



ANNUAL REPORT 2023

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

MARCH 2024

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Annual Report 2023

Executive summary

“The Government has not adapted to a Catalan population of eight million”

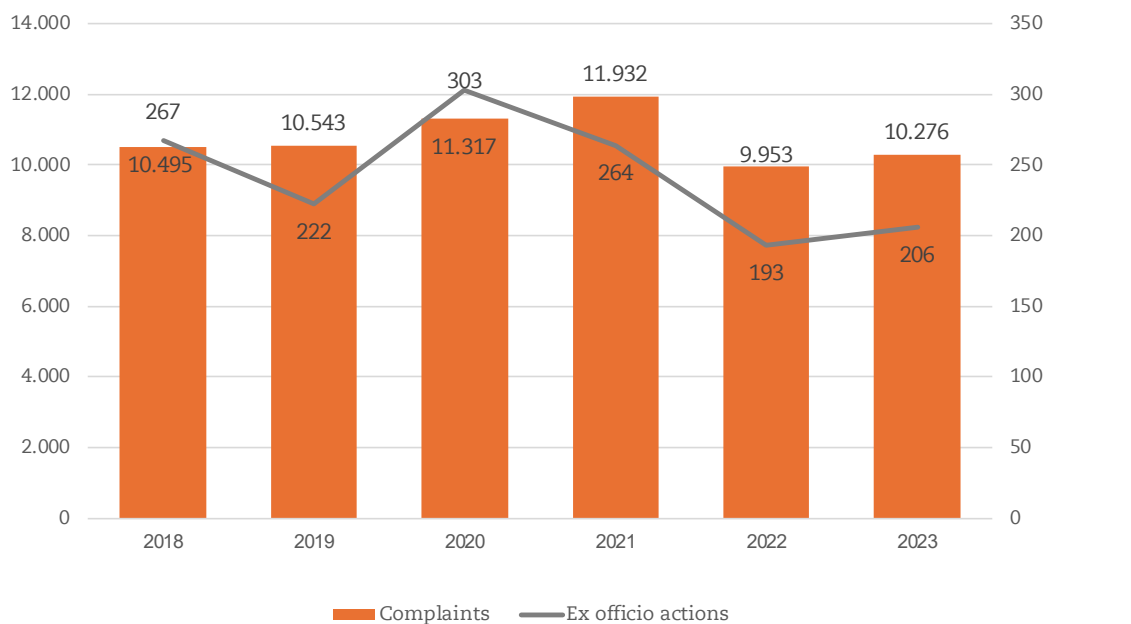
Each year, the Catalan Ombudsman (Síndic de Greuges de Catalunya) presents their report to the Catalan Parliament detailing the actions carried out by the institution during the year.

In 2023, the institution consolidated the approach it initiated the previous year to adopt a more cross-cutting, global and transformative perspective with regard to complaints and ex officio actions, while adopting a comprehensive approach to the problems reported by interested parties.

With the aim of making the institution a tool for transforming the Administration of the Government of Catalonia (Generalitat) and its public policy, this year’s report not only includes the institution’s internal activity, but also contains an analysis of the main problems facing people living in Catalonia and the capacity of administrations to respond to them.

Last year, 17,992 people contacted the institution, initiating 21,938 actions, including complaints, enquiries and ex officio actions. The number of complaints received has stabilised at around 10,000 a year, after the increase during the pandemic.

Graph 1. Trend in complaints to the Catalan Ombudsman office and ex officio actions (2018-2023)

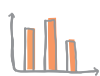


Source: Catalan Ombudsman office.

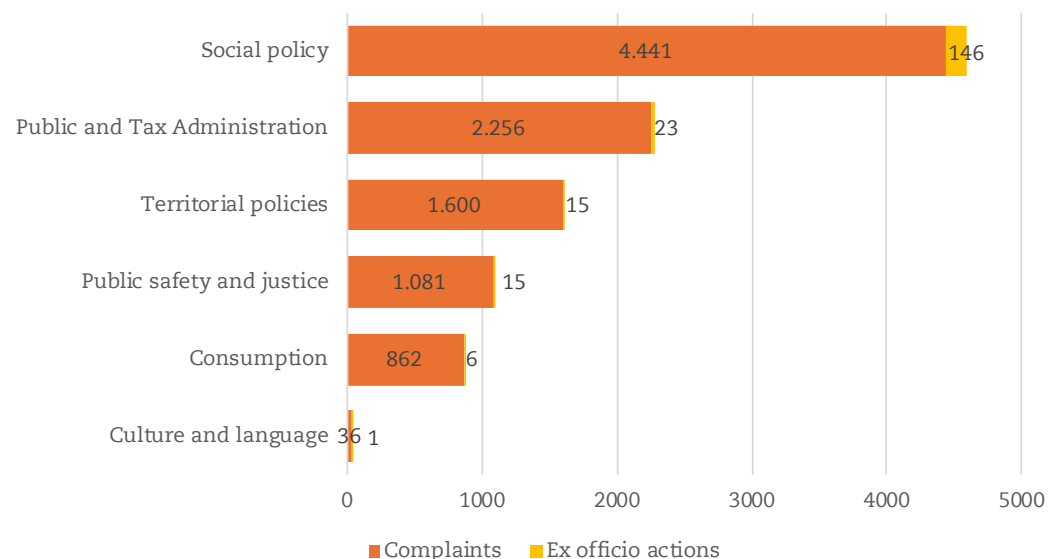
1. The five main challenges posed by the social context in Catalonia

► The large number of complaints related to social policies point to the difficulties administrations have in adequately meeting the population's social needs.

Social policy is the institution's main field of activity, representing 43.8% of all complaints and ex officio actions, in line with the trend in recent years.



Graph 2. Complaints to the Catalan Ombudsman office and ex officio actions by field of activity (2023)



Source: Catalan Ombudsman office.

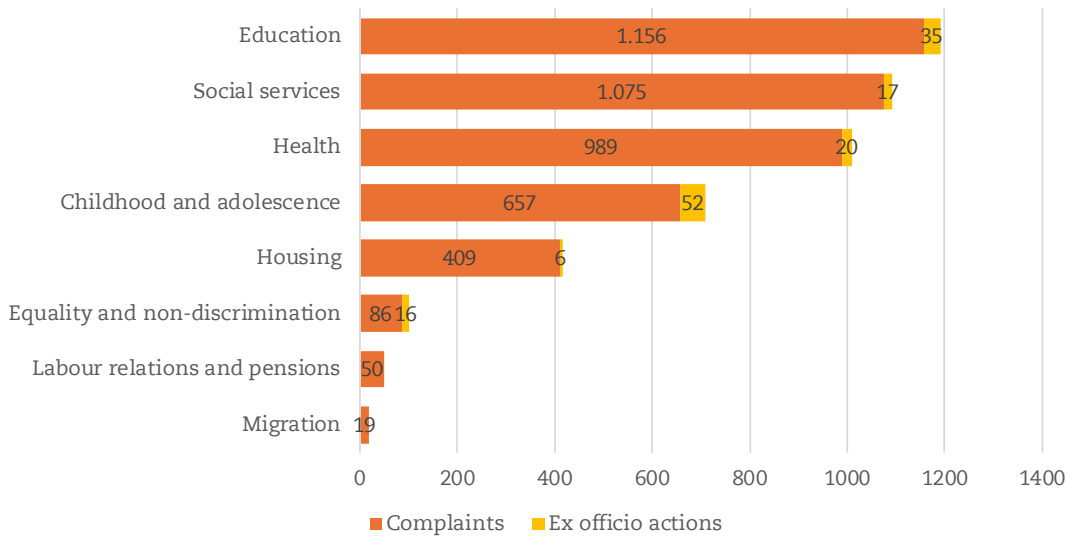
Notable in this field are complaints about education, social services and health.

■ Most of the complaints about education are related to admissions, scheduling and school segregation (23.6%), the state of facilities (16.6%) and inclusive education (10.7%).

■ Complaints regarding social services mostly refer to lack of a ruling or contested rulings on aid and benefits (62.6%) and lack of places in residential care services (8.1%).

■ In relation to health, the main cause of complaints is the treatment and information received (43%) and waiting lists (23%).

Graph 3. Complaints to the Catalan Ombudsman and ex officio actions related to social policy (2023)



Source: Catalan Ombudsman office.

The institution's second field of activity is the Public Administration, which includes complaints regarding the civil service (especially recent stabilisation processes) and administrative procedures, referring to the slowness of the Administration in resolving procedures and the need to provide more accompaniment for people when carrying out procedures.

This report discusses the five main social transformations affecting Catalonia and the challenges they pose for public policy.

1.1. Demographic growth and the challenge posed to the sizing and quality of service

► The population of Catalonia grew by almost two million people from 2000 to 2023, an increase of 27.8% (higher than the average for Spain, 17.2%, and the European Union, 4.3% in 2022), placing it among the countries with the highest demographic growth in recent decades.

This growth has increased pressure on public welfare programmes and services and obliged the Administration to rapidly and substantially increase its capacity for intervention in response to greater demand.

Both growing pressure on welfare services and the rapid roll-out of public policies due to demographic growth can have negative impacts on quality of service:

- In the field of education, the rise in student numbers in recent decades (up 38.4%, much higher than the state-wide average, which is 13.7%, and the European average, down 8.0%) has required a rapid, significant rise in teacher numbers, while lacking sufficiently robust mechanisms to guarantee their training. **In March 2023, 15.1% of teacher absences were not covered by substitutes.**

- In the field of health, the public health system has had difficulties covering certain specialities due to a lack of medical staff.

1.2. Migration and the challenge of social cohesion

Given the lowest birth rates in decades, **a major part of this demographic growth is due to foreign migrants (71.2% of the total).**

Migration has had a greater weight in Catalonia than in Spain as a whole or in the European Union: currently, **16.3% of the Catalan population are foreign nationals, higher than the state (11.7%) or European (8.4%) average.**

The social inequalities experienced by the migrant population means they suffer unequal access to different social welfare opportunities and limited opportunities for integration.

The foreign population, despite experiencing greater precarity, make less use of public services and receive fewer government benefits:

- They have a three times greater risk of poverty (50% compared to 14.7% of Spanish nationals).

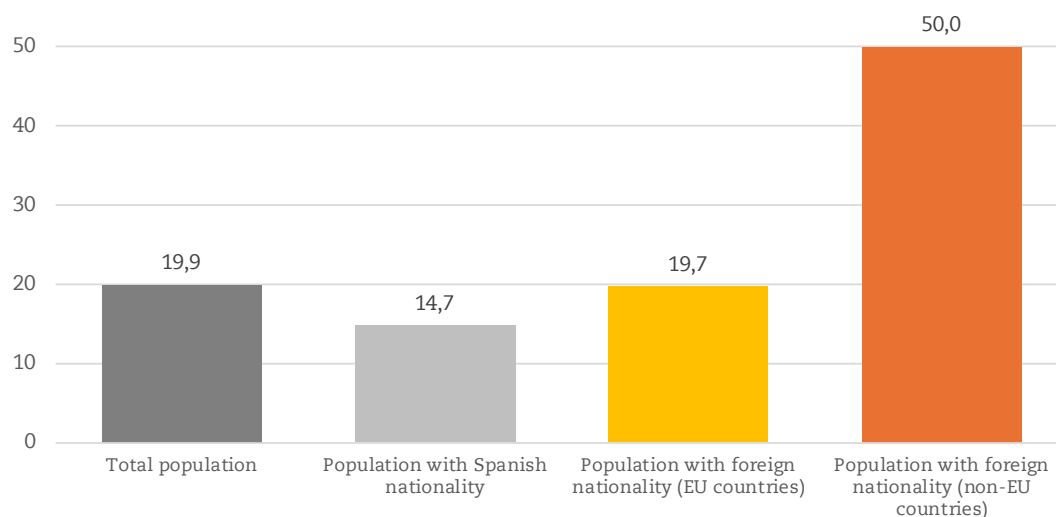
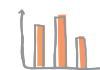
- They have double the rate of unemployment (16.6% compared to 8.2%).

- They find it twice as hard to access housing (29% of the foreign population are on the subsidised housing application register compared to 13.2% of Spanish nationals).

- They receive half the amount of benefits: **fewer foreign nationals at risk of poverty receive the citizens' guaranteed income benefit (RGC) than Spanish nationals in the same situation (3.7% compared to 7.5%).**

- They are three times less likely to attend preschool education (14.9% compared to 52.4%) while their school dropout rates are three times higher (38.2% compared to 13.0%).

Graph 4. Risk of poverty by nationality in Catalonia (2022)



Source: Statistical Institute of Catalonia (Idescat).

Table 1. Number of citizens' guaranteed income beneficiaries by social situation in Catalonia (2022, 2023)



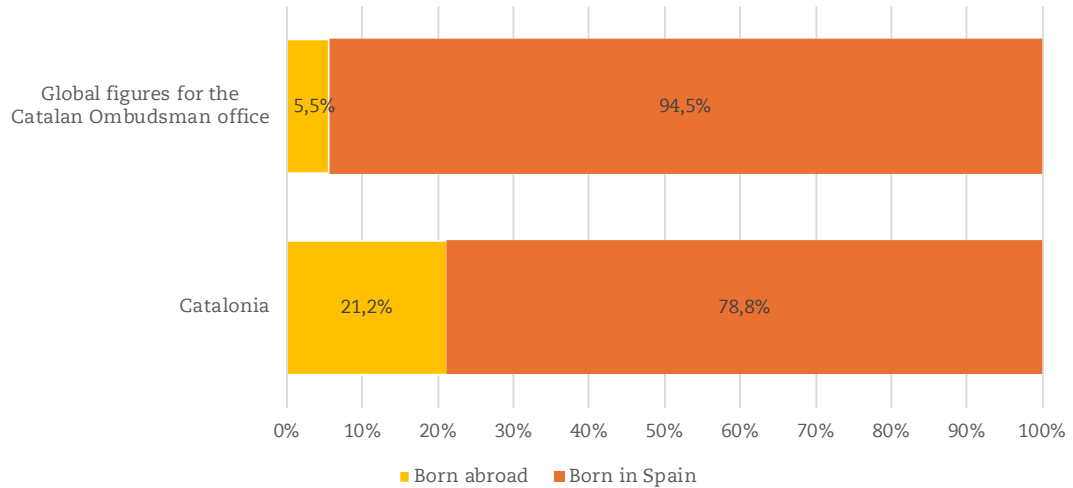
Beneficiaries able to work	Beneficiaries 2022	% of total recipients/beneficiaries	% of total population	% of population at risk of poverty	Beneficiaries 2023 (November)
Total	54.047	100,0	1,20	6,0	51.771
Spanish nationality (with national ID card (DNI))	39.320	72,8	1,10	7,5	37.874
Foreign nationality (with foreign identification number (NIE))	14.727	27,2	1,59	3,7	13.897

Source: Directorate General for Social Benefits, Catalan Ministry of Social Rights.

Despite their situation, vulnerable groups tend to make less use of the Catalan Ombudsman office to defend their rights. Thus, for example, people born abroad presented only 5.5% of complaints, despite their demographic weight (21.2%).



Graph 5. Percentage of complaints presented to the Catalan Ombudsman office by complainant's place of birth (2023)



Source: Catalan Ombudsman office.

Aware that people born abroad do not usually use the institution to lodge their complaints, often because they do not know the service exists, more *ex officio* actions were started to study problems especially affecting them (**72.8% of *ex officio* actions in 2023, compared to 67.9% in 2022**).

1.3. Rising poverty and the challenge of social mobility

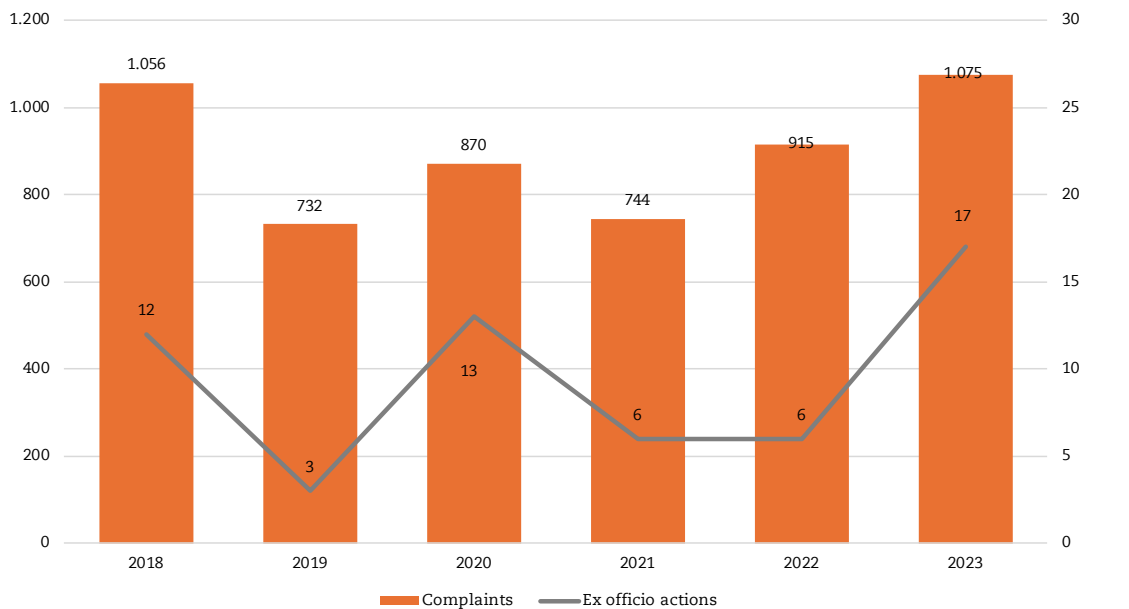
► In recent decades, poverty among the population has risen due to the economic crisis of 2008 and the pandemic, as well as the overall global situation producing higher inflation.

■ Bearing inflation in mind, over the period 2010-2021, per capita gross domestic product (GDP) fell by 3.9% and the gross average wage by 2.2% (while prices rose). The cost of living has risen faster than family incomes.

Catalonia has one of the highest rates of severe material and social deprivation in Europe (8.0% in 2022), slightly higher than the average for Spain (7.7%) and the European Union (6.7%). However, some indicators have improved in recent years, such as the unemployment rate and the number of recipients of the RGC, both of which have dropped.

With regard to actions by the Catalan Ombudsman office, **since the pandemic, there has been an upward trend in complaints about actions by the social services in relation to situations of vulnerability.**

Graph 6. Complaints to the Catalan Ombudsman office and ex officio actions related to social services (2018-2023)



Source: Catalan Ombudsman office.

1.4. Population ageing and the challenge to the sustainability of the welfare state

► In two decades, the percentage population of over-65s has risen from 17.2% in 2003 to 19.4% in 2023. This proportion is forecast to rise to 28.9% by 2050. In 1980, the elderly population represented 11%.

Population ageing increases the need for social services. The Administration has to meet this need, while the percentage population whose taxes finance social provision is shrinking.

Low birth rates heighten population ageing and complicate the demographic renewal needed to ensure the future sustainability of our welfare state. On a positive note, migration, mostly involving working-age people among whom birth rates are higher, has helped contain the rising proportion of elderly people in situations of dependency.

In a society with an increasing number of elderly people, there needs to be greater awareness of ageism, which considers old people to be less able, incapable of making decisions and an inconvenience, while providing little social value.

■ Ageism has serious consequences for elderly people and society in general: it has a negative impact on people's health and well-being and can lead to social and work exclusion and even lack of consideration in terms of access to social and medical care.

1.5. Climate change and the challenge of sustainability

Demographic growth has also caused production and consumption to rise, increasing the use of fossil fuels, waste generation and greenhouse gas emissions, among other problems. At the same time, the model of economic growth has been prioritised, whatever its global environmental impact. All these factors have led to climate change, producing meteorological phenomena such as droughts, flooding and heatwaves.

- Since 1950, the average temperature in Catalonia has risen by 1.8°C. The years 2022 and 2023 were the hottest in this period. Taking August as a reference, the average temperature in the city of Barcelona was 18.1°C in the period 1991-2020, rising to 25.8°C from 2021-2023.

- The rise in average temperatures has been accompanied by a change in precipitation patterns in recent decades. **The Meteorological Service of Catalonia notes 2022-2023 was one of the five driest periods in Catalonia since 2000.** In the case of the city of Barcelona, it was the driest in the last 110 years, and the driest since 1950 in the case of Figueres.

- Low precipitation levels have caused reservoir levels to drop. **In March 2024, water reserves were at 15%, their lowest level in the last two decades.**

The Catalan Ombudsman office has opened two specific ex officio actions, one analysing the actions of public administrations with regard to floods, which aims to identify municipalities that do not have a municipal action plan (PAM) in place for flooding (**only 170 municipalities currently have a valid PAM out of the 520 required to do so**), and another to analysis actions by public administrations to tackle the drought.

- With regard to drought actions, the institution issued recommendations on the information provided over the Catalan Water Agency (ACA) Drought Portal on municipalities with a drought emergency plan, and also on promoting measures to ensure all municipalities have accurate data on water use, by installing measurement devices (meters) if not already in place.

2. The five main shortcomings of public administrations in meeting these challenges

2.1. Excessively long response times by the Administration

► Demographic growth and population ageing contribute to greater pressure on public welfare services and the waiting times to access them.

■ Waiting times lessen the capacity to provide an adequate response to the population's social needs. This is a determining factor when it affects vulnerable groups, such as children and the elderly, when one considers what it means for a life that has only just started or for someone with little time left to live.

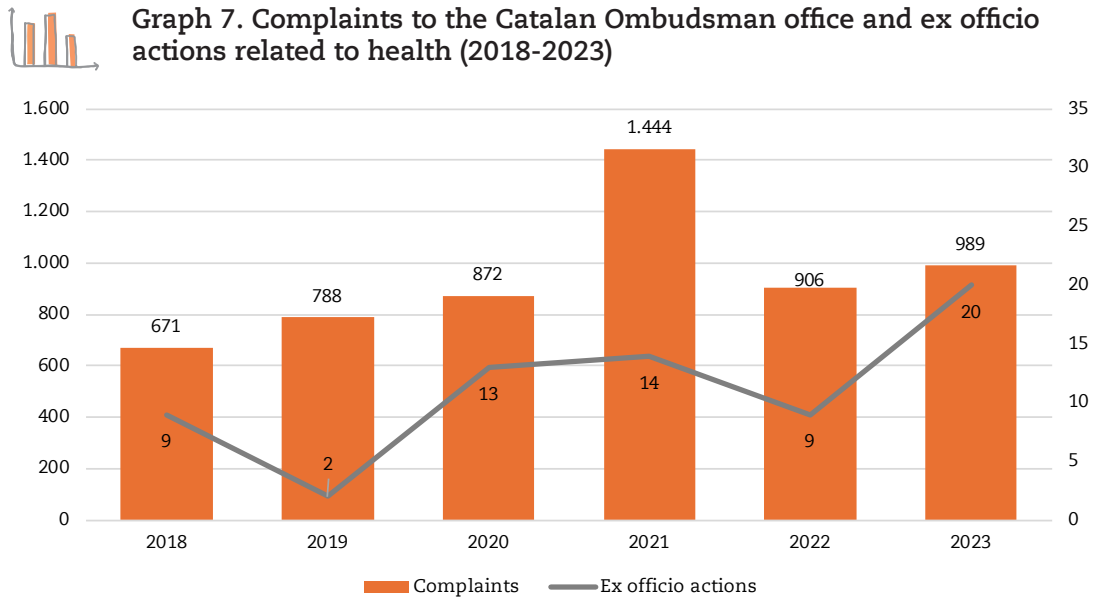
With regard to healthcare, waiting lists, which affect patients' quality of life, have not been significantly shortened in recent years

■ In October 2023, there were more people on waiting lists for surgery (195,270 people), diagnostic tests (170,262) and outpatient visits (477,088) than in 2017, although waiting times had not increased (141 days for surgery).

■ The maximum guarantee/reference times for certain types of surgery and other medical procedures, whose introduction was a major step forward in guaranteeing quality care, are often exceeded, despite guaranteed waiting times being mandatory.

■ **The rise in demand for mental healthcare, especially among children and young people, has led to a rise in the number of people receiving attention but also in the number of people on waiting lists.** From 2014-2022, the number of people attended to in adult mental health centres (CSMA) rose by 8.1%, and the number of children and young people attended to in child and young people's mental health centres (CSMIJ) rose by 30.4%. According to figures from 2023, pressure on healthcare meant there were nearly 3,500 children and young people on waiting lists, a higher number than in the previous year.

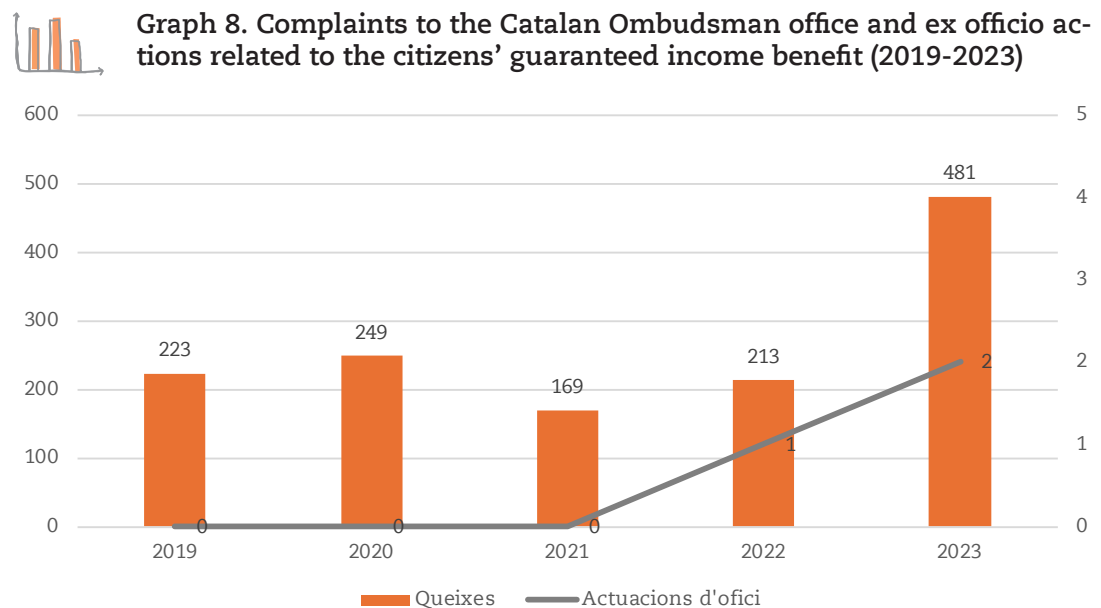
Complaints lodged with the Catalan Ombudsman office in relation to healthcare have been rising for some years. Of these, 25.5% are related to waiting lists (252).



Source: Catalan Ombudsman office.

Delays in processing benefits can reduce their effectiveness, as the social needs they are meant to cover go unmet during the waiting period

■ **Processing times for the citizens' guaranteed income benefit (RGC) are getting shorter.** In June 2023, the average time taken to rule on applications for this benefit for people able to work was 91 days, almost three months, a slight improvement over the previous year (110 days in June 2022). **However, complaints regarding the procedure for these benefits increased.**



Source: Catalan Ombudsman office.

■ Although delays in processing dependency benefits are shorter than in previous years, they generate discriminatory situations for people with disabilities or elderly people in situations of dependency. In October 2023, the average waiting time between applying for assessment and receiving a ruling on the degree of disability was 176 days (with 28,063 dependent persons awaiting assessment, 5,519 of them for longer than 6 months). For its part, the average waiting time for a ruling on disability or the individual care programme (PIA) was 112 days (with 72,010 people waiting for PIA assessment, and 66,583 waiting for longer than 6 months).

In the field of justice, legal delays, which have increased in the last decade due to an overburdened legal system, is a secondary victimisation factor that negatively affects the efficiency and effectiveness of judicial protection

■ Since 2014, there has been steady rise in the number of legal cases still open or pending processing at the end of the year in Catalonia. From 2014-2022, there was a 51.4% increase in the number of open cases (from 354,318 to 573,388), although the number of cases admitted during the year decreased by 14.1%. There was a rise in the rate of cases pending (ratio of cases pending to resolved cases) from 0.29 to 0.53, and in the congestion rate (from 1.27 to 1.54), while there was a drop in the resolution rate (ratio of cases resolved to admitted) from 1.02 to 0.97. In 2022, more cases were admitted (1,119,158) than resolved (1,080,379).

Table 2. Justice Administration indicators for Catalonia (2010-2022)



Cases	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022
Litigation rate per 1,000 inhabitants	191,7	182,2	181,4	175,8	173,3	166,6	113,0	119,0	122,8	132,5	111,8	130,1	143,6
Pending rate (pending/closed)	0,32	0,30	0,29	0,28	0,29	0,27	0,41	0,44	0,47	0,50	0,66	0,54	0,53
Resolution rate (resolved/admitted)	1,00	1,03	1,02	1,03	1,02	1,05	1,02	0,97	0,97	0,95	0,94	1,00	0,97
Congestion rate	1,32	1,30	1,29	1,27	1,27	1,25	1,39	1,43	1,46	1,49	1,65	1,53	1,54

Source: Catalan Ministry of Justice, Rights and Memory.

Lack of rulings on procedures within the legally established period is one of the most frequent causes of poor administration and one of the main reasons for complaints lodged with the institution

■ In 2023, the Catalan Ombudsman office received numerous complaints regarding delays to rulings on dependency benefits and applications for subsidies, and on the payment of subsidies for sustainable mobility (MOVES III) and installation of solar panels and other renewable energy elements for homes.

2.2. Insufficient coverage for certain public policies

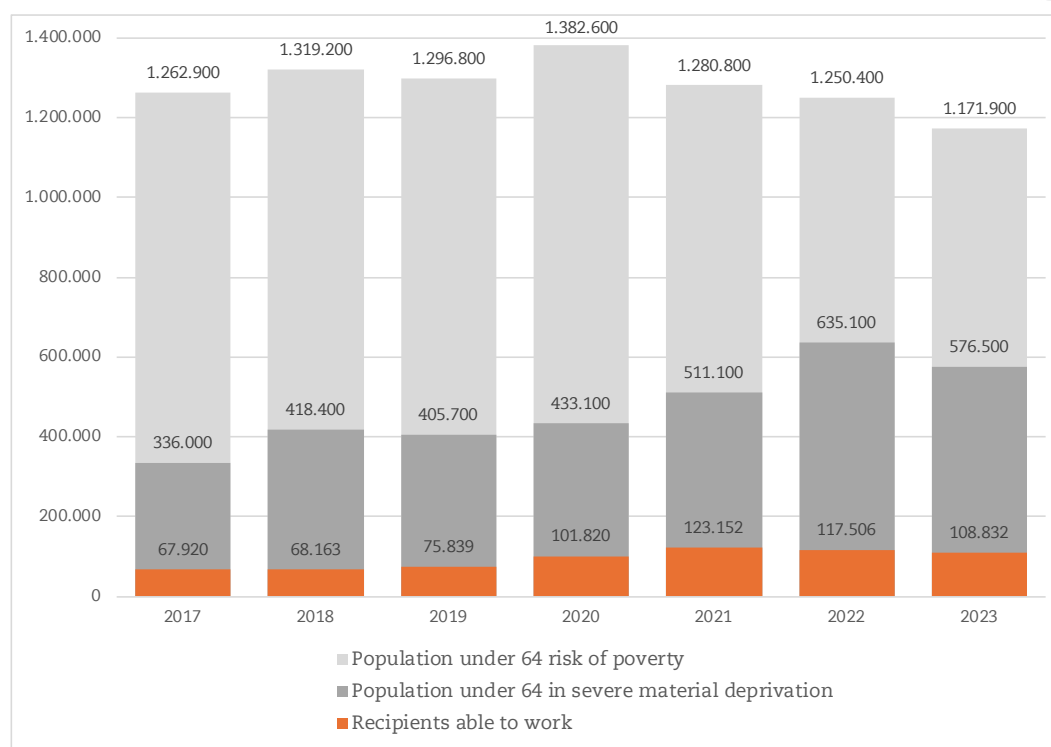
Demographic growth and rising poverty affect the coverage of public policy. Putting people at the centre and matching government actions to existing social needs involves ensuring social provisions (benefits, services, etc.) are available to the people who need them. Failure to ensure this coverage means social needs go unmet and government action is not effective enough.

Lack of coverage for benefits reduces their effectiveness as a measure to combat poverty

There are problems with the coverage from the RGC and it is failing to reach everyone in need.

■ Only 18.9% of people in situations of severe material deprivation among those able to work received the RGC in 2023. Including also beneficiaries of the minimum basic income (IMV), over half the population in situations of severe material deprivation do not receive an income from either the IMV or the RGC.

Graph 9. RGC coverage for situations of poverty (2017-2023)



	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023
People under 64 in severe material deprivation receiving the RGC (%)	20,2	16,3	18,7	23,5	24,1	18,5	18,9
People under 64 at risk of poverty receiving the RGC (%)	5,4	5,2	5,8	7,4	9,6	9,4	9,3

Source: Directorate General for Social Benefits, Catalan Ministry of Social Rights.

■ **Established requirements leave a large part of the population uncovered, with insufficient financial resources to meet their basic needs:** in September 2023, only 33% of applications from people able to work met the requirements (by way of example, 21% of rejections were due to difficulties in accrediting situations of need).

The lack of sufficient social rental housing stock makes it impossible to meet the needs of growing numbers of people applying for social housing, even those in situations of residential emergency

Despite a 19% increase in social housing over the 2016-2023 period, dwellings available for social policies managed by different public administrations or non-profit organisations represent only 1.0% of family homes (1.3% of main family homes), below the average for other European countries.

■ The total of 39,095 homes earmarked for social policy contrasts with the 94,572 applications in the Subsidised Housing Application Register (RSHPO) of Catalonia in September 2023.

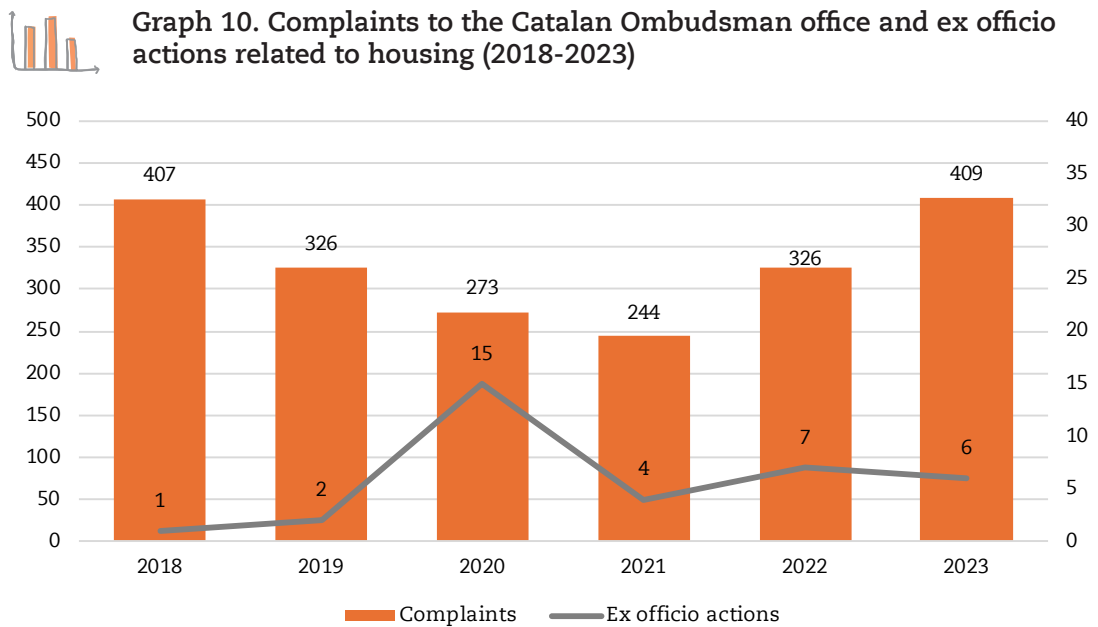
■ The RSHPO is no longer an ineffective instrument for allocating social housing due to the rise in demand. In 2022, 37,909 new applications for subsidised housing were registered, while only 1,723 such dwellings were built.

■ Policies for subsidised housing to sell have been implemented which have failed to boost a stable and permanent stock of social rental housing. In the last three decades, 66.4% of new subsidised housing has been intended for sale, 55.7% in the case of subsidised housing built by public developers. Only 25.8% has been earmarked for rental homes (38.7% in the case of public developers).

The lack of social housing means the emergency boards have difficulties tackling situations of social emergency: around 3,000 household units are waiting to be assigned a home.

Since the pandemic, the number of families approaching the Catalan Ombudsman office with complaints about housing policy has risen.

Graph 10. Complaints to the Catalan Ombudsman office and ex officio actions related to housing (2018-2023)



Source: Catalan Ombudsman office.

2.3. Obstacles to accessing the Administration and services

Vulnerability can limit people's ability to access the provisions they need to meet their social needs. Such obstacles include unfamiliarity, lack of skills for managing access to the provisions, restrictions to access, functional problems with the service and red tape.

The right to good administration is based, partly, on people's right to access administrations and services in conditions of equality and without unjustified restrictions

- Currently, there are still administrations, **although only a few, that continue to insist on prior appointments as an absolute and general requisite for accessing public service and registration offices.** In 2022, after the COVID-19 epidemic, the Catalan Ombudsman office suggested eliminating the obligatory prior appointment for accessing public service offices in person, a suggestion that has been adopted in many cases.

- **The progressive digitisation of administrative actions is a positive development, as it improves their efficiency, but it can also limit access to the Administration for vulnerable populations due to the digital divide.** This is especially acute when the right to in-person attention is not guaranteed and no accompaniment and assistance measures for electronic procedures are in place.

The failure to integrate different financial benefit systems creates inefficiency because it obliges people to find out about each different benefit available and carry out additional procedures, while generating unjustified incompatibilities in accessing them.

- **Both the RGC and IMV have a similar function, yet their lack of integration impedes the design of a consistent benefits system that combats poverty effectively** while being coherent and comprehensible to the public. According to figures from November 2023, a third of RGC beneficiaries also received the IMV at some time during the year (16,630 out of 51,771 beneficiaries).

■ When the RGC is withheld because the low income threshold has been exceeded, this may be because family members or other people in the household unit have received benefits in the period of calculation (the two months prior to applying for the benefit). **The incompatibility of the RGC with income from employment as well as from other public benefits aimed at combating situations of social exclusion, such as housing subsidies, restricts its coverage for real, existing needs.**

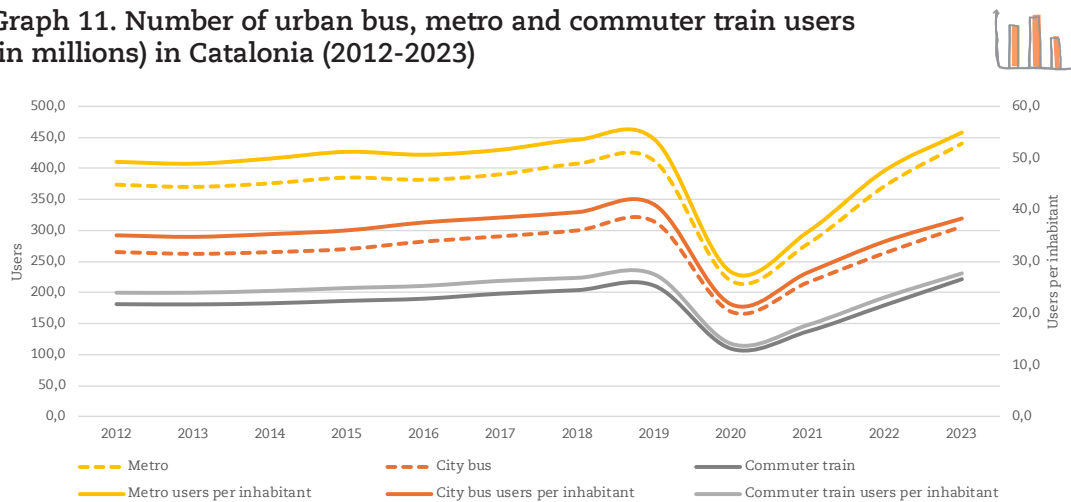
■ Administrations usually require the same documentation to check applicants meet the requirements established for different benefits.

Implementing benefit systems to ensure affordable public transport has not substantially increased user numbers, due to other obstacles in accessing them

Thanks largely to the end of the 2008-2013 recession, with a pause for the pandemic, **the number of passengers using public transport has increased, but this rise is relatively modest** if one bears in mind the greater affordability of transport services in recent years and also demographic growth.

■ Despite higher figures for metro and commuter train users in the last decade, the ratio of users per inhabitant for 2023 was largely similar to 2019, just before the pandemic.

Graph 11. Number of urban bus, metro and commuter train users (in millions) in Catalonia (2012-2023)



	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023
Metro	373,5	369,9	375,7	385,0	381,5	390,4	407,5	411,9	217,9	278,2	371,7	440,1
City bus	265,2	262,4	265,1	270,1	282,1	290,5	300,0	313,9	169,3	216,7	263,9	306,1
Commuter train	181	180,6	182,3	186,3	189,7	197,8	203,4	210,4	109,7	137,6	179,5	220,9
Metro users per inhabitant	49,3	49,0	50,0	51,3	50,7	51,7	53,6	53,7	28,0	35,8	47,7	55,0
City bus users per inhabitant	35,0	34,7	35,3	36,0	37,5	38,4	39,5	40,9	21,8	27,9	33,9	38,3
Commuter train users per inhabitant	23,9	23,9	24,3	24,8	25,2	26,2	26,8	27,4	14,1	17,7	23,0	27,6

Source: Idescat, Spanish Statistical Office (INE), Ferrocarrils de la Generalitat de Catalunya (FGC), Barcelona City Council.

■ **Universally accessible public transport is not fully guaranteed due to failure to adapt stations and services.** Although accessibility is protected by law, there are still commuter train and metro stations in Catalonia that are not adapted. Of the 163 stations in the metro network, 11 have still not been adapted.

■ **Operating incidents to commuter and regional trains mean public rail transport lacks reliability and quality.** The Catalan Ombudsman office receives complaints about delays, misinformation, lack of punctuality, lack of assistance, uncivil behaviour, breakdowns and more. These deficiencies in reliability also occur in road interurban transport by coach.

2.4. Deficiencies in accompanying and listening to people, especially the most vulnerable

Some vulnerable people require closer accompaniment to ensure their basic social needs are covered, either due to lack of personal autonomy or to revert structural conditions that generate situations of vulnerability.

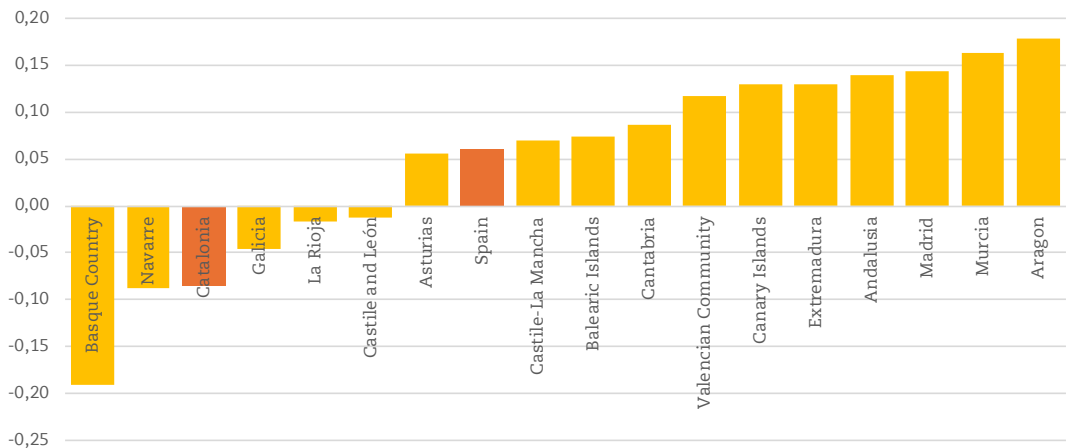
The intervention model for basic social services is still too controlling and welfare-based: it looks to cover the most basic needs and responding to social emergency situations, while failing to accompany families through a therapeutic approach to improve their autonomy

■ In many municipalities, the growing pressure on welfare services has negatively affected the quality and coverage of basic social services. To this must be added the greater bureaucratic burden, as social services are tasked with management work (such as accrediting situations of residential exclusion) by other areas. **Some social services have long waiting lists for first visits, little psychosocial follow-up for families and their children, and little time available for preventative work in the community.**

In the area of education, the PISA tests show that students do not feel adequately accompanied in their schooling by teachers or their families

■ Although the increase in resources for the education system means Catalonia is comparatively well placed with regard to teacher numbers, according to the 2022 PISA report, it is among the autonomous communities with the lowest levels of teacher support for students in their learning process. **A third of all students think teachers are not interested in students overall (37.8%) and do not provide additional support (37.1%).** At the same time, **over a third of students do not receive family accompaniment for their schooling**, and Catalonia is the autonomous community with the lowest rate of family support for students.

Graph 12. The teacher support index in maths for 15-year-old students by autonomous community (2022)



Source: Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD).

■ In recent years, the Catalan Ombudsman office has detected rising discontent among teachers, especially in the public sector. The increase in teacher absences in the public sector may be an indicator of this discontent. In the 2022/2023 academic year, the impact of the pandemic on teacher sick leaves having ended, a total of 38,146 substitute teachers were appointed, 19.4% more than in the 2019/2020 academic year, immediately before the pandemic.

Table 3. Appointments of substitute teachers by educational stage (2019-2023)

Academic year	Primary education	Secondary education	Total
2019/2020	20.644	11.294	31.938
2020/2021	32.672	18.461	51.133
2021/2022	32.821	18.380	51.201
2022/2023	24.235	13.911	38.146

Source. Catalan Ministry of Education.

■ Although school dropout rates (14.0%) are higher than the average for the state (13.6%) and Europe (9.6%), their trend has been downward in recent years, partly thanks to the increase in vocational training places. **Since 2008, the number of vocational training places has doubled and dropout rates halved, from 32.9% in 2008 to 14.0% in 2023.**

■ Despite this, there is still a high dropout rate after completing compulsory secondary education and also during the first year of intermediate vocational training. **In the 2022/2023 academic year, 4.9% of students who had studied the third year of compulsory secondary education the previous year and 21.7% of students who had studied the fourth year were not enrolled in the education system.**

■ Access to intermediate vocational training courses is no guarantee of preventing dropout. Indeed, in the 2022/2023 academic year, 24.0% of students in the first year of intermediate vocational training courses did not continue their training or switch to the post-compulsory baccalaureate or a higher-level vocational training course. These dropout rates are related to the failure to match supply and demand, and also to poor guidance for students in their step up to post-obligatory secondary education. **The larger vocational training offer should therefore be accompanied by other student mentoring and guidance measures.**

Citizens' duty to pay their taxes does not exonerate the Administration from its duty to guarantee a fair, redistributive, and not strictly confiscatory, tax system, which takes into account the taxpayer's financial means and needs

Administrations rigidly structure and apply taxes, often **lacking empathy regarding the multiple economic, social and personal factors that may affect people with tax debts**, who are willing to pay but unable to meet the conditions set by the Administration (periods, etc.). **Too often, the applicable sanctions are imposed with little attempt at trying to find alternative solutions.**

■ People's right to a tax system that does not deprive them of the financial resources needed for a dignified life is not always fully guaranteed. **The tax system should be compatible with the exemption of a basic minimum income, i.e. the amount people spend on their basic needs.** Although the law states that certain assets and rights cannot be seized, this provision does not go far enough.

■ **Recovery and, especially, enforcement proceedings should be conducted in the manner that is least costly for the persons concerned.** When the debtor asks to pay the debt in instalments, the Catalan Ombudsman office calls for amounts and periods to be set that are realistically and effectively affordable.

■ **Citizens have the right for the Tax Administration's actions to be carried out in the way that is least harmful to them**, avoiding gratuitous damage and unnecessary costs. In cases of supplementary settlements arising from verification procedures, the Administration often exceeds the period in which the statute of limitations applies, thus generating an additional settlement for late interest payment of up to four years, which could be avoided by more diligent Administration action.

A comprehensive approach to people's healthcare means also considering social aspects

People's health and their social situation are closely linked, yet there is still a clear separation between the healthcare and social service circuits, which impedes a global approach to meeting people's needs.

- Vulnerable people lacking a social environment have no guarantee of specific accompaniment. **Among other factors, comprehensive patient care means being well treated and accompanied throughout patients' time in the health system.**

- **There is a lack of coordination and integration between primary and specialist care.** For instance, complaints are received regarding specialists' rejection of referrals from primary care doctors.

Institutionalisation affects around 100,000 people in Catalonia, and this figure has been rising in recent years

Institutionalisation, or admission to residential care homes or institutions, often has negative effects on people's development, because it involves living and socialising in non-normalising environments while isolated, to a degree, from the social reality around them, potentially limiting their capacity for present and future social integration. Although there are clear differences in how different types of institution function, the people who suffer from these negative effects are children and adolescents in protection centres, the elderly or people with disabilities in care homes and prison inmates, among others.

- From 2010-2023, the number of institutionalised people rose by 10.9% (while the population grew by 6.5% over the same period). This increase is mainly explained by the rise in the elderly population living in residential care homes (around 7,000 more residents in the same period) and also the increase in children and adolescents in protection centres (around 2,500 more) and people with disabilities in care centres (around 2,500 more). By contrast, there has been a significant drop in prison numbers (around 3,000 fewer inmates) and also, to a lesser extent, the number of people admitted in long-stay psychiatric hospitals.



Table 4. Institutionalised population in Catalonia (2010-2023)

	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023
Prisons	10.520	10.513	10.062	9.818	9.294	8.810	8.566	8.367	8.367	8.391	7.884	7.746	7.713	7.994
Juvenile detention centres	285	295	264	245	252	221	207	230	252	295	180	219	210	-
Children in residential centres	2.749	2.701	2.764	2.706	2.685	2.672	2.975	3.487	5.681	5.677	4.246	4.168	5.004	4.859
Elderly care homes	54.541	56.023	56.724	57.486	58.294	58.639	59.458	59.635	59.888	60.197	60.954	60.977	61.295	-
Residential centres or homes for people with disabilities	7.891	8.301	8.197	9.277	9.081	9.326	9.358	9.477	9.510	9.683	9.879	9.886	10.069	-
Total	75.986	77.833	78.011	79.532	79.606	79.668	80.564	81.196	83.698	84.243	83.143	82.996	84.291	-
Long-stay psychiatric hospitals	-	2.471	-	2.282	-	2.172	-	2.223	-	2.297	-	-	-	-
Long-stay hospitals	-	8.966	-	8.820	-	8.720	-	8.553	-	8.825	-	-	-	-

Source: Ministry of Justice, Ministry of Social Rights and Ministry of Health of the Government of Catalonia.

■ Catalonia's institutionalisation levels are above Spain's average for children and adolescents in the protection system (53.6% in foster care in Catalonia compared to 46.7% in Spain) and also in the case of the elderly and people with disabilities using residential services (15.9% of residential care services for people in situations of dependency in Catalonia compared to 9.7% in Spain). By contrast, in the prison system, the inmate population in Catalonia (99 inmates for every 100,000 inhabitants) is below Spain's average (116.2), although levels are similar to the average for European Union countries. Indeed, the prison population in Catalonia is higher than in most Nordic and continental European countries and lower than most Eastern European countries.

The trend in institutionalisation is closely related to deficiencies in developing alternatives to institutionalisation.

■ In the case of the protection system, **the number of children in foster homes has remained stable over the last decade**, from 902 in 2012 to 937 in 2023. The number of foster families has not increased to the same extent as the child population in government protective care.

■ In the case of institutionalisation of the elderly over the last two decades, the number of places in day care centres has doubled, and family carer services have also been introduced for people in situations of dependency. Nevertheless, more progress needs to be made towards more comprehensive home healthcare models, to allow people with a minimum level of autonomy to live in their own home with whatever support they need.

■ By contrast, in the prison system, the drop in inmate numbers over the last decade has been helped by the greater ratio of people in alternative penal measures for every 100 inmates, which rose from 63.5 in 2013 to 100.6 in 2022 (although the alternative penal measure population remained relatively stable in this period).

2.5. Lack of political planning to combat climate change

▶ A development model must be promoted that includes measures to mitigate the effects of climate change in all public policies.

The Catalan Government has introduced emergency measures to combat the drought, but these are insufficient, given the lack of rainfall, lack of foresight and deficient management going back years. Investment to guarantee the supply of water to the population has been inadequate and widespread consumption control measures have not been implemented.

Catalonia has a low rate of renewable energy consumption (9.9%) compared to the state average (18.4%) and European average (19.7%)

■ Although a step forward was taken in 2017 with the roll-out of renewable energies, a territorial plan for their implementation, determining the energy production in each region, has still not been approved. Nor has the operation and members order been approved for the Renewable Energy Dialogue Board, whose role is to set financial compensation measures.

3. Ten recommendations to transform the Administration

The Catalan Ombudsman office proposes that the Government and Parliament of Catalonia design a strategy for the transformation of the Administration aimed at placing people at the centre of its intervention. Such a strategy should include:

3.1. Alternative models to the institutionalisation of people

An action plan should be established to deinstitutionalise people living in centres: through the promotion of alternative penal measures in the case of the prison system, through foster care and the prevention of homelessness in the case of the protection system, or through comprehensive home care in the case of the elderly or people with disabilities.

3.2. A model of integrated, universal access to social services oriented towards prevention and accompanying people

The different services in the social service portfolio must be integrated, as must the benefits system, so that the approach to combating poverty focusses on people needs (citizens' guaranteed income, minimum basic income, etc.). In addition, basic social services must be promoted that guarantee closer accompaniment for people in situations of social vulnerability, thereby fostering their autonomy and capacity to overcome the inequalities they suffer.

3.3. An integrated system of support and accompaniment policies for families with dependent children

Coverage provided by income transfer policies for families with dependent children and the different family support programmes and services must be improved. An intensive accompaniment sub-system must also be created for families with children in situations of risk.

3.4. Boosting the social housing stock

A sufficient, stable and permanent social rental housing stock, for people with greatest difficulties in accessing housing. The social housing stock must be enlarged through public subsidised rental housing developments, by the Administration exercising of the right of first refusal, by entering into agreements with major landlords to transfer housing for social policies or by converting unjustifiably unoccupied housing into social rental accommodation, among other approaches. In addition, the emergency boards need to address situations of homelessness, for which they need to have a sufficient number of homes available to ensure rehousing.

3.5. Comprehensive and integrated care for people's health requirements

Strategies must be developed to place people's and patients' needs at the centre of the system, by integrating health system services (including mental health) and coordinating them with other social services. This would facilitate integrated social and health care and provide unified care (as well as guaranteeing care within a reasonable time period, respecting the guaranteed and reference waiting times for surgery, diagnostic tests and outpatient visits).

3.6. A plan to improve educational success

Equal distribution of resources among centres, based on their complexity, is needed to improve learning and to ensure the centres with the greatest educational needs have more resources to provide personalised attention. In addition, teachers must be given training in mentoring students, based on individualised learning pathways.

3.7. Planning cities in harmony with people's needs and rights

The reality of cities must be assessed, bearing in mind the importance of urban planning for habitable and sustainable environments, strengthening measures to consolidate peaceful co-existence in the public space (e.g. civic agents) and promoting affordable, accessible and reliable public transport.

3.8. A national strategy to promote social cohesion that consolidates a reception model for migrants and emphasises measures that guarantee social mobility

A migrant reception model must be defined for Catalonia, one that works to facilitate the inclusion of the migrant population in conditions of equality of opportunity in the different areas of social life, while preventing social segregation (e.g. in schools, housing, etc.) and which reviews public policy from an anti-racism perspective.

3.9. A pact to combat climate change

Co-responsibility among different stakeholders with an impact on the environment (citizens, primary sector, industrial sector, administrations, etc.) must be promoted to drive sustainable development and facilitate practices that help mitigate climate change and its effects. In particular, renewable energy production and consumption and reducing pollutant emissions must be promoted, while ensuring responsible water management in situations of drought.

3.10. A strategy to transform the organisation and functioning of the different Government of Catalonia (Generalitat) ministries

The Administration must be more accessible and friendly and able to provide guarantees, with a competent civil service committed to the general well-being, placing citizens at the centre of its intervention and providing comprehensive responses to their needs. And all this must be done with the aim of improving the quality of its services, through actions targeted at, for example, guaranteeing a person-centred Justice Administration free of undue delays, a model of community policing, a taxpayer-centred tax agency model, and a more transparent and accessible Administration as a guarantee of the right to good administration, among other characteristics.

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