senior-only, 41.6%; 160 intergenerational, 58.4%). Fifty-five records (20.1%) were operational initiatives; the remainder were planned or under construction. Of all records, 115 (42.0%) were in Cataluña. The spatial distribution did not consistently coincide with the highest values of the exploratory area-level need index.

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Limitations: There is no official register of cohousing projects in Spain.

Implications: Spanish cohousing can be understood as a potential community-based response to territorially uneven needs. The combination of population ageing, income vulnerability, residential loneliness, housing shortage and regional LTC stress provides a stronger analytical basis for discussing the role of cohousing for deinstitutionalization policies.

BACKGROUND

Senior cohousing emerged earlier in other countries, in the 1960s and 70s, than in Spain, and is slowly spreading and becoming recognized as a new type of housing. It originated in the Nordic countries (Denmark, Sweden) and expanded to Central Europe (Germany, the Netherlands, Austria), but has also emerged in the UK, USA, Canada, Japan and some Latin American countries (Uruguay), where cooperative movements may or may not exist (Rodríguez, 2018; Cuesta *et al*., 2020; Ruiz-Vernacci *et al*., 2025).

These housing types stand out for their collaborative nature and because their emergence is primarily due, depending on the region, to care and health concerns, as well as the economic situation and housing conditions of older people. In an ageing world this is a housing option that also considers older people's need for care, supported by the European Ageing Network (EAN, 2019), in line with the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and the 2030 Agenda (SDGs 11, 12 and 3). Official data on cohousing are scarce, as these are private residences and, as far as we know, not reported in housing statistics. Yet, in Sweden, a 2010 survey of members of the Swedish national pensioners' organization (SPF) suggested that approximately 2% of them lived in cohousing; earlier surveys had suggested 1% (Grafström and Sundström, 2010). This may be compared to the 3.8% who now (2025) reside in Swedish nursing homes (Socialstyrelsen, 2025) There remains a need for research to understand the true state of senior cohousing around the world.

Social challenges, social isolation, unwanted loneliness and the international housing market crisis have led to international agreements by the UN, WHO, EU and other organizations to promote the SDGs, active ageing and the deinstitutionalization of care. At the European level, the European Pillar of Social Rights and the European Care Strategy have reinforced commitments to accessible, affordable and high-quality LTC, while the WHO age-friendly cities framework highlights the role of housing and the local environment in later life (World Health Organization, 2007, 2010; United Nations, 2015, 2017; European Committee of the Regions, 2018; European Commission, 2022, 2026). Spain and other European governments have updated their policies for older people, facilitating senior cohousing. However, this may lead to varying development of cohousing. We believe this also happens in Spain; therefore, we focus on analysing cohousing in Spain.

Spain has a rapidly ageing population (20.7%) (INE, 2026). No official or validated estimate exists of the proportion of older people who need and/or live in cohousing. Survey evidence instead measures stated interest: some studies report that approximately half of surveyed older adults would consider collaborative housing, but this cannot be interpreted as effective demand or assessed care need. Spanish publicly supported LTC is organized through the System for Autonomy and Care for Dependency (SAAD), which combines services and cash benefits delivered in a decentralized regional system. Senior cohousing is primarily a housing arrangement, but it may interact with SAAD when residents require home care, personal assistance or residential-equivalent care; this creates a need for coordination across housing, social-services and health policies, and the national and regional regulations of SAAD in Spain (Sánchez *et al*., 2021).

Despite increased funding for Spanish LTC in recent years, funding is insufficient to meet current demand (Costa-Font *et al*., 2024). The latest forecast (Asociación Estatal de Directoras y Gerentes en Servicios Sociales, 2026) points to bureaucratic barriers and organizational problems; some 259,000 people are waiting for their application for care to be even considered. Compared to other Southern European countries Spain has extensive residential care; 4% of the Spanish population aged 65+ reside in nursing homes with c. 412,000 beds, 70% of them run by a few big companies (De Asis, 2023; Pérez et al, 2025; Asociación Estatal de Directoras y Gerentes en Servicios Sociales, 2025). Home care and home help (5.8%) are still scarce, as are other intermediate services (IMSERSO, 2024, 2026).

The Spanish LTC scenario would be worse without its LTC insurance, with potential negative consequences for needy persons, and even greater burdens of care for families (Korfhage and Fischer-Weckemann, 2024). Older Spaniards increasingly live just with their partner or alone, increasingly also childless or with no children living nearby (Puga, 2020; Puga 2024). Previously, there was evidence of rising preferences for institutional care among older Spaniards (Fernandez-Carro, 2016). However,, this changed during the Covid pandemic due to blatant shortcomings in residential care, and dissatisfaction among nursing home residents and their

families still prevails (Oliva and Peña, 2022; Tortosa and Sundström, 2022a). The government and citizens are also aware that institutional care is costly and that there is a lack of funds to improve it.

Amid the shortcomings of Spanish LTC, older people are looking for new types of accommodation and services. Senior cohousing is a recent housing alternative that emphasizes community, mutual support and relief of loneliness.

The first cohousing projects in Spain began to emerge in the early 21st century, facing numerous obstacles to their development. Over time, as cohousing participants aged, issues regarding collaborative care arose, and older adults called upon regional governments to let SAAD address their needs (Simón, 2020; Tortosa and Sundström, 2022b). Some regions responded to these requests, resulting in a lack of coordination between national and regional SAAD regulations regarding cohousing; This highlighted the need for an imminent reform of the national SAAD regulations to determine how to provide care for older adults living in cohousing arrangements. This reform is currently approved in the Spanish Parliament (Ministerio de Asuntos Sociales, Consumo y Agenda 2030, 2026).

Regulations that may affect cohousing projects are presently heterogeneous. Some Spanish regions consider alternative care models in their regulations on LTC and there is a live social and political debate on whether senior cohousing favours the deinstitutionalization of care. In 2024 the National Deinstitutionalization Strategy, which also considers cohousing, was approved (Ministerio de Derechos Sociales, Consumo y Agenda 2030, 2024) and it refers to addressing and extending cohousing. Other regulations for local development and social innovation seek to address rural depopulation, reduce poverty and loneliness among older adults, and promote senior cohousing and community care among residents. Housing policies like the Public National Housing Strategy 2022–2025 and 2026–2030 also provide funding for senior cohousing.

Taking into account the international and national background, the objective of this study is to describe the distribution and characteristics of senior and intergenerational cohousing initiatives in Spain and their relationship with national and regional deinstitutionalization and LTC policies. We also explore whether their municipal distribution co-occurs with selected area-level indicators of population ageing, income vulnerability, older-person household structure, housing context and regional LTC system access.

To achieve these objectives, we conducted (1) a cross-sectional national inventory from web and organizational sources; (2) a descriptive review of national and regional policy documents and (3) an exploratory ecological analysis linking project locations to area-level indicators.

The main limitation of the study is that Spain has no comprehensive official register of senior or intergenerational cohousing. Several non-official maps and listings exist, but they differ in scope, definitions, update frequency and project status. Surveys have asked about preferences for cohousing, but have not explored the actual number (Unión Democrática Pensionistas, 2018; De Martí, 2021; HABICOOP, 2025). This fragmentation motivates the multi-source inventory used in this study.

METHODS AND DATA

The study is a multi-component descriptive study based on aggregate, publicly available data, and follows the Strengthening the Reporting of Observation Studies in Epidemiology (STROBE) checklist for cross-sectional studies, applying each item to the units of analysis of this study (cohousing projects and municipalities). In addition, for the construction of the national inventory we provide an identification flow diagram reporting the records retrieved from each source, duplicates removed, the records excluded and the initiatives finally included.

The identification process began with a structured search conducted from 1 January 2025 to 31 March 2026, across various sources. Search strings combined ‘cohousing’, ‘covivienda’, ‘vivienda colaborativa’, ‘cohousing senior’ and ‘cohousing intergeneracional’ with each of the 17 autonomous communities and the two autonomous cities.

Senior cohousing was defined as a collaborative residential project explicitly intended for older adults, combining private living space with shared facilities and resident participation in governance. Intergenerational cohousing was defined as a collaborative residential project explicitly open to more than one adult age group and not restricted to older residents. Project status was coded as planned, under construction or operational, using a prespecified decision rule and a dated public source. Each record was assigned to a municipality using the official INE code. Area-level indicators were measured at municipal or autonomous-community level and describe the territorial context in which each initiative is located.

Eligible records were Spanish residential cohousing projects that involved older adults either exclusively or in an explicitly intergenerational population, and supported by a verifiable dated source. We excluded projects outside Spain, general proposals without an identifiable promoter or location, conventional residential-care facilities, day centres and records lacking sufficient evidence of a concrete project.

The researchers screened, extracted, reported and cross-checked the records obtained from each additional source, applying the eligibility criteria to every record and

documenting each decision in a search log. Records were managed in Microsoft Excel 365 using a unique project identifier.

The inventory started with an initial baseline of 194 records in January 2025 (Silverizados, 65ymas.com and MOVICOMA); and moved to 248 records on 25 February 2026 after broadening the sources with ecohousing.es, MOVICOMA and press coverage (+54 records); later this expanded to 278 records on 1 March 2026 after complementary searching in CohousingSpain.org and inforesidencias2026 and cross-checking with observatories, consultancies, public initiatives, other residential experiences and press coverage (+30 records); the final inventory was 274 project records on 16 March 2026, after the targeted Google search ('cohousing' and 'vivienda colaborativa', together with REAS, mapaviviendacooperativa.es and Llargavista.coop) and a final screening that removed four records corresponding to duplicates and to facilities identified as nursing homes.

We consistently excluded projects that did not meet cohousing characteristics including the following: their collaborative residential character, the combination of private and shared spaces and the participation of residents in their organization. We then reviewed the agreed list independently, checking project identity, verified status and eligibility, and made a final decision on the projects accepted into the inventory. The complete sequence of sourdes, additions and removals is shown in Figure 1.

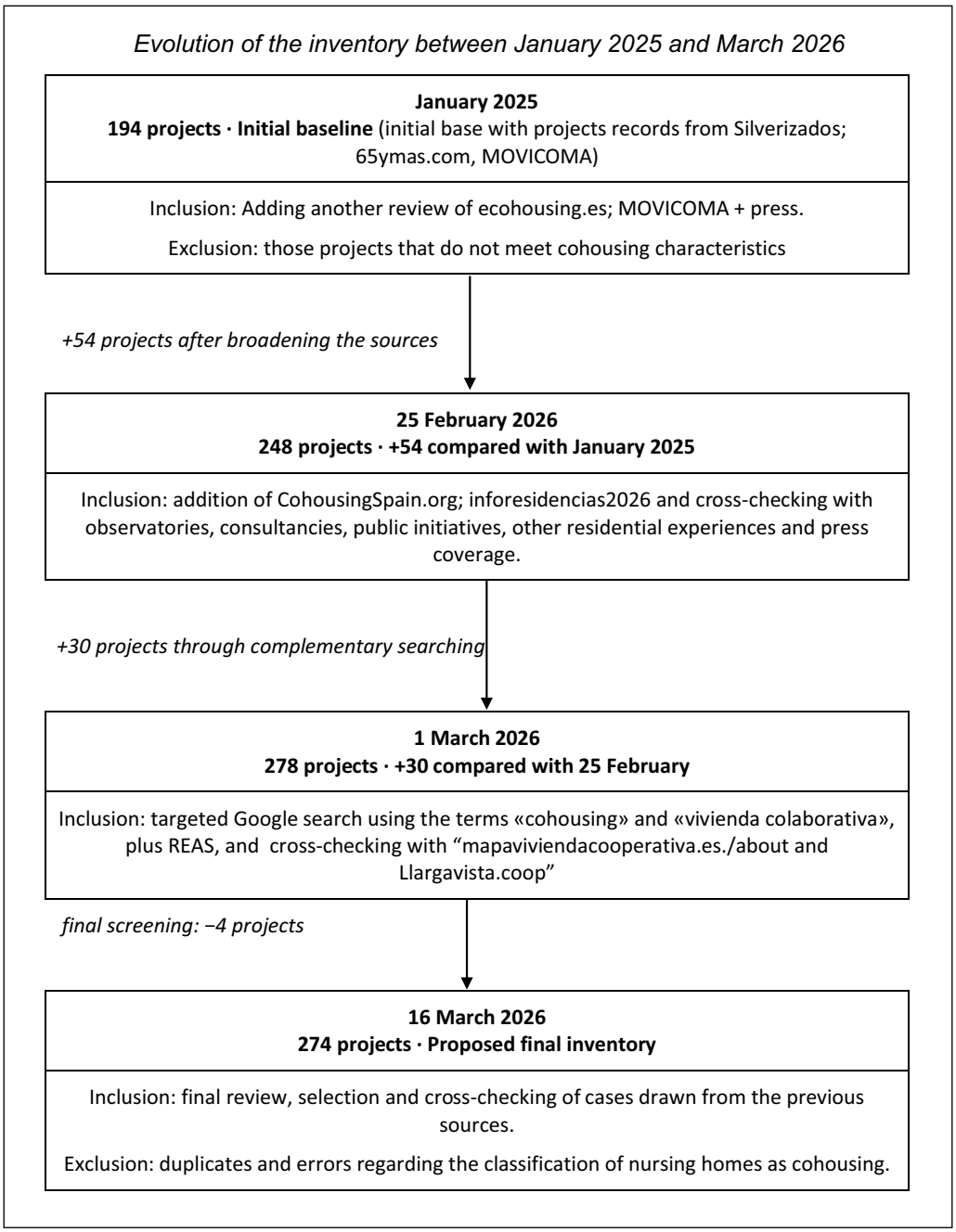


Figure 1 Process for identifying and selecting cohousing projects in Spain.

This helped validate the final database and ensure that it covered both units that were actually working and projects at various stages, from initiatives to units under construction. It also enabled us to verify the status of each project, obtain more detailed descriptions and discard duplicates or initiatives that were no longer active. Through this multi-source triangulation, we established a national-level dataset of cohousing initiatives involving older adults, distinguishing between senior-only and intergenerational projects, and identifying whether they were operational or still under development.

In order to construct a consistent and analytically meaningful dataset, we systematically extracted a set of key variables for each identified project that were charted in a standardized Microsoft Excel 365 form containing the 11 prespecified project variables, with one row per project record, and the file was imported into R version 4.5.1 using readxl.

We recorded the following: (1) project name; (2) region (CCAA); (3) municipality or detailed location; (4) the official INE code corresponding to each municipality; (5) type of institution or organizational model (e.g., cooperative, association, private initiative); (6) year of project initiation; (7) year in which the project became operational (where applicable); (8) current status (planned, under construction, functioning); (9) number of dwellings or housing units; (10) presence and characteristics of LTC services and (11) type of users or target population (e.g., exclusively senior, intergenerational, mixed profiles).

These variables were selected to capture both the structural and the functional dimensions of cohousing projects, following methodological recommendations for the comparative study of housing alternatives and LTC models (Etxezarreta *et al*., 2018; Rosa-Jiménez *et al*., 2024). Recording institutional form, operational status and LTC-related features facilitated the analysis of how cohousing aligns with deinstitutionalization policies. The inclusion of geographic codes (*código INE*) allowed spatial analysis and future integration with territorial data.

To complement the database construction and enable a spatial representation of cohousing initiatives across Spain, we performed a geospatial analysis using R software (version R 4.5.1). Specifically, we employed a set of widely used packages for data management, spatial processing and visualization: dplyr for data wrangling, readxl for importing Excel-based project records, sf for handling spatial objects, ggplot2 for graphical visualization, mapSpain for obtaining high-resolution administrative boundaries and forcats for categorical variable management. Using these tools, we produced a national map identifying all municipalities in which senior or intergenerational cohousing projects were located. The workflow involved linking each project's *código INE* to the corresponding municipal polygon from mapSpain, transforming the data into an sf object and generating a thematic map using ggplot2. This spatial visualization allowed us to examine regional clustering patterns, interregional differences and the geographic distribution of functioning versus planned projects, thereby enhancing the interpretive value of the dataset and supporting subsequent policy-oriented analyses.

We also reviewed the latest regional and national regulations about deinstitutionalization, LTC, housing and cooperative housing that may affect senior cohousing projects in Spain.

We searched the Official State Gazette (BOE), the Congress legislative database and the official gazettes and social services portals of the 17 autonomous communities for documents available and in force by 31 March 2026. Search terms included 'desinstitucionalización', 'vivienda colaborativa', 'vivienda con servicios', 'cohousing', 'cesión de uso' and 'catálogo de servicios sociales'. We included legislation, regulations, official strategies and formal legislative proposals directly addressing collaborative housing, community care or LTC eligibility. For each document, researchers recorded jurisdiction, legal status, date, population addressed, recognition of cohousing, type of public support envisaged and relationship to the LTC system and its service catalogue. The findings were summarized using directed qualitative content analysis. The legal status and the level of government of each document were recorded, so that laws and strategies in force, bills and non-legislative motions were analysed separately.

TERRITORIAL INDICATORS AND EXPLORATORY INDEX

Project-level variables were summarized as counts and percentages with explicit denominators, and the area-level indicators through descriptive summaries. All area-level information consists of publicly available official statistics: For every municipality with a cohousing record we collected the published figures for residents aged 65+ and 80+, the change in the older population between 2021 and 2025, income per consumption unit, one-person households among older people and rental households, and, at autonomous community level, the published share of persons entitled to a dependency benefit who remain on the waiting list. These published values were linked to each project record through the official INE municipality code and were analysed in R version 4.5.1. The exploratory territorial need index refers to this set of publicly available indicators considered together, and it is reported only for municipalities for which the corresponding published data exist. All analyses reported are descriptive summaries of the project records and of these publicly available indicators.

To address the territorial context in which cohousing initiatives emerged, we linked the project database to a set of municipal and regional indicators. Municipal linkage was made using the official INE code recorded for each project. The indicators capture five dimensions relevant to the role of cohousing in deinstitutionalization and

community-based care: demographic ageing, residential loneliness, income vulnerability, rental housing shortage and regional pressure on the LTC system.

The territorial linkage was conducted at project-record level (n = 274 in the cleaned analytical file), and Table 1 reports unique initiatives according to the original classification. Demographic indicators include the share of residents aged 65+ and 80+ in 2025, and the change in older population between 2021 and 2025. Income vulnerability was calculated from municipal income per consumption unit by converting income into a percentile and then reversing it: lower income corresponds to higher vulnerability. Residential loneliness was proxied by one-person households among older people, and rental shortage by rental households per 1,000 inhabitants. Because not all Spanish municipal statistics cover small municipalities, coverage differs by indicator.

We also incorporated regional LTC pressure indicators at the CCAA level, particularly the percentage of persons entitled to a dependency benefit who remained on the waiting list. This variable was used only as a contextual proxy for the pressure on the regional care system; it was not interpreted as a municipal indicator.

Finally, we constructed an exploratory territorial need index. The base version combines demographic ageing and income vulnerability. The extended version adds residential loneliness and rental shortage, when available. The final version adds regional LTC pressure with a limited weight. Missing values were not treated as zero: indices were re-weighted according to available components, and the final index was only calculated when a municipal reference index existed. The index is therefore intended as an exploratory tool to identify locations where cohousing may be particularly relevant, rather than as a causal explanation or a definitive ranking.

RESULTS

SENIOR COHOUSING IN SPAIN

The Results are presented in three subsections, each stating its data source. The first reports the distribution

REGIONS	TOTAL COHOUSING		FUNCTIONING		SENIOR		INTERGENERATIONAL	
	N	%REGIONAL COH/TOTAL SPAIN	N	% FUNCTIONING/ TOTAL	N	% SENIOR COH/ TOTAL	N	%INTERGENERATIONAL/ TOTAL
Andalucía	20	7.30	5	25.0	17.00	85.0	3.00	13.0
Aragón	6	2.19	0	0.0	6.00	100.0	0.00	0.0
Asturias	6	2.19	0	0.0	4.00	66.7	2.00	33.3
Illes Balears	5	1.82	0	0.0	5.00	100.0	0.00	0.0
Canarias	16	5.84	0	0.0	6.00	37.5	10.00	62.5
Cantabria	0	0.00	0	0.0	0.00	0.0	0.00	0.0
Castilla y León	15	5.47	2	13.3	12.00	80.0	3.00	20.0
Castilla-La Mancha	5	1.82	2	40.0	5.00	100.0	0.00	0.0
Cataluña	115	41.97	36	35.0	16.00	13.9	99.00	86.1
C. Valenciana	23	8.39	1	4.3	11.00	47.8	12.00	52.2
Extremadura	4	1.46	0	0.0	3.00	75.0	1.00	25.0
Galicia	6	2.19	0	0.0	4.00	66.7	2.00	33.3
Madrid	24	8.76	4	16.7	15.00	62.5	9.00	37.5
Murcia	8	2.92	0	0.0	4.00	50.0	4.00	50.0
Navarra	7	2.55	1	14.3	2.00	28.6	5.00	71.4
País Vasco	11	4.01	4	36.4	3.00	27.3	8.00	72.7
La Rioja	3	1.09	0	0.0	1.00	33.3	2.00	66.7
Ceuta	0	0.00	0	0.0	0.00	0.0	0.00	0.0
Melilla	0	0.00	0	0.0	0.00	0.0	0.00	0.0
TOTAL	**274**	**100**	**55**	**20.1**	**114.00**	**41.6**	**160.00**	**58.4**

Table 1 Senior/intergenerational cohousing in Spain (March 2026).

Source: Our own estimations.

and characteristics of senior and intergenerational initiatives on the basis of the national inventory of 274 project records. The second reports how cohousing is addressed in national and regional deinstitutionalization, LTC, housing and cooperative housing documents, on the basis of the policy document review. The third reports the territorial context of the initiatives, on the basis of the publicly available municipal and regional indicators linked to each project record through the official INE municipality code.

The final inventory contained 274 project records, of which 114 (41.6%) were senior-only and 160 (58.4%) intergenerational. A total of 55 records (20.1%) corresponded to operational initiatives and the remaining 219 (79.9%) to projects planned or under construction. Cataluña accounted for 115 records (42.0%), whereas in Aragón, Asturias, the Balearic Islands, the Canary Islands, Extremadura, Galicia, Murcia and La Rioja all recorded projects were planned or under construction. Table 1 presents counts and percentages by region, population type and project status.

By contrast, a number of regions with non-trivial numbers of initiatives currently have no operational projects (e.g., Aragón, Asturias, Baleares Islands, Canarias Islands, Extremadura, Galicia, Murcia and La Rioja): their projects are at the planning stage or under construction. Intergenerational projects (58%) outnumber senior-only initiatives (42%).

The national map of cohousing initiatives (Figure 2) reveals a pronounced territorial imbalance, with a strong concentration in Cataluña (42% of all projects), followed by Madrid, the Comunidad Valenciana, Andalucia and Canarias. Several regions, such as Cantabria, Ceuta and Melilla, have no projects at all. The map also reflects the challenge of depopulation: sparsely populated regions host fewer and less mature initiatives, indicating that demographic decline, limited local capacity and weaker service ecosystems hinder community-based housing and care models despite policies addressing rural depopulation and social isolation.

DEINSTITUTIONALIZATION POLICIES TO STIMULATE DEVELOPMENT SPANISH SENIOR COHOUSING

During the Covid pandemic the EU approved financial aid, and the Spanish government launched the Recovery, Transformation and Resilience Plan (Gobierno de España, 2021). Its Component 22 proposes a plan for public care and reinforced inclusion policies with a national deinstitutionalization strategy to reorient the whole LTC system, now being implemented: The main idea is to provide for a good life in the community. Those thought to benefit are older and disabled persons, but also children and young people at risk, homeless persons and others who might otherwise be institutionalized.

The strategy explicitly covers homelessness, an objective also mentioned by other Spanish and EU regulations, and promotes social innovation and the prevention of institutionalization, to facilitate people living where they want and receiving community-based care. About 89% of older Spaniards own their home, but for some of them this is problematic, as their housing situation is less than good: households with older people spend about half (45%) of their budget on maintenance,

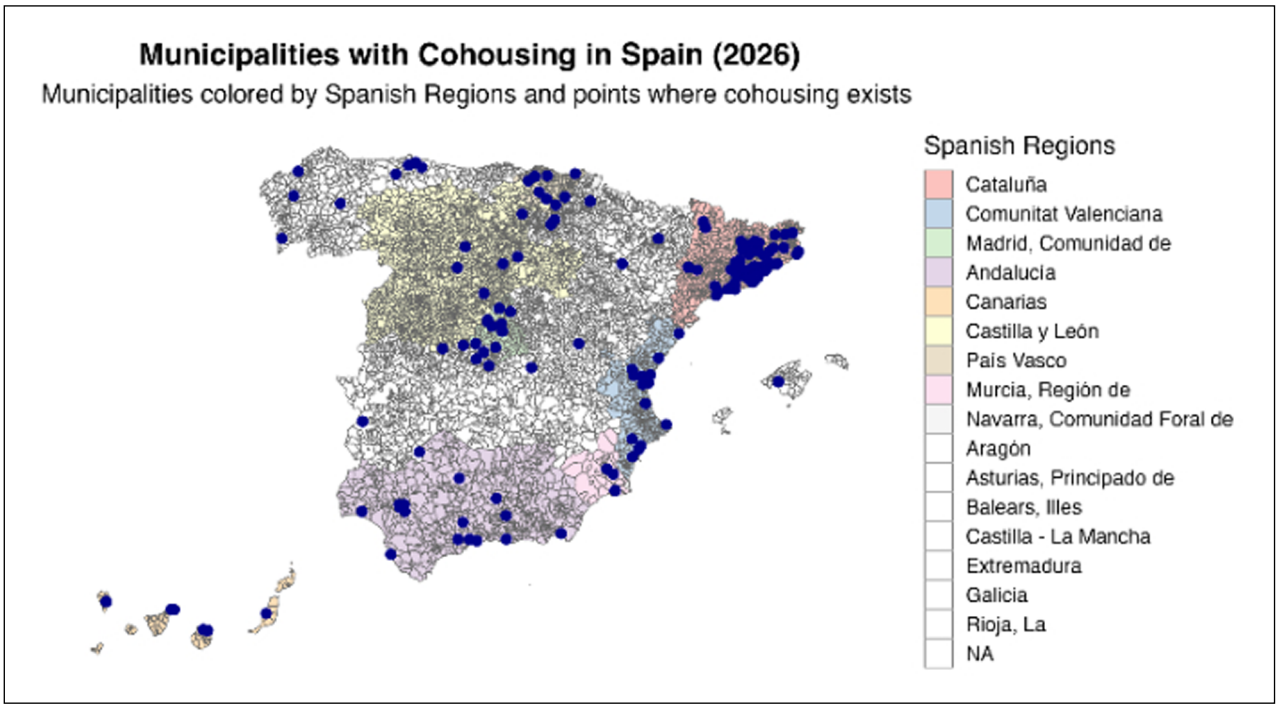


Figure 2 Spanish municipalities with cohousing (2026).

Source: Own elaboration based on the cohousing database in Spain created by the authors.

including water, electricity and other expenses, a bigger proportion than in other households.

Deinstitutionalization is a new concept that until recently was used only at a more technical level; the term is known by just 57% of older Spaniards. To make the strategy more credible, a few pilot experiments were carried out beforehand and accompanied by a financial plan of investments and public subsidies to make its implementation feasible (Ministerio de Asuntos Sociales, Consumo y Agenda 2030, 2023). Some Spanish regions such as the País Vasco have tried new ways to facilitate life for older people and promote a changed model of care. This region is seen as a benchmark due to initiatives such as the Basque Strategy for Older People 2021–2024, and the Basque Strategy for Transition of Long-term Care (Gobierno País Vasco, 2021, 2023, 2024a, 2024b). Deinstitutionalization may stimulate the development of senior cohousing.

There are various housing measures in the Strategy of Deinstitutionalization that promote access to affordable housing, rental or owned. Noteworthy inclusions are measures to improve housing standards and foster housing cooperatives. The Strategy is also explicit about senior cohousing as a way to create community support networks and services needed for deinstitutionalization, and it proposes many key factors to achieve this, such as person-centred care that is participative, accessible, collaborative, sustainable and flexible.

The Deinstitutionalization Strategy highlights the need for coordinated regulation of housing initiatives for older people by different policies, and to include proper financing of them. At present, the Spanish central government and some regional governments believe in the development of alternative accommodation for older people and therefore provide financial support for cooperative housing. This has boosted senior cohousing initiatives, but the main challenge is how senior cohousing is considered by the Spanish LTC regulations. Spanish housing and LTC policies appear not to be coordinated, which creates some gaps, disinformation and inequities in care.

To reduce these effects and given the housing crisis in Spain, the Spanish Congress recently approved a non-legislative proposal to promote cohousing as an alternative way to guarantee the right to housing (Congreso de los Diputados, 2025).

SENIOR COHOUSING AND LTC POLICIES IN SPAIN

An important issue about senior cohousing is whether it should be integrated with LTC services. There are various options according to Spanish regional LTC and housing regulations; some regions include senior cohousing in their LTC 'catalogue', but the majority do not. In the latter regions LTC services are provided for needy residents in senior cohousing just as for persons residing in the community.

A few Spanish regions (Asturias, Madrid, Baleares) have changed their LTC regulations to include senior cohousing: If a senior cohousing unit has care services equal to those of a nursing home, it may be considered a LTC centre. Senior cohousing may then gradually turn into something similar to a nursing home as residents grow older and frailer. However, senior cohousing was not created to act as a substitute for nursing homes. Increased social services and health care may facilitate older people living there till the end. Rising costs for these services (over €1,000 per resident) will lead to demands for public support. Some regions have agreed to this (e.g., Madrid, with Resolución 940/2022; Comunidad de Madrid, 2022). As mentioned, they then become a LTC centre in the 'catalogue' of LTC services.

The unequal treatment of LTC users in Spanish regions has generated controversy among users and nursing home providers (Tortosa and Sundström, 2022a), who in some regions must comply with, for similar services, much more demanding LTC regulations.

In 2025 the Spanish government proposed a reform to eliminate the remaining inequities in Spanish LTC, including senior cohousing. The proposal's details are beyond the scope of this article, but it aims to extend on-site LTC benefits and services to cohousing units.

This will be possible by recognizing and including the following: (1) care and support services in housing through financial assistance; (2) care and support services in housing including cohousing and self-managed communities and (3) collective home care services (for a small group of dependent people who live nearby and know each other). A coordination plan between social and health services will also include cohousing.

This reform for long-term care in Spain was approved by parliament on 16 September 2026 (Ministerio de Asuntos Sociales, Consumo y Agenda 2030, 2026). Spain can therefore now avoid uncertainties about LTC in senior cohousing and care inequalities, since LTC regulations for senior cohousing will be the same in all regions.

TERRITORIAL CONTEXT OF COHOUSING IN MUNICIPALITIES

The linkage with territorial indicators changes the interpretation of the cohousing map. Rather than simply identifying where projects are located, it allows us to examine whether initiatives are emerging in municipalities with higher ageing, lower income, residential isolation or stronger regional LTC pressure. Table 2 shows that municipalities with cohousing projects have, on average, a markedly old population structure: among projects with demographic data, the mean share of residents aged 65+ is 42.4%, and the mean share aged 80+ is 13%.

The income dimension adds a second layer to the interpretation. Senior cohousing projects are located in municipalities with lower average income and higher income vulnerability than intergenerational projects.

GROUP	N	MEAN %65+	MEAN %80+	MEAN DEMOGRAPHIC INDEX	MEAN INCOME	MEAN INCOME VULNERABILITY	N ONE-PERSON DATA	MEAN ONE-PERSON 80+/POP80 RATIO	N RENTAL DATA	MEAN RENTAL HOUSEHOLDS/1,000 INHABITANTS	MEAN LTC PRESSURE PERCENTILE	MEAN NEED INDEX V2
All projects	277	42.4	13	51.5	21,018	50	125	484.1	133	5269.1	69.7	53.3
Senior cohousing	64	42.4	12.5	49.1	19,784	62.1	33	24.8	34	152.9	57.5	53.5
Intergenerational	103	40.6	12.1	47.7	21,849	41.2	39	14.2	39	98.9	84.6	50.5
Functioning	45	40.9	12.3	46.4	21,286	46.5	15	39.4	15	324.9	86.5	51.8
Not yet functioning/other status	232	42.7	13.1	52.6	20,964	50.7	110	544.7	118	5897.5	66.5	53.6

Table 2 Territorial profile of cohousing projects by type and status.

Notes: Means are project-weighted. One-person household and rental indicators use only projects with available municipal data.

This is relevant for the debate on whether cohousing in Spain should be understood only as a lifestyle or cooperative housing preference, or also as a potential response to more vulnerable ageing contexts. However, the association should be interpreted cautiously, as the indicators refer to the municipality and not to the income of residents in each project.

Residential loneliness and rental indicators provide useful but partial evidence. One-person household data and rental data are available for fewer municipalities, mainly larger municipalities and provincial capitals. Where available, they allow us to identify projects located in areas with a higher proportion of older people living alone or with a stronger presence in rental housing. These dimensions are important because they connect cohousing with two of its main policy justifications: reducing isolation and offering alternative forms of housing and support.

Table 3 shows that regional differences in cohousing are not explained by the number of projects alone. Those regions with many initiatives do not necessarily have the highest estimated territorial need, while some regions with strong LTC pressure or income vulnerability have fewer or less mature cohousing initiatives. This suggests that public institutions, regulatory frameworks, municipal capacity and cooperative traditions may influence the territorial variability of cohousing supply, rather than sociodemographic need itself.

The exploratory territorial need index integrates these dimensions. Table 4 documents the coverage and limitations of each block of indicators. The index should not be interpreted as a prediction of where cohousing will emerge, but as a way to identify where cohousing may be especially relevant as a community-based response to ageing, residential loneliness, economic vulnerability, housing shortage and stress in the LTC system.

The spatial coincidence between initiatives and territorial indicators does not allow the mechanisms that explain their location to be identified. Unobserved factors—such as the availability and price of land, organizational and financial capacity of groups, municipal support or cooperative tradition—may be relevant. The results therefore describe patterns of location and do not assess the responsiveness of public policy or the causal determinants of the emergence of cohousing.

The relationship between cohousing and deinstitutionalization is examined through its recognition in normative or strategic documents, as

REGION	N PROJECTS	FUNCTIONING (%)	SENIOR (%)	MEAN %65+	MEAN %80+	MEAN INCOME	MEAN INCOME VULNERABILITY	MEAN NEED INDEX V2	LTC WAITING LIST (%)	LTC PRESSURE PERCENTILE
Andalucía	23	26.1	73.9	41	11.4	18,073	80	54.1	5.5	56.2
Aragón	6	0	100	47.5	15.6	21,700	40.8	58.2	0.2	12.5
Asturias	6	0	66.7	52.8	15.7	20,767	52.4	60.3	1.3	18.8
Canarias	16	0	6.2	40.2	11.7	18,812	74.8	69.3	14.2	87.5
Castilla y León	13	0	7.7	58.6	19.9	18,958	71.3	64.7	0.1	6.2
Castilla-La Mancha	5	0	20	38.5	11.8	18,130	77.3	49.4	2.5	31.2
Cataluña	115	32.2	13.9	40.5	12.3	22,336	35.6	50.3	14.8	93.8
Comunidad Valenciana	25	8	48	41.7	11.9	18,774	74.3	56.4	4.6	43.8
Extremadura	4	0	0	43.6	13.7	16,800	89.1	65.7	9.3	62.5
Galicia	3	0	0	49.6	16.1	21,583	44	53.7	1.6	25
Islas Baleares	5	0	100	35.1	9.6	21,350	45.3	27.4	10.5	75
La Rioja	4	0	0	46	13.6	21,000	50.1	57.8	10.3	68.8
Madrid	24	0	4.2	41.5	14.3	22,354	38.5	45.7	5.4	50
Murcia	8	0	0	35.1	9.5	17,500	89.1	50.7	13.5	81.2
Navarra	8	0	0	47.5	15.6	23,294	24.6	53.6	2.7	37.5
País Vasco	12	0	0	48.6	15.2	25,200	10	56.2	16.8	100

Table 3 Regional distribution and territorial indicators of cohousing projects.

Notes: LTC pressure is a CCAA-level proxy, not a municipal measure.

BLOCK	INDICATOR(S)	SPATIAL LEVEL	PROJECTS WITH DATA	PROJECTS WITHOUT DATA	KEY LIMITATION
Demography	%65+, %80+, senior population growth	Municipal	254	23	Municipal CSV covered most but not all projects.
Income	Income per consumption unit; inverse percentile income vulnerability	Municipal	266	11	Relative vulnerability within the project database; not a poverty threshold.
One-person households	One-person households among older people	Municipal, partial	125	152	Municipal coverage mainly for large municipalities/capitals; 65+ estimated from 60–69/70–79/80+ groups.
Rental housing	Rental households by rent band; rental households/1,000 inhabitants	Municipal, partial	133	144	Downloaded table does not include total municipal households; % renting could not be calculated.
LTC pressure	Waiting list percentage in the regional dependency system	Regional (CCAA)	274	0	Proxy applied to all projects in the same region; not municipal.
Need index v2	Demography, income, loneliness, rental pressure and regional LTC pressure	Mixed	268	9	Exploratory; only computed when a municipal reference index exists.

Table 4 Data availability and limitations of the territorial indicators.

Notes: Uneven coverage is a substantive limitation of the analysis and is reported to avoid treating missing municipal data as absence of need.

well as by identifying its existence and location as an alternative form of housing sought and created by individuals who wish to live autonomously and in community. Therefore, this study provides evidence for the first two situations, but does not estimate effects on service use, institutionalization, equity of access or health outcomes.

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

This study identified 274 senior and intergenerational cohousing project records in Spain, but only 55 (20.1%) were operational by the cut-off date, and initiatives were highly concentrated geographically. The policy review showed uneven recognition of cohousing across regional housing and LTC frameworks. In the ecological analysis, areas with more projects did not consistently have the highest contextual need scores. These findings suggest a mismatch between recorded project location and selected area-level indicators, but they do not establish that need causes—or fails to cause—the emergence of cohousing.

The territorial analysis reinforces the main argument of this paper. Spanish cohousing should not be understood only as an emerging housing preference among older people or as a cooperative movement, but also as a potential community-based response to territorially uneven needs. The combination of population ageing, income vulnerability, residential loneliness, housing shortage and regional LTC stress provides a stronger analytical basis for discussing the role of cohousing in deinstitutionalization policies.

At the same time, the results caution against a simple need–supply interpretation. Regional concentration of cohousing does not automatically coincide with the highest estimated need. This gap suggests that the emergence of cohousing depends not only on demographic or social demand, but also on institutional capacity, local regulation, access to land and finance, cooperative traditions and the ability of community groups to organize complex projects.

The exploratory index is useful precisely because it makes these tensions visible. It does not measure individual care needs and should not be used as a definitive allocation tool. Rather, it helps identify municipalities and regions where cohousing may be especially relevant for policy discussion, case study selection and future research. Its limitations are also informative: the absence of complete municipal data on residential loneliness and rental housing reflects the difficulty of studying intermediate housing and care models with existing statistical sources.

The shift toward deinstitutionalization appears increasingly inevitable as models such as senior cohousing—more personalized, community-oriented and integrated in everyday life—continues to gain traction across Europe. Maintaining a strategy based on expanding the number of residential facilities has become overly costly for both public administrations and

families, prompting the search for alternative solutions for housing and care.

Senior cohousing combines autonomy with community life, providing environments where older adults retain control of their daily routines while enjoying access to—and provision of—peer support that may reduce loneliness, and strengthen social participation (Roy *et al.*, 2018).

In Spain, the response of regional governments has been uneven. In regions where projects already exist, legislative reforms have been implemented, senior cohousing has been recognized as a LTC resource and public funding has been allocated. Nonetheless, numerous administrative and financial barriers continue to hinder expansion. Many of these challenges are also observed internationally, including issues of affordability, limited scalability and weak alignment with traditional social services frameworks.

The cohousing movement is global and the European Network of Cities for Collaborative Housing (NETCO) highlights the growing expansion of both senior and intergenerational cohousing, with many countries working to improve coordination between housing and care policies. This trend aligns with the evolution of cohousing initiatives for more inclusive, intergenerational and publicly supported models. However, some scholars have warned that deinstitutionalization entails risks, in particular the emergence of non-integrated 'parallel care' systems. Insufficient investment, over-medicalized cooperatives unable to meet high-dependency needs, unequal access to services and, above all, an increased burden on families and informal support networks might be the major risks (Echevarría, 2024).

Many projects rely heavily on fragile or informal community dynamics, and there is limited longitudinal research assessing their sustainability as residents' needs increase (Rodríguez, 2024). Moreover, these models often 'idealize' community life, overlooking situations in which a residential facility may in fact be the most appropriate option for certain individuals.

The low operational share and prolonged development pipeline are consistent with literature describing financial, regulatory and organizational barriers to collaborative housing. Spanish typological studies emphasize diversity in governance, tenure and service arrangements (Rosa-Jiménez *et al.*, 2024), while European evidence shows substantial heterogeneity between the themes discussed in research and projects implemented in practice (Ruiz-Vernacci *et al.*, 2025). Miranda's (2026) systematic review similarly treats senior cohousing as a heterogeneous alternative rather than a uniform substitute for residential LTC. Our inventory extends this literature by documenting the geographic and maturity distribution of recorded Spanish initiatives.

Collaborative-housing research identifies governance, affordability, project development and the relationship between private and shared space as recurring development issues (Rosa-Jiménez *et al.*, 2024; Ruiz-Vernacci *et al.*, 2025; Miranda, 2026). International comparisons also show that community-based care may moderate but not eliminate the need for residential provision, and that access, funding and informal care reliance vary substantially across LTC systems (Sánchez, *et al.*, 2021; Tortosa and Sundström, 2022a).

Policy makers should clarify how residents of collaborative housing access ordinary community-based SAAD benefits and when a project becomes subject to residential care authorization. Public land, finance or technical assistance could be considered where local needs assessments and community demand support a project, but the exploratory index alone should not be used to allocate resources. Future research should validate our inventory longitudinally, distinguish unique projects from phases and duplicate records, examine affordability and resident selection using individual-level data, and follow changes in dependency and care arrangements over time. It should also compare cohousing with home care, service-enriched housing and residential care.

The key is not to replace residential facilities altogether with cohousing, but rather to build a coordinated, flexible, rights-based care architecture in which these collaborative models can thrive without being idealized (Lebrusan, 2023). Promoting cohousing—both senior and intergenerational—appears to be a promising strategy in a context marked by population ageing, housing shortages and increasing family care burdens, provided that its limitations are acknowledged and that it is embedded in a well-funded and systematically evaluated care system.

DATA ACCESSIBILITY STATEMENT

The data that support the findings of this study are available on request from the corresponding author. The data are not publicly available due to privacy or ethical restrictions.

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COMPETING INTERESTS

The authors have no competing interests to declare.

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