

## **OFFICE OF THE HIGH COMMISSIONER FOR HUMAN RIGHTS**

### **Call for inputs: Promoting and protecting economic, social and cultural rights within the context of addressing inequalities in the recovery from the COVID-19 pandemic**

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#### **Contribution from the Ministry of Social Rights of the Government of Catalonia**

##### **Introduction**

Catalonia, like Europe, is in a context of successive economic and social crises that have occurred throughout the last decade. When the consequences of the 2008 crisis had not yet completely disappeared, the socio-economic consequences of the crisis arising from the **COVID-19 pandemic** have been added. In addition, from 2022, we're facing the crisis arising from the conflict triggered by Russia's invasion of Ukraine, which has led to an escalation of energy and food prices and, consequently, the loss of people's purchasing power.

In this context, Catalonia presents a **poverty risk rate of 19.9% in 2021** (latest available data). The AROPE (At Risk of Poverty and/or Exclusion) rate was, in 2021, at 25.1%. Plus, the Gini coefficient, which measures the degree of income inequality in a society, showed a value of 30.9 in 2021, and the S80/20, which also measures the inequality in the distribution of income, stood in 2021 at 5.4 points.

As for the **most affected groups**, by age group in 2021 the risk of poverty was higher at those under 16, a group where the rate reaches 29.3%. By gender, women are the ones with a higher rate, at 20.1% in 2021. By household type, households with an adult with one or more dependent children are the ones with a higher at-risk-of-poverty rate, of 51.9% in 2021, compared to 15.4% of households without dependent children.

The **aging of the population** has consequences on people's health, the quality of life of the elderly and their impacts on the family burdens of caring for dependent people, as well as on public spending. Catalonia reached an aging index in 2022 of 131 people over 65 for every 100 people under 15. The overaging index, the ratio between the number of people aged 85 and over, and the number of people aged 65 and over, stood at 17.1. On the other hand, the number of people whose disability has been legally recognized in Catalonia stood at 657,933 people in 2022, which represents 8.49% of the population.

The **II Strategic Plan for Social Services 2021-2024** of the Government of the Catalonia sets up a model of social care that is closer and adapted to the needs of each citizen, focusing on being more proactive, preventive, and with more proximity services.

In the Catalan Social Services System, **local authorities** are responsible for providing **basic social services**, the gateway to the system, and the Government of Catalonia, with exclusive competences in matters of social services, acts as a planner of social services policies and as a manager of specialized social services.

Cooperation with local authorities and the Third Sector organizations is fundamental to provide the right services to citizens, and in this sense, the Ministry of Social Rights of the Government of Catalonia supports both local authorities and social care entities.

##### **Social expenditure in the Catalan Government budget**

In 2022, the Government of Catalonia has earmarked 74.6% of its budget for social spending, including areas such as social rights and housing, education, health, employment promotion and public transport. Specifically, the Government's Ministry of Social Rights –competent in matters of social services, support for families, social inclusion and the fight against poverty, childhood, and youth, promotion of personal autonomy and community action– increased its budget more than 30% compared to the year 2020, including housing policies.

One of the strategic axes in budgetary matters is to strengthen the Catalan Social Services System and expand the policies addressed to most vulnerable groups, tackling especially child poverty, social exclusion and inequalities.

An agreement has been reached with the social agents, which allows, for the first time in the last twelve years, the update of the **sufficiency income of Catalonia indicator**. This update is pending the approval of the 2023 budget. As we increase the access thresholds, it allows more families to enter the social protection system.

### **Guaranteed Income**

Among the protection networks to deal with poverty, it is worth mentioning the [Citizen's Guaranteed Income](#) (RGC, for its acronym in Catalan), a social benefit to ensure the minimum income for a dignified life. It is addressed either to individuals than family units who are in a severe situation of poverty, in order to promote their autonomy and their full participation in society. It is a social benefit of an economic nature. It consists of a guaranteed benefit, and a complementary benefit for activation and job placement.

People who can receive RGC are people with no incomes or insufficient incomes to cover basic needs.

In short, this instrument in place in Catalonia aims to guarantee a minimum income for its citizens. Catalonia has been increasing its financial endowment and the number of beneficiaries and at the end of 2022, benefits associated with the RGC had more than 170,900 beneficiaries.

The RGC has the capacity to reduce the incidence and intensity of severe poverty. According to evaluation reports, seven out of ten households that receive it register a substantial improvement of their quality of life and leave the situation of severe poverty.

However, it will be necessary to improve its coverage for families with more members, especially with dependent children and adolescents to reduce the risk of poverty.

Another challenge is the reduction of the processing time of administrative proceedings, simplifying and accompanying people and strengthening the presence in the territory through the network of attention points.

### **Increase of places**

The Catalan Government is working to increase services and resources for the promotion of personal autonomy and reduce waiting lists for care services, specially those who affect the elders, people with dependency, people with disabilities and people with social problems arising from mental illness.

One of the top priority goals is to approve a shock plan that reduces waiting lists in the fields of disability and dependency. In order to facilitate this, the information and file management systems will be improved; we will move towards a one-single procedure; discrepancies in the numbers of applicants and beneficiaries will be eliminated; and residential and day care places for the elderly will be increased, which in 2022 already presented an increase of 800 new places.

Regarding waiting lists, if in August 2021 the waiting list for dependency assessment and resolution of the Individual Care Programme (programme that determines the intervention modalities most suitable to the needs of dependent people in terms of services and economic benefits) was 613 days, at the end of 2022, it was 295. It is planned that throughout the year 2023, the period will shorten to 180 days.

In this same area, in 2022 the fees for services in the areas of dependency, disability, mental health, childhood and adolescence, foster care and adoption, early care, support for autonomy, drug addiction, HIV/AIDS and guardianships increased a 3%, assuming a direct investment in the working conditions of professionals in care services for people. It gave more stability to this group and placed the people care as one of the fundamental pillars of the welfare state. This increase was applied retroactively from January 1, 2022.

### **Collaboration with local authorities**

The Government of the Catalonia establishes inter-administrative coordination and cooperation agreements with supra-municipal local authorities, counties and municipalities with more than twenty thousand inhabitants in order to guarantee co-responsibility and continuity in the provision of social services. It is called “Programme Contract”, which ultimately represents a support tool at the local level.

The new Programme Contract 2022-2025 has a budget of 1,400 MEUR, compared to 925 MEUR in the previous multiyear contract. It prioritizes the reinforcement of professional teams, with the progressive inclusion of the figure of the ‘support technician’. It also gives priority to services that promote personal autonomy, such as advanced remote care, and places special emphasis on the fight against homelessness. In addition, the new Programme Contract will boost other services in the field of active aging or socio-educational intervention for children and adolescents at risk. This 2023 we will allocate 333.4 MEUR.

In relation to homelessness, the Government main policy is the [Action Framework to address homelessness](#). It is planned to allocate 98 MEUR until 2025. The goal is to face the homelessness problem.

### **Next Generation EU funds**

The Next Generation EU funds represent a key opportunity to bring Catalonia on par with the most advanced European countries in terms of social protection. With the implementation of the projects financed with these European funds, the changes in the citizen-centred care model and the promotion of personal autonomy promoted by the Ministry can be accelerated. It also allows the application of social inclusion policies with the capacity to reverse the situations of inequality that the pandemic has exacerbated, and at the same time represents an opportunity to introduce technological and innovation improvements both in direct care and in the information systems of the social field.

With an investment of €397 million until 2026, the funds will be distributed through the following instruments: construction and rehabilitation projects of residential centres and day care for the elderly, people with disabilities or with mental health problems; technological projects to transform social services that allow progress and accelerate the digital transformation plan in which the Ministry is immersed; projects and investments of local authorities; and a call for grants addressed to all entities, companies and socio-economic agents that work in the field of social policies and whose priority objectives, among others, are to reform the care and long-term care system, strengthen high-quality home care, continue promoting actions that favour accessibility, improve the energy and technology of child care centres or promote the energy transition in youth facilities.

### **Conclusions**

Within a context of population aging and post-pandemic crisis, the Government of Catalonia has been increasing the social budget in recent years. In the field of social services, most relevant politics are the **support for families in a situation of vulnerability**, especially with dependent **children**, to reduce poverty, exclusion and inequality, with protection networks such as **guaranteed citizenship income** and tackling **homelessness**

It is also important to mention the efforts made to promote personal autonomy with a shock plan to create new places and reduce waiting lists. On the other hand, the reactivation of the **National Pact for the Rights of People with Disabilities**, in accordance with the United Nations Convention, is also one of the current challenges, in order to guarantee the rights of people with disabilities and their full inclusion in all areas.

Cooperation with **local authorities** and the **Third Sector** organizations is fundamental, and in this sense, the Ministry of Social Rights of the Government of Catalonia supports both local authorities and social care entities.