



**Executive summary**

# **Loneliness in Spain Barometer 2024**

A study conducted by Fundación ONCE and Fundación AXA



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AXA**

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# 1. Aim and scope of the study

The aim of this report is **to identify the incidence of loneliness in Spain, investigating the possible causes or correlations. In addition, it seeks to find out the population's opinion on the phenomenon of loneliness.** This study follows the line of research on loneliness carried out by the Observatorio SoledadES (State Loneliness Observatory), such as the *Informe de percepción social de la soledad no deseada (Report on Social Perception of Loneliness)*, or the study *El coste de la soledad en España (The Cost of Loneliness in Spain)*, as well as the study *La soledad en España (Loneliness in Spain)*, published in 2015 by Fundación ONCE and Fundación AXA (ONCE Foundation and AXA Foundation).

The study seeks to analyze the **relationship between loneliness and sex and age, in addition to other key factors**!:

## Relationships with other people

- Number of family relationships and friendships
- Quality of relationships
- Sense of support

## Digital world

- Relationships with family, friends, coworkers and fellow students through digital media
- Use of social media

## Social vulnerability

- Level of education, school dropout, school performance
- Unemployment
- Social inclusion

## Education

- Loneliness by level of education

## Living environment

- Rural loneliness and urban loneliness
- Differences by sex and age between urban and rural settings

## Home

- Loneliness among people who live alone or with others
- Loneliness by housing type

## Health

- Physical health
- Mental health

## Feelings of discrimination

- Disability
- Origin
- Sexual orientation



In addition, the study seeks to **better understand how society perceives the phenomenon of loneliness.**

## Prevalence

- Is loneliness a widespread problem in society?

## Opening up to loneliness

- Is loneliness an easy topic to talk about?
- Do people who suffer from loneliness feel comfortable talking about their own loneliness and asking for help?

## Causes of loneliness

- What causes loneliness according to the people who suffer or have suffered from it in the past?

## Notoriety of the problem and responsibility

- Should the administration take action to reduce loneliness?
- Who should perform these actions? Who currently performs more actions?

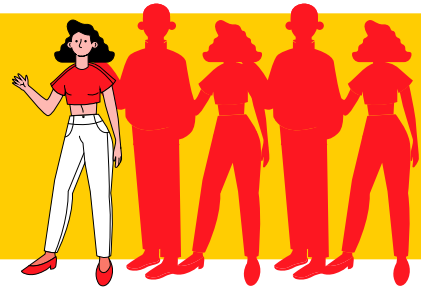
## Sample and methodology

The study is based on a survey conducted on 2,900 people aged 18 years or over through a telephone survey. The survey obtains the prevalence of loneliness and includes a wide range of questions on the profile and life situation of the person (sex, age, level of education, employment status, living environment, health status, disability or other issues), which allows us to compare the results of people who feel lonely with that of people who do not feel lonely through the aforementioned factors.



## 2. Prevalence of loneliness

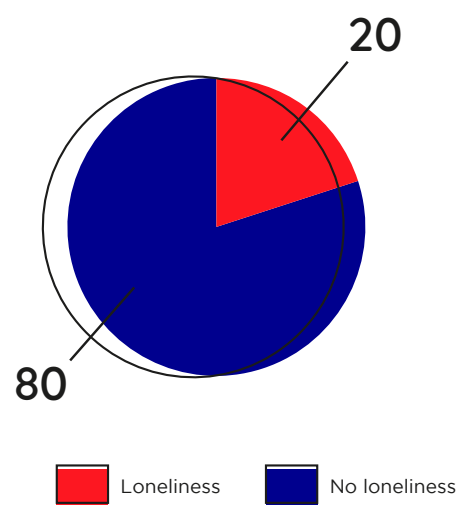
**One in five people (20.0%) in Spain suffers from loneliness.**



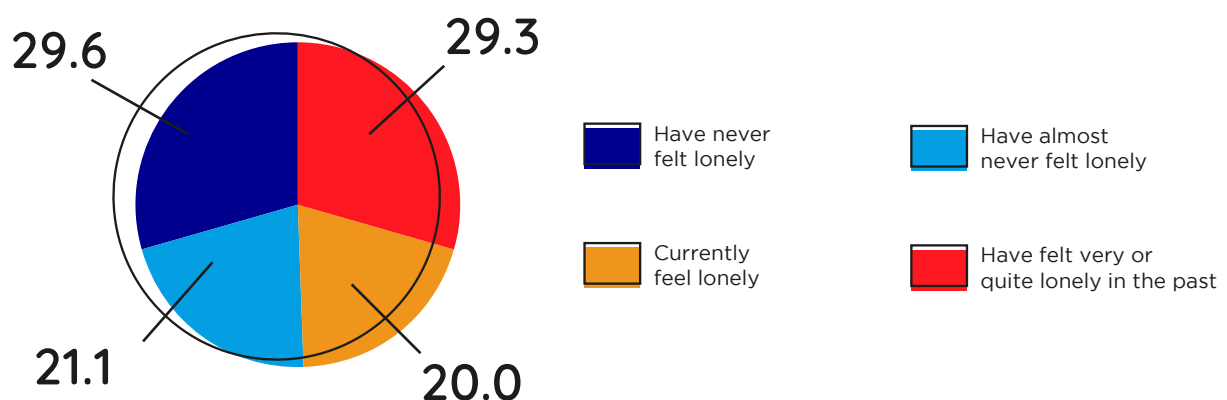
Loneliness is a persistent problem. **Two out of three people (67.7%)** who suffer from loneliness, **have been in this situation for over two years,** and 59% for more than three years. Therefore, in Spain, 13.5% of the population suffers from chronic loneliness (people who have suffered from loneliness for two or more years).

Out of the people who currently do not feel lonely, two in three (63%) have felt lonely at some point in their lives. Therefore, **seven in ten people have suffered from loneliness at some point in their life,** either now or at some stage in the past.

Graph 1. Loneliness in Spain, 2024.

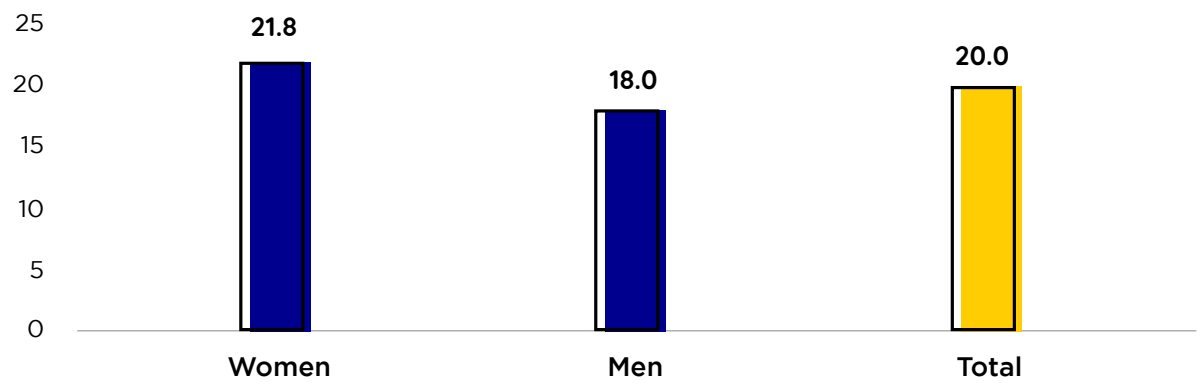


Graph 2. Current or past feeling of loneliness



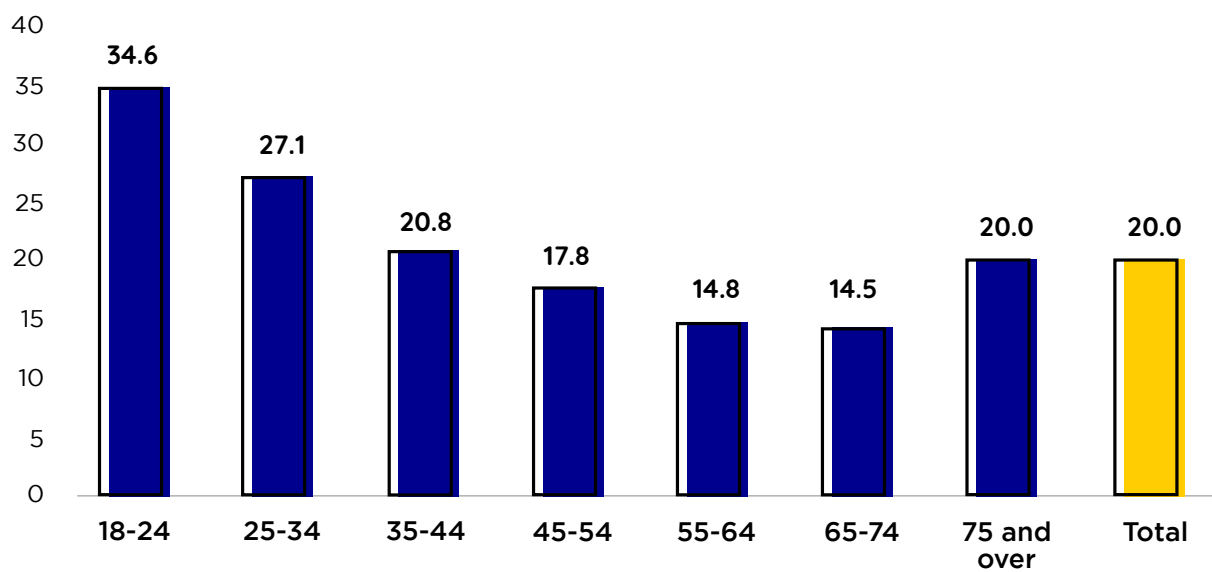
**Loneliness is more common among women than men:** slightly more than one in five women (21.8%) say that they feel lonely, versus 18.0% in men.

Graph 3. Prevalence of loneliness in Spain by sex, 2024

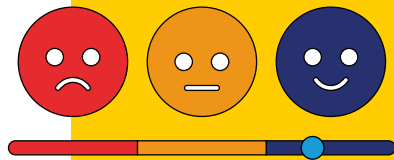


By age, loneliness **is especially widespread among young people** and decreases with age until it reaches its lowest point between the ages of 55 and 74. Loneliness **rises again among people aged 75 and over.**

Graph 4. Prevalence of loneliness in Spain by age, 2024



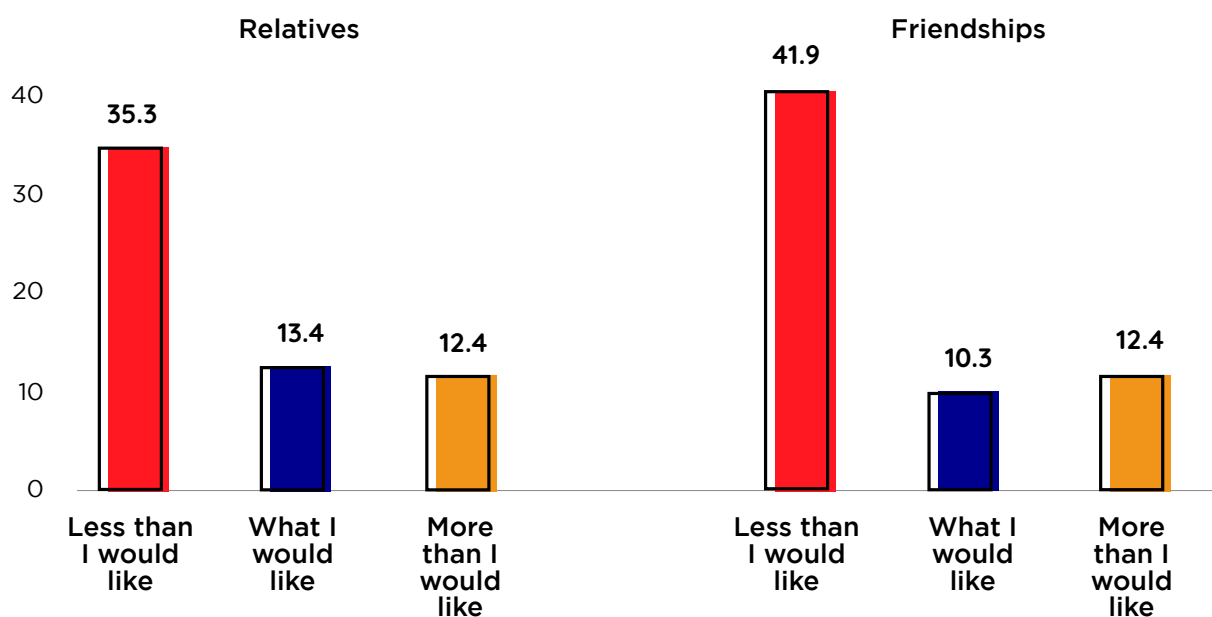
## 2.1 Loneliness and relationships with other people



**The degree of satisfaction with the number of family and friendship relationships is a key factor for loneliness.**

Over half of people who suffer from loneliness indicate that they have fewer family and friendship relationships than they would like, 53.3% and 63.2% respectively. In comparison, among people who do not suffer from loneliness, this percentage does not reach a quarter, 24.3% and 21.7% respectively. Loneliness is more prevalent among people with fewer friendships than they would like (41.9%) than people with fewer family relationships (35.3%).

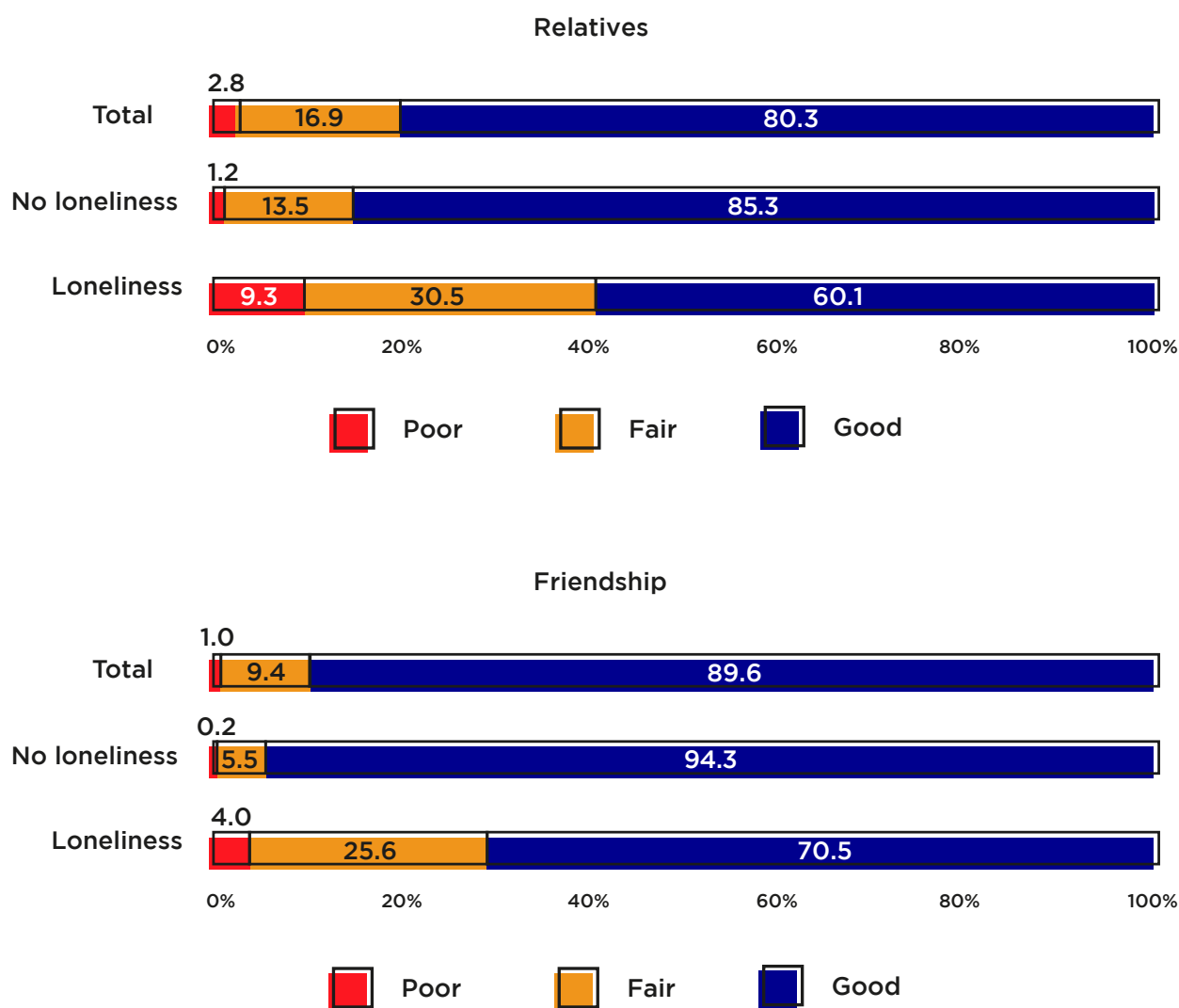
*Graph 5. Prevalence of loneliness according to the degree of satisfaction with the number of family and friendship relationships, 2024*



**The quality of family and social relationships is also a key factor for loneliness.** While four in ten people who suffer from loneliness (39.9%) consider that the quality of their family relationships is poor or fair, this percentage does not exceed 15% (14.7%) among people who do not suffer from loneliness.



Graph 6. Degree of satisfaction with the quality of family and friendship relationships according to a person's feeling of loneliness.



The proportion of people who do not have support where needed is three times higher among those who suffer from loneliness than those who do not (17.9% vs. 6.6%).

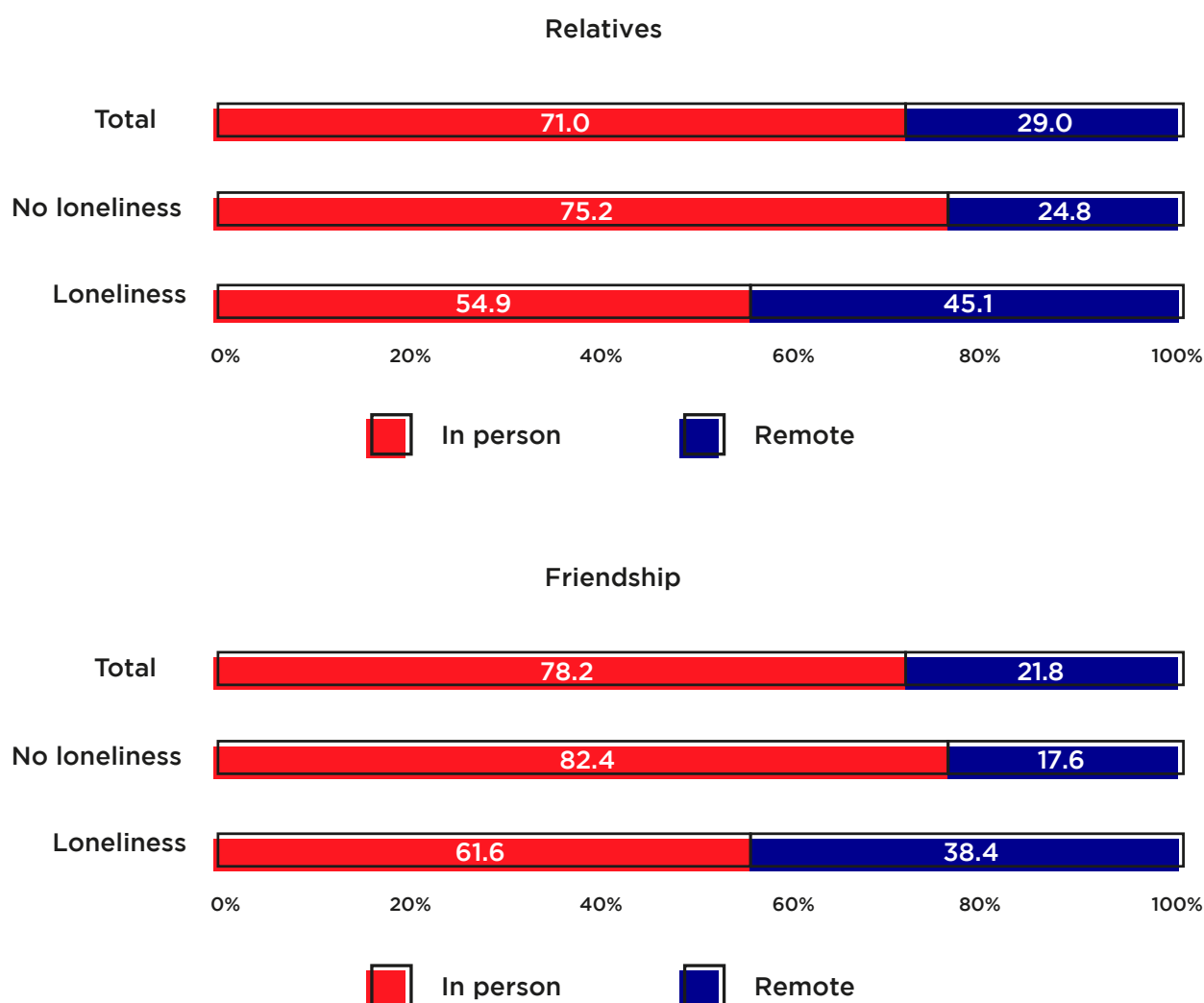


## 2.2 Loneliness and the digital world

In recent years, society has become increasingly digital. The vast majority of people aged 16 to 74 (90%) use the Internet daily.

Online social interactions are more frequent among people who suffer from loneliness than those who do not. The percentage of people who interact with their family mainly online is 45.1% among people who suffer from loneliness, compared with 24.8% for those who are not lonely. 38.4% of people who suffer from loneliness interact with their friends mainly online, in comparison with only 17.6% of those who are not lonely.

Graph 7. Most frequent types of relationship by environment and the person's feeling of loneliness

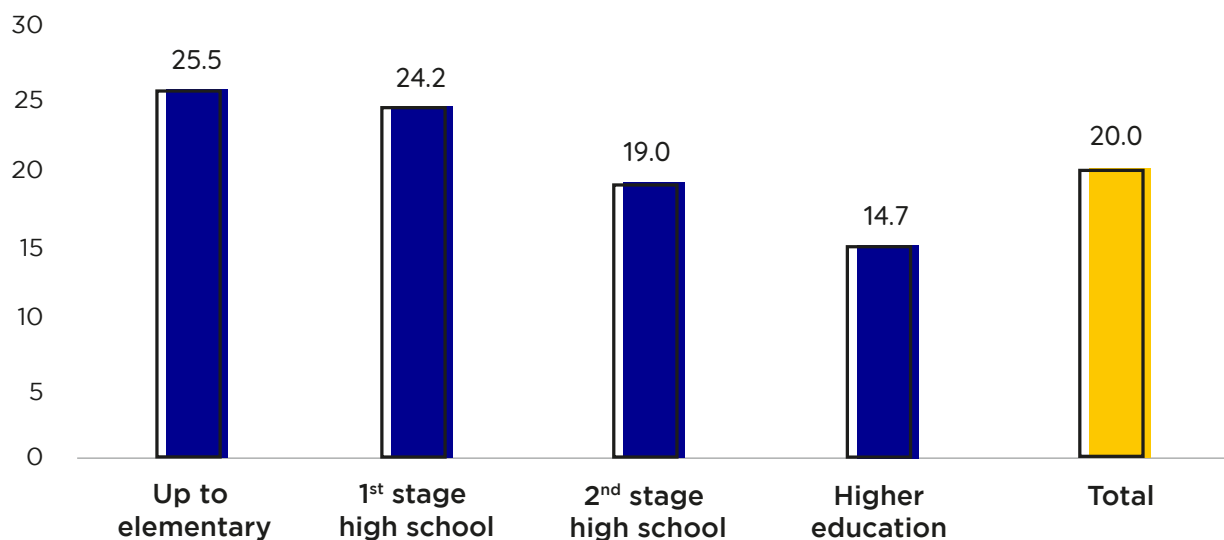


However, in some personal relationships, digital interactions are not an alternative for in-person communication but rather the only option. The Internet has made it possible to overcome geographical and physical barriers, which is highly relevant for migrants, people with disabilities, or the elderly.

## 2.3 Loneliness and education

**Loneliness is inversely related to level of education.** Among people whose level of education is lower than elementary education, the prevalence of loneliness is ten points higher than people at a higher education level.

Graph 8. Prevalence of loneliness in Spain by level of education (grouped), 2024



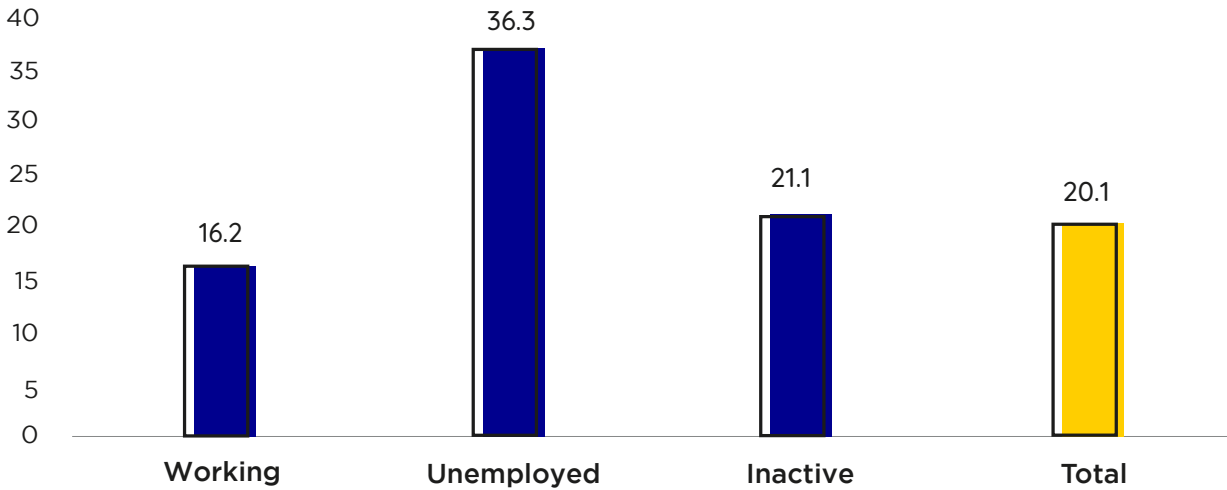
Literature typically considers that high level of education is a protective factor for loneliness, but there are doubts regarding direct causality. The favorable effect of education on loneliness is related to other associated factors, such as better job placement and income, and perhaps this is the determining factor of causality. This study shows that a lack of higher education is a significant factor in explaining loneliness.



## 2.4 Loneliness and social vulnerability

The rate of loneliness among unemployed people is over double that of working people (36.3% vs.16.2%). By sex, the main difference is observed among the inactive population, among which the prevalence of loneliness among women is nine points higher than among men (24.9% vs. 15.9%).

Graph 9. Prevalence of loneliness in Spain by relationship to the activity, 2024



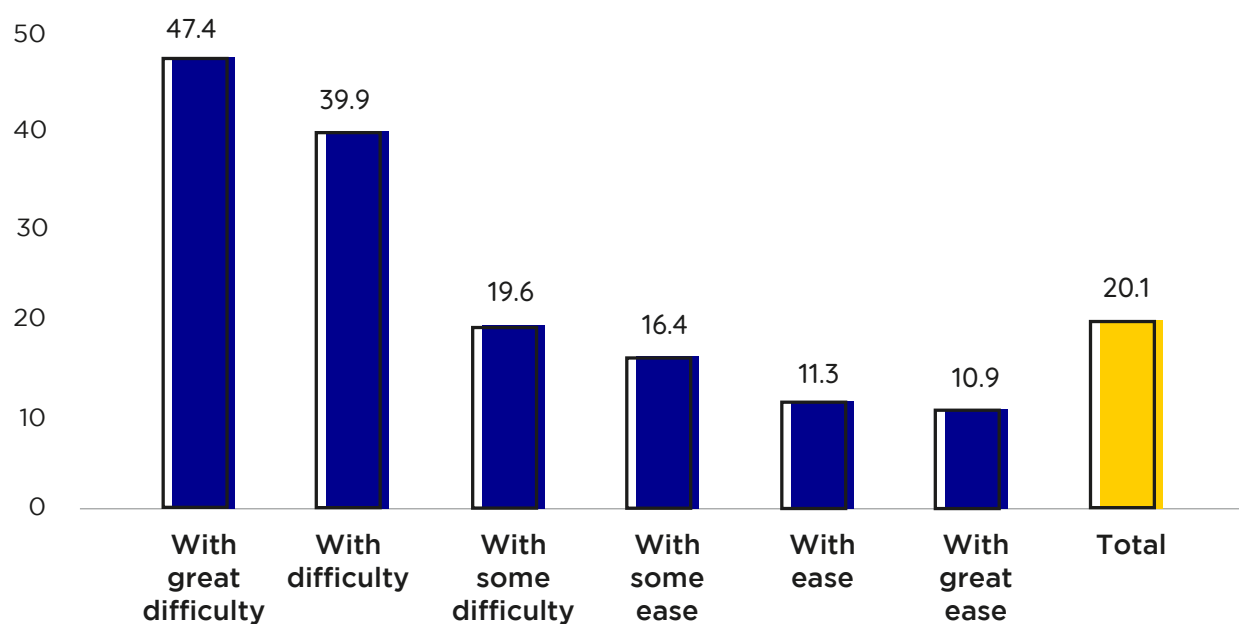
The effect of one's professional situation on loneliness is radically different according to age. The difference in the prevalence of loneliness between working and non-working youth is very minor. However, between the ages of 30 and 55, the prevalence of loneliness among unemployed people is three times higher than among those employed. This is because meeting vital expectations for each stage of life influences loneliness. This is highly relevant, as it is a factor which is not related to company, but as a consequence of people's social vulnerability.

Table 1: Prevalence of loneliness by professional situation and age range, 2024

	18-29	30-44	45-54	55-64	65 and over	Total
Working	31.0%	14.3%	11.4%	13.3%	22.3%	16.2%
Unemployed	35.6%	46.6%	40.3%	19.3%	0.0%	36.3%
Inactive	36.7%	32.1%	34.2%	15.5%	16.2%	21.1%
Total	33.5%	20.7%	17.8%	14.8%	16.3%	20.1%

In fact, **loneliness is closely related to economic capacity**. Loneliness is more than twice as prevalent in the population living in households that have difficulty making ends meet (30.1%) than in those that make ends meet easily (13.3%).

Graph 10. Prevalence of loneliness according to the difficulty or ease with which the household makes ends meet (six categories)



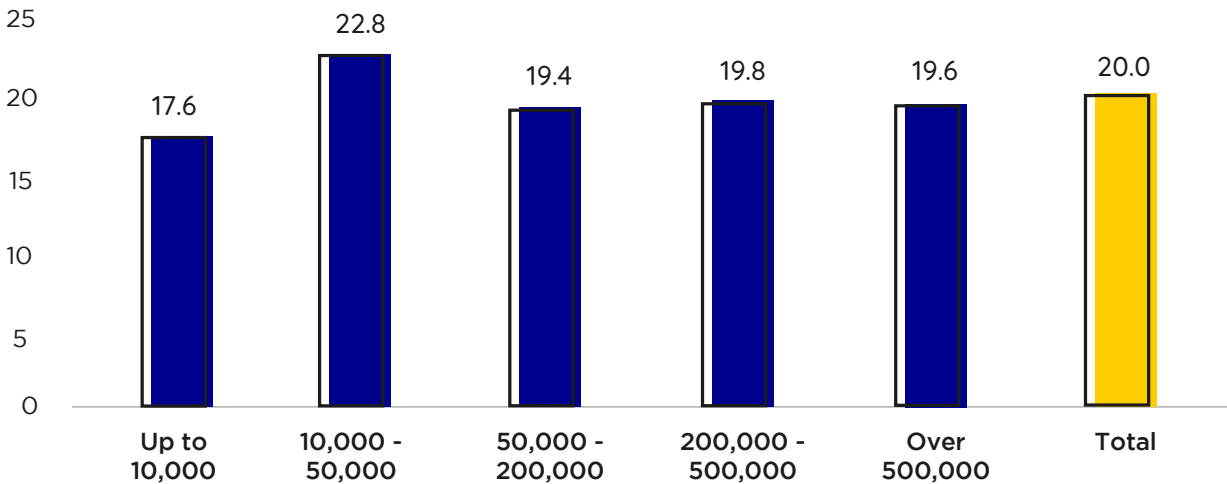
Availability or lack of economic means is important as it means greater or lesser **ability to participate in social activities** and thus interact with others. Moreover, household income is associated with **better health**, a factor that prevents loneliness. From another perspective, income can be especially relevant for people in poor health.



## 2.5 Loneliness and living environment

Despite fewer services and depopulation problems in rural areas, the prevalence of loneliness does not vary notably between urban and rural areas. In fact, the lowest prevalence of loneliness is observed in the smallest municipalities (less than 10,000 inhabitants) and the highest in intermediate sized areas (municipalities from 10,000 to 50,000 inhabitants).

Graph 11. Prevalence of loneliness by municipality size, 2024



One of the key factors to explain the fact that rurality does not seem to have a significant effect on loneliness is its demographic composition, as older people have a lower prevalence of loneliness than younger people.

Table 2: Prevalence of loneliness by municipality size and age range, 2024

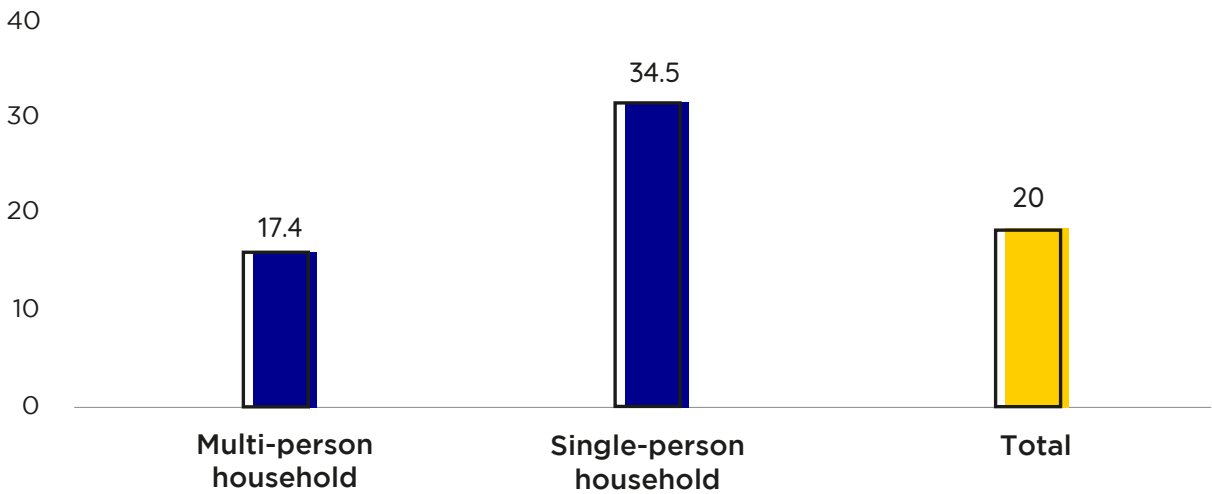
	18-29	30-44	45-54	55-64	65 y mas
Up to 20,000	37.2%	19.7%	17.7%	17.3%	12.7%
20,000-100,000	39.7%	25.6%	16.7%	11.3%	13.4%
100,000-500,000	29.8%	16.6%	20.2%	11.9%	20.5%
Over 500,000	21.8%	15.9%	16.0%	18.4%	25.1%

Youth loneliness is very high in rural areas and decreases in large cities. However, among the elderly, the opposite is true: loneliness is much higher in large cities than in rural areas. This finding has implications for the analysis and policies on the phenomenon of depopulation and the aging of the population in rural Spain. The highest rates of loneliness among women are found in urban centers.

## 2.6 Loneliness and household

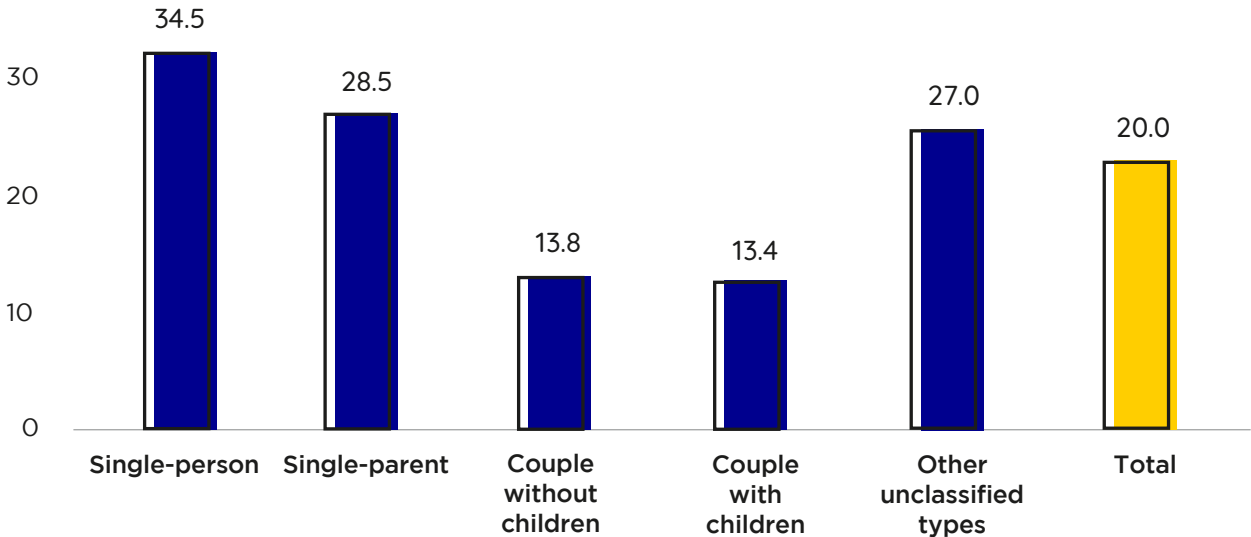
Living with others plays a very important role in loneliness. Loneliness is twice as prevalent among people living alone (34.5%) as among those living with others. Moreover, the prevalence of loneliness among people who live alone because they have no one who can or wants to live with them is more than twice as high as among people who live alone by choice (62.2% vs. 25.4%). However, the prevalence of loneliness among people living alone by choice is higher than average of the overall population (25.4% vs. 20.0%).

Graph 12. Prevalence of loneliness among people who live alone and people who do not live alone, 2024



People living as a couple, with or without children, have the lowest prevalence of loneliness. However, single-parent families, or other forms of co-housing, such as shared apartments or living with other family members, suffer a much higher prevalence of loneliness than the average, although lower than people living alone.

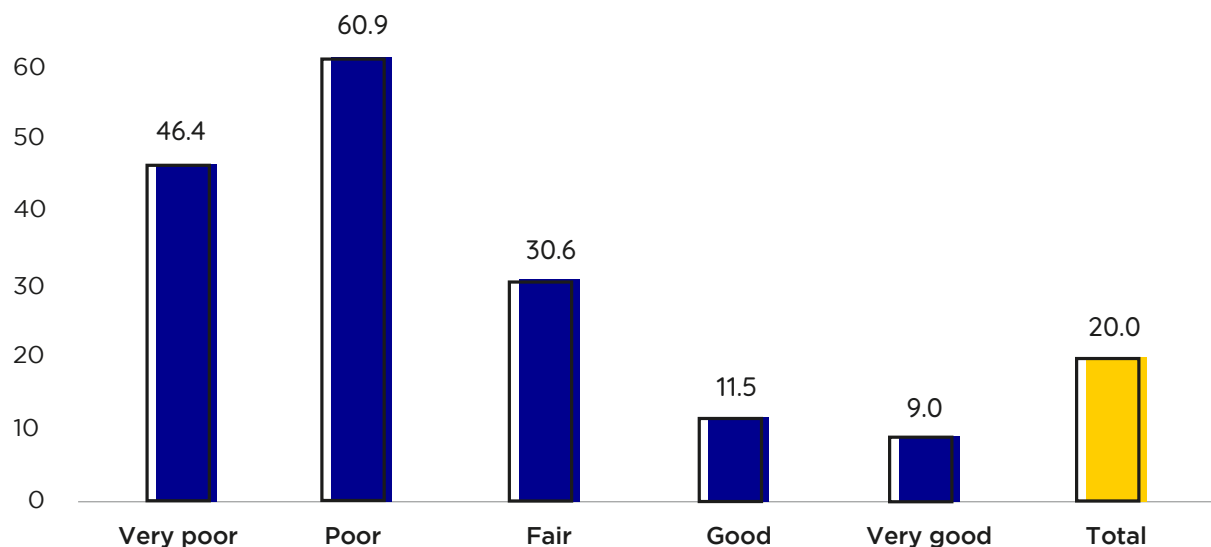
Graph 13. Prevalence of loneliness by type of household, 2024



## 2.7 Loneliness and health

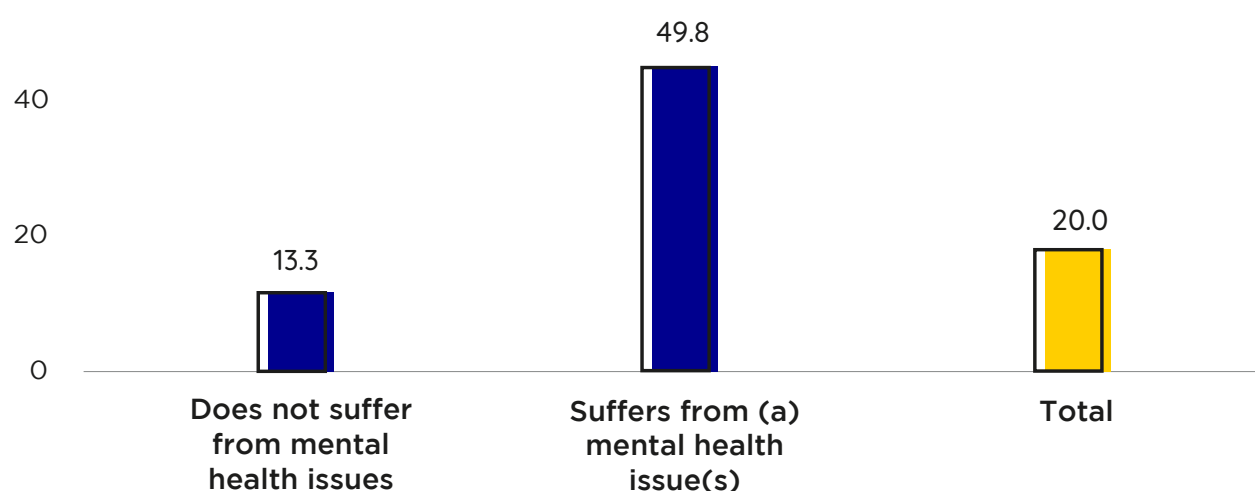
Health status is clearly related to loneliness. The prevalence of loneliness among people who perceive their state of health as poor or very poor is around half, and six times higher than among people in good health.

Graph 14. Prevalence of loneliness by health status, 2024



Moreover, mental health is clearly related to loneliness. Half of people with mental health problems suffer from loneliness. This is three to four times more than people without mental health problems.

Graph 15. Prevalence of loneliness by mental health status, 2024



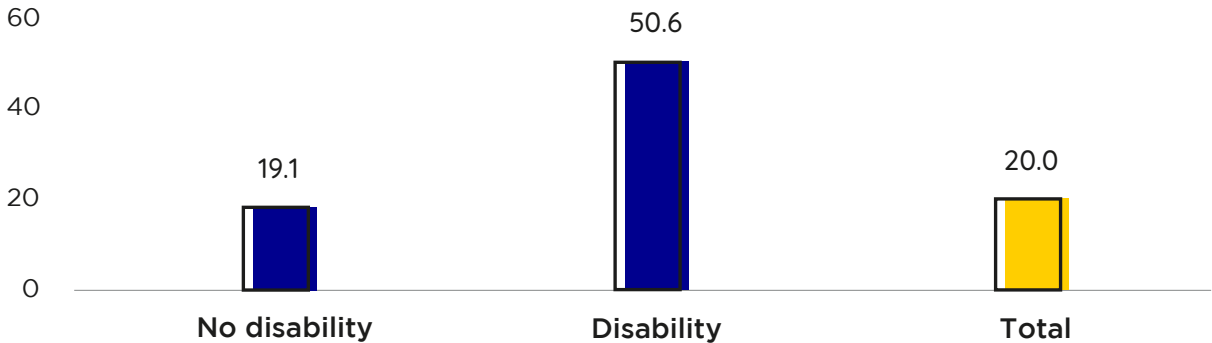
Nearly half (43%) of the population suffering from loneliness has had suicidal thoughts or considered self-harm. The percentage of people who have had suicidal thoughts or considered self-harm among the population suffering from loneliness is almost four times higher than those who do not.



# 2.8 Loneliness and feelings of discrimination

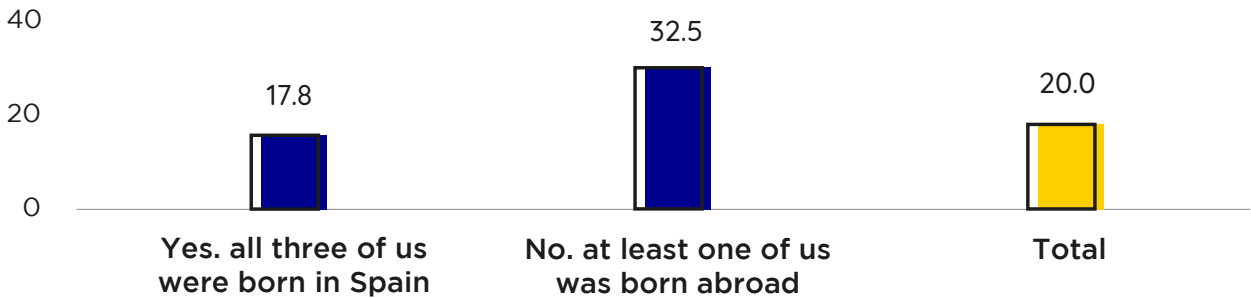
The prevalence of loneliness among people with disabilities is 30 points higher than among people without disabilities (50.6% vs. 19.1%). Women with disabilities report a higher proportion of loneliness than men (54.3% of women vs 45.7% of men).

Graph 16. Prevalence of loneliness in Spain by disability, 2024



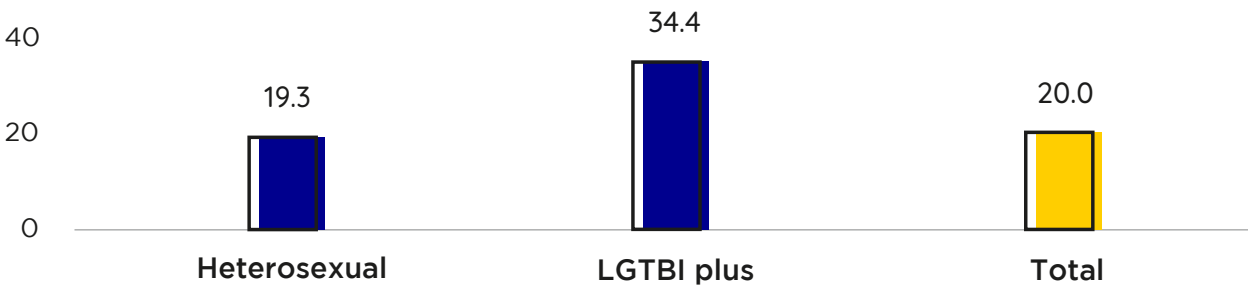
The prevalence of loneliness among people who were born abroad or whose mother or father was born abroad is almost double the prevalence among people born in Spain and whose father and mother were also born in Spain (32.5% vs. 17.8%).

Graph 17. Prevalence of loneliness by personal and family origin, 2024



LGTBI plus people suffer a rate of loneliness 15 points higher than heterosexual people (34.4% vs. 19.3%).

Graph 18. Prevalence of loneliness in Spain by sexual orientation, 2024



### 3. Multivariate analysis

Loneliness is related to a wide variety of factors. However, a higher prevalence does not necessarily mean that this factor is the cause of loneliness. Therefore, **is it possible to know whether some factors have greater a priori influence than others?** A multivariate analysis was carried out to answer this question. The results show that 17 of the 30 variables analyzed are significant predictors of loneliness.

Table 3. Significant variables of loneliness

Factor	Increased in number of times the probability of suffering from loneliness
Friendships: fewer wanted relationships	3.97
Unwanted single-person household	3.15
No one to ask for help	2.97
Diagnosed or undiagnosed mental health problems	2.97
Age 18-29 years	2.78
Single-person household	2.73
Very poor, poor, or fair health	2.68
30-54-year-old not-working	2.33
Friendships: fair or poor relationships	2.26
18-29-year-olds in municipalities with less than 20,000 inhabitants	2.18
Foreign origin	1.77
Friendships: mainly online/remote communication	1.60
Relatives: fewer wanted relationships	1.60
No higher education	1.55
Has attended psychological therapy	1.43
Financial difficulties	1.38
Relatives: fair or poor relationships	1.36

**There are factors that are not only associated with a higher prevalence but are also significant in explaining loneliness,** such as physical and mental health, living alone, especially if one wishes to live with others, foreign origin, financial difficulties, fewer and lower quality friendships than desired and, to a lesser extent, inadequate quantity and quality of family relationships.

**Other factors that are associated with a higher prevalence are not significant** in explaining loneliness, i.e., they alone do not generate a greater likelihood of loneliness. These factors include being a woman, being 65 or older, being unemployed, having a disability or sexual orientation.

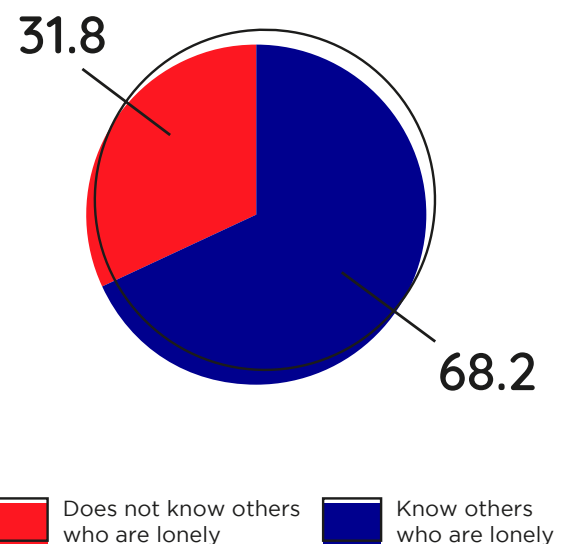
## 4. Perception of loneliness

### Perception regarding prevalence

The general perception is that loneliness is a widespread problem in society. More than two out of three (68.2%), know other people who may be experiencing loneliness. Among people who feel lonely, it is more common to meet other people who may also feel lonely.

Almost all of society (98.8% of the population) considers that all people are vulnerable to loneliness and there is a generalized perception that loneliness is an increasingly important social problem. However, the vast majority of society (93.3%) considers loneliness to be an invisible problem.

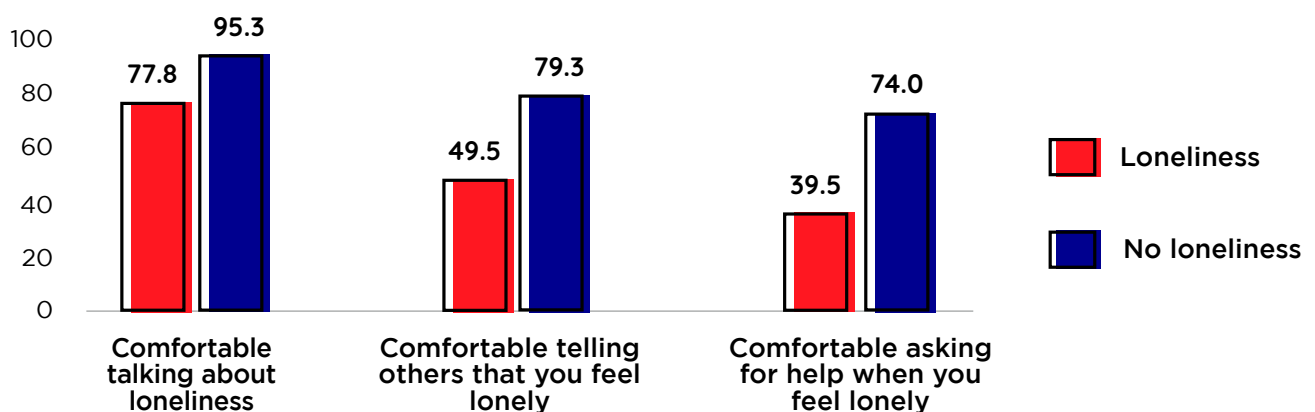
Graph 19. Knowledge of other people who may be experiencing loneliness in the community, 2024



### On the perception of society's openness to loneliness

The vast majority of the population that do not feel lonely finds no problem in talking about loneliness as a topic of conversation. However, half of the people who feel lonely are not actually comfortable talking about their own experience of loneliness, let alone asking for help.

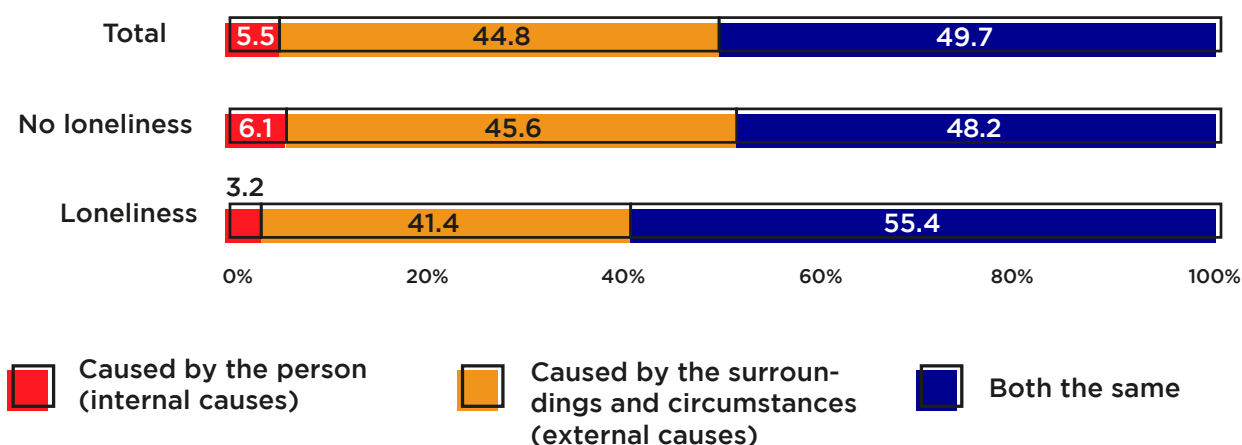
Graph 20. Differences in feelings when talking about loneliness and asking for help in dealing with loneliness, depending on whether the person is experiencing loneliness, 2024



## On the perception of the causes

Only a minority of society considers that loneliness is caused solely by the behavior of the people who suffer from it. The most widely held view (especially among those suffering from loneliness) is that loneliness is caused by a combination of factors, both internal and external, i.e., both factors and circumstances beyond a person's control and attitudes of the individuals themselves.

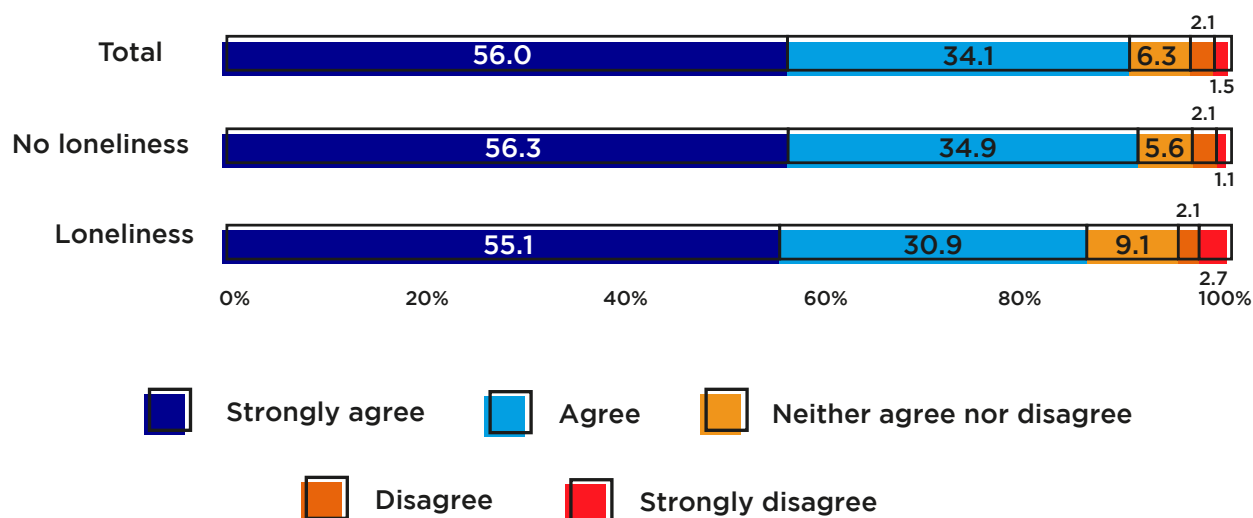
Graph 21. Perception of the causes of loneliness, by loneliness status, 2024



## On the notoriety of the problem and responsibilities

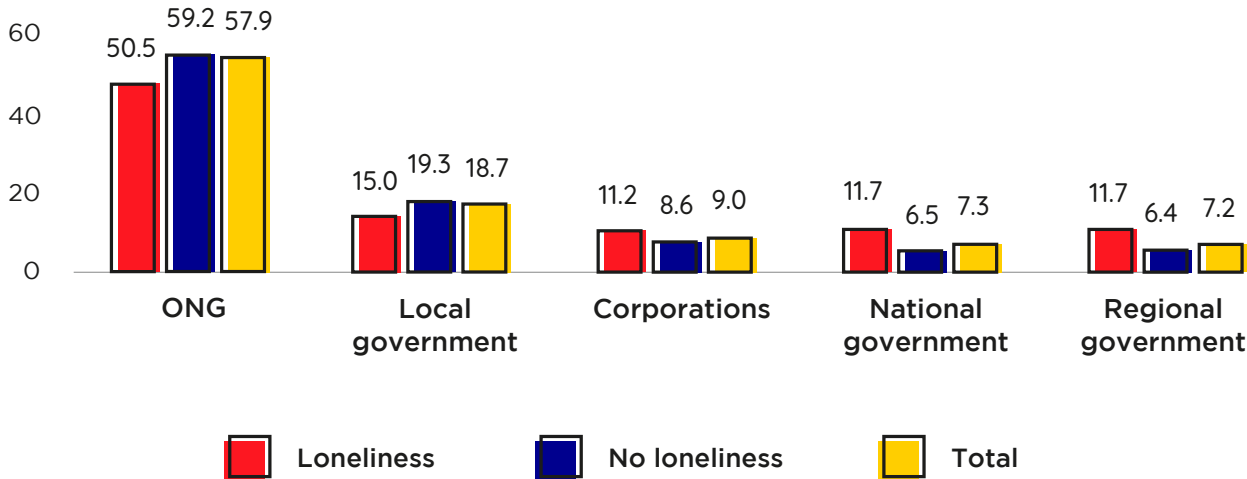
The vast majority of society considers that the fight against loneliness should be a priority for public administrations.

Graph 22. Opinion on whether the fight against loneliness should be a priority for Administrations, by loneliness status, 2024



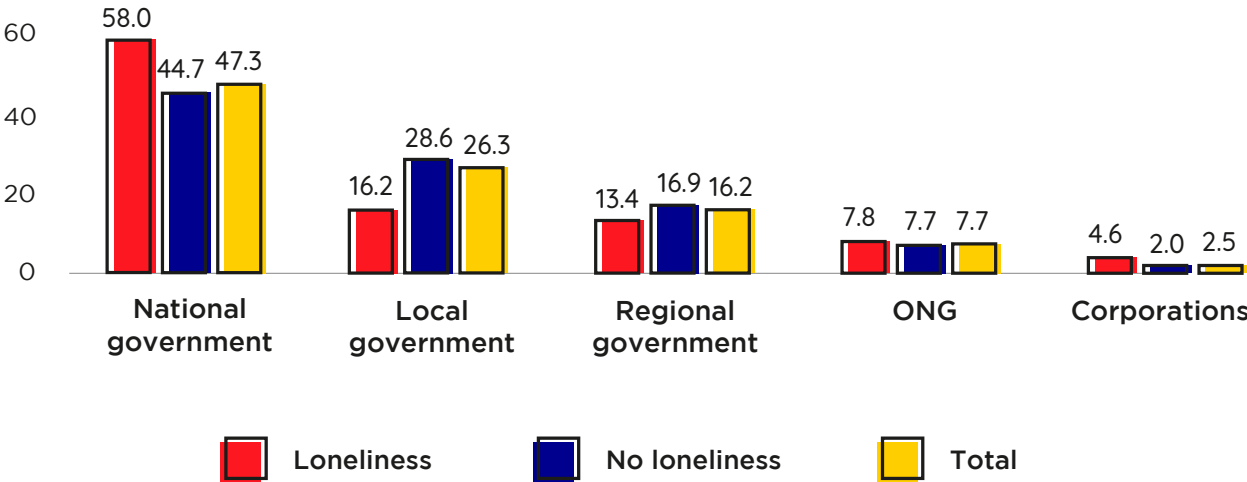
NGOs are the most valued institution in the fight against loneliness today, far ahead of local entities and considerably ahead of regional and national governments.

Graph 23. Opinion on which institution does the most to combat loneliness, according to loneliness status, 2024



 The institution with the greatest responsibility for loneliness is the national government, followed by the local or regional government.

Graph 24. Opinion on which institution should ensure that no one experiences loneliness according to loneliness status, 2024



Beyond the role of the administration, there is also a clear consensus that the fight against loneliness is a responsibility shared by society as a whole. In line with this opinion, the vast majority of society claims to carry out actions that help to combat loneliness (79.1%) and the vast majority of the population would like to be able to carry out more actions to combat loneliness (82%).

# 5. Conclusions

The 2024 Loneliness in Spain Barometer identifies the following conclusions:

01

## **Society considers loneliness to be a very relevant problem.**

The general perception is that loneliness is an increasingly important social problem.

02

## **In many cases, loneliness has a solution.**

50.4% of the population has felt lonely at some stage of their lives but do not feel lonely at the present time. This data also shows that in many cases loneliness is a reversible problem that can be solved.

03

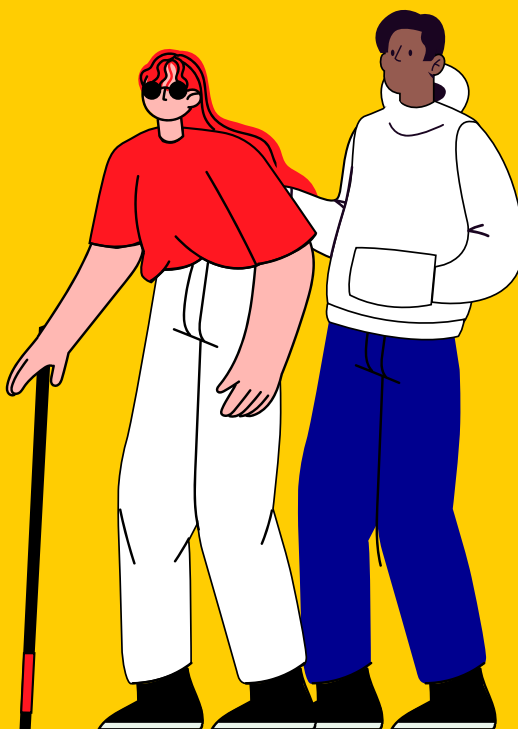
## **Most of society has experienced loneliness in the present or the past.**

Loneliness currently affects one fifth of the population in Spain and two out of three people who do not currently feel lonely (63%) have suffered from loneliness in the past.

04

## **However, the data show that there is also chronic or long-term loneliness.**

Two out of three people (67.7%) who suffer from loneliness, have been in this situation for over two years, and 59% for over three years.



05

## **Loneliness, beyond the subjective experience of suffering, is related to many other problems**

Loneliness is much more prevalent among people who have problems in other areas, such as those who struggle to make ends meet, are unemployed, suffer from physical or mental health problems, or have a disability.

06

## **Some factors are significant in explaining loneliness, while others simply have a relationship with loneliness, but not necessarily a causal one**

In addition to a higher prevalence, many of these vulnerability factors are significant. In other words, they imply a higher probability of suffering from loneliness, such as suffering from financial difficulties, being of foreign origin, suffering from a mental health problem, being young or unemployed between the ages of 30 and 54. However, this is not always the case. There are factors that, despite being associated with a higher prevalence, do not imply a higher probability of suffering loneliness.

07

**The quantity, quality, and presence of relationships, especially friendships and family relationships, are very relevant to loneliness.**

Loneliness is more prevalent among people with fewer friendships than they would like to have (41.9%) than people with fewer family relationships (35.3%). This is four times higher than people who are happy with the number of friendships (10.3%).

10

**Physical and mental health is a key factor in the fight against loneliness.**

Being in very poor, poor or fair health is 2.7 times more likely to suffer from loneliness and 3 times more likely to suffer from a mental health problem, diagnosed or undiagnosed.

08

**Living with others, especially with a partner, also plays a key role in loneliness.**

Regardless of social life, the core living situation is key. Loneliness is twice as prevalent among people living alone as among those living with others.

11

**Education prevents loneliness.**

Loneliness is much less frequent among people with a higher level of education. Lack of higher education also implies a 1.5 times higher probability of suffering from loneliness.

09

**Life expectations influence loneliness.**

The difference in the prevalence of loneliness between employed and unemployed people is vast in the middle stages of life but negligible in youth.

12

**Loneliness is somewhat more prevalent among women than among men, although the differences are observed mainly in certain profiles.**

The prevalence of loneliness among women is 21.8%, which is higher but close to the prevalence among men (18.0%). However, behind this average, the differences between men and women are particularly wide after the age of 55, among the lowest levels of education and in urban areas.



13

### **Loneliness is especially widespread among young people**

Young people suffer the highest levels of loneliness in both sexes. This figure decreases with increasing age, until the 75 and over age group, where the prevalence increases again. In addition, being between 18 and 29 years old implies a 2.8 times higher probability of experiencing loneliness.

16

### **There is increasing awareness of loneliness as a social problem.**

The results of the 2024 Loneliness in Spain Barometer show a greater awareness of loneliness as a social problem compared to the Report on Social Perception of Loneliness, published two years earlier in 2022.



14

### **There are no broad differences between urban and rural environments, but there are differences in the way the environment affects the age group.**

The prevalence of loneliness does not vary notably between urban and rural environments despite the lower provision of services and the problems of depopulation in rural areas. However, in rural areas, young people experience very high levels of loneliness (and the older population very low levels), while in urban areas the opposite is true, with older people suffering more loneliness.

17

### **Volunteering is important to reduce loneliness.**

Most of society not only considers that the fight against loneliness is a responsibility shared by society as a whole, but also states that they would like to be able to carry out more actions to combat loneliness (82.0% of the population).

15

### **There is consensus on the need to strengthen actions to reduce loneliness.**

Most of society considers that the fight against loneliness should be a priority for public administration and a shared responsibility for society.

18

### **Research helps to get closer to people who suffer loneliness in silence**

A significant proportion of people who suffer from loneliness, more than half, do not feel comfortable asking for help, which is why it is important to offer it even if they do not ask for it. Research allows us to identify a series of profiles in which loneliness is particularly prevalent. This serves to channel this offer of help, although not necessarily explicit, to certain profiles that have a higher prevalence of loneliness.



## It is important to continue researching in the field of loneliness in Spain.

Research that measures the extent of loneliness is the first step to making it visible. Regular research is essential to understand the evolution of the phenomenon and therefore to gradually gain a deeper insight into it.





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# Loneliness in Spain Barometer 2024

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[www.soledades.es](http://www.soledades.es)

Within the framework of:

