**CONTRIBUTION OF CARITAS SPAIN TO THE 2024 ANNUAL REPORT OF THE SPECIAL RAPPORTEUR ON EXTREME POVERTY AND HUMAN RIGHTS**

**"ERADICATING POVERTY IN A POST-GROWTH CONTEXT: PREPARING FOR THE NEXT DEVELOPMENT GOALS"**

**1.INTRODUCTION**

The drop in economic activity caused by the pandemic, followed by the impact of the inflation crisis, have visibly shown the income instability and insufficiency of many people in Spain. However, this trend is especially acute for people who access the labour market with an informal or short-term contract, with low salaries and a limited access to social benefits. Therefore, a relevant share of working people lives from day to day, with great challenges to face unforeseen expenses and with severe difficulties to meet expenses related to housing, food, energy, water, medications…

Since 2020 and until the date of the present document (the latest regulation was published on December 27th, 2023 with validity throughout 2024[[1]](#footnote-1)), several emergency social measures have been adopted in regards to the Access to an adequate housing, suspension of evictions and the prohibition to cut supplies such as energy and water, as well as measures regarding food, transportation, social benefits, employment and others[[2]](#footnote-2).

These measures have been insufficient for vulnerable people, suffering situations of exclusion and inequality in our country. The following sections outline the aforementioned human rights violations. Further detail is available in **FOESSA’s publication “Income and expenses: an equation that conditions our quality of life”**[[3]](#footnote-3) (Analysis and Perspectives 2023).

**2. ACCESS TO A DECENT EMPLOYMENT, SOCIAL CARE, FOOD AND HOUSING**

The 11% rise in income in Spain since 2008 pales in comparison with the inflationary context of recent months, **which has caused family expenses to increase by 30%.** This disparity is even more pronounced in the poorest households, considering that the increase in income of these families since 2008 has been virtually non-existent (0.5%).

This disconformity between growth in income and expenses – in addition to the high percentage of poor workers (11.7%) and the low coverage capacity of the minimum income schemes (only 44% of the population that live in conditions of severe poverty have access to them) - has overwhelmed the spending capacity of many families who already entered this period in a vulnerable situation. In fact, **extreme poverty affects 8.1% of households (3.8 million people)**.

Three significant statistics stand out:

* The percentage of families that fall below the extreme poverty threshold once housing expenses and essential supplies are met stands at 16.8%.
* Families dedicated roughly 54% of its expenses to essential goods and supplies in 2006. In 2022, the percentage of household expenditures in housing and its essential supplies, food and transportation rose to 60%, therefore shortening available income for the remaining necessities and goods. Lower income households spend more than 6 of every 10 available euros in housing and food.
* 16% of tenants currently allocate more than 60% of their income to pay for the rent, suffering acute financial shortcomings.

**Access to a decent employment:**

* The percentage of temporary contracts in the Spanish labour market began to decline in the beginning of 2022 and stood at 17.3% in the first trimester of 2023, the lowest temporary employment rate in record. In absolute terms, there are 1,311,000 fewer temporary contracts than 2021 (a 32% decrease since the final months of 2021).
* The percentage of part time workers continues to evidence a gender gap. Since 2004, the percentage of female workers with part-time jobs has ranged between 20 and 25%, while these percentages have fluctuated between 5 and 8% among male workers.
* 15% of employed workers have wages that are lower than the 11€ per hour threshold, and are therefore considered low-income workers. This percentage is greater among women than men, with an approximate 10% gap. The percentage is also relevant among employees under 25 years old, due to their shorter professional career.
* Spain also stands out for suffering from one of the greatest working poverty rates: during the years spanning between 2004 and 2022 the minimum rate has been 10.1% in 2006, reaching a maximum of 13.1% in 2015. Since its peak, data shows a gradual reduction of working poverty rate until 2022 (11.7%). In contrast, the EU27 average has never surpassed the 10% plateau (reaching its peak at 9.8% in 2016). The most recent available data shows an 8.5% average in 2022.
* Households with minor dependants have a greater risk of working poverty (15% in 2022) than households composed entirely of adults (8%).

**Access to social benefits**

* The upward trend of total spent amount in guaranteed minimum income (hereinafter “GMI”) – “renta minima garantizada” in Spanish - observed since 2008 was interrupted in 2018, when it suffered a 1.7% decrease. Although the upward trend continued in 2019 and 2020, we witnessed a severe decrease in 2021, specially in the number of recipients, which was the lowest since 2014.
* Given that Spain has 4.8 million people living below the severe poverty threshold (perceiving less than 40% of the median income according to the 2021 survey on living conditions of the Spanish National Institute of Statistics) and only slightly over 600,000 people received the GMI, the current coverage rate is calculated at 13%. Therefore, 87% of people in conditions of severe poverty have not been able to access the GMI, which sustains the thesis of a poor coverage of the measure.
* The Independent Fiscal Responsibility Authority (the “autoridad independiente de responsabilidad – AIREF” in Spanish) has published several reports[[4]](#footnote-4) and has recently stated that of the 808,000 households that can be beneficiaries of the GMI as of December 2022, only 35% were. Only 47% of the budgeted amount to spend on this measure was being executed. In addition, the processing time stood at 120 days in 2022 (a 60% increase compared to 2021) and the refusal rate at 69%. 58% of the households that would benefit from this measure had not requested it in December 2022 (non take-up).
* In June 2023, there were 1,868,172 recipients of the Minimum Vital Income, which implies a coverage rate of 44% of the population suffering from severe poverty.
* In 2021, the minimum wage (“Salario Mínimo Interprofesional” in Spanish) was set at €965.00, while the “public income indicator for multiple effects” (IPREM in Spanish) reached €564.90. The average amount of the minimum vital income per recipient, €490.81 per month, represented only 50.9% of the minimum wage and 86.9% of IPREM. These figures underline the limited capacity of these benefit schemes to provide meaningful financial support to individuals and families in need, highlighting the need to reconsider their design and scope.

**Access to adequate housing**

* The most recent Household Budget Survey[[5]](#footnote-5) (2022) showed that families in Spain destined in 2021 almost one third of their resources, on average, to pay for housing and basic supplies.
* It currently requires que equivalent to 7.7 years of gross annual income to but a house, in contrast with the 2.9 years that were necessary in 1987.
* In merely five years, the percentage of families that rent their house has notably increased, reaching 6.6% in 2022 (more than 1.2 million houses).
* There is a notable increase in the number of families living in unsafe housing conditions. Reaching 23.2% in 2021. Therefore, more than 4.2 million households live in shared apartments, in rented apartments with no lease agreements or are in a situation of risk of eviction.
* In parallel, the number of families living in inadequate housing conditions – those houses that do not meet minimum decent conditions for daily life – has greatly increased, from 25% in 2018 to 30% in 2021 (5.6 million families).

**Access to energy and water**

* The number of families[[6]](#footnote-6) who could not maintain their home at an adequate temperature increased by 189% compared to 2008. The electricity bills increased 82%, while the cost of liquid fuels that supply heating systems increased 180%.

**Access to adequate food**

* On average, 16% of household incomes are destined to purchasing food for daily consumption.
* The 20% of the population with the lowest income has reduced their spending on food by 6%, with a significant impact on their health and their long term well-being and food security.
* The consumer price index (IPC in Spanish) has risen by 24% between 2021 and 2023 in the food section, further stressing all household economies. Both bread and fresh fruit have experienced an increase of over 20%. Coffee, cocoa and infusions (34%) and legumes (36%) have increased by over one third of their price. Likewise, eggs, potatoes and milk have experienced a significant increase – greater than 40%, while sugar and oils have suffered a spike of over 60%.

**3. THE PARTICULAR LIVING CONDITIONS OF MIGRANTS AND THEIR FAMILIES**

People of immigrant origin with non-UE nationality are overrepresented in Spain among the population in a situation of social exclusion. **Representing 15% of the total population, they are 25% of the population in risk of social exclusion**.

In addition, the situation of irregular or undocumented migrants – people of non-EU nationality who do not have an authorization to reside in Spain – is especially dire in terms of their poverty and social exclusion rates, according to **the FOESSA publication “Violation of rights: People in an irregular administrative situation” (Focus 2023)**[[7]](#footnote-7).

Due to the absence of official figures to determine the number of undocumented migrants in Spain, Caritas has generated an estimate based on the volume of people in this situation that it accompanies. During 2022, **approximately 32% of the population assisted by Caritas were undocumented migrants (roughly 500,000 people)**, a 43% increase compared to the figure estimated in 2019.

The following data has been extracted from the survey on integration and social needs developed by the Foessa foundation and included in the study “**Excluded society and the right to income**[[8]](#footnote-8)” (Analysis and perspectives 2021):

* While, among the Spanish citizens the percentage of social exclusion is calculated at 26%, for people of non-EU origin this percentage rises to 68%, and to 81% among undocumented migrants.
* While 15% of Spanish citizens suffer from severe poverty, this percentage rises to 34% among people of non-EU origin and reaches 56% for undocumented migrants.

 **Access to adequate housing**

* 7 out of 10 undocumented migrants have to assume excessive housing expenses, making it very difficult for them to face other essential expenses.
* The lack of stable and sufficient income often forces many undocumented migrants to live in inadequate housing conditions (17% with unhealthy situations) or in severe overcrowding (35%).
* 24% of undocumented migrants live in unsafe housing conditions (compared to 11% of people with non-UE origin but with a residence permit and 5% of Spanish citizens).

**Access to healthcare:**

* 12% of undocumented migrants live in a household with someone who lacks health coverage (compared to 3% of non-EU national with a residence permit).
* 17% live in households with serious nutritional issues: someone has frequently suffered hunger in the last 10 years or is currently suffering hunger.
* 57% live in households with an economic situation that forces them to avoid purchasing certain medication, diets or medical treatments.

As a response to this number of undocumented migrants and the impact that their administrative situation has on their lives, a draft legislation that introduces an extraordinary and general regularization of undocumented migrants is currently being entertained by the Spanish Congress. This initiative has been presented to parliament by the procedure of the “Popular Legislative Iniciative”, after collecting a minimum of 500,000 endorsements from Spanish citizens.

**4. RECOMMENDATIONS**

1. Concrete and effective state actions to **guarantee access to adequate and decent housing**. On one hand, it is decisive to increase the number social houses available for rent, which would provide families with an accessible and safe alternative to obtain quality housing at an affordable price. On the other hand, to increase the number of emergency housing, to guarantee an alternative for families in desperate need. Therefore, no one would be left homeless due to economic difficulties. In application of the UN General Comment No. 7, suspend all evictions of vulnerable people as long as there is no alternative housing provided public administration.

2. **Plan and coordinate the labour policies focused on groups that find greater barriers to access the labour market**. Always considering the personal and family situation of the employee and facilitating his/her conciliation of family and work life. Ensure access to training programs that are not entirely online – to avoid risks of digital gap – and to training programs accompanied by socio-educative activities for people from priority specific groups.

3. **Address job insecurity from a comprehensive approach**. To achieve this goal, we must draw a road map that follows current path of reducing temporary contracts and part-time jobs, allowing more people to access full-time jobs and all their inherent benefits. To continue facing precariousness, wages must also improve, ensuring that they are fair and that they adequately reflect the workers contribution to society.

4. **Entertain the necessary legislative amendments to ensure that domestic workers** – the vast majority of whom are women – **enjoy equal labour and social security rights**.

5. The minimum vital income requires a regulatory reform, with the following objectives:

* Facilitate access to this social scheme and generate conditions for ex officio concessions.
* Increase the coverage of this social scheme, **aiming to reach the entire population in a situation of severe poverty (adjust the concept of “unit of coexistence” and the calculation of wealth…), including undocumented migrants**.
* **A system of minimum guaranteed income must necessarily** **offer sufficient monetary amounts**, calculated in accordance with both the real prices and the current cost of living.

The public administration must guarantee face-to-face service, since the digital gap creates barriers to access right if the only alternative is the electronic administration. The most vulnerable people sometimes do not have the devices, internet connection or skills to be able to access these benefits by telematic means.

Finally, it is necessary that both the Central Government and the Spanish regional governments commit to a system of minimum guaranteed income, entertaining the complementarity between the benefits provided by each of the levels of government.

6. Drastically reduce the scenarios in which migrants are in an undocumented status while residing in Spain, by the following means:

* **Introducing a regulation that foresees an extraordinary and general regularization of undocumented migrants**, to alleviate the current situation of almost 500,000 undocumented migrants living in Spain.
* Revising and adjusting the Spanish immigration policies and regulations in order to **promote migration possibilities (safe and legal pathways), and facilitates access to residence permits,** contemplating opportunities beyond the labour market.

1. Royal Decree 8/2023, that approves measures to face the economic and social consequences of the conflicts in Ukraine and the Middle Ease, and to alleviate the effects of the drought (in Spanish): <https://www.boe.es/diario_boe/txt.php?id=BOE-A-2023-26452>

 [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. Royal Decree 6/2022, that approves urgent measures as part of the national plan to face the economic and social consequences of the war in Ukraine (in Spanish): <https://www.boe.es/buscar/act.php?id=BOE-A-2022-4972>

Royal Decree 11/2022, that approves and extends the validity of certain measures to face the economic and social consequences of the war in Ukraine, to tackle situations of economic and social vulnerability (in Spanish): <https://www.boe.es/buscar/act.php?id=BOE-A-2022-10557>

Royal Decree 20/2022, that approves measures to face the economic and social consequences of the war in Ukraine and to support the recovery of the island of La Palma and other vulnerable situations and Royal Decree 5/2023, that approves and extends the validity of certain measures to face the economic and social consequences of the war in Ukraine and to support the recovery of the island of La Palma and other vulnerable situations (in Spanish): <https://www.boe.es/buscar/act.php?id=BOE-A-2022-22685> [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. <https://www.caritas.es/main-files/uploads/2023/11/CA%CC%81RITAS-analisis-y-persectivas-2023-digital-.pdf> (In Spanish) [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. 2021: <https://www.airef.es/wp-content/uploads/2022/08/IMV/OPINION-AIREF-IMV.pdf> (in spanish)

2022: <https://www.airef.es/es/centro-documental/segunda-opinion-sobre-el-ingreso-minimo-vital/> (in spanish) [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. <https://ine.es/prensa/epf_2022.pdf> (in spanish) [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. 2022 survey of living conditions: <https://ine.es/prensa/ecv_2022.pdf> (in spanish) [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
7. <https://www.foessa.es/main-files/uploads/sites/16/2023/09/Focus-PSAI.pdf> (in Spanish) [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
8. <https://www.caritas.es/main-files/uploads/2021/10/analisis-y-persectivas-2021.pdf> (in Spanish) [↑](#footnote-ref-8)