

**Inputs on Spain in response to the call of the United Nations Special Rapporteur on extreme poverty and human rights, Philip Alston, before his official visit to Spain to be held from 27 January to 7 February, 2020.**

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**Joint submission of the Legal Clinic of the Faculty of Law of the University of Murcia, and Fundación Cepaim**

*Insumos sobre España en respuesta a la convocatoria del Relator Especial de las Naciones Unidas sobre la pobreza extrema y los derechos humanos, Philip Alston, antes de su visita oficial a España a realizarse del 27 de enero al 7 de febrero de 2020*

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**Clínica Jurídica de la Facultad de Derecho  
de la Universidad de Murcia**



**Fundación Cepaim**

***The nature of poverty and inequality in Spain, including how poverty is or should be defined and measured, its prevalence and its distribution.***

To measure poverty in Spain we can use the Arope (At Risk Of Poverty) indicator. This, in addition to measuring poverty from the material and monetary dimensions already envisaged in the *National Strategy for Preventing and Combating Poverty and Social Exclusion*, has added a third element, the low intensity of work at home.

In Spain, since 2018, 26.1% of the Spanish population is at risk of poverty and/or social exclusion. This percentage, according to the *2018 Report on the State of Poverty in Spain* based on the ‘Arope indicator’ conducted by the European Anti-Poverty Network, shows that the poorest part of the population, has not yet recovered from the crisis from a few years ago.<sup>1</sup>

As for the nature of poverty in Spain we must emphasize that today, poverty affects both unemployed people and workers, especially touching young people between 16 and 30 years old, who encounter more difficulties to enter the labor market and to do so with more stable contracts.

It should also be noted that the distribution of poverty is not homogeneous, since there are differences according to sex, age, nationality, disability, type of employment, and so on, which is a clear reflection of inequality among the population.

Regarding sex, in 2018 the poverty rate for women was 27% versus 25.1% in men;<sup>2</sup> the main cause of this is the wage gap between men and women, since it is estimated that a woman needs to work 1.5 hours more per day to earn the same as a man.<sup>3</sup> Similarly, unemployed people are those that maintain the highest risk of poverty rates (46.8%). In any case, another big problem in Spain is that many workers do not have a steady job, but work part-time and with precarious contracts, a fact that results in the rate of poverty among employed people to rise up in 14%.<sup>4</sup>

***People disproportionately affected by poverty, including women, children, youth, unemployed, minorities, non-citizens and people living in urban and rural areas.***

Regarding poverty in relation to age groups, as we mentioned, the most vulnerable group to experience poverty is that of young people under 29 years of age. For that group, the poverty rate is 33.8%, i.e. more than ten percentage points above the rate of poverty in Spain (21.5%). In this sense, the *Survey of Living Conditions 2018* and the *FOESSA Report* agree that we have a “juvenilization of poverty”.<sup>5</sup>

The next affected age group is that of people over 65 years old (17.6%) and children. Child poverty in 2018 was placed at 29.5%, according to the AROPE rate.

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<sup>1</sup> “The State of Poverty” following the Indicator of poverty and social exclusion in Spain. Juan Carlos Llano Ortíz. October 2019. Page 4.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.* Page 5.

<sup>3</sup> “The situation of poverty and social exclusion in Spain in 2019”. Website “Ayuda en acción”.

<sup>4</sup> “The State of Poverty”, *op. cit.* Pages 5-7.

<sup>5</sup> Website Soziabile.es; ‘Arope Report: poverty becomes chronic’; October 16th, 2019.

On the other hand, the eighth *FOESSA Report on Social Exclusion and Development in Spain*, carried out by the Foundation on the Promotion of Social Studies and Applied Sociology ('Fundación FOESSA', by its acronym in Spanish), notes that in recent years the gap between households headed by men and women has increased.<sup>6</sup> In fact, 20% of households headed by women are in situations of social exclusion, in contrast to the 16% households led by men.

Another of the affected groups is that of people with disabilities, as they recorded higher values than those who do not have any disability. Their situation is alarming because one out of three people with disabilities live at risk of poverty and/or exclusion.<sup>7</sup>

### ***The role of the austerity measures, management of public finances and fiscal policy in relation to poverty.***

Overall, because of the economic crisis successive governments have implemented measures to improve the efficiency of the Spanish economy. The main problem with these measures is that they come alongside with cuts in different sectors that seriously affect people with lower incomes.

The Government, through the *2018 Stability Program*, aims to reduce the weight of the public sector on the GDP to 38.5% by 2021, and among the items that will undergo a major adjustment are those of health and education. As a result, the combined weight of the allocations to education and health will fall in 2021 to 9.4% of GDP, representing an adjustment of 7 tenths in four years.

This means that the effort made by Spain each year to fund education and health will be lower and, therefore, families will have to invest more in these two sectors, which hinder the situation of those who are at risk or poverty.

In any case, it is noteworthy that the Council of Ministers approved, in March 2019, an agreement on the *National Strategy for Preventing and Combating Poverty and Social Exclusion*, expected to last until 2023.

### ***The impact of poverty on civil and political rights and on economic, social and cultural rights and rights to health, housing, food, education and social security. And the main challenges and issues related to human rights to which people living in poverty face.***

#### ***Main challenges and issues related to human rights to which people living in poverty face.***

As regards human rights, it is noteworthy that in Spain one of the main forms of discrimination against foreign nationals and ethnic minorities is racism. In recent years, a worrying increase has been detected regarding discriminatory acts in the workplace and educational environment, making it difficult for these minorities to enter the labor market and acquire a high level of education, thus exacerbating their poverty and/or exclusion.

In terms of civil and political rights, one of the main problems of our country is that people with low income and social exclusion are practically not involved in the electoral process.

<sup>6</sup> VII FOESSA Report; Social exclusion deepens in an increasingly detached society, 29 June 2019, at <https://www.caritas.es/noticias/viii-informe-foessa-la-exclusion-social-se-enquista-en-una-sociedad-cada-vez-mas-desvinculada/>

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*

Abstention rates are recorded up to 75% in the most disadvantaged neighborhoods. Consequently, the interests of those groups are not represented.<sup>8</sup>

On the other hand, access to decent housing has become an inaccessible right for many families who suffer the insecurity and inadequacy of their homes. This situation has exacerbated the fact that in the last two years the rent to be paid for housing has gone up in 30% and thus two million people in our country live with the uncertainty of homelessness.

Currently, 11% of the population lives below the threshold of severe poverty, after deducting the expenses or debts relating to the payment of housing and its supplies. It is remarkable that in the last decade and, especially with the bursting of the real state bubble, more than 650,000 evictions have been carried out in Spain, which represents 180 evictions a day.<sup>9</sup>

Furthermore, poverty also affects the health of people. In fact, today, 8.8% of the population has stopped buying medicines or following medical treatments or diets because of their economic problems, and 15% of the population lives without access to dental treatment.

It is also important to mention that the population with the highest poverty rate is more prone to diseases because they cannot consume high-protein foods such as meat or fish.<sup>10</sup> According to the latest data from the 'Quality of Life Survey' conducted by the *National Statistics Institute (NSI)* in Spain (*INE*, by its acronym in Spanish), published in 2015, 6.4% of the population - almost three million people-, can't eat meat or fish at least every two days.

Concerning education, early school abandonment affects especially the most vulnerable groups who lack support and referrals for help and, largely, are forced to leave school and enter a labor market that can offer little opportunities for unskilled employment.

In any case, we must mention that early school abandonment decreased in 2018 to 17.9%,<sup>11</sup> according to the analysis prepared by the Ministry of Education and Vocational Training regarding educational variables of the *Labor Force Survey (LFS) of the National Statistics Institute*, which is 0.33 less than in 2017.

### ***The impact of environmental issues and climate change on people living in poverty.***

On the one hand, the climate crisis is significantly affecting certain nations, which could eventually become uninhabitable, causing a wave of migration that would affect Spain. The Spanish labor market, given its precariousness will not be able to respond to all these people so that many would live in poverty due to the lack of income.<sup>12</sup>

On the other hand, it should be noted that most people who are at risk or poverty, work in the agricultural sector or make a living based on fishing, sectors significantly impacted by environmental hazards.

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<sup>8</sup> VII FOESSA Report; *op. cit.*; June 29, 2019.

<sup>9</sup> Amnesty International: right to housing.

<sup>10</sup> "The State of Poverty" following the Indicator of poverty and social exclusion in Spain. Juan Carlos Llano Ortíz. October 2019. Page 8.

<sup>11</sup> "Early school abandonment decreased in 2018 to 17.9%". Website Europa Press (newspaper). 29 January 2019.

<sup>12</sup> "Five consequences for Spain because of the impact of climate change on the oceans projected by United Nations experts" Javier Martínez, Info libre. 26 September 2019.

Data from the International Monetary Fund predicts that climate change will increase inequality between the ‘rich Spain’ and the ‘poor Spain’, affecting more the primary (agricultural) and secondary (industrial) sectors, than the tertiary sector (services), the first two presenting more difficulties to adapt to changes.<sup>13</sup>

***Autonomous regions, provinces, municipalities or communities in Spain that the Special Rapporteur should visit for its particular relevance to poverty and human rights.***

Perhaps one of the most relevant data presented in the *VIII FOESSA Report* is the territorial distribution of social exclusion in Spain.

If Spain traditionally has been explained in terms of north-south, a rich north and a poor south, that “picture” is still true. Today, following the risk of poverty rate of 2018 compiled by the NSI, at the top of the list were the autonomous regions of Southern Spain, including Extremadura (37.6%), Andalucía (36%), Canarias (32, 1%), Castilla-La Mancha (29.9%) and Murcia (28.1%), while the lowest rates are those of the Basque Country (12.1%) and Navarra (12.6%).

One cause is the activity of these regions: while Andalucía and Extremadura live from agriculture and livestock, in the northern parts, industry is the main economic activity. For this reason, it would be advisable to visit the Southern part of Spain, as it registers the highest poverty rate of the country.

***Individuals and organizations with which the Special Rapporteur should meet during his visit to the country.***

In conclusion, and based on the analysis presented in this report, we propose that you meet the following experts and organizations:

- **Fundación Cepaim.** Founded 25 years ago, it is an independent, cohesive and sustainable organization that provides answers to social dynamics related mainly to the migratory phenomenon and the processes of social exclusion.
- We also recommend the following:
  - Broad-based organizations: Cáritas and the Red Cross.
  - The European Anti-Poverty Network in Spain (EAPN España).
  - Residential exclusion: Fundación Cepaim and Provivienda.
  - Homelessness: Fundación RAIS.
  - Health: Médicos del Mundo.
  - Human trafficking: APRAMP.
  - International protection and asylum: Fundación Cepaim, Accem and CEAR.
  - Ethnic minorities: Secretariado Gitano.
  - Infancy: Plataforma Estatal de Protección a la Infancia.
  - Energy and water poverty, and evictions: Plataforma de Afectados por la Hipoteca and Sindicato de Inquilinos from Madrid and Barcelona.
  - Drug abuse: UNAD.
  - Demographic challenge and exclusion in rural areas: Coceder.
  - Disabilities: CERMI.
  - Gender: Fundación Mujeres and Mujeres Progresistas.
  - Elderly people: UDP.

- Education: Liga de la Educación.

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<sup>13</sup> Newspaper article, “The IMF expects climate change to increase inequality between 'rich Spain' and 'poor Spain'”. *El Mundo*. Pablo Pardo. October 16th, 2019.