

Annual report 2020

The Catalan Ombudsman warns of the serious widening rights crisis during 2020

- **Of the year of the COVID-19 the Catalan Ombudsman emphasizes the accessibility to healthcare, the inequality in the education, the vulnerability of the elders in residential care homes, the recklessness on the nature and environment, the housing emergence as a vital element, the impoverishment of labour and entrepreneurship, and the growing erosion of rights and freedoms**
- **During 2020 the Catalan Ombudsman has received 11,317 complaints from 22,476 people and 303 ex officio actions have been initiated**
- **Actions in social policies have accounted for 40% of interventions**
- **A budgetary strengthening is needed in the field of health, education and welfare equating the percentage of the GDP of the countries of northern Europe**

In 2020 more than 11,000 complaints have been filed, more than 17,000 have been processed and 303 ex officio actions have also been initiated.

PROTECTION OF SOCIAL RIGHTS

Actions initiated around social policies represent almost 40% of the Catalan Ombudsman's intervention volume, figures comparable to the worst years of the economic crisis of the last decade.

In the field of poverty and social emergency, the Catalan Ombudsman created the Social Emergency Board to work in a transversal way on the challenges posed by the crisis in the short, medium and long term, with eight social sector entities.

There is no doubt that the right to health has been one of the hardest hit this year. From the very beginning, the Catalan Ombudsman claimed the necessary human and material resources to deal with a crisis such as COVID-19.

The COVID-19 crisis has also highlighted the need to review the current residential care model and its ability to deal with the pandemic with the necessary precautionary and preventive measures.

The pandemic has also had a major impact on children's right to education. In this sense, the Catalan Ombudsman has highlighted the necessary schools opening in the 2020/2021 academic year, despite the challenges it may involve.

In the field of work, the impact of the crisis on people in the self-employed system should be underlined. The Catalan Ombudsman has reported the lack of economic support, such benefits or subsidies.

With regard to housing, the Catalan Ombudsman has stated that structural reforms must be tackled to guarantee the right to housing in the medium and long term.

ENVIRONMENT AND CONSUMER RIGHTS

It is necessary to strengthen environmental protection policies and apply the principle of zero alternative in present and future urban projections, as a way to ensure an environmentally friendly country.

The pandemic has also exacerbated the difficulties many people already face in accessing the electricity social benefit through a procedure that has been identified as complex.

TRANSPARENCY AND GOOD GOVERNANCE

The administrations have introduced the appointment in the provision of face-to-face customer services. It is a useful tool from the point of view of the protection of occupational risks, but in the opinion of the Catalan Ombudsman this cannot suggest not serving citizens without prior appointment that come to register documents or for proceedings that cannot be postponed.

On the other hand, the Catalan Ombudsman has reminded that the lack of registration of people, whatever their housing situation is, not only violates current legislation, but also prevents them from effective access to basic social services and rights.

FREEDOM AND DEMOCRATIC QUALITY

In November 2020, the Catalan Ombudsman began to analyse the electoral contest scheduled for February 14, 2021 from the perspective of reconciling the guarantee of the right to health and the right of participation of all citizens.

Fundamental rights and freedoms have been restricted under successive alarm states. Care must be taken with these limitations of rights, which must rigorously weigh the rights at stake with the need for restrictive measures.

The situation of lockdown has also multiplied situations of racist abuse and violence against women and vulnerable groups. For this reason, the passage of the Equal Treatment and Non-Discrimination Act is good news.

Finally, in the face of current complaints and events, the Catalan Ombudsman reiterates the full democratic exercise of freedom of expression and demonstration and amnesty.