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EUROPEAN SOCIAL CHARTER

Comments submitted by
The Greek General Confederation of Labour
concerning the Ad hoc report on the cost-of-living crisis
submitted by
THE GOVERNMENT OF GREECE

Comments registered by the Secretariat

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Subject: Additional information and comments submitted by the Greek General Confederation of Labour –GSEE to the European Committee of Social Rights on the 1st ad hoc report on the cost-of-living crisis

1. Preliminary considerations

The Greek General Confederation of Labour (GSEE) is the third-level trade union and the foremost representative central workers' organization in Greece. It represents, through its affiliated members, all private sector wage and salary earners (in dependent employment relationships as defined in Article 1 of Law 1264/1982, OJ A' 79-1.7.1982).

On April 12, 2024, the Ministry of Labour and Social Security (Directorate of International Relations) forwarded a copy of the 1st ad hoc National Report on the cost-of-living crisis to the national social partners, including the GSEE and the five employers' organizations. This was done for informational purposes, as the report had already been submitted to the European Committee of Social Rights (ECSR) and registered on December 21, 2023.

GSEE would like to note that a timely and genuinely informative and consultative tripartite procedure on this ad hoc reporting process would have been welcomed. Such a procedure would enhance transparency regarding the process and content of the national report on the 1st ad hoc report, as well as the overall revised ESC (revESC) reporting process. Institutional social dialogue is crucial, given our right and willingness to participate by submitting comments and/or additional information, as encouraged by the ECSR, on the cost-of-living crisis in Greece. This crisis is a human rights issue, and we need to consider the relevant criteria (or their absence)

addressed in the 1st national ad hoc report, the progress made by the competent authorities, and the way forward in addressing crisis that is harmful to human rights.

Furthermore, the Greek Government is aware of GSEE's substantial interest in the proper implementation of the European Social Charter (ESC), as evidenced by the Collective Complaint No. 111, characterized as a case of general interest. Our reports on Greece's non-compliance with the ESCR's decision on the merits dated March 23, 2017, and the overall state of labor rights as protected by the revised ESC, further emphasize this interest.

Given these introductory comments, we hereby submit to the ECSR GSEE's additional information and comments on the on the 1st national report submitted by Greece within the framework of the 1st ad hoc report process on "The cost-of-living crisis." Our observations, which were also presented by GSEE's appointed member to the Greek National Commission for Human Rights and unanimously adopted by its Plenary on June 6, 2024, and included in the GNCHR report submitted to the ECSR, focus on the following issues:

2. The Cost-of-Living Crisis as a Multifactorial Human Rights Issue of Supra-National Interest

1. GSEE acknowledges the emerging challenge concerning contemporary rights within the Council of Europe. The cost-of-living crisis can be viewed as a human rights crisis, encompassing aspects of many rights and provisions of the revised ESC, including those related to the questionnaire basis for the ad hoc reports. The Committee has particularly focused on aspects of Articles 12, 13, 15, 16, 17, 23, 30, 31, and 4§1, especially those related to income and purchasing power.
2. It is important to consider the fundamental decision of the ECSR on collective complaint No. 14/2003, *International Federation of Human Rights Leagues (FIDH) v. France*.¹ For the first time, the ECSR highlighted that it views the ESC as a living instrument inspired by values such as dignity, autonomy, equality, and solidarity. This case law has been systematically confirmed in subsequent years. The ECSR emphasizes that the rights guaranteed are not ends in themselves but complement the rights enshrined in the European Convention on Human Rights. Effectively addressing the cost-of-living crisis requires a comprehensive economic policy that tackles the roots of the crisis, grounded in state policies. The principles from which the Charter is inspired can guide this approach. Starting from the ESC principles, it is critical to reach the core of fiscal and monetary policies and observe their impact on rights.
3. The current cost-of-living crisis represents a crisis of dignity, autonomy, equality, and solidarity. It significantly impacts living standards, decent living conditions, the percentage of the population living below the poverty line, and economic and social

¹ ECSR, *International Federation of Human Rights Leagues (FIDH) v. France No. 14/2003, decision on the merits of 4 March 2005*, par. 27, 31. See also for the analysis Stangos, Petros, *La fabrique de la jurisprudence sociale européenne – Les décisions «réclamations collectives» du Comité européen des droits sociaux*, Larcier, 2024, p. 149.

exclusion. Addressing these issues underlines the fact that the cost-of-living crisis is a human rights law issue.

4. Therefore, the importance of this ad hoc thematic report is undeniable, given the horizontal impact of the cost-of-living crisis and the holistic approach that needs to be adopted by States and relevant stakeholders.

3. Multiple Crisis Environment

1. GSEE highlights the impact on the due implementation of the ESC due to restrictive measures from the debt crisis, migration policies, and pandemic measures, all of which have cumulatively negatively affected workers' rights and living standards. Additionally, the ongoing wars severely impact socio-economic environments and increase the risk of further deterioration of labor rights and working and living conditions.
2. The Greek economy, having been challenged by multiple crises (debt and pandemic), now faces a new destabilizing shock centered on energy, raw materials, and basic food prices. Meanwhile, the real estate market shows significant increases² in both purchasing and renting main residences. This disturbance directly affects the supply side and indirectly impacts demand through inflation, increasing the risk of another economic slowdown.
3. To recognize good practices in combating the cost-of-living crisis in a multiple crisis environment, the gender dimension of the crisis impact and restrictive measures, which still exist in Greek law and practice, should be assessed as a priority. A notable issue for Greece is the downgrading of the gender equality portfolio from the Ministry of Labour (responsible for implementing the revESC) to the Ministry of Social Cohesion and Family (Presidential Decree No 77/2023/OJ A' 130-27.6.2023), along with other important employment policy competencies such as social inclusion and social housing. This policy fragmentation is further aggravated by the operational detachment of the Labour Inspection from the Ministry of Labour following its transformation into an independent authority.
4. In a multi-crisis environment, coherent monitoring and assessment of the cost-of-living crisis are necessary, focusing on the protection of individual and collective labor rights and existing challenges, in line with the human rights standards set by the revised ESC. These include equal access to and protection of just working conditions, fair remuneration, wage protection, and the protection of dignity, health, and safety at work. There is an urgent need to strengthen the regulatory framework and address any remaining or emerging gaps, in compliance with ECSR decisions.
5. The precarious and burdened work environment, resulting from the ten-year economic crisis that caused irreparable damage to social rights protection in Greece, was further strained by the unprecedented and multi-layered crisis induced by the pandemic. This had

² See indicatively Bank of Greece, [Real Estate Market](#) and Bank of Greece, [New Index of Apartment Prices by Age](#), 2024.

additional serious impacts on the overall economic situation and the enjoyment of rights protected by the rev ESC.

6. It is widely acknowledged that civil, political, economic, and social rights were openly violated at all levels during the economic crisis in Greece.³ Austerity measures were often prioritized over human rights standards. The sequence from an economic crisis to a health crisis and the ongoing cost-of-living crisis described in this ad hoc report requires full consideration of human rights standards to allow monitoring of violations and compliance by the State.
7. GSEE stresses that the cost-of-living crisis is linked to the previous two crises, as main indicators, such as vulnerability, remain consistent. In particular, the present phase of human rights monitoring can be ambiguous, especially regarding whether policy determination focuses narrowly on fiscal discipline to the detriment of the human rights dimension, potentially overlooking important indicators, such as vulnerability, which extends to several groups. In GSEE's view, policy should be planned and implemented considering social rights indicators in compliance with ESC provisions and standards, avoiding fragmentary approaches that narrowly focus on economic indicators.

4. Human Rights' Impact Assessment Mechanism

1. The national report, informed by the relevant questionnaire, spans the last five years and/or begins from the end of 2021. GSEE consistently emphasizes the importance of a comprehensive and current presentation of the national framework in accordance with the revised ESC norms and principles. To achieve this, the national report should include a human rights impact assessment that evaluates the reasoning, content, and duration of national policies and measures. This assessment should integrate human rights indicators and criteria to analyze the cost-of-living crisis. The report should also provide comments on the effectiveness and efficiency of implemented measures, their impact, alternative policy proposals, and other critical indicators. These indicators should assess the ongoing cost-of-living crisis within a precarious socio-economic environment that poses increased risks to both living and working conditions. Policies that exemplify good practice could then be highlighted and shared as examples.
2. Throughout the debt crisis and the successive cumulative restrictive measures, most of which remain in effect, GSEE has consistently highlighted the importance of conducting human rights impact assessments (HRIA) in its submissions to international and European supervisory bodies. HRIA is essential for identifying, understanding, assessing, and addressing the human rights challenges and effects of specific measures. This process is crucial for ensuring compliance with the ESC provisions on social rights. The Council of Europe's Toolkit on Human Rights Impact Assessment in crisis situations recently underscored the necessity and significance of HRIA.⁴ Additionally, it

³ FIDH – Hellenic League for Human Rights, [Downgrading rights: the cost of austerity in Greece](#), 2014, p. 90.

⁴ Council of Europe, [Toolkit - Human Rights Impact Assessment of the measures taken by the State in situations of crisis](#), May 2024. The Toolkit is the first instrument adopted at intergovernmental level that is intended to assist national authorities in this

is unclear how rights are quantified within the economic framework and how this process adheres to specific criteria and standards. This is essential for assessing the cumulative impact of measures on social rights and for enhancing accountability regarding progress made in protecting human rights.

3. The 1st national ad hoc report on the cost-of-living crisis, which presents the country's social policy and good practices for securing income and addressing the risk of poverty, does not employ a specific methodology and adequate indicators to assess the impact on social rights or evaluate how well authorities comply with the revised ESC provisions and principles.
4. It is important to consider the State obligations outlined in Article 21, paragraph 1 of the Constitution of Greece: "The State shall take care to ensure that all citizens enjoy a decent standard of living by means of a system of minimum guaranteed income, as specified by law." This falls under Part Two, "Individual and Social Rights." Additionally, the Observations on the 5th National Report on the implementation of the Revised ESC highlight that the reduction of the minimum wage has been a persistent issue throughout the economic and pandemic crises.⁵ The minimum wage issue has also been extensively discussed in the ECSR decision on Complaint No. 114/2014, Greek General Confederation of Labour (GSEE) v. Greece.⁶
5. As mentioned above, and under the European social acquis, there must be a stable process of social dialogue between the State and national social partners representing institutional workers and employers before finalizing any reports. This ensures cooperation in good faith and highlights the needs and suggestions from the field. A significant lack of institutional social dialogue has been observed in Greece, particularly during the debt crisis period, and this deficiency persists today. For example, the minimum wage setting process, which until 2010 was determined through free collective bargaining as part of the National General Collective Agreement, has been affected. Under the 1st MoU conditionalities, this process and competency were transferred by law to the State as one of the most stringent austerity measures.⁷ Its implementation began in 2019, while the latest Ministerial Decision No. 25058, issued on March 29, 2024 (Official Gazette B 1974/29.3.2024), according to Article 26 ("Determination of the minimum wage for the year 2024") of Law 5085/2024 (Official Gazette A 17/2.2.2024), sets the minimum wage and daily

process. Following its preparation by the Steering Committee for Human Rights, it was adopted by the Committee of Ministers of the Council of Europe, at the 1491st meeting of the Minister's Deputies held on 6 March 2024.

⁵ See for more focused references to different recipients and contexts in the GNCHR, [Thematic Factsheet on the "Impact of Economic Reform Policies and Austerity Measures on Human Rights"](#), 5 January 2018.

⁶ ECSR, Greek General Confederation of Labour (GSEE) v. Greece, Complaint No. 111/2014, decision on the merits of 23 March 2017, preliminary considerations and para. 86.

⁷ For references to the minimum wage see GNCHR [Thematic Factsheet on the "Impact of Economic Reform Policies and Austerity Measures on Human Rights"](#), 5 January 2018.

wage for white-collar and blue-collar workers nationwide. Additionally, the lack of social dialogue has been highlighted in Case No. 2820 under the ILO supervisory mechanism, which emphasizes the critical role of social partners in the design and implementation of measures.⁸ A recent example is the exclusion of national social partners from appointing their representatives and participating in the special Working Group established by the Ministry of Labour and Social Security. This group was tasked with incorporating Directive (EU) 2022/2041 of the European Parliament and Council of 19 October 2022 on adequate minimum wages in the European Union into Greek law, aiming to combat the cost-of-living crisis.⁹

6. Based on the 1981 ILO Collective Bargaining Convention (No. 154), the Committee of Experts on the Application of Conventions and Recommendations in its 2023 findings¹⁰ has firmly hoped that the Government will continue its efforts to promote collective bargaining for all groups of workers, including the public service, and to progressively extend the matters covered by collective bargaining. It requests the Government to provide information on all the measures taken in this respect.
7. The cost-of-living indicators should include elements such as the coverage of population, the drawbacks emanating from the current situation, the reference to vulnerable groups and the universality of benefits. This kind of indicators is not a result of measuring only specific policies and using statistics, focusing e.g., on the inflation, but there is a need to follow a specific methodology of a human rights impact assessment, when it comes to identifying the ESC indicators. It is indicative that in page 8 of the National Report, there are no reference to data regarding persons with disabilities. The National Confederation of Disabled Persons (NCDP) Observatory on Disability Issues has published three Statistical Bulletins (Bulletin 1, 8, and 13) since 2018 that focus on persons with disabilities, poverty, and social exclusion. Additionally, the Observatory's annual reports also contain data on persons with disabilities, poverty, and social exclusion (see annual report 2020, 2021, and 2022¹¹). It is useful to refer to the 2021 Committee's findings regarding the 4th Assessment of the follow-up: *International Federation of Human Rights (FIDH) v. Belgium*, Complaint No. 75/2011, decision on the merits of 18 March 2013, Resolution CM/ResChS(2013)16, where the Committee

⁸ ILO, Case No 2820 (Greece) – Complaint date: 21 October 2010, Closed, Report in which the Committee requests to be kept informed of development – Report No 365, November 2012, para. 891.

⁹ Ministry of Labour and Social Security, Amendment of No. 25530/1.4.2024 of the decision "Establishment of a Scientific Committee for the incorporation of Community Directive (EU) 2022/2041 of the European Parliament and of the Council of October 19, 2022 for adequate minimum wages in the EU" and for the incorporation of the International Labor Convention 131 (ILO 131)", 24 April 2024.

¹⁰ ILO, Application of International Labour Standards 2023, Report of the Committee of Experts on the Application of Conventions and Recommendations, International Labour Conference, 111th Session, 2023, Report III (Part A), p. 143.

¹¹ See respectively the following parts of the Annual Reports: pp. 106-107, pp. 132-133 and especially the charts on the risk of poverty and/or social exclusion and disability situation based on a Survey of Income and Living Conditions (EU-SILC) and p. 51, which focuses on poverty and social exclusion for persons with disabilities in the thirteen regions of Greece.

finally concluded that there had been a violation of Article 30 of the Charter on the ground that the State's failure to collect reliable data and statistics throughout the whole territory of Belgium in respect of highly dependent persons with disabilities prevented an "overall and co-ordinated approach" to the social protection of these persons and constituted an obstacle to the development of targeted policies concerning them. In its cost-of-living crisis report, Belgium refers to the chapter 2 of the Integrated Social Health Plan, which aims to reduce social and health inequalities and prevent social breakdowns and measures aimed at activating social benefits as a tool to combat child poverty are taken up, such as the definition of a model of solidarity and fair family allowances, which takes into consideration the needs of families in this area (firstly on the basis of family income), while also taking into account specific situations (children suffering from an illness, vulnerable families, pandemic, etc.)¹². The inclusion of persons with disabilities and persons suffering from mental illnesses and other groups that may face poverty or social exclusion can be found in the Lithuania report on the cost-of-living crisis¹³.

8. According to the findings of the Labour Institute of GSEE (INE GSEE) Annual Report 2024 on "The Greek economy and employment"¹⁴:

- ~ Overall, in the period 2019-2023 Greece records the largest percentage decrease in real income from work (-8.3%) compared to all EU-27 countries. Therefore, Greece not only does not converge with the EU-27 in terms of social sustainability, but also diverges rapidly from the northern European countries and from the peripheral countries, which developed rapidly during the same period.
- ~ In 2023, 19 Collective Labor Agreements (CLAs) were signed (sectoral and professional, national and local). Out of these, 12 are national sectoral and same-professional, while 7 are local sectoral and the same professional. In the same year, 209 enterprise CLAs have also been signed.
- ~ The findings of many of the indicators of social sustainability in Greece show a deterioration of social conditions after 2020 as a result of the impact of the pandemic crisis, the crisis on lives but also the ineffectiveness of the economic and social policy in place. Indicatively, we mention that in 2023, 21.8% of minors and 18.3% of adults were at risk of poverty. In the same year 27.5% of people with education level 0-2, 18.5% of people with education level 3-4 and 7.6% with education level 5-8 were at risk of poverty. Besides, 23 out of 100 employed with education level 0-2 lived with income below the poverty line, about 10 out of 100 employed with education level 3-4 and 3.5 out of 100 employed with education level 5-8.

¹² Belgique, Rapport ad hoc sur la crise du coût de la vie, Cycle 2024, RAP/RCha/BEL(2023), 21 décembre 2023, pp. 36-37.

¹³ Lithuania, Ad hoc report on the cost-of-living crisis, Cycle 2024, RAP/Cha/LTU/2023, 29 December 2023, p. 12.

¹⁴ GSEE, Annual Report: "The Greek economy and employment", 2024 and Main Findings, 2024, pp. 6-8 (in Greek).

- ~ The percentage of minors and adults living in households with very low labor intensity reached 86.9% and 61.7% respectively in 2023, highlighting the significant social ramifications of the underperformance of the labor market in Greece. In the same year 24.1% of people living in cities and 30.4% of those living in rural areas were found at risk of poverty or in social exclusion. The percentage of young people aged 18-24 in severe material and social deprivation in Greece is more than twice as high as the European equivalent. In 2023, 14.7% of persons of 18-24 year old, 13% of persons of over 55 years old, 12.9% of men and 14.1% of women were in severe material and social deprivation. In the same year, the percentage of people with material and social deprivation in the 1st income quintile decreased from 73.7% in 2022 to 68.3%. However, it is still at significantly high levels.
 - ~ From 2021 to 2023, approximately 36% of households in Greece coped with great difficulty in spending to cover their basic needs. In 2023 the proportion of part-time contract workers at risk of in-work poverty rose by 3.5 percentage points, with almost 22 in 100 workers having disposable income below the poverty line, compared to 9 in 100 employed people with a full-time contract.
8. Findings by the European Trade Union Institute¹⁵ are also revealing. The real reduction by an additional 1.7% of the purchasing power of employees in Greece is also recorded by the ETUI report for 2022. There are several references and campaigns against inflation from the perspective of the standard of living and the quality of life of the consumer¹⁶.
 9. The findings of the ILO Global Wage Report 2022-23 on “The Impact of COVID-19 and inflation on wages and purchasing power”¹⁷ indicate critical issues such as the fact that lower-income earners are the most impacted, the wage employees lost six weeks of wages due to the COVID-19 crisis, but also that the minimum wages and social dialogue are key to maintaining wage workers’ living standards.
 10. The cost-of-living crisis is having a negative impact on women's economic and social inclusion, health and fundamental rights, housing while intensifying energy poverty. Women without an income or with a low income find it increasingly difficult to flee abuse and domestic violence by a partner to whom they are financially tied¹⁸. The lack of explanation of the charts defining material deprivation rates by gender (National Report, p. 13), emphasizes the need to consider gender specific needs so as to provide clear data that would allow narrowing down the poverty gap.

¹⁵ See Figure 1 - Development of hourly nominal and real minimum wages in 2023 (in %; 1 January 2022 – 1 January 2023) on the reduction up to 1.7% as part of the real changes in 2023 in the ETUI/Torsten Müller, Policy Brief, Minimum wage developments in 2022 – fighting the cost-of-living crisis, 2023.

¹⁶ See e.g., Union of Working Consumers of Greece (EEKE), Campaign against inflationary grocery prices, 1.9.2023-1.9.2024.

¹⁷ ILO, Global Wage Report 2022-23 on “The Impact of COVID-19 and inflation on wages and purchasing power”, 2022.

¹⁸ European Parliament, Topics – Gender equality - International Women’s Day: the gender aspects of energy poverty, published 27.02.2023.

11. Interference to the right to adequate housing, which has recently emerged with the issue of social housing¹⁹, raise questions regarding the violation of the substance of the right. GSEE would like to recall that the right to housing could have impact on vulnerable groups such as Roma, persons with disabilities, children, women or third country nationals and migrant workers —the latter being exposed to neglect by the State to appropriately prevent and address phenomena of human trafficking for the purpose of labour exploitation and of forced labour²⁰.
12. The cost-of-living crisis assessment should include third-country nationals residing, working, or seeking work in the reporting State, evaluating whether reporting focuses on equal inclusion, labor rights, and the prevention of trafficking and forced labor. The protection of migrant workers' rights must align with the State's international and European human rights obligations and included in the human rights impact assessment indicators. The State must include references to the reception and working conditions of third-country nationals in bilateral agreements to ensure non-discrimination and equal labor conditions.
13. Intersectionality is crucial in assessing and mitigating the human rights impact of the rising cost of living. Different households have varied needs requiring tailored support. Unfortunately, the National Report did not consider data on the vulnerability of children with disabilities or the precarious situation of young people with disabilities amidst the cost-of-living crisis. Social issues need to be integrated into ecological planning. As highlighted by the France report, the poorest, though not primarily responsible, are often the first to suffer from environmental degradation and have fewer means to adapt to climate and technological changes.²¹
14. The Council of Europe HRIA Toolkit outlines six phases essential for a comprehensive human rights impact assessment (HRIA): defining the scope and scale, assessing measures in light of human rights, examining the availability of remedies, analyzing and mitigating impacts, adapting measures based on experience and changing contexts, and identifying lessons learned. These phases guide decision-making and the development of an emergency legal framework, which should be considered in the National Report.
15. The HRIA process includes planning and scoping, data collection, selecting human rights indicators, and analyzing impacts by assessing their types and severity. Mitigation and management measures, such as participatory monitoring, reporting, and evaluation, are crucial. Establishing a permanent mechanism to evaluate the impact of austerity measures

¹⁹ Council of Europe, ECSR, [2023 Conclusions of the ECSR](#), March 2024. See e.g. the reference to insufficient data of on the average waiting time for the allocation of social housing, as well inadequate supply of social housing. Greece is not included in the findings.

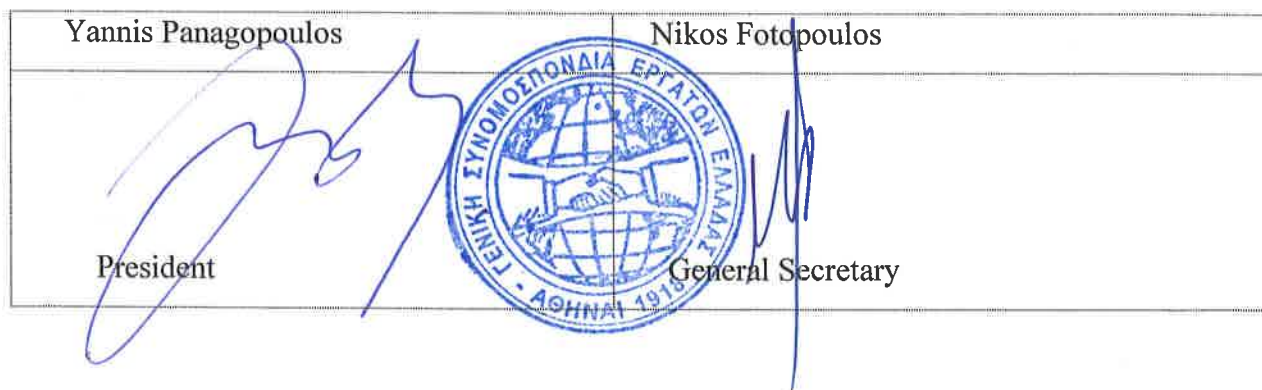
²⁰ GNCHR [Chowdury and Others v. Greece. Recommendations for the full compliance of the Greek State](#), 27 August 2018, [Communication](#) on the assessment of the level of compliance of the Greek State with GNCHR's recommendations on ECtHR judgment [Chowdury and Others v. Greece \(Manolada-case\)](#) 5 June 2020 and GNCHR [Chowdury and Others v. Greece. Recommendations for the full compliance of the Greek State](#), 27 August 2018.

²¹ France, [Rapport ad hoc sur la crise du coût de la vie](#), Cycle 2024, RAP/RCha/FRA/2023, 12 janvier 2024, p. 22.

on human rights for all EU residents is essential. The HRIA should provide evidence-based analysis and address the impact of measures using concrete data. Fundamental parameters of HRIA should include the cumulative impact of austerity measures, considering the State's non-compliance with rulings from national courts and decisions from national, European, and international human rights bodies.

16. Indicators from other contexts, such as the ILO and the EU, should alert national authorities to assess whether the national context fully complies with ILO and EU standards. According to ECSR conclusions,²² the cost of living has been considered an indicator for certain rights and groups, such as the right to equal treatment and children's rights.
17. In conclusion, the human rights dimension needs to be evident within financial reports, especially those with significant social rights implications. Failure to do so results in fragmented compliance, where the State focuses on policy goals, particularly economic ones, but cannot simultaneously meet ESC objectives and human rights obligations.

On behalf of the G.S.E.E.



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²² Council of Europe, Digest of the case law of the European Committee of Social Rights, June 2022, p. 123.