

1 **Ignacio Escolar**

2 **Unsustainable welfare?**

3 original at:

4 <http://www.guardian.co.uk/commentisfree/2011/mar/30/spain-welfare-healthcare-education?INTCMP=SRCH>

5 Much of Spain's public spending is done by the country's 17 regional
6 governments, who run healthcare, education and other services. The
7 president of the Murcia region has suggested that one way to save money
8 is to start partial charging for healthcare. He recently said that citizens
9 should meet part of the costs of healthcare and education because the
10 expenditure "is unsustainable".

11 The champions of co-payment argue that charging a symbolic sum for
12 these services would lead to a fall in demand because people would not
13 abuse them. This might be the case with healthcare, although I do not
14 really think it would make up for it; few people go to the doctor out of
15 choice, and this symbolic payment – no matter how small – would not
16 mean the same thing to everyone. We would run the risk of sick people
17 dying for the sake of saving a few pence.

18 But who "abuses" education? What kind of co-payment would reduce
19 demand in schools without leading to serious problems of social exclusion?
20 If expenditure on healthcare and education is genuinely "unsustainable",
21 then wouldn't it be better to improve its management and perhaps
22 reconsider its income: taxation. But the solution must not depend on
23 making those who have the least pay higher bills.

Questions

- 1) Why are the opinions of regional presidents important in terms of the development in Spanish education and health care?
- 2) Find, in paragraph 1 and elsewhere, a synonym for 'expenditure' (lines 10 and 20).
- 3) What arguments are used to back the suggestion that people should cover part of the healthcare and education costs individually?
- 4) What risks would the introduction of fees for healthcare services involve according to the author of the text?
- 5) Does the author of the text think that demand for education should be reduced?
- 6) What does the author of the article suggest to tackle the problem of welfare unsustainability? What arguments does he use?
- 7) Paraphrase the sentence 'But the solution must not depend on making those who have the least pay higher bills.' (lines 22 to 23).
- 8) Do you think that education and health care should be paid on an individual basis or would you rather have them paid from the national budget? Or should both individuals and society as a whole share the costs?

Vocabulary

charging (line 8) – asking people to pay a certain amount of money

unsustainable (line 10) – incapable of being maintained at a steady level; unable to go over the longer term

genuinely (line 20) – Truly

reconsider (line 22) – to think again about something you have decided, with the possibility that you might change your mind.

You can find additional explanation and more examples to help you understand and use English words and phrases at <http://dictionary.reference.com>, <http://dictionary.cambridge.org/>, <http://www.merriam-webster.com/> or <http://www.ldoceonline.com/>

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