

LIFE AFTER THE DANA

The "return to normality" has worked differently in each of the Valencian regions affected by last year's floods. While homes, businesses and public spaces remain devastated in the poorest neighbourhoods, large companies and commercial establishments are back in business thanks to the support of direct aid, guarantees and public loans.

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The Carme Miquel del Arrabal primary school in Algemesí (Ribera Alta county) still lies in rubble, pending demolition and reconstruction at the same location.

A QUESTION OF CLASS

Walking through the Orba neighbourhood in Alfafar in Horta Sur county (popularly known as Alcosa Park), the devastation caused by the floods of October 29th, 2024, is still striking. A year on, some buildings have been renovated, others are beginning to be rebuilt, and of others the only remains are the walls, facades or signs indicating that there used to be a greengrocer or a hairdresser where now there are only shuttered premises. The school still needs to be rebuilt, elevators need to be fixed and sewers cleaned. "We are a long way from normality, despite what they try to make us believe. They have forgotten about the poorest people, who have not been able to return home, reopen businesses or access help," laments local resident Fernando González as he looks down Calle de Sedaví, the street where he lives, at some ground floor flats where reconstruction is only just beginning.



The Mercedes Benz authorised dealer in the Pista de Silla industrial state has resumed operations.

González has received a €6,000 grant from Carlos Mazón's Valencian government to compensate the loss of basic necessities and €9,000 euros from the Spanish State for replacing furniture and appliances, but twelve months on he is still waiting for a €20,000 grant to repair his damaged home. "I'll have enough because I don't pay for labour and I do it all myself, and they've also given me second-hand tools," he says. His example

shows how the DANA¹ has laid bare the limits of a working class that lacks the savings capacity to cope with unforeseen disaster. Aid, in general, is drip fed and comes late, and not everyone manages to apply for it. "Poverty means that many people have not been able to access all the public aid programmes," said Joan Hancer, who works at Vibra, a community initiative in the El Raval neighbourhood of Algemesí, a town in Ribera Alta, and is a member of the Local Emergency and Reconstruction Committee (*Comité Local de Emergencia y Reconstrucción*, CLER). These committees, spaces for direct participation which bring together residents, companies and local organisations, were created a few months after the storm to find solutions to the destruction based on the principles of the social and solidarity economy.

THE MUDDIED WATERS OF EXCLUSION

Neighbourhoods like Parque Alcosa, made up of social housing built in the sixties to house a working class population newly arrived in Valencia; El Raval, a neighbourhood made up mostly of Roma and migrant families, castigated by poverty, stigma and neglect; or El Xenillet in Torrent, one of the humblest areas in the municipality, doubly afflicted by the mud flows and by poverty, not only have not got back to normal, but, with the passage of time and the lack of response from institutions, have seen the devastation of homes, businesses and neighbourhoods worsen. We have verified this through fieldwork in the three neighbourhoods, located in flood-prone areas.



The Bonaire shopping centre, in Aldaia (Horta Sur), is one of the beneficiary companies of the Spanish State guarantees that is now back in business.

¹ Translator's note: The DANA (Depresión Aislada en Niveles Altos, lit. Isolated Depression at High Levels, also known as a "cut-off low") is a weather event that led to the catastrophic floods of October 2024 in Valencia.

The ongoing recovery of these more disadvantaged areas contrasts with the return to normality already achieved in Alfafar retail park or in the industrial estate along the V-31 Pista de Silla motorway, where economic activity and footfall have returned for large businesses and car showrooms. Rut Moyano, an affected resident and spokesperson for the CLER in Benetússer (Horta Sur), gives the example of the Pista de Silla car dealerships, such as Mercedes-Benz and Kia, which re-opened just a month after the deadly passage of the DANA. In Aldaia, the CLER's spokesperson Maria Jiménez contrasts the "rapid" re-opening of the Bonaire shopping centre last February with the administration's slowness in what she believes is most important: "rebuilding schools, offering an alternative to those who have lost their homes and speeding up aid for the most vulnerable."

The Spanish government has led the distribution of the bulk of public funds (both Spanish and European) targeted at individuals, self-employed workers or affected companies, as well as infrastructure reconstruction. In total, it has mobilised €16.6 billion, of which, at the end of July, almost €6 billion (37%) had been paid out. It should be noted that this total includes payments to affected parties by the Insurance Compensation Consortium (*Consortio de Compensaciones de Seguros*), a public entity attached to the Spanish Ministry of Economy and Finance which covers damages in cases of extraordinary circumstances though a public fund funded by a percentage taken from private insurance premiums. If this amount is deducted from the total, the amount of direct aid falls to €2.552 billion. Looking at the number of applications, of the 448,922 submitted, 320,108 are still being processed, according to official data.

Shortly after the disaster, the Generalitat Valenciana announced its own contribution of €2.364 billion euros for emergency and recovery projects during 2025. Of this sum, €772.5 million has been reserved for direct aid. In August, according to the data requested by La Directa through the Valencian administration's Transparency Portal, €283.2 million had been paid in aid (36% of the total announced) and 87% of the requests had been granted. According to the available information, the entire fund cannot have been exhausted because the number of requests reported would not have accounted for the whole sum. At the beginning of September, Carlos Mazón took pride in its management, and boasted of having provided "economic and direct support" for "a recovery process that needs to reach everyone".

In practice, far from it. Júlia Martí and Marta Pérez Fargas, members of the Debt Observatory in Globalisation (ODG), an organisation that has investigated the destination of public funds allocated to post-DANA reconstruction, say that "aid to the public is insufficient and does not arrive with the necessary urgency". On the other hand, Martí says, "the aid to large companies has been delivered quickly and in amounts related more to turnover than to impact. That is to say, transnational companies with profits in the millions have received hundreds of thousands of euros in aid." This publication has requested data from the Spanish government in relation to the multinationals that have benefited from public policies (through direct aid, tax reductions or exemptions, or

suspension of interest payments on outstanding sums) connected to damage caused by the DANA, and also the distribution of funds to small and large businesses and to neighbourhoods with lower and higher per capita income. These requests were denied, some on the grounds that the data "is confidential" and others because the government "does not have such data".

MULTI-MILLION EURO SUBSIDIES AND GUARANTEES

Some multinationals affected by the DANA have played the role of the banks during the 2008 financial crisis or the tourism sector after pandemic: at a time of instability, they have taken advantage of public bailout policies, in this case at the local level. The non-refundable sum that the Spanish administration can allocate to affected companies ranges from €10,000 for companies with an annual turnover of less than €1 million to €150,000 euros for commercial companies turning over more than €10 million per year.

This is one of the types of aid where it is indeed possible to obtain public information on how it has been distributed. Using the National System for Publicising Subsidies and Public Aid portal (*Sistema Nacional de Publicidad de Subvenciones y Ayudas Públicas*), part of the Spanish Ministry of Finance, you can see the names of some of the firms that have received €150,000 euros and, as we have seen, are already back in business in the devastated areas. We are talking about names like Heineken, Adidas, Kiabi, Decathlon, Sprinter, Consumo, Danone, Ford and Renault. "The large retailers, the large distribution chains, such as Mercadona, have recovered, while stores such as the Dauden shoe store, the Molins bakery or the Carceller florist are still closed," as Maria Jiménez as she showed us the impacts of the disaster in her municipality, Aldaia (Horta Sur), which was almost completely flooded when the Salita ravine burst its banks.

With turnovers in the millions, the Acrismatic group of casinos and gambling halls, the Aristaria SL cement plants and the Turkish company Cimsa (which became a world leader in the production of white cement by acquiring the Spanish subsidiary of the Mexican Cemex, including the Buñol cement plant), the Air Nostrum airline, the Clece multi-service company (which belongs to the ACS Group, the IBEX-35 construction company owned by Florentino Pérez), the Gimeno Calabuig family's waste collection company (Fovasa) and the FCC construction and services group are some of the major beneficiaries, receiving huge sums of direct public aid. In the same list we also find Simetria Fidentia SL, a construction company 50% owned by the Valencian investment fund Atitlan, led by investors Aritza Rodeno and Roberto Centeno, Juan Roig's son-in-law. Rodeno and Centeno were advisors at Goldman Sachs, a financial body converted into a commercial bank in order to receive public financial support during the 2008 crisis.

Júlia Martí reads these concessions as "the State's way of maintaining the functioning of the capitalist system." "This happens," she adds, "because, even within parties that present themselves as progressive, it is assumed that the way to ensure the well-being of the population is to make sure that the capitalist wheel does not stop turning, that growth does not stagnate. The bailout of large companies is not questioned, and neither does it

come with obligations, such as guaranteeing jobs or promoting reconstruction adapted to climate change." In this sense, Maria Jiménez is blunt. "It should not be necessary to bail out companies which make enough to afford reconstruction by themselves," she concludes.

What is more, in addition to being handed money without being asked for anything in return, companies can also access guarantees from public financial institutions, such as the Official Credit Institute (*Instituto de Crédito Oficial*, ICO). Set up as a public bank in 1971 and attached to the Ministry of Economy, the ICO is the body in charge of administering loans and state guarantees, which are then managed by private banks which act as intermediaries and decide to whom to grant the loans. If the beneficiary company cannot repay them, it is the State that assumes the bulk of the loss (80%), while 20% is passed on to the fund manager. "This means," explains Nicola Scherer, an ODG researcher who has examined the activity of the ICO, "that they are highly favourable loans, based on a logic of privatising profits and socialising losses, despite the risk of public indebtedness."

The automotive sector has been one of the main beneficiaries of ICO guarantees and loans. Mercedes-Benz subsidiaries including Valencia Distribuidora Angal Automoción SL, businesses like Industrias Alegre SL, which supplies brands like Ford and Stellantis (an automotive industry conglomerate), and dealers such as Marcos Automoción, the largest group in the Valencian region, have received guarantees of up to €16 million. Construction companies, biofuels producers, agri-food companies (many of which supply Mercadona and other large distribution chains) and even the Bonaire shopping centre have also accessed multi-million euro guarantees.

Nicola Scherer emphasises how, as happened with COVID-19 and then with the DANA, the distribution of credits and guarantees shows that "there is a bias towards bailing out large companies, because they have more capacity to request aid, better contacts with private banks and more financial credibility backing them." Therefore, the researcher believes a different distribution system is needed, "which includes environmental criteria to avoid bailing out the companies that have led us into a state of climate emergency, and social and economic criteria to identify who needs more help and is not receiving it."

One of the testimonies that reflects the difficulties of some actors in accessing aid is that of Javier Bort, owner of a paint shop in Catarroja (Horta Sur) that has not been able to reopen. At 54, Bort is part of the third generation of a family business that was completely flooded by water a year ago. The damage was such that he had to fit out his garage, where the mud "only" reached 1.3 metres, as an interim solution to be able to continue operating. "My priority was to make ends meet. Starting now, with the compensation from the Consorcio de Compensación de Seguros and a private donation from the Red Cross, I will repair the store, but I won't be able to re-open for at least a year," he estimates.

Bort did not request any direct aid, either from the Generalitat or the State. "The first ones would only cover 50% of my costs, and both administrations had exacting requirements

and created many bureaucratic difficulties for those of us who do not have administrative staff. The big businesses can manage it, but the small ones are lost," he laments. As for loans from public banks, he says that he did not want to make any move that "posed a risk". "I do not have the knowledge nor am I a large company that can afford to make losses. I just want to hold out until I retire," he makes clear.



Javier Bort, owner of a paint shop in Catarroja (Horta Sur), has not been able to reopen his premises.

A similar case is that of Fernando Moreno, who manages a kiosk and the Tio Fen bar in El Raval in Algemés. Despite not receiving any compensation because he did not have insurance, he has been able to reopen the kiosk "thanks to the human and economic support of the community and a state public grant of €5,000 euros for the self-employed," he says. He has tried to apply for other aid to rebuild the small business, but when he went to fill in the application, he found that the deadline was in February 2025. "You had to be very vigilant and here we were digging out mud for months," he says. The bar has not yet reopened, and he does not know if he will ever be able to reopen it. "I rented it, and the current owner has no interest in rebuilding it," he says.

Laia Garcia and Jordi Cabezas, from Benetússer's Somnis de Paper bookstore, have been more fortunate. "The Ministry of Culture acted immediately," Garcia acknowledges. In their case, they accessed state and regional aid aimed at rebuilding the cultural sector and were given specialist technical advice. In total, they received €29,575 from the State and €60,000 from the Generalitat. However, the sum of the aid and compensation from the Consortium did not cover a loss of "more than €110,000" and they tried,

unsuccessfully, to request support from the Institut Valencià de la Competitivitat Empresarial (Valencian Institute for Business Competitiveness). "We encountered many obstacles, such as having to hire an auditor, which small businesses cannot afford," she sighs.

WITHOUT DECENT HOUSING

The Spanish government has received 43,637 requests for aid to alleviate personal damages and material damage to the structure of homes or residential buildings, funded exclusively by the State. The Generalitat, in turn, has allocated money to rent support, the demolition of damaged homes and the acquisition of new ones. By mid-September, the State had distributed €92 million of the €120 million initially planned, even though, according to sources in the press department of the Ministry of the Interior, "the allocation is constantly expanding based on the damage reports analysed." However, Rut Moyano criticises the slow distribution of these funds, which, in his opinion, were "extremely high priority". "We continue to face a lot of uncertainty, living in flats with serious structural damage. There are many people who do not have access to decent housing. It is unacceptable," he concludes.

Moyano lives in Benetússer, in a four-storey building where the water reached the first floor and a car hit the entrance. Today, the garage, the entrance and the lift are still not repaired, and residents live with damp, cracks and collapsing false ceilings. The damage to the property is estimated at about €235,000 euros, but by August 2025 only 20% of this amount had been collected from the Consortium, which they allocated to the most urgent repairs, such as electricity meters or the water pump. As of October 2025, they are still missing 10% of the total budget. As with other buildings in the area, the building's lift still does not work, which makes life difficult for elderly people or people with reduced mobility. "We have a neighbour who can only go outside the building one day a month, when the Red Cross comes," he says indignantly. According to Moyano, it is a problem that does not affect everyone equally. "Businesses are collapsing and tell us that they do not have availability or that they can't get the parts. We don't doubt it, but curiously the lifts in the shopping centres in Alfafar and Aldaia are working again," he points out.

The poorer the neighbourhood, the slower the replacement of homes goes. This is the case of the group of houses located in the Calle de Murcia and Calle de Albacete streets in Torrent (Horta Sur), before El Xenillet and at the top of the Poio ravine. In addition to the usual problems in affected areas, there is "the total marginalisation which people are living in," says Maria Jiménez, who travels periodically from Aldaia to Torrent to support the residents. Most inhabitants do not have home insurance and, therefore, have not received compensation from the Consortium. Only the €6,000 grant from the Generalitat, €10,000 from the State for loss of belongings, and some private donations have been received.

Consolación Dual is one of those affected on Calle de Murcia, where she lived in a house on the floor of the gorge which is now scheduled for demotion. In total, the city council will demolish 45 homes "due to the high level of danger in the location". The families are

aware and do not object, but they denounce that they are facing this process without information, without knowing if they will receive compensation and without formalised rehousing proposals in writing. In Dual's case, she says that she received contradictory information about the state of the house. "A technician from the city council came and said that we could return home, but he did not give us any paper to certify it and, in the press, the city council spoke of the risk of living in them." While she waits to receive state aid of €60,000 for the total destruction of the house, Dual is living in an apartment provided by an NGO, which she must renew every three months.



Consolación Dual, a resident of Calle de Murcia in Torrent (Horta Sur), is still waiting to receive a grant of €60,000 for the destruction of her home.

Amparo González is in a similar situation. She remains in her apartment on Calle de Murcia despite the corridor between the dining room and the bathroom requiring ceiling props due to the risk of collapse. "First they told me that it had to be demolished, then that reinforcement was enough... What we know for sure is that we can't live in it," she says, worried about how the rehousing process will play out. Torrent council maintains that they have offered accommodation to families and that work continues "so that they can live close to their home".

Another testimony which shows the clear class bias marking the return to normality is that of married couple Paco Ramírez and Maria Garcia, aged 70 and 68 respectively. They currently have a €21,000 mortgage on a home that they will not be able to get back. They lived on Avenida de Carlet, a street in Algemesí located on the very bed of the Magro River where the water flooded about twenty ground floor flats. Given the flood risk in the

location, the city council has approved expropriating the houses and allocating the land to public roads and sports areas in exchange for financial compensation. Ramírez and Garcia will receive €22,741 from the city council plus €33,461.43 in compensation from the Consortium, figures that they consider "derisory" considering that an insurer valued their home at €150,920.

Ramírez and Garcia have not received any direct aid for damage to the house, because "we did not know how to apply for it," Garcia confesses. She criticises the lack of advice and information, saying that "here we needed council staff to knock on doors and explain what we needed to do." All in all, they still feel "lucky" because "we have not been left homeless, we have another home in El Raval". Even so, the ground floor of this building, where they had the garage and a kitchen, was also damaged, and without any help or the financial protection of an insurer they do not know when they will be able to repair it.

Some households located on the front line of the floods have had more economic capacity to cope with the catastrophe. Unlike the families of El Raval or El Xenillet, some residents living along the bed of the Poio ravine in Picanya have been able to rebuild their homes or begin the reconstruction process - although they do not know what the future holds, as the city council has decided to reclassify the land as green space. This is the case of José Espinosa, who commissioned plans for rebuilding his home and requested a building permit, which was denied due to the hazards of the site. "Beyond the fear of losing our homes and our place, what hurts us is the lack of information," he criticises. Currently, the city council has expressed its willingness to "respond to different situations", "ensure safety" and "process alternatives".

FORGOTTEN NEIGHBOURHOODS

The devastation of the humblest neighbourhoods also persists outside the residents' houses: parks and public facilities still awaiting reconstruction, streets torn up by the force of the water and abandoned flats accumulating litter are still a common landscape in many places. The Spanish government has awarded the affected municipalities grants of between 2 and 200 million euros to rebuild infrastructure, a budget that is difficult to spend due to the lack of municipal technical personnel and that, according to Joan Nacher, "is being invested at two different speeds and in a discriminatory manner".

Nacher is referring to the "lack of investment" in neighbourhoods with higher poverty rates, and gives his town as an example. "If you walk through Algemesí you barely see the scars of the storm, while on the other hand, in El Raval severe damage still persists." This neighbourhood only had three community facilities, and they have been devastated: the citizen participation centre, the primary school and the nursery. "The centre is closed, the school has been replaced by portacabins and the nursery has been moved into the cultural centre, a space designed for adults where children have to urinate in urinals," says Jacinta Domínguez, the nursery's director. The city council has explained that the three spaces will be demolished and rebuilt following anti-flood criteria to ensure safety, a decision that Nacher questions. "Rebuilding them in the same place is not the solution," he believes.



Decathlon, in the commercial park of Alfafar (Horta Sur), is one of the multinationals that has received €150,000 euros in direct aid.

Another problem highlighted is that drains and the air chambers built under some buildings to isolate them from damp have not been cleaned. Twelve months on, many of the air chambers are still full of mud, a situation that affects half of the buildings in neighbourhoods such as Parque Alcosa. In addition to the risk of infections and the structural damage that this accumulation can cause, the local committees are concerned about how this autumn's rains will be dealt with. "We run an enormous risk because now the water can rise much more easily," they warn.

To alleviate these class biases in the reconstruction, in the words of Andrea Ariza, urban planner and anthropologist from the La Dula cooperative, "institutional support cannot be limited to offering economic aid, leaving the responsibility of reconstruction or repair in the hands of individuals". She believes that the administration needs to intervene directly to solve issues which increase vulnerability "and to do so in line with the principles of the social and solidarity economy". Maria Jiménez and Rut Moyano agree, concluding that "we have had to solve issues such as housing, cleaning air chambers and repairing elevators ourselves, but not everyone has the capacity to do so."

The CLER spokesperson in Aldaia, Maria Jiménez, compares the "rapid" inauguration of the Bonaire shopping centre in February with the sluggish pace seen in "rebuilding schools or offering an alternative to those who have lost their homes".