



Madrid, December 18, 2023

Dear attendees of the 32nd Meeting of the National Ethics Councils, held in Madrid, Spain, from November 27 to 28, 2023:

For the Spanish Bioethics Committee it has been an honor and a privilege to have welcomed you in Madrid for the celebration of such an important event.

Through this letter, we want to thank all the institutions that, through committed, generous people with a high sense of responsibility, have accompanied us in its organization and development. Our special thanks to the Directorate General of Research and Innovation of the European Commission, co-organizers of this meeting. Thank you Isidoros Karatzas and Edyta Sikorska for your timely instructions and your invaluable support from the beginning to the end. Thanks to the Ministry of Science and Innovation, the Carlos III Health Institute, and the Ministry of Health that welcomed us into their home and, of course, to all the speakers, session chairs and participants.

This meeting has represented a collective effort to address fundamental issues that affect Bioethics and its practice throughout Europe.

On this occasion, our shared purpose has been to explore and understand the complex dimensions of inequality through the lens of bioethics. The central theme of the meeting, "Inequality in Europe", has required us to reflect on crucial aspects of human life, from the challenges that occur in end-of-life scenarios, to the development and application of artificial intelligence, not forgetting the existing gaps in access to health determined by disability, origin, zip code, gender, social condition or the degradation of the environment in which life takes place.

An ethical and social commitment is required to reduce inequality in the world, acting on the determinants that we have clearly identified, and being attentive to those that will condition our lives in the future.

With these concerns as a common thread, we have had the opportunity to debate in sessions and workshops about the challenges posed by decisions at the end of life, the healthy life for people that only a society that includes justice and compassion among its values can aspire to offer, the importance of joining efforts so that no one is left behind, and also the need to transcend reductionist concepts of health to look at a holistic conception of it.

When discussing all these topics, we have asked ourselves how to address them. The principles are important, the consequences are important, but it is essential to work together on a daily basis, in each protocol, in each program, in each action, to build a more inclusive and more equitable future, where all people are treated with dignity, respect and are afforded equal opportunities.

This Meeting of National Ethics Councils has been a great opportunity to share knowledge, perspectives and experiences.

We would like to highlight some of the ideas that have constituted the core of this 32nd Meeting of the NEC Forum, and that we present to you as conclusions:

First:

Decisions at the end of life present us with serious challenges. It is necessary to know the trajectories of the diseases that persons may be suffering from, in order to help them in a significant way. It is also urgent to study the responsibilities of the people around those who decided to commit suicide and how we should act both to prevent acts of suicide and to respect the autonomy of the people who commit it. In this end-of-life context, it has been very enriching to show the recent experience of the application of the euthanasia law in Spain, and compare it with the long and valuable history of end-of-life decisions in the Netherlands, encouraging a very fruitful debate, especially for those countries that are considering updating their end-of-life legislation.

Second:

Current inequalities in access to health are an important challenge for ethics. Our commitment to dignity and compassion in these situations is fundamental to building a more just and ethical society.

Health emergencies have been one of the most pressing challenges we have addressed. The global pandemic has tested our health systems and highlighted the need to make difficult ethical decisions in crisis situations. We have reflected on how bioethics can provide the necessary framework to guide our actions in critical moments, ensuring that equity and justice are guiding principles even in the most challenging circumstances.

Disability, migration, social and gender differences have been key themes of our discussions. These aspects of human life are often affected by structural and social inequalities that require serious ethical attention. We have explored how bioethics can be a voice for those who are marginalized and how it can advocate for justice and equality in all facets of healthcare and research.

Inequalities in emergencies or in people with disabilities must be reduced, and the challenge of humanitarian assistance to people in situations of extreme vulnerability must be faced in a solidarity-based manner.

Third:

We must take extreme precautions to protect sensitive data and the privacy of human beings. Relatedly, a particularly exciting and complex challenge we have tackled is that of regenerative artificial intelligence. This technological advancement raises fundamental questions about how to balance innovation and protecting people. In a world where science is advancing rapidly, we have discussed how bioethics can provide guidance to ensure that research in regenerative artificial intelligence is conducted ethically and equitably.

Artificial intelligence has revolutionized the way we live and work. Particularly in the healthcare field, it presents exciting opportunities, but also poses major ethical challenges. There is a need to ensure that artificial intelligence is used fairly and equitably, and to prevent existing gaps in healthcare from widening.

Fourth:

Climate change, inequality in health care, gender or immigration are issues with a great social impact that must be resolved, and the “one health” model as a holistic proposal marks an interesting path to address these challenges.


Throughout these days, it has become clear that bioethics is an essential tool to address inequalities in all their forms. We are committed to being advocates for equity, justice, and dignity in health care and research. Each of the participating people has contributed in an indispensable way to this dialogue and has been part of a collective effort to build a more ethical and equitable future.

Let's continue working together to turn our reflections into concrete actions that drive positive changes in people's lives.

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On behalf of the Spanish Bioethics Committee