

CONSELL NACIONAL DELS INFANTS I ELS ADOLESCENTS DE CATALUNYA

Comment on Spain within the framework of the UPR

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1. Who are we?

The Consell Nacional dels Infants i Adolescents de Catalunya (CNIAC) is a consultative collegiate body for child and adolescent participation within the Government of Catalonia. It represents the interests and viewpoints of children and adolescents in Catalonia regarding their rights. It is composed of children and adolescents aged 8 to 17, with parental authorization, who have been selected by the Local Councils for Childhood and Adolescence of each municipality.

2. Did the government organize national consultations?

It is worth noting that the Government of Spain has organized national consultations to prepare the National Report within the framework of the Universal Periodic Review (UPR). According to a document from the Spanish Congress of Deputies, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, European Union, and Cooperation has promoted the participation of civil society in the UPR process and the drafting of the national report (*see Ref.1*). Although this document confirms civil society's participation, we have not been informed or consulted at any time regarding this participation.

3. Brief description of the statement

This statement addresses two main topics: **Mental Health and Education**. For each topic, we will discuss issues where Spanish children and adolescents have felt threatened or unsafe.

4. Statement on individual issues

4.1 Mental Health of Children and Adolescents

The mental health of children and adolescents in Spain is an issue of growing concern, especially following the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic.

We have identified a lack of mental health resources. The ratio of clinical psychologists in Spain remains below the European average, limiting children and adolescents' access to timely and quality psychological care. From 2013 to 2019, the rate of **anxiety diagnoses in individuals under 25 increased by nearly 5%**, and from 2010 to 2019, antidepressant medication consumption rose by 36%, according to a 2020 report from the Spanish Ministry of Health (*see Ref.2*).

Exposure to harmful content, social pressure, and cyberbullying have been identified as factors negatively impacting children's and adolescents' psychological well-being. Despite some governmental and educational initiatives to regulate these risks, greater oversight and specific protective measures are needed.

Another significant factor contributing to poor mental health among children and adolescents is the lack of economic resources, which often leads to a tense atmosphere at home with their parents. To illustrate the severity of this issue, in 2023, **9.0% of the Spanish population—4.3 million people—lived in severe material and social deprivation** (ARPE Report 2024). This data suggests that the Spanish aid system does not cover all citizens.

In the digital environment, we have identified problems related to the early use of social media, such as **FOMO (Fear of Missing Out)** and aesthetic pressure to meet beauty standards, particularly affecting women. This has contributed to high rates of **Eating Disorders (EDs)**. **94% of affected individuals are women aged 12 to 36**, though cases among men and older individuals are rising.

The issue with social media is not just the victims but also the aggressors. There are very few mechanisms to correct harmful actions such as cyberbullying, whether from their own identity or an entirely different one.

4.2 Education

Regarding education, several problems have been identified in our country:

School failure in Spain is a reality due to constant legal changes every time a new government takes office. According to the same report from the Ministry of Health, in the last 18 years, the percentage of the population with only a **basic level of education or lower has decreased by 37% in total**.

Education legislation in Spain is constantly changing, as seen in the recent modifications to university entrance exams, which were implemented with very little time and no room for teachers to adapt. This measure has led to many teenagers experiencing mental health issues due to constant academic pressure. When it comes to addressing these problems, many teachers lack the necessary training to handle them effectively.

We also highlight a strong focus on rote memorization—an important skill, of course, but not the only one. Especially in countries that do not adopt new educational systems, like Spain, there is clear evidence that competency-based learning and critical thinking are not given enough importance. Additionally, there is a lack of connection between education and the job market. Vocational training is undervalued and faces accessibility barriers.

5. Recommendations

Therefore, we ask states to make the following recommendations:

- Increase the number of **trained psychologists in healthcare centers**
- Regulate the **use of social media at early ages**
- Provide **psychological support to aggressors** and implement corrective measures to prevent repeated harmful actions
- Organize **mental health awareness workshops and conferences** with qualified professionals
- Currently, **education spending is at 4.7% of GDP**. We believe it is necessary to **increase this budget** to implement these measures
- Ensure an **efficient and fast aid system** for disadvantaged families
- Strengthen the presence of **qualified teaching staff and psychologists in schools**
- Reduce the **student-to-teacher ratio** in classrooms
- Improve **school equipment in public schools**
- Adopt a **competency-based educational system** that values applying theory rather than just memorization
- Ensure **stability in national and regional education legislation**
- Ease **transitions between educational stages**

Thank you very much for your attention.

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