



10

CHALLENGES for the SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT of CATALONIA

2023 edition



Generalitat de Catalunya
Consell Assessor
per al Desenvolupament Sostenible

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Introduction

The Advisory Council for the Sustainable Development of Catalonia (hereinafter CADS, after its Catalan acronym) is an advisory body to the Government of Catalonia on sustainability. Created in 1998 (it is celebrating its 25th anniversary this year), its main functions is to advise the Government on sustainable development and, in particular, on the integration of sustainability in policies, territorial and sectoral planning instruments, legislative and regulatory projects, and strategic projects or initiatives promoted by the Government¹. It is also responsible for analysing the strategic policies for sustainable development promoted by the Government.

In addition, the Council promotes the transfer of knowledge and exchanges between the Government, academia and civil society in the field of sustainable development, to advises the Government on the design and implementation of actions to promote education for sustainability and, finally, encourages the involvement of the economic and social sectors in Catalonia's development process.

Since its creation, the CADS has worked with the conviction that it is necessary to accelerate the process of transition towards a more mature, just, egalitarian, cohesive, and inclusive society that is involved in decision-making. A transition towards a country at the forefront of research, where education is considered one of the most precious assets it can offer its citizens throughout their lives, and where culture is a fundamental right for everyone, contributing to the personal development and the progress of society.

The CADS also believes that it is necessary to move rapidly towards a more innovative, diversified, competitive and efficient economy in terms of resource use, with high rates of quality employment, a solid business sector with global activity and that is committed to the challenges posed by the twin green and digital transition, in order to achieve a resilient system. It considers that our country must face its energy transition process, which is absolutely essential, in agreement with all stakeholders and ensure that rural areas are in dialogue with different urban realities.

The CADS joins those who warn of the need to accelerate action to halt the loss of biodiversity and ensure the good health of ecosystems and the services they provide to society. It also recognises the urgency of increasing the country's resilience to the effects of climate change and further reducing pollution and its impact on ecosystems and human health.

Reasons behind this CADS' opinion

Catalonia faces major economic, social and environmental challenges that will determine both its present and its future. In this context, the CADS, in its plenary session on 20 January 2020, took the initiative of periodically drawing up an opinion of the Council, identifying the priority issues for the sustainability of the country at any given time.

The first edition, corresponding to the year 2021, was presented to the Government by the Minister for Climate Action, Food and Rural Agenda on 15 February 2022.

In this first edition, the CADS identified the following 10 challenges²:

	Climate change is a reality and its effects will continue to worsen in the medium and long term.		Children, who represent the most critical group for the future of the country, have no guarantee of the conditions necessary for their full development in a healthy environment.
	In Catalonia, wildlife populations lost 25% of their individuals between 2002 and 2019.		Access to housing remains one of the most serious social problems facing Catalan society, and the right to decent housing for all is far from being guaranteed.
	In the current context of climate emergency, the decarbonisation of the economy is slower than required by climate targets, and the use of renewable energy sources does not have sufficient territorial consensus.		Despite some progress, we are still far from achieving full equality between men and women, and discriminatory situations against the LGBTQ+ community persist.
	Since the 2008 financial crisis, around 20% of Catalan households are poor or at risk of social exclusion.		The tertiarisation of the Catalan economy over the last decade challenges the country's industrial capacity to design, produce and use the products and technologies needed to participate in the global transition to sustainability.
	17% of Catalan students drop out of their studies prematurely, a figure well above the European average.		The territorial imbalance, the ageing population and the lack of services continue to determine the future of Catalonia's rural areas.

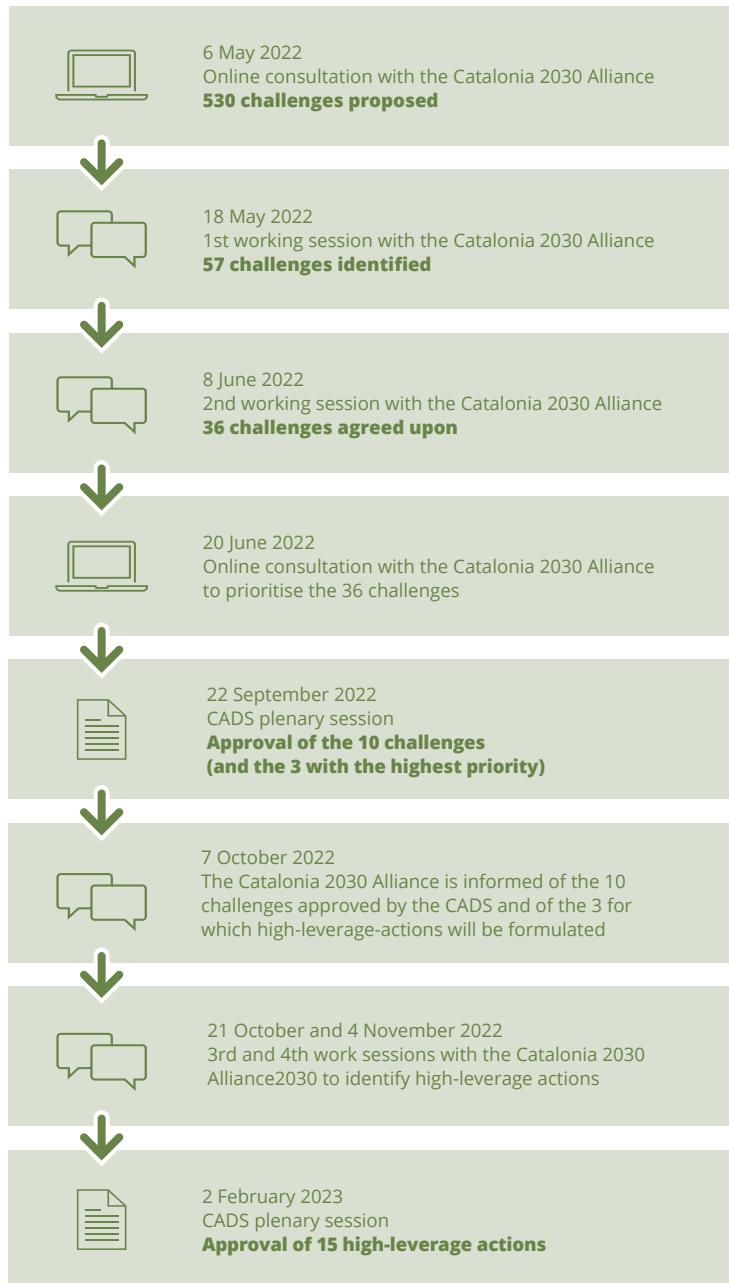
When planning the first edition, the CADS agreed to prioritise 10 challenges, which could be both structural and conjunctural. In addition, it recognised that limiting the analysis to only 10 strategic issues entailed several risks, such as the impossibility of being exhaustive, and leaving out of the list issues of great relevance.

Novelties of the 2023 edition

The second edition of this opinion also identifies 10 challenges for sustainable development, maintaining the decalogue structure of the previous version. However, the CADS wanted to give it a more proactive character and therefore included a proposal for high-leverage actions for three of the ten identified challenges. These were priority actions to address the challenges raised. These actions had to be feasible and specific and have transformative potential, i.e. the ability to bring about change, as well as being able to be implemented in 2023. They were addressed to the different levels of government operating in Catalonia, as well as to the business sector, organisations and associations, and citizens as a whole.

A second novelty of the 2023 edition is the involvement of the Catalonia 2030³ Alliance in the identification of challenges and high-leverage actions. The Catalonia 2030 Alliance is a joint initiative of public and private organisations committed to the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), created by the Government following a mandate from the Catalan Parliament in November 2018. At the time of writing, it includes more than 75 organisations of a very diverse nature.

The participation of the Catalonia 2030 Alliance in the process of drafting this opinion took place through several face-to-face meetings and online questionnaires between May and November 2022, with various contributions from the CADS plenary, as described in the following figure:





The 10 Challenges for the Sustainable Development of Catalonia in 2023

Next, the 10 challenges approved by the CADS Plenary on 22 September 2022 are presented. The order in which they appear does not indicate a priority, as they are all considered equally important. They are as follows:

	The need to accelerate a sustainable and just energy transition		The chronic poverty and social exclusion of a significant proportion of the population
	An excessively slow shift towards a circular and collaborative economic model		Neglected and underserved rural areas
	A transport and mobility model that still fails to respond to the climate emergency context		The ageing of the population and the need to improve living conditions and rights of older people
	The increasing impact of climate change on water resources, ecosystems, the economy, and human health and well-being		The persistence of social inequalities
	The growing difficulties in accessing and maintaining decent housing		The lack of effectiveness, efficiency and coordination between administrations and social and economic actors



The need to accelerate a sustainable and just energy transition

The EU's European Green Deal aims to make Europe climate-neutral by 2050. Achieving this goal requires rethinking the current consumption model and accelerating the process of decarbonising the economy along the entire value chain, from resource extraction, production, storage and distribution to consumption, in a just transition.

The recent geopolitical context and the depletion of fossil fuel reserves have highlighted the weaknesses of the Catalan energy model, with an external energy dependency of more than 90%⁴, and the need for a just transition to short-term renewable energies that guarantee energy supply and affordable prices⁵.

Final energy consumption in Catalonia increased by 50% between 1990 and 2019⁶. Most of this energy comes from fossil fuels, which contribute to climate change and have environmental and social impacts, including in their extraction. In 2019, petroleum products accounted for 49.8% of final energy consumption, with a significant increase linked to transport. Despite the importance of the electrification of the economy, only a quarter of the final energy consumed⁷ in that year was electrical energy, a proportion that is expected to triple by 2050⁸.

Overall, there has been a positive development in the self-consumption of photovoltaic energy in recent years, which has reached 60,208 installations in operation and an installed capacity of 466.59 MW. It should be noted that while in 2019 there were 1,673 installations (19.48 MW of installed capacity), in 2022 there were 39,237 new installations (with a capacity of 293.56 MW)⁹.

Catalonia's 2050 Energy Outlook (PROENCAT 2050) sets out the strategy to achieve climate neutrality by 2050, based on electrifying the economy, improving energy efficiency and switching to renewable energy. According to PROENCAT, a fourfold increase in the installed renewable electricity capacity in 2020 will be required by 2030, and a 16-fold increase by 2050 to achieve a fully decarbonised electricity system¹⁰. Despite minimising land use, which is key to ensuring food sovereignty and avoiding environmental impacts, it is expected that 2.5% of the territory (80,000 ha) will have to be used for energy purposes.

Technology has a key role to play in the process of electrification with renewable energy sources, particularly in terms of electricity storage, which must allow the balance of electricity supply and demand, and intelligent network man-

agement, which must ensure a stable and secure supply¹¹. In addition, energy demand must be reduced through improved energy efficiency and energy savings, mainly in the transport and manufacturing sectors, but also in households.

The energy transition must be fair and leave no one behind. In other words, it must enable all citizens and businesses to have an affordable energy supply and safeguard jobs in the sectors affected by the energy transition¹². However, energy poverty has more than doubled since 2019, and in 2012, 19% of households were unable to keep their homes at an adequate temperature¹³.

On the other hand, the energy transition may lead to job losses and opportunities. In the worst-case scenario, it is estimated that around 250,000 jobs would be lost. However, the transition also offers many opportunities in emerging sectors, where investment is needed to create local jobs. The energy renovation sector alone has the potential to create 150,000 jobs.^{14,15}



An excessively slow shift towards a circular and collaborative economic model

The slowness of the transition of the economic model towards a circular and collaborative economy is limiting industrial capacity and the development of a transformative national innovation ecosystem, affecting the competitiveness of our economy in the medium and long term and increasing the environmental and social impact of our production and consumption model.

Global consumption of natural resources has tripled since 1970¹⁶ and currently stands at 100 billion tonnes per year. Although the natural resource crisis has been identified for years as one of the top 10 global risks, and several¹⁷ international institutions and governments have proposed strategies and instruments to increase the circularity of the economy, the use of these resources continues to grow on a global scale and the percentage of materials returned to the economy continues to decline, with the circularity rate falling from 9.1% in 2018 to 7.2% in 2022¹⁸.

In Europe, the circularity rate is slightly higher, at 12%, but the economy remains predominantly linear. Although the European Union has become more efficient in its use of resourc-

es in recent years, efforts to prevent waste are lacking: in 2020, each European citizen produced 25% more plastic waste than ten years earlier. In addition, only 1% of most metals and rare earths are recycled at the end of their useful life. However, the recycling rates of two materials used in batteries are noteworthy: nickel, with a circularity of 16%, and cobalt, with a circularity of 22%¹⁹.

Catalonia is a net importer of these materials. In the decade from 2009 to 2019²⁰, the physical balance of trade in materials with the rest of the world was between 10 and 18 million tonnes, with a value of 17.6 million tonnes in 2019. On the other hand, in the same year, Catalonia produced 12.8 million tonnes of waste²¹, of which more than 5 million tonnes were sent to incinerators or landfills²². Despite the fact that the majority of companies consider it extremely urgent to move towards a circular economy and almost half have made investments in technological innovation in this direction²³, material productivity (gross domestic product in relation to domestic material consumption) has been declining since 2016²⁴.

It is therefore necessary to multiply efforts to reduce the consumption of materials, to prolong their use and to reuse them, and to seize the opportunity offered by digitalisation to make both transitions simultaneously and to create an innovation ecosystem that facilitates the development of pilot projects and local and international scalability programmes.



A transport and mobility model that still fails to respond to the climate emergency context

Current transport and mobility infrastructures and services contribute significantly to greenhouse gas emissions and are not yet adapted to the possible risks of climate change, such as high temperatures, heavy rainfall and storms, or rising sea levels.

Globally, transport is responsible for a quarter of greenhouse gas emissions. The main contributor is road transport with 70% of these emissions, followed by aviation with 12%, maritime transport with 11% and rail transport with 1%²⁵. Transport is also the sector that has increased its emissions the most since 2010. Addressing it is therefore key to making mitigation strategies effective around the world.

In the European Union, transport-related emissions account for about 25% of total greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions. Between 1990 and 2019, these emissions increased by 33% and those from road transport by 28%²⁶. In Catalonia, the two main emitters in 2019 were industry and transport, each responsible for 30% of GHG emissions²⁷.



Through the European Green Deal, the European Union committed to becoming the first emission-neutral continent by 2050. To achieve this, it pledged, among other things, to reduce transport-related emissions by 90% by the middle of the century. This decision will have an impact on transport policy in Catalonia, where the Catalan Energy Institute has already estimated that in order to complete the transition to an energy model based on renewable energies by 2050, the percentage of electrification of transport energy demand must increase from 1.5% to 63%²⁸.

In the context of climate change, it is necessary to bet on the resilience and adaptability of the Catalan transport system, especially in relation to high temperatures, storms and floods. Priority actions for mobility infrastructure must focus on preventing flooding of tracks, tunnels, bridges, stations and underground facilities; damage from landslides, falling trees, coastal erosion and undermining; deformation of rails and catenaries; impact on electronic components in technical cabinets; reduction of thermal comfort, and alteration of track functionality due to forest fires.²⁹

In this sense, in Catalonia, the road and rail sections with the highest risk

of vulnerability represent between 2% and 35% of the transport network, depending on the variable analysed, although this figure increases in the case of heat waves, where 45% of the main road network and 60% of the rail network are at high risk³⁰.

The risks related to temperature mainly affect a large area of Ponent, around the city of Lleida, and the interior of Terres de l'Ebre. The risk of intense rainfall is evident in a large part of the Catalan coast, especially in Maresme and Costa Brava and from Tarragona to the south, and in a large part of the regions of Girona, including areas of the central Pyrenees. Moreover, sea-level rise will have a greater impact on the Ebre Delta and the Gulf of Roses, particularly on the local road network³¹. Coastal infrastructures are therefore particularly vulnerable to the combination of rising sea levels and sea storms, with the most paradigmatic example being the R1 commuter train line as it passes through the Maresme region³².



The increasing impact of climate change on water resources, ecosystems, the economy, and human health and well-being

Climatic anomalies are already having a significant impact on the functioning of the main ecosystems, reducing the provision of many of their services and affecting basic economic sectors as well as human health and well-being, with a particularly severe impact on the most vulnerable sections of the population. This situation could be exacerbated under future climate scenarios.

The average annual temperature in Catalonia has increased by 1.8 °C between the years 1950 and 2021 as a whole (+0.25 °C/decade) and projections indicate that it could increase by 2 to 3 °C by 2050 and up to 5 °C by the end of the 21st century. In terms of rainfall, there has been a decrease of almost 70 mm per year between 1950 and 2021, and projections indicate a 10% decrease in average annual precipitation for the country as a whole by the middle of the 21st century³³.

In fact, the four warmest years on record in Catalonia are concentrated between 2015 and 2022. This last year was the warmest of all, with a thermal anomaly compared to the 1961-1990 climate average of more than +1.4 °C across the territory (although in much of the country, it was between +2 °C and +3 °C)³⁴. In addition, 2022 was a dry year, especially in the coastal and pre-coastal central areas, and at the northern and southern ends of the coast.

These climate changes and their more direct effects, such as droughts (which are becoming more frequent and prolonged), water acidification, rising sea levels, higher risk of flooding and increased risk of forest fires³⁵, are having (and may have in the future) a very negative impact on biodiversity and ecosystems and the many services they provide, which are fundamental to the well-being and health of people and our economy.

Globally, Mediterranean ecosystems are among the most vulnerable to climate change and are already experiencing its impacts. As far as Catalonia is concerned, there is ample scientific evidence of the impact³⁶ of climate change on terrestrial and aquatic organisms and ecosystems³⁷. These changes are likely to be exacerbated if climate change, together with the other components of global change (in particular land use, pollution and overexploitation of resources), continues or intensifies. A concrete example of this is the impact on forests, where we observe repeated episodes of decline due to the combined effect of drought, the growth and densification of forest masses due to their current low use, and various forest scourges that can lead to the death of large stands of trees³⁸ or to a general reduction in their capacity to absorb greenhouse gases³⁹.

Climate change also affects the Catalan economy through the worsening of the current drought situation, the increased frequency and severity of extreme weather events, and rising sea levels and coastal erosion. The impacts on the primary sector (and therefore food production) and tourism are particularly worrying: some Catalan ski resorts could become unviable⁴⁰ and many beaches and coastal areas are already suffering from the effects of rising sea levels and coastal erosion⁴¹.

Finally, the CADS highlights the direct effects of high temperatures: in the summer of 2022, there was a 15.5% excess mortality in Catalonia (2,705 people), of which 3.3% was due to high temperatures, particularly affecting older people, people with chronic illnesses and those in a vulnerable social situation. Due to their older age structure and lower socio-economic level, women suffered higher excess mortality than men⁴².

Rising temperatures also allow the vectors of various diseases to expand their distribution northwards and to higher altitudes, and there have already been outbreaks of autochthonous transmission of dengue, chikungunya, West Nile fever and even malaria in southern and south-eastern Europe⁴³.



The growing difficulties in accessing and maintaining decent housing

The gap between the average income of Catalan households and the price of housing is widening every year, making it more difficult for many people and families to access decent housing at an affordable price and to maintain it in comfortable conditions.



Access to housing remains one of the most serious social problems of Catalan society and the right to housing for all is far from being guaranteed.

Social organisations estimate that in 2022, more than 1.3 million people in our country lived in inadequate housing (i.e. substandard, temporary or overcrowded housing) and almost 1 million more lived in housing considered to be insecure (i.e. squatting, temporary housing, threat of eviction or threats of violence)⁴⁴. In addition, according to the same sources, 97% of the people supported by social inclusion organisations had housing problems. Finally, energy poverty almost quadrupled between 2013 and 2022⁴⁵. In that year, 19% of the population living in Catalonia were unable to heat their homes adequately.

According to the Government of Catalonia's Housing Secretariat, 2,705 families received special emergency aid to avoid eviction between January and September 2022. Between 2013 and 2021, the number of households receiving these subsidies increased by 45% and the number of households receiving assistance from the Mortgage Debt Information and Advice Service (Ofideute) multiplied by seven, with most of these households reaching agreements with the landlord to pay for their home. In addition, the

number of households receiving rent subsidies has more than tripled^{46,47}.

Furthermore, mortgage repossession increased by 26% in 2021 compared to the previous year to reach 5,848 (out of 27,874 in Spain) and the number of evictions^a increased by 63.81% to reach 9,398 in the same period⁴⁸. The majority of these evictions took place in rented housing (71%).

Although there is no up-to-date data on the total number of people experiencing homelessness, several estimates have been published in recent years: in 2017, the number of homeless people was estimated at 53,118, based on data provided by the social services of 76% of Catalan municipalities⁴⁹. The Federation of Catalan Social Action Organisations (ECAS) estimated the number of homeless people in 2022 at 18,000⁵⁰.

In a broader context, it should be noted that between 2013 and 2022, the average income of Catalan households increased by 19%⁵¹, while the average price of rented housing rose by 42%^{52,53}, and the purchase price of new and second-hand homes increased by 57%⁵⁴ and 34%⁵⁵ respec-

tively. Similarly, in 2022, one in ten Catalan households spent 40% or more of their income on housing costs, including rent or mortgage, water, electricity, gas or heating⁵⁶. In 2021, 40.9% of families renting a home in Spain spent more than 40% of their available income on housing (compared to 21.2% in the European Union) and 48.9% were at risk of poverty or social exclusion.

Finally, the housing stock intended for social policies amounted to 37,840 dwellings in June 2022, including 17,552 dwellings of the public housing stock of the Government of Catalonia, the dwellings assigned by financial institutions and individuals, the dwellings included in the Mediation Housing Network for Social Rent and those included in the Social Rental Housing Fund⁵⁷. The public housing stock for social rental represents approximately 1.7% of the total housing stock. The Territorial Sectoral Housing Plan—the road map of housing policy for the next twenty years, which is yet to be approved—points out the need to expand it to 7% in order to be in line with the European Union average (a far cry from countries such as the Netherlands, where social rent accounts for 34% of the total)⁵⁸.

a Eviction is defined as the act and effect of removing an occupant or their belongings from a property as a result of non-payment of mortgage or rent or for other reasons.



The chronic poverty and social exclusion of a significant proportion of the population

The high levels of poverty and social exclusion in Catalonia have been exacerbated by the current crisis context and unresolved structural problems, such as difficulties in accessing housing, high unemployment rates and an insecure labour market.

In 2022, 24.7% of the Catalan population was at risk of poverty or social exclusion, according to the Living Conditions Survey published by the Catalan Statistics Institute (IEC) on 24 April 2023⁵⁹. Although it decreased by 1.2 points compared to 2021, the rate of people at risk of poverty or social exclusion (better known by its English acronym, the AROPE rate) has not fallen below 20% for practically the last decade, which shows that poverty and exclusion are chronic and deeply rooted in Catalonia.

Moreover, since 2016, the AROPE rate has been higher for women than for men, with 2022 being the year in which the difference was most reduced. Women also have more difficulties making ends meet than men⁶⁰, which shows that poverty and social



exclusion continue to be feminised⁶¹. In addition, the 2022 Living Conditions Survey shows that around 400,000 children and young people (31.7% of the total) are at risk of poverty in Catalonia. Similarly, 28.1% of households with dependent children are at risk of poverty or social exclusion, which is 7.3 points higher than for households without dependent children (20.8%).

This situation has been exacerbated by the current context of multiple crises. The climate emergency, the global crisis caused by COVID-19 and the war in Ukraine have led to an increase in social inequalities, resource scarcity, rising energy prices and rising inflation⁶². All of this has had a strong impact on the well-being of Catalan households, many of which have not yet recovered from the 2008 financial crisis.

The context of the global crisis has exacerbated structural problems such as housing affordability, unemployment and job insecurity. In terms of housing, more than 10% of the Catalan population devote 40% or more of their available household income to housing, including the payment of rent or mortgage interest, but also the cost of public utilities such as water, electricity, gas or heating⁶³. Furthermore, according to 2022 data, almost

19.2% of the population cannot keep their homes adequately heated⁶⁴.

The unemployment rate in Catalonia was 9.7% in 2022, the lowest since the end of 2008 and significantly lower than the national rate (12.9%)⁶⁵, but still higher than the European Union average (6.1%)⁶⁶. Of particular concern is the high unemployment rate of the population under 25 years of age (24.1% in 2022), which is far from the European average (16.6% in 2021)⁶⁷. It is also essential to warn about long-term unemployment in Catalonia, which represents an exponential increase in the probability of social exclusion, although it has decreased to reach 3.5%⁶⁸ in 2022.

However, having a job is not an insurance against poverty in Catalonia. Almost 11% of working people have an available income below the at-risk-of-poverty threshold⁶⁹. In-work poverty, which is partly due to high rates of temporary employment and precarious conditions, affects not only people's material and economic conditions, but also their mental health.



Neglected and underserved rural areas

The rural world is not finding quick answers to its needs and has many challenges ahead in terms of services, infrastructure and legislation to promote new ruralities, facilitate the repopulation of abandoned areas and contribute to the promotion of innovation and creativity in rural areas.

The population of Catalonia is concentrated in Barcelona, its metropolitan area and the coast. In fact, only 9% of the population lives in rural towns of less than 5,000 inhabitants, although they cover three quarters of the territory⁷⁰. Not only are there fewer people living in these towns, but the general ageing of the Catalan population is accentuated there: up to 277 towns have more than a quarter of the population over 65⁷¹, with Terres de l'Ebre, Alt Pirineu and Aran being the areas with the highest ageing rates⁷².

The lack of available housing, especially in smaller towns, and competition from the demand for second homes in tourist areas make it difficult for young people to settle in rural towns.



On the other hand, the low population density and its dispersion make it difficult to access health services, education—especially secondary and higher education—or care for people with special needs. Although high-speed internet coverage in sparsely populated areas has improved in recent years, reaching 86% of households⁷³ in 2020, the deployment of new technologies such as 5G is lagging behind in urban areas⁷⁴.

The major challenges of the primary sector, especially the lack of generational changeover, the constant insecurity of this sector, the neglect of the rural world and changes in land use, the effects of climate change, legislation that is not well adapted to the reality and needs of the territory and the lack of a collective, socially and politically agreed project on what the rural world should be in a context of global change, are crucial issues for the present and, above all, for the future of the rural world and, therefore, of the whole country.

To reverse this situation, the Government of Catalonia agreed in May 2022 to promote the deployment of the Catalan Rural Agenda⁷⁵, accompanied by a multi-level governance model with active and open social partici-

pation. It is essential to monitor the implementation of this agenda and to modify and strengthen the measures necessary to guarantee a prosperous and sustainable rural development.



The ageing of the population and the need to improve living conditions and rights of older people

The Catalan population shows a clear and continuous ageing trend, as a result of the combination of a low birth rate and an increase in life expectancy at birth (81 years for men and 86 years for women in 2021⁷⁶).

The percentage of the population aged 65 and over has doubled in the last 40 years, reaching 19% in 2022⁷⁷. In addition, the overageing rate, i.e. the proportion of people aged 85 and over within the group aged 65 and over, has almost tripled over the same period, reaching 17% in 2022. Data on the ageing of the population show gender differences: while 22% of women were 65 years or older in 2022, this proportion dropped to 17%⁷⁸, for men, and the overageing index for the female population was 20%, much higher than that for the male population (13.3 %)⁷⁹.

The weight of older people in relation to adults and young people has continued to increase and, as a result, the old-age dependency ratio, i.e. the number of people aged 65 and over for

every 100 people aged 15 to 64 years, continues to rise. In 2022, there were 3 people aged 65 and over for every 10 people of working age⁸⁰. According to the Catalan Statistics Institute (IEC), this ratio will reach 5 people aged 65 or over for every 10 people of working age in 2050⁸¹.

The ageing of the population poses specific challenges that must be met with a comprehensive system of effective care and protection for the elderly, allowing them to age with dignity and good health. In this context, it should be noted that the number of applicants for and recipients of the dependent person status and the dependent person benefits is increasing every year. However, in 2022, 27% of those entitled to benefits were on the waiting list, twice as many as in Spain as a whole (12%)⁸². This means not being able to access housing at a public price, financial benefits or services that facilitate personal autonomy⁸³. It should be noted here that Spain has a low rate of investment in the management of long-term care, which represented 0.9% of GDP in 2020, compared with 2.5% in Germany and around 3%⁸⁴ in the Nordic countries. Finally, it is essential to dignify and revalue the care sector, which is highly feminised and under very precarious conditions.

Among public care services for the elderly, the role of public health care also stands out. In this sense, the Catalan Council for the Elderly highlights the weaknesses of this service—with long waiting lists in primary care centres, hospitals and specialised centres—and the lack of time for professionals to properly attend to patients⁸⁵.

Another challenge is unwanted loneliness. It is estimated that in 2020, 19% of people aged between 65 and 79 lived alone, rising to 36% for those aged 85 and over and with a strong bias towards women. In 2020, more than 44% of women aged 85 and over lived alone, compared to 24% of men in the same age group⁸⁶. Although living alone is not necessarily synonymous with unwanted loneliness, loneliness and social isolation are on the rise in Catalonia⁸⁷, with the consequences of fragility, poor health and dependency.

Finally, although the risk of poverty among the elderly is much lower than among the child population, thanks in part to the public pension system, measures must be taken to ensure its sustainability, taking into account the impending retirement of the baby boom generation⁸⁸.



The persistence of social inequalities

Factors such as socio-economic level, age, functional diversity, gender, sexual orientation, gender identity or expression, race and mental health continue to be a source of discrimination and a barrier to equality.

Catalan society is diverse in terms of social class, gender, affective and sexual preferences, race, ethnicity, origin, ability and age, among others. These

characteristics, according to the intersectional perspective, interact with each other and shape complex social and economic inequalities⁸⁹.

In 2022, inequality in income distribution was at its lowest level in the last ten years. However, the richest 20% of the population still had five times more income than the poorest 20%⁹⁰. Young people were one of the groups most affected, with almost half of young people in our country living in a state of poverty or economic insecurity. Within this group, foreign young people aged 25-35 were the most exposed to economic insecurity.

In fact, origin and gender are factors that increase the likelihood of being economically insecure or at risk of poverty in Catalonia⁹¹. As regards origin, between 2013 and 2022, inequalities by origin have been slowly decreasing, but they still exist: in 2022, people from outside the EU living in our coun-



try were three times more likely to suffer from poverty⁹² and to drop out of school early than the population with Spanish nationality⁹³. Moreover, the employment rate of non-Europeans has been around 15% lower than that of Spaniards over the last decade (and particularly low for women)⁹⁴.

With regard to gender inequalities, it is worth highlighting the feminisation of poverty⁹⁵ and the gender pay gap, which was between 11.7% and 19.7% in 2020, according to different sources (in the latter case, this means that women earned on average 80.3% of men's wages)^{96,97}.

As for people with disabilities, they continue to experience situations of inequality of opportunity, discrimination and difficulties in participating in society and exercising their rights⁹⁸. Furthermore, accessibility affects not only people with functional diversity, but also people with reduced mobility and the elderly. For example, the Catalan Council for the Elderly denounces that this group still suffers serious discrimination on the grounds of age, denial of their rights, difficulties in accessing services, abuse and inappropriate treatment⁹⁹. Discrimination on the basis of age or ageism, manifested in stereotypes and prejudices about older people that are widespread in society as a whole, is currently the least reported form of discrimination¹⁰⁰.

With regard to mental health, the Catalan Mental Health Federation recorded up to 269 violations of mental health rights in 2022, six times more than in the previous year, half of which took place in the health sector, with public administration being the main discriminator¹⁰¹.

Situations of racial discrimination and racist and exclusionary hate speech have also increased. According to the annual report of SOS Racisme¹⁰², 182 situations of racism were identified in Catalonia in 2020, 334 in 2021 and 337 new situations of racism in 2022.

With regard to the LGBTQI+ community, the number of reports of assaults has increased year on year, and in 2022 the Observatory against Homophobia received twice as many reports as in 2015. Most of the complaints were related to verbal attacks in public spaces, although LGBT-phobia is present in all areas of society¹⁰³.

Finally, male violence remains one of the main problems of Catalan society. According to the results of the 2021¹⁰⁴ survey, 79.3% of women living in Catalonia have suffered at least one incident of sexist violence in their lives. 26.2% of women have suffered such incidents in the last year, almost nine percentage points more than in 2016.



The lack of effectiveness, efficiency and coordination between administrations and social and economic actors

Several actors and institutions stress the importance of improving the effectiveness and efficiency of public administrations and of working together with governments, civil society, the private sector and academia to promote the design and implementation of policies, plans and programmes that effectively contribute to sustainable development in Catalonia.

The Law on the legal regime and procedure of the public administrations of Catalonia establishes effectiveness and efficiency as one of their general principles of action^b. However, according to the Forum of Organisations for the Reform of the Administration (FERA)^c, although Catalan administrations are reasonably effective, they are generally inefficient, which reduces their ability to generate value. The main causes identified are deficiencies in the organisational model, both in terms of governance and coordination between administrations¹⁰⁵.

The Ombudsman of Catalonia, in her Report to the Catalan Parliament of 2022, also stated the need to make the administration more agile, efficient and, above all, closer to the citizens and more humane. She stressed the need to simplify administrative procedures and work so that digitalisation does not become an obstacle for the most vulnerable¹⁰⁶.

At the global level, the Independent Group of Scientists appointed by the UN Secretary-General stated that achieving the Sustainable Development Goals will require profound changes in human activities for which government action is not enough, as governments must work with businesses, civil society, communities and individuals¹⁰⁷. Public-private initiatives, multi-stakeholder alliances and citizen participation are some of the most commonly used collaborative mechanisms. However, there is still little involvement of stakeholders in the implementation, monitoring and review of government strategies¹⁰⁸.

In Catalonia, public-private cooperation in health and social policies stands out, which over the years has made it possible to accelerate innovation in the sector and provide resources for the provision of public services with a significant social contribution¹⁰⁹. Co-operation between public bodies, private non-profit organisations, owners or managers of agroforestry land and citizens in the conservation of nature through contracts and land custody agreements is also relevant¹¹⁰. In addition, the academic world has established itself as a key actor to be reckoned with, especially in the context of European projects.

In terms of cooperation between public institutions, more than 27,600 cooperation agreements have been signed with the local and international public sectors since 2015, with a clear upward trend¹¹¹.

Citizen participation is seen as a mechanism to improve the effectiveness of public interventions and, in the medium term, to improve the efficiency of decision-making on controversial issues¹¹². Along these lines, the number of spaces for citizen participation has increased in recent years. In 2022, on the Participa Gencat portal alone, 30% more participatory processes were initiated than in the previous year¹¹³, and there were 67 stable spaces for participation¹¹⁴.

- b Law 26/2010, of 3 August 2010, on the legal regime and procedures of the public administrations of Catalonia. Available online at: <https://portaljuridic.gencat.cat/ca/document-del-pjur/?documentId=546116>
- c The initial members of FERA are the Catalan Association of Public Management (ACGP), the Barcelona Chamber of Commerce, the Cecot Business Association, the ESADE Alumni Public Management Club, the Association of Economists of Catalonia, the Commission of Industrial Engineers in Public Administrations of the Association of Industrial Engineers of Catalonia, the Association of Political Science and Sociology Professionals and the Third Social Sector Platform.



Proposals for high-leverage actions

In this edition of the opinion “10 Challenges for Sustainable Development”, the CADS wishes to propose high-leverage actions for three of the ten challenges identified. High-leverage actions are priority actions to address the challenges raised that are identified jointly with the organisations that are part of the Catalonia 2030 Alliance. They are specific actions with transformative potential, i.e. the ability to bring about change, that can start being implemented in 2023. In addition, these actions are aimed at the different levels of government operating in Catalonia, as well as the business/private sector, organisations and citizens as a whole.

Challenge: An excessively slow shift towards a circular and collaborative economic model

The slowness of the transition of the economic model towards a circular and collaborative economy is limiting industrial capacity and the development of a transformative national innovation ecosystem, affecting the competitiveness of our economy in the medium and long term and increasing the environmental and social impact of our production and consumption model.

High-leverage actions

1. Promote spaces for dialogue and social consultation to define sectoral strategies aimed at promoting the circular economy (such as the Circular Fashion Pact).
2. Apply circularity criteria with progressive quantitative objectives to all public procurement, especially for goods and services with a higher impact, and train those in the administration who intervene in the public procurement process.
3. Develop the necessary regulatory instruments to ensure the rapid implementation of circular solutions, to speed up and reduce the time required for administrative procedures to implement these economic models, and to facilitate the use of by-products as raw materials.
4. Implement economic incentives for the market uptake of circular solutions that reach consumers.
5. Integrate the circular economy into all educational resources, especially in vocational training and in training and retraining measures for the working population.

Challenge: The increasing impact of climate change on water resources, ecosystems, the economy, and human health and well-being

Climatic anomalies are already significantly affecting the functioning of key ecosystems and reducing the provision of many of their services. They are also affecting key economic sectors and human health and well-being, with the most vulnerable being particularly hard hit. This situation could be exacerbated under future climate scenarios.

High-leverage actions

1. Promote adaptive management and restoration of ecosystems to reduce their vulnerability to climate change and increase their resilience, with particular attention to restoring the dynamics of forest ecosystems. Address the degradation of forest ecosystems, river ecosystems and coasts, as well as storms and floods.
2. Integrate social, economic and environmental functions in the management of the main ecosystems (forestry, agriculture, rivers, etc.) in order to guarantee the provision of their services, such as agricultural and forestry production, the maintenance of biodiversity, water supply and human recreation.
3. Increase investment in facilities for the regeneration of purified water and their distribution networks, and encourage their use to increase available water resources. Raise public awareness of the need for and safety of these facilities, with the aim of recovering and reusing more water from domestic and industrial use in order to mitigate droughts (which will become more frequent and prolonged in the 21st century due to climate change¹¹⁵).

4. Prevent the effects of high temperatures on the population by promoting nature-based solutions (NBS) such as the expansion and improvement of climate shelters and the renaturation of urban spaces, combined with measures such as the analysis of the effects on the population's health and corresponding public awareness.
5. Promote local and supra-local climate change adaptation plans based on the expansion of restoration measures and NBS to prevent impacts, manage risks, plan actions to improve resilience and raise public awareness of the climate emergency and its consequences.

Challenge: The chronic poverty and social exclusion of a significant proportion of the population

The high levels of poverty and social exclusion in Catalonia have been exacerbated by the current crisis context and unresolved structural problems, such as difficulties in accessing housing, high unemployment rates and an insecure labour market .

High-leverage actions

1. Effectively coordinate social benefits, in particular the minimum living income and the guaranteed citizen's income, and design them in such a way that they complement and rationalise each other, taking into account the situation of each household and the urgency of the needs of the claimants.
2. Work towards the establishment of a decent minimum wage which, in line with the recommendations of the Parliament of Catalonia and various European institutions (such as the European Parliament and the European Committee of the Regions), of at least 60% of the average or median wage of the territory, in order to combat in-work poverty¹¹⁶.
3. Adequately regulate rental prices according to their use and the characteristics of each territory, make housing subsidies compatible with other benefits and expand the supply of social rental housing in order to guarantee access to housing and reduce the burden that this expenditure represents for Catalan households.
4. Promote 360 education, also known as full-time education, and provide it with sufficient financial resources, linking schools, families and all the resources and assets of the community to guarantee equal educational opportunities both in and out of school, and to allow for inclusive leisure that enables the participation of all vulnerable children.

5. Expand the provision of and improve access to health promotion measures for particularly vulnerable groups, such as those at risk of social exclusion, migrants, the elderly, children and adolescents, so that everyone has access to a healthy lifestyle.

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