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EUROPEAN SOCIAL CHARTER

Comments submitted by
the Kimbé Rèd - French West Indies (F.W.I.)
concerning the Ad hoc report on the cost-of-living crisis
submitted by

THE GOVERNMENT OF FRANCE

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CYCLE 2024

FRANCE:

AD HOC REPORT ON THE COST OF LIVING CRISIS

Additional information



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Author: Kimbé Rêd - French West Indies (F.W.I.), Antillean human rights association

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Introduction

The ad hoc [Report](#) on the cost-of-living crisis submitted by the French government to the European Committee of Social Rights on January 12, 2024, does not mention (except once on page 19) the situation in its 11 so-called inhabited overseas territories, which account for nearly 3 million inhabitants.

This report provides additional information concerning these French territories, which are severely affected by the high cost-of-living crisis.

Glaring inequalities

The so-called “overseas” populations are disproportionately affected by the cost-of-living crisis, poverty, and limited access to employment and basic services, particularly safe drinking water and sanitation, as well as housing, education, health, and communications.

The [Law for Real Equality in Overseas Territories and Other Provisions in Social and Economic Matters](#) was adopted on February 14, 2017, to reduce inequalities between mainland France and the overseas territories, strengthen the local economy, and enhance the rights of overseas citizens. It must be noted that in 2024, this law still has not been effectively implemented.







In both law and practice, the overseas populations remain largely **“left behind.”**

In 2024, the inequalities between mainland France and the DROM-COM (Overseas Departments and Regions and Collectivities) remain glaring, as revealed notably in publications from:

- The [National Consultative Commission on Human Rights](#) (CNCDH)
- The Defender of Rights: [Report - Public Services in the Antilles: Ensuring Access to Rights | Defender of Rights \(defenseurdesdroits.fr\)](#)
- The National Institute of Statistics and Economic Studies (INSEE) - *see key figures below*
- The [report of the inquiry commission on the cost-of-living in the overseas departments and regions \(No. 664\) adopted on February 9, 2023](#)

Key data

INSEE notes in particular that:

	<p>"In 2022, prices remain higher in the Overseas Departments (DOM) than in mainland France, particularly for food products: from 9% in Réunion to 16% in Guadeloupe. For all the DOM, the price differences have increased compared to 2015. These differences are primarily explained by the high cost of goods, especially food products, for which the prices paid by households are 30% to 42% higher."</p>
	<p>"Extreme poverty is 5 to 15 times more common in the overseas departments (DOM) than in mainland France. It is also much more intense."</p>
	<p>"It costs up to 17% more to seek healthcare in the overseas departments."</p>
	<p>" Rents, maintenance and repairs are higher in the DOM."</p>
	<p>«Communications (telephone, internet and postal mail) are also more expensive than in mainland France, up to +35% in Guadeloupe, Martinique and French Guiana.»</p>
	<p>"The halo around unemployment is 2.5 to 5 times more prevalent in the Overseas Departments (DOM) than in mainland France."</p>

These figures, extremely alarming, are nevertheless **underestimated** by the calculation method by INSEE which contains biases. ([Patient, Georges "Sincérité des taux de pauvreté en Outremer", Sénat: question écrite n°09202, 28 février 2019](#)).

In response, state measures aimed at achieving real equality appear nonexistent, insufficient, or ineffective. For example:

- While the French state, aware of these disparities, provides its civil servants working in the DROM-COM with a monthly high cost-of-living allowance of 40%, **the minimum wage remains the same in the DROM as in mainland France**, worsening local poverty and deepening socio-economic inequalities among citizens;
- **Economic and commercial monopolies persist;**
- **Social pricing for public services (such as water) or social measures** implemented in mainland France are not implemented, or are delayed, in the so-called overseas territories, where they should be a priority given the economic vulnerability of their populations.

Report of the Parliamentary Committee of Inquiry on the cost-of-living in the Overseas Departments and Regions (2023)

The report highlights "**The urgent need to determine the mechanisms contributing to the cost-of-living in the Overseas Departments and Regions (DROM)**" where:

- **The cost-of-living is significantly higher** than in mainland France **due to historical and structural determinants**;
- **The standard of living of local populations is lower** than that observed in mainland France;
- **Underfunding** affects the functioning of local authorities;
- **The state's treatment of overseas territories is inequitable and unfair**;
- Existing instruments and institutions to combat the high cost-of-living produce **effects that remain largely insufficient** to reduce the cost-of-living.

In conclusion, the report of the Inquiry Commission recommends an "**Economic and Social shock absorption plan.**"

EXTRACTS OF THE ARTICLE

[High cost-of-living in overseas territories: The report of the Committee of Inquiry recommends an 'economic and social shock absorption plan' | LCP - National Assembly](#)

"AN HISTORICAL PROBLEM", INADEQUATES STANDARDS

Recalling the historical legacy of **colonization**, which led overseas territories to develop 'export cultures' and subsequently depend heavily on imports from mainland France, the report from the inquiry commission documents lower incomes compared to mainland France, while the **'level of prices [is] much higher,' 'continuously rising' over the past twenty years**, according to Socialist rapporteur Johnny Hajjar.

Inquestion: 'very limited competition, insufficient local production, very significant historical imports, oligopolies and monopolies,' as well as 'underfunding' of local authorities highlighted by the report, leading, in order to remedy this, to an increase in local taxation or a reduction in public services for the population."



"NEED TO RENEW TOOLS AND SOLUTIONS"

Without the support of commission president Guillaume Vuilletet (Renaissance), inquiry commission rapporteur Johnny Hajjar (Socialists) proposes 'twenty measures for **an economic and social shock absorption** of the overseas territories,' including:

Conducting **commercial negotiations** with major overseas distribution groups to achieve a '**10 to 20% reduction** in prices on most [products];'

Increasing and automating legal social benefits, enhanced by a differential reflecting the cost-of-living;

Conditioning 'employment aid, within the framework of general free zones or any other scheme promoting employment, on the recruitment of residents from the concerned overseas territory.'"

United Nations Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (2023)

Following its review of France's fifth periodic report on October 2 and 3, 2023, the Committee adopted the following [Concluding Observations](#):

Overseas territories

16. The Committee is concerned about the lack of adequate resources and public policies to ensure the full enjoyment of economic, social and cultural rights in the overseas territories (art. 2 (2)).

17. The Committee recommends that the State party provide adequate financial and human resources for the administrations in the overseas departments and regions and the overseas collectivities, so that all inhabitants of the State party enjoy economic, social and cultural rights on an equal footing.

Poverty

38. The Committee notes with concern that, despite the measures adopted by the State party, the incidence of poverty among certain disadvantaged and marginalized groups continues to worsen their situation of social exclusion. It also notes with concern that the poverty rate has not fallen, and is even rising slightly, and that certain suburbs and rural areas, as well as the overseas territories such as Mayotte and French Guiana, are more affected by poverty. The Committee is concerned about the lack of targeted measures to combat poverty that take into account the specific characteristics of the most affected regions (art. 11).

39. The Committee recommends that the State party review and adapt its national strategy on preventing and combating poverty, ensuring that it focuses on the most affected individuals and groups and is implemented using a human rights-based approach. It also recommends that sufficient resources be allocated to its implementation. The Committee reminds the State party of the recommendation made in its previous concluding observations and recommends that it give priority to tackling poverty and extreme poverty in the overseas territories, particularly Mayotte, by ensuring that persons living in extreme poverty have access to adequate social benefits. The Committee draws the attention of the State party to its statement on poverty and the Covenant, which was adopted in 2001.

Conclusion

The Covid-19 pandemic and the underlying economic crisis have undeniably widened already significant structural gaps.

It is urgent that the State address these issues sustainably by adopting a human rights-based approach. This means recognizing the populations of the overseas territories as full rights holders and assuming its role as duty bearer by respecting, protecting, and implementing their rights in accordance with the **European Social Charter**.

In doing so, rather than continuing to diverge, France will be able to move closer to achieving many of the **Sustainable Development Goals for 2030** in the DROM-COM.

"This report is not an end, but a beginning."

Johnny Hajjar, Rapporteur of the Parliamentary Inquiry Commission on the Cost of Living in the Overseas Departments and Regions.

Contact

kimberedfwi@gmail.com • Guadeloupe



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