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Comments submitted by
the Social Justice Center
concerning the Ad hoc report on the cost-of-living crisis
submitted by
THE GOVERNMENT OF GEORGIA

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**Comments on Ad Hoc Report of Georgia
on the Cost-of-living Crisis under the European Social Charter**

Submitted by The Social Justice Center

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I. Introduction

1. This report analyzes and addresses key issues related to the cost-of-living crisis, including the minimum wage, social protection programs, anti-poverty measures, and underlying systemic challenges in Georgia.
2. This report is prepared by the Social Justice Center, a Georgian left-wing civil society organization advocating for human rights and social justice. The Center focuses on identifying the root causes of economic, social, and political inequality in Georgia and sharing critical knowledge while contributing to transforming the existing order through democratic means.
3. This report is based on the Social Justice Center’s experience in research, advocacy, and strategic litigation. It also incorporates information and recommendations from relevant analytical work by Georgian and international organizations, as well as the Public Defender’s Office of Georgia.
4. Please note that the recent passage of the “Law on Transparency of Foreign Influence” by the Georgian Parliament has raised significant concerns among domestic and international actors. Implementation of this law is expected to lead to the shutdown of independent civil society organizations and media outlets, thereby silencing critical voices in the country. Therefore, we recommend that the Committee urge the government to repeal these regulations and allow civil society entities to operate freely, ensuring democratic processes within the country.

II. Minimum Wage (questions 1-4)

5. The right to decent remuneration, the means of realization of which is a minimum wage, is not recognized by the Georgian legislation as of today. The concept of the right to decent remuneration is found neither in the supreme law of Georgia – the Constitution nor in the Organic Law regulating labour relations – the Labour Code of Georgia. In the list of labour rights enumerated in the Constitution of Georgia, labour remuneration is not mentioned. The Labour Code of Georgia recognizes only certain types of fair remuneration – prohibition of discrimination on the conditions of

labour remuneration, equal remuneration for equal work, and equal remuneration for equal work of female and male workers. The concept of decent remuneration is not found in the legislation related to labour service in the public sector either – the Law on Public Service and the Law on Labour Remuneration in Public Institutions.¹

6. According to the N 351 Order of the President of Georgia, issued in 1999, the minimum wage of the workers employed in the private sector amounts to **20 GEL (6.67 EUR) a month**.² The N 351 Order envisages revision of the level of the minimum wage and making proposals regarding its possible increase by the relevant governmental bodies, considering the level of socio-economic development of the country. Although Georgia's socio-economic situation significantly progressed since 1999, including economic growth and an increase in the average wage, the minimum wage of 20 GEL set by the 1999 Order has never increased. The issue of minimum wage has been bypassed by every legislative reform implemented in Georgia in recent years for the improvement of the guarantees of workers' rights.
7. Compared to the private sector, the minimum wage is slightly higher in the public sector. However, it is still highly inadequate for ensuring the needs of decent living for the workers and their families. According to N 43 Order of the President of Georgia, adopted in 2005, the minimum salary for employees of the executive branch of government amounts to **135 GEL (45 EUR) a month**.³ The order does not envisage the need to review, adjust, or increase the level of the aforementioned minimum wage.
8. Setting 20 GEL as a minimum monthly wage for the workers employed in the private sector blatantly violates the right to fair remuneration guaranteed by the European Social Charter. It is obviously not sufficient to ensure either the subsistence needs or any other needs necessary for leading a dignified life, which can be calculated by reference to the average wage or living wage. According to the data of National Statistics Office of Georgia, as of December 2023, the subsistence minimum for the working age male amounted to 249.7 GEL (83.2 EUR) in Georgia.⁴ As for the living wage - the wage which takes into account both the subsistence needs and other needs for decent standard of living – it amounted to 1706 GEL (568.44 EUR) in October 2023.⁵ As for the average wage, it amounted to 1855.4 GEL (618.22 EUR) in the third quarter of 2023.⁶
9. It should be noted that in certain sectors of employment, there are specific minimum wages set for particular workers, such as doctors and nurses, employed in the clinics involved in the universal health care program and the teachers employed in the public schools, amounting to relatively higher remuneration than the aforementioned general minimum wages. However, such sectoral minimum wages are only individual cases of a relatively improved standard of minimum wage. As for the general minimum standard, as set by the Orders of the President, it is grossly inadequate for the decent living

¹ Social Justice Center, Minimum Wage as a Human Right – International Standards and Prospects for Georgia, p. 23, <https://cutt.ly/uedfmFdN>.

² The N 351 Order of the President of Georgia on the Amount of Minimum Wage, 4 June 1999, <https://cutt.ly/CedfQyBr>.

³ N 43 Order of the President of Georgia, 24 January 2005, <https://cutt.ly/hedfQE8J>.

⁴ National Statistics Office of Georgia, Subsistence Minimum, <https://cutt.ly/8edfWqKK>.

⁵ Calculated by Wage Indicator Foundation for October 2023, <https://cutt.ly/FedfWdzd>.

⁶ National Statistics Office of Georgia, Wages, <https://cutt.ly/FedfWUr8>.

of workers and it leaves a wide range of employees in conditions of extremely low pay.⁷ **Many workers in Georgia have a labour remuneration lower than a subsistence minimum.** According to the information of the Revenue Service, in January 2023, the salary of 57 014 employed persons was less than 200 GEL (66.6 EUR).⁸ It is also alarming that there is a sharp disparity between the salaries of men and women in Georgia. As of 2020, the average salary of women in Georgia was 36.2% lower than that of men.⁹ According to the data of 2021, among the total number of persons employed in the private sector throughout the whole country, the share of women whose salary was less than 250 GEL (83.3 EUR) was 11.7%, and that of men - 5.4%.¹⁰

10. As of now, Georgia has not accepted the provision of the European Social Charter concerning the right to fair remuneration (Article 4 (1)), which covers the right to a minimum wage. In its 2015 report, the European Committee of Social Rights (ECSR) noted that Georgia had undertaken similar obligations under the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (ICESCR) and encouraged Georgia to accept the aforementioned provision of the Charter. Georgia has accepted Article 7 (5) of the Charter, which guarantees the right of young workers and apprentices to a fair wage. In its conclusions concerning 2015, 2017 and 2019, the ECSR underlines that it has requested information from the Georgian government regarding the minimum wages paid to young workers in practice in different economic activities. **The Committee notes that the reports of the Georgian government have repeatedly failed to provide the aforementioned information. Therefore, the Committee has repeatedly reiterated its finding on the non-conformity with Article 7 (5) of the Charter.**¹¹ **It should be noted that in the 2022 national report submitted by the government of Georgia to the ECSR regarding the implementation of the European Social Charter, the Government fails again to provide statistical data regarding the minimum wages paid to young workers despite the specific request made by the ECSR in this regard.**¹²
11. In February 2024, the Healthcare and Social Issues Committee of the Parliament of Georgia supported the legislative proposal of the Georgian Trade Union Confederation (GTUC) regarding the minimum wage, under the condition that at first, it should be discussed within the framework of the Tripartite Commission of Social Partnership. The Tripartite Commission of Social Partnership is an advisory body of the Government of Georgia, which comprises the representatives of the Government of Georgia, the unions of workers, and the unions of employers. It is problematic that the composition of the Commission does not include the representatives of civil society organizations and various sectoral trade unions, which have extensive experience in terms of working on the issues of labour and social policy. According to the 2019-2023 Strategy and Action Plan of the Labour and Employment Policy of Georgia, the Commission was obliged to discuss issues of minimum wage in 2023, including its economic feasibility, and, in case of necessity, based on the regulatory impact assessment, plan

⁷ Social Justice Center, Increased Minimum Wage for Medical Workers is a Positive Step, but Further Reforms Needed, 24 November 2022, <https://cutt.ly/ledfEDRI>.

⁸ Revenue Service of Georgia, <https://cutt.ly/QedfRq37>.

⁹ Giorgi Chanturidze, Difference in Wages based on Gender in Georgia, p. 7.

¹⁰ The International School of Economics at Tbilisi State University (ISET), Research Institute, Will establishing a minimum level of labor remuneration affect the poverty rate among women in Georgia – A Simulated Case Study on the Example of Georgia, 2023, <https://cutt.ly/pedfiDf>.

¹¹ European Committee of Social Rights, Conclusions 2019, issued on March 2020, p. 11, <https://cutt.ly/oedflzgi>.

¹² Government of Georgia, 16th National Report on the Implementation of the European Social Charter, 30/12/2022, pp. 6-7, <https://cutt.ly/BedfiGDL>.

relevant activities. The Commission has not fulfilled these functions. According to the existing information, the Georgian Trade Union Confederation (GTUC) presented the initiative related to the minimum wage at the Commission several times for discussion. However, this did not result in any relevant response from the Commission.¹³

III. Social Security and Social Assistance Systems and Benefits (questions 5-10)

General Framework and Statistics

12. In its report, the state emphasized that the governmental policy is focused on creating a sustainable social protection system designed to help the population realize their social rights and reduce the social risks associated with poverty. The State Report underlined that the government is continuously developing new measures and improving existing programs to achieve the goals established in social policy.
13. Unfortunately, it should be noted that, in reality, the government has failed to create an effective and unified state social protection policy that adequately considers the vulnerabilities and barriers faced by different groups. Central and municipal services are not harmonized, and there is no unified social protection framework or strategic document aimed at eradicating poverty and ensuring adequate protection for the population.
14. Due to the absence of a unified vision, municipal services vary from municipality to municipality, primarily offering one-off cash payments to certain vulnerable groups rather than providing long-term support for individuals living in poverty.¹⁴ Furthermore, the system still does not provide crucial life cycle benefits, such as survivor support for adults and unemployment insurance, essential for comprehensive and effective social protection.¹⁵
15. In 2006, a significant change in the social protection system occurred with the enactment of the Law on Social Assistance. According to the explanatory note of the Law, the social assistance was framed as a gift from the government rather than being construed as a legal right. This change also reflected the government's perspective on social protection measures, emphasizing a targeted approach. Almost two decades later, the government still adheres to the same approaches in its social assistance policies, which undermines the proper realization of the rights to social protection and an adequate standard of living.
16. The statistics concerning poverty and socio-economic vulnerability are also concerning. Although that the portion of the population living in extreme poverty is decreasing, with 11.8% of the total population living below the absolute poverty line by 2023,¹⁶ this number remains high and concerning.

¹³ The Georgia Fair Labor Platform Responds to the Initiative regarding minimum wage, 22 March 2024, <https://cutt.ly/iedfi3WI> (link available only in Georgian).

¹⁴ Social Justice Center, *The Role of Targeted Social Assistance in the Social Protection System and Its Connection with Other Social Support Services*, 2023, p. 42.

¹⁵ International Labour Organization, UN Women, *Assessment of the Social Protection System in Georgia, Final Report*, 2020, pp. 1, 19 – 20.

¹⁶ National Statistics Office of Georgia, *Poverty and Gini Coefficients*, <https://cutt.ly/1edfVjeo>.

This figure, although a historic low for the Georgian population, still highlights significant socio-economic challenges.

17. When analyzing poverty and social vulnerability, other statistics (for example, the portion of the population living in relative poverty, those receiving basic social allowance, and the Gini coefficient) are also relevant. Relative poverty is one of the most important indicators of social vulnerability and income inequality. In 2023, the relative poverty rate (the share of the population that consumes less than 60% of the median consumer expenditure) across the country decreased by only 0.1% and amounted to 19.8%.¹⁷ It should be emphasized that relative poverty in rural areas increased by 0.2%, reaching 26.8%, highlighting the vulnerability of population living in these regions and the weaknesses and fragmentation of the social protection policy.
18. In 2023, the Gini coefficient, an indicator of income inequality, also increased. Statistical data show that the ratio of total consumer spending increased by 2 points, equalling the rate of 2020 (0.36).¹⁸ This increase indicates that the situation regarding the social inequality in the country has worsened.
19. The high number of individuals living in poverty and receiving targeted social assistance (TSA) is also concerning. As of May 2024, 667 528 people (18.1% of the total population) are recipients of TSA, while 1 237 467 individuals (33.5% of the total population) are registered in the database of socially vulnerable.¹⁹
20. The difficult socio-economic situation in the country is also reflected in migration indicators. People are moving abroad en masse for survival and a minimum standard of living. In 2023, a record number of Georgian citizens left the country—more than 163 000 people.²⁰

State Social Policy Towards Certain Vulnerable Groups

21. The absence of a unified social protection policy negatively affects the human rights situation of various vulnerable groups and greatly impacts their daily lives. The present report will address only some of these groups; however, the fact that the state overlooks the needs of almost all vulnerable groups should not be ignored.

Families Living in Poverty

22. The social protection system in Georgia foresees monthly financial assistance to families living in poverty with TSA scores below 65 001 points and 120 001 points for each family member under 16. The financial benefit received by each individual aged 16 and above ranges from 30 to 60 GEL (10 to 20 EUR), while the support for children under 16 is 200 GEL (66.8 EUR). The amount foreseen by the program falls below the subsistence minimum and is not sufficient to meet even the basic needs of its beneficiaries. Unlike the children's benefit, the assistance provided to individuals aged 16 and above has not increased since 2015, disregarding inflation and the rising needs of those living in poverty.

¹⁷ Ibid.

¹⁸ Ibid.

¹⁹ LEPL – Social Service Agency, Statistics, <https://cutt.ly/bedf0nPF>, <https://cutt.ly/Tedf0Zel>.

²⁰ National Statistics Office of Georgia, Migration, <https://cutt.ly/jedf39My>.

23. Considering the ineffective support by the social assistance system, the prolonged dependence of beneficiaries on the TSA is also a significant issue. By June 2023, 47% of TSA recipients had been in the system for more than five years, while 19.3% had been enrolled for over 11 years. Over 61 000 individuals had been recipients of the TSA for a period exceeding 15 years.
24. One of the major drawbacks of the system is its exclusion of certain groups and households who might need assistance the most. For example, existing regulations prevent roofless individuals from receiving TSA. According to UNICEF, one-third of households living below the poverty line do not apply for state assessment and subsequent TSA allocation. Additionally, the system employs Proxy Means Testing (PMT), which inherently has inclusion and exclusion errors, resulting in some households living in poverty falling outside the system. For instance, a study by the ILO revealed that by 2018, TSA covered only 43% of children in the poorest decile, while according to UNICEF, by 2019, 76% of households in the poorest decile were covered by one or more social assistance programs, including TSA.²¹
25. The PMT system, which relies on a computerized score-granting mechanism, not only prevents some individuals from receiving TSA but also limits their ability to challenge their TSA score. They must wait for a reassessment from the Social Service Agency for one year. Additionally, if a family provides false and/or incorrect information during the assessment, or if a TSA beneficiary family member fails to inform the Agency on changes in the family (such as demographic changes, a change in permanent residence, or a change in the household's socio-economic status) within one month, the Agency is to exclude the family from the database of socially vulnerable, stop providing the TSA and/or prohibit to prohibit registration in the database for the next year.
26. Since a TSA score is a prerequisite for receiving numerous municipal social protection services—such as free meals programs, coverage of medical treatment and/or medicine costs, and monetary assistance programs—those who fall outside the TSA system are excluded from these basic protections and are left in severe poverty.²²
27. The state report underlined that in order to activate the socially vulnerable population in the labour market, the public employment program was launched in March 2022. Although the program aims to promote the activation of TSA beneficiaries and support their integration into the labour market, there are systemic problems, which undermine the effectiveness of the program and do not serve to alleviate poverty among the vulnerable population.²³
28. Namely, this program does not focus on developing the skills of its beneficiaries or raising their motivation to promote future employment in the open labour market, as according to available information, the primary labour activities involve cleaning and minor rehabilitation of squares, canals, roads, and buildings. The amount foreseen for a full-time job under the program is also not satisfactory—300 GEL (100 EUR) per month cannot be considered an effective amount for the eradication of poverty.

²¹ International Labour Organization, UN Women, Assessment of the Social Protection System in Georgia, Final Report, 2020, p. 2, 23, 42 – 43, 54, 117; UNICEF, A Detailed Analysis of Targeted Social Assistance and Child Poverty and Simulations of the Poverty – Reducing Effects of Social Transfers, 2019, pp. 5, 13.

²² Social Justice Center, The Role of Targeted Social Assistance in the Social Protection System and Its Connection with Other Social Support Services, 2023, p. 56 – 63.

²³ Social Justice Center, Anatomy of the Public Employment Program, 2023, p. 33, <https://cutt.ly/1edgg8uc>.

29. There are particular concerns for women beneficiaries employed within the program, as it perpetuates stereotypical roles and increases their risk of dual vulnerability. Additionally, it is unclear whether the basic labour rights of program beneficiaries, including decent working conditions, are ensured while performing work under the program, and what mechanisms are in place to safeguard their labour rights in case of violations.
30. To sum up, without adequate home care services, unemployment insurance and strengthening of various vulnerable communities, the public employment program remains a fragmented tool for addressing poverty and unemployment.

Persons with Disabilities

31. The social protection of Persons with Disabilities (PwDs) is a critical and pressing concern in Georgia. Unfortunately, this issue has not been given the priority it deserves on the government's agenda. Existing social protection mechanisms, dispersed across central and municipal levels, lack cohesion and efficiency, failing to constitute a unified system that adequately addresses the individual needs of PwDs.
32. The state report underlines that the Law on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities serves as the basis for the implementation of many programs aimed at improving the social conditions of PwDs. However, the enactment of this law in 2020 did not enhance the social rights standards for PwDs as expected. While it introduced significant human rights standards, it fell short of reflecting international human rights obligations concerning social protection, poverty prevention, and ensuring an adequate standard of living for PwDs. Unfortunately, the adoption of this law resulted in the abolition of the previous Law on Social Protection of Persons with Disabilities without introducing new mechanisms, thereby leaving PwDs without substantial guarantees for social protection.²⁴
33. Along with the absence of a unified policy and a systematic vision, the fact that the social protection system for PwDs is solely based on medical diagnoses and ignores the human rights-based paradigm presents one of the major problems in the Georgian context. Additionally, the lack of accurate statistical data concerning PwDs prevents a precise evaluation of the community's socio-economic vulnerability.
34. A UNICEF study highlights that households with a member with disabilities face a 4% increased risk of falling into poverty.²⁵ As of May 2024, more than 35 700 PwDs were considered to be living in extreme poverty and receiving social allowances, while more than 70 100 PwDs were registered in the unified database of socially vulnerable individuals.²⁶ However, the Proxy-Means Testing (PMT) system used to assess household poverty, a prerequisite for receiving social allowances, has significant inclusion and exclusion errors. These errors lead to the under-identification of those in need, meaning that more PwDs living in poverty remain undetected by the state.

²⁴ Social Justice Center, Organizations and activists working on the rights of persons with disabilities respond to the Draft Law "on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities", 2020, <https://cutt.ly/Pedgl7EL>.

²⁵ UNICEF, A Detailed Analysis of Targeted Social Assistance and Child Poverty and Simulations of the Poverty – Reducing Effects of Social Transfers, 2019, p. 22.

²⁶ LEPL – Social Service Agency, Statistics, <https://cutt.ly/bedf0nPE>, <https://cutt.ly/Tedf0Zel>.

35. The provision of the social package—a cash transfer aimed at compensating for environmental barriers faced by PwDs—is also challenging. Although the state indicated that amendments in the legislation allow for the annual increase of the social package, numerous challenges (including coverage and cash assistance rates) undermine the adequacy of the program.
36. It should be noted that only 3.5 % of the total population (more than 130 300 PwDs as of May 2024) receives the social package, leaving approximately at least two-thirds of the disability community without minimal state protection. Additionally, older PwDs are prevented from receiving the package alongside an old-age pension, while those with moderate disabilities who did not have the status during childhood, and those prevented from having a status due to the existing medical model of disability, are also unjustly excluded.
37. Furthermore, the monthly amount provided by the social package is extremely low. For 83 500 PwDs, it falls below the subsistence minimum (app. 250 GEL/83.2 EUR as of December 2023), amounting to 195 GEL/64.9 EUR for persons with significant disabilities and 155 GEL/51.6 EUR for persons with moderate disabilities. This exacerbates the challenges faced by PwDs, who already live with limited resources, including very limited employment opportunities, and puts them at risk of living in extreme social and economic vulnerability.
38. In addition to the social package and social allowance schemes, social protection mechanisms are also developed at the municipal level. While municipalities are ideally positioned to be the closest actors to local populations, the reality is that local social protection services often suffer from fragmentation and insufficient focus on adequately supporting PwDs. The lack of uniformity in municipal social protection services leads to significant discrepancies in the support available to PwDs based on their place of residence. Furthermore, the limited reliance on studies and research concerning the challenges faced by PwDs, along with minimal involvement of the community in decision-making processes, results in social protection services that are inadequately tailored to their needs.
39. Some municipal social services engage in discriminatory practices through derogatory language or selective coverage, violating the principle of equality by excluding certain groups of PwDs. Additionally, PwDs encounter multiple barriers to accessing social benefits, including service unavailability, geographical, physical, and informational inaccessibility, as well as linguistic obstacles, particularly for those from ethnic minority groups.
40. In its state report, the government emphasizes that the Ministry of Internally Displaced Persons from the Occupied Territories, Labour, Health and Social Affairs has approved the strategy and action plan on Independent Living of Persons with Disabilities and Deinstitutionalization, which is focused on preventing institutionalization through the creation of appropriate mechanisms, preventive measures, supportive services, and alternative care options. However, the actual implementation of the strategy is hindered, negatively affecting the human rights situation of hundreds of persons with psychosocial and intellectual disabilities, leaving them institutionalized in large-sized psychiatric facilities and boarding houses of PwDs.
41. Against this background, the lack of a national housing strategy and action plan, combined with underdeveloped mainstream housing services, worsens the challenges faced by PwDs. The inadequacy of social housing, shelters, and rent allowances, along with unsuitable and inaccessible living conditions in most facilities, further deteriorates the human rights situation for community members and heightens the risks of their institutionalization and/or homelessness.

42. The state report underlines that starting in 2023, two new social sub-programs of Home Care and Personal Assistant were integrated into the Social Rehabilitation and Child Care state program. However, according to the 2023 Report of the Public Defender, despite increased funding for the Social Rehabilitation and Child Care state program, there are still queues of people waiting to receive services, and geographical accessibility remains a serious problem.²⁷
43. Additionally, based on changes made in the 2023 program, children with disabilities are no longer the target group for the personal assistant services sub-program. The responsibility for implementing personal assistant services has been shifted to municipal bodies, with a deadline of January 1, 2025. Consequently, children with disabilities remain without personal assistant services until this date, which negatively impacts their ability to have their needs met.²⁸

Homeless Persons

44. One of the most vulnerable groups affected by the ineffective state policy is homeless persons. Unfortunately, the Georgian government has largely overlooked the right to adequate housing. This right is not reflected in national legislation or policy frameworks. There's a critical lack of data on homelessness, including its prevalence, root causes, and the specific needs of different homeless groups. The government has not developed a national housing strategy or action plan, and the National Strategy for the Protection of Human Rights (2022-2030) fails to address housing as a human rights issue.
45. The existing legislative framework is inadequate and falls short of international human rights standards. The lack of relevant regulations allows the central government to evade responsibility for ensuring adequate housing. Municipal efforts are disjointed and ineffective, further hindering progress on this issue.
46. The definition of "homeless person" in the Law on Social Assistance is restrictive and fails to capture the full scope of the problem. For example, it excludes people living in inadequate housing, those temporarily staying with relatives, and institutionalized people. As a result, most municipalities have not established procedures for registering homeless individuals and providing them with housing. Even where registration exists, criteria vary between municipalities, creating an uneven and unjust approach.
47. The availability and adequacy of housing services present significant challenges, with only a few municipalities offering emergency shelters, rent allowances, and social housing programs. These services face complex issues, but the most pressing concerns include the adequacy of social housing and the lack of long-term solutions to homelessness. Problems such as extreme overcrowding, lack of housing accessibility for PwDs, and obstacles in accessing social services are widespread in social housing across Georgia, particularly in Tbilisi, Gori, Rustavi, and Ozurgeti municipalities. In Gori, structural damages in social housing increase risks to residents' lives and health, highlighting the

²⁷ Report of the Public Defender of Georgia On the Situation of Protection of Human Rights and Freedoms in Georgia, 2023, pp. 210 – 211.

²⁸ Ibid.

urgent need for action.²⁹ Additionally, the affordability of social housing has become a critical issue. A 2021 study by the Social Justice Center found that 41.7% of individuals living in rented or pledged properties lacked financial access to housing.³⁰ Rising rental costs in large cities, especially Tbilisi, have created severe challenges for students, whose needs remain unmet.

48. Flawed eviction legislation and policy pose another significant challenge. The current framework does not provide legal safeguards for persons before, during, or after evictions. Eviction proceedings prioritize property rights over the right to adequate housing. Courts mainly focus on ownership status, neglecting the risk of homelessness, the socio-economic vulnerability of those facing eviction, and their need for support. The government plans to amend the legislation to allow certain evictions without court involvement, further worsening the situation for vulnerable tenants.

Children

49. Children and families with children are among the most vulnerable groups in Georgia. According to 2023 data from the National Statistical Service of Georgia, 16% of children live in absolute poverty, which is significantly higher than the average national poverty rate of 11.8% and other age groups (18-64 years - 11.5%; 65 years and over - 8%).³¹ As of March 2023, the Social Services Agency reported that 254 627 children (30.25% of the total number of children) receive subsistence allowances, and 351 518 children are registered as socially vulnerable (40.8% of the total number of children).³² Given the shortcomings of the subsistence allowance system, many children in need of support are likely left behind.
50. A 2023 study by the United Nations Children’s Fund found that 37.8% of children in Georgia experience material and social deficits. The situation is even worse for children in rural areas, where this rate exceeds 47%. Additionally, hundreds of homeless children live in social housing across various municipalities, often in less than dignified environments.
51. Against this background, the Government of Georgia struggles to provide sustainable support and long-term strengthening for families with children. The scarcity of services and barriers to physical, geographic, and financial access leave many minors in need without significant support. In this context, the number of specialists in the field is also decreasing. For example, according to the Public Defender’s report, by the end of 2023, only 255 social workers and 19 psychologists were employed in the State Care and Guardianship body throughout Georgia.³³

Consultations with Relevant Stakeholders, including Organizations

54. In Georgia, ensuring meaningful participation of stakeholders, including organizations representing those affected by the cost of living crisis, in decision-making processes is challenging. The government

²⁹ Social Justice Center, Practice of Providing Housing for Homeless Groups: What are the Special Needs of Women, 2022, <https://cutt.ly/2edgW8xE>; Public Defender of Georgia, Implementation of Housing Services in the Context of the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, 2022, <https://cutt.ly/WedgEpi2>.

³⁰ Social Justice Center, How affordable is housing for rent in Georgia? 2023, <https://cutt.ly/5edgTnbX>.

³¹ National Statistics Office of Georgia, Poverty and Gini Coefficients, <https://cutt.ly/1edfVjeo>.

³² LEPL – Social Service Agency, Statistics, <https://cutt.ly/bedf0nPF>, <https://cutt.ly/Tedf0Zel>.

³³ Report of the Public Defender of Georgia On the Situation of Protection of Human Rights and Freedoms in Georgia, 2023, p. 219.

typically views social benefit recipients as beneficiaries rather than as individuals with valuable knowledge and insights into the systemic challenges of programs and services. Many decisions are made without genuine consultation with independent organizations, groups, or individuals who possess expertise and firsthand experience related to the issues at hand.

55. Compounding these challenges is the recent enactment of the “Law on Transparency of Foreign Influence”. This legislation imposes restrictions CSOs and media outlets, which are often pivotal in advocating for and representing vulnerable populations. This law will further deter CSOs from actively participating in policy discussions and critiques of government measures. Consequently, the law risks marginalizing critical voices and diminishing the government’s ability to address the genuine needs of those most impacted by the ongoing cost of living crisis.

IV. Recommendations

- Recognize the concepts of decent remuneration and minimum wage by legislation, in accordance with the definitions established in international human rights law;
- Expand the membership of the Tripartite Social Partnership Commission, include more sectoral trade unions and civil society organizations which have extensive experience of working on the issues of social policy and employment;
- The Tripartite Social Partnership Commission should become functional and hold discussions on the issues of minimum wage with a renewed composition;
- Develop a systematic vision and strategic document based on an in-depth study of the social needs of the population, detailing the short and long-term steps state agencies must take in this field;
- Revise the social protection system to incorporate essential elements currently missing, such as unemployment insurance;
- Revise the TSA system in line with international human rights standards to ensure it adequately meets the needs of the population;
- Abolish the legal regulations that prevent people living on the street from being registered in the database of socially vulnerable households and from receiving subsistence allowance and related benefits;
- Ensure that inclusion in services at central and municipal levels is based on the real needs of the population, rather than solely on a TSA score;
- At both central and local levels, establish a practice of conducting periodic in-depth studies of the population’s needs. Base social protection policies, delivery features, and coverage on the information gathered from these studies;
- Examine the scale, forms, and causes of homelessness, and develop a human rights-based housing strategy and action plan with adequate financial and human resources to address systemic challenges both short-term and long-term;
- Revise the national legislative framework in line with international human rights standards to reflect every element of the right to adequate housing in respective provisions;

- Define the obligations and functions of central and municipal authorities in the housing system and create an effective coordination system between relevant stakeholders;
- Develop national adequacy standards for housing services that reflect international human rights obligations and ensure the accessibility of a wide range of housing services and housing stock throughout the country;
- Fully revise national standards regulating eviction procedures to harmonize them with international human rights standards and ensure the functioning of preventive and reactive mechanisms.