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Response to the European Trade Union
Confederation (ETUC)'s comments on the
15th National Report on the implementation
of the European Social Charter

submitted by

THE GOVERNMENT OF CROATIA

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Replies of the Republic of Croatia to the Comments Submitted by the European Trade Union Confederation (ETUC) on the National Report on the Implementation of the European Social Charter

Equality between men and women

Paragraph 21(a)

Increase women's participation in the labour market and support women's transition to formal employment

The Republic of Croatia continues to implement measures aimed at increasing women's participation in the labour market and improving access to employment, considering gender inequalities, occupational segregation, regional disparities and barriers faced by women in vulnerable situations.

Active Labour Market Policies implemented by the Croatian Employment Service (CES), in accordance with the Labour Market Act (Official Gazette, Nos. 118/18, 32/20, 18/22, 156/23 and 152/24), include employment subsidies, support for self-employment, education and training programmes, workplace training and individualized employment support.

These measures are implemented within the framework of the National Plan for Gender Equality for the period 2021-2027, the National Plan for Labour, Occupational Safety and Employment for the period 2021-2027 and related implementation programmes of CES.

Attention is given to women facing increased barriers to employment, including women living in rural and less developed areas, women with lower levels of education, long-term unemployed women and women returning to the labour market after periods outside employment due to family responsibilities.

In 2025, a total of 50,541 persons were newly included in Active Labour Market Policy measures implemented by CES. Women represented 58.5% of newly enrolled participants, compared with 41.5% of men. The largest share of participants was included in education and training measures (53.5%), followed by job retention support, self-employment support and employment subsidies.

The implementation of employment measures is monitored through administrative data and gender-disaggregated statistical indicators, including data published by the Croatian Bureau of Statistics. These indicators are used to assess gender differences in employment and labour market participation and to support the development of targeted measures.

Employment policies are implemented together with gender equality, education and social inclusion measures, considering structural factors affecting women's economic participation, including the unequal distribution of unpaid care responsibilities and access to childcare services.

Recommendations of independent institutions, including the Ombudsperson of the Republic of Croatia and the Ombudsperson for Gender Equality, are considered in further development of policies aimed at improving women's participation in the labour market.

The implementation of measures is monitored through administrative data of the CES, gender-disaggregated data published by the Croatian Bureau of Statistics (CBS), including the publication “Women and Men in Croatia”, and reports of equality bodies, including the Ombudsperson for Gender Equality.

Paragraph 21(b)

Ensure that maternity protections for working women also apply to the informal economy

The Republic of Croatia continues to strengthen the system of maternity and parental protection with the aim of supporting families, facilitating reconciliation of professional and private life and ensuring access to social protection mechanisms for persons participating in the labour market.

Maternity and parental rights are regulated by the Maternity and Parental Benefits Act (Official Gazette, No. 152/22 and 34/25), which provides rights to employed and self-employed parents, including maternity leave, parental leave, paternity leave, adoption leave and other forms of support related to childcare.

The implementation of maternity and parental benefits is carried out by the Croatian Health Insurance Fund (HZZO), which monitors the exercise of these rights through administrative data and regular reporting.

Croatia recognizes that persons engaged in undeclared work or outside formal employment relationships may face difficulties in accessing statutory labour and social protection rights. Therefore, measures aimed at combating undeclared work and promoting transition to formal employment contribute to ensuring effective access to maternity and parental protection.

The Act on Suppression of Undeclared Work (Official Gazette, No. 151/22 and 69/26) establishes mechanisms for preventing, detecting and sanctioning undeclared work and contributes to strengthening the protection of persons participating in the labour market. The measures are monitored through the activities of the State Inspectorate and other competent authorities.

Information on maternity and parental rights and available protection mechanisms is provided through competent institutions, including the Croatian Health Insurance Fund, with the aim of increasing awareness and facilitating access to available rights.

Paragraph 21(c)

Accelerate efforts to close the gender pay gap and promote the equitable distribution of domestic and care work between women and men

The Republic of Croatia continues to strengthen measures aimed at ensuring equal pay for women and men and addressing structural factors contributing to the gender pay gap.

The principle of equal pay for equal work or work of equal value is regulated by the Labour Act (Official Gazette, Nos. 93/14, 127/17, 98/19, 151/22, 46/23 and 64/23), which prohibits

discrimination in remuneration and requires employers to ensure equal remuneration for work of equal value. The assessment of work of equal value considers relevant criteria, including qualifications, knowledge and skills, responsibility, autonomy and working conditions.

Croatia is further strengthening the legislative and institutional framework in line with Directive (EU) 2023/970 on strengthening the application of the principle of equal pay for equal work or work of equal value through pay transparency and enforcement mechanisms. These measures aim to increase transparency of remuneration systems, improve access to information on pay criteria, strengthen protection against wage discrimination and enhance enforcement mechanisms.

The Republic of Croatia recognizes that the gender pay gap is influenced by structural factors, including occupational segregation, differences in career progression opportunities, employment interruptions due to family responsibilities and the unequal distribution of unpaid domestic and care work.

Measures aimed at strengthening women's economic independence and promoting gender equality in employment are implemented within the framework of the National Plan for Gender Equality 2021-2027.

According to Eurostat data cited in the Report on the Work of the Ombudsperson for Gender Equality, the gender pay gap in average gross hourly earnings in Croatia amounted to 6.6%, representing a decrease compared with the previous year. Croatia remains among the EU Member States with a lower gender pay gap, although continued efforts are required to address remaining inequalities.

Gender-disaggregated statistical indicators published by the Croatian Bureau of Statistics, together with reports and recommendations of equality bodies, are used to monitor developments and support further policy measures aimed at reducing gender inequalities in employment and remuneration.

The Republic of Croatia continues to promote a more equal distribution of domestic and care responsibilities between women and men through measures supporting parental leave, childcare availability and gender equality policies.

Paragraph 21(d)

Expand the use of parental leave by men, including flexible work arrangements, and increase efforts to ensure the availability, accessibility and affordability of childcare and education services

The Republic of Croatia continues to promote a more equal distribution of family responsibilities between women and men as an important element of gender equality and women's participation in the labour market.

The Maternity and Parental Benefits Act provides fathers with an individual and non-transferable right to paternity leave, enabling greater involvement of fathers in the early care and upbringing of children and promoting shared parental responsibilities.

According to data of the Croatian Health Insurance Fund (HZZO), as presented in the Report on the Work of the Ombudsperson for Gender Equality for 2025, paternity leave was used by 19,597 fathers in 2025, representing an increase of 22.14% compared with 2024. The use of parental leave by men also increased, with men accounting for 4.52% of all parental leave users in 2025, compared with 3.77% in 2024. These developments indicate a positive trend in the involvement of fathers in childcare, although further efforts are required to encourage greater use of parental leave by men.

The Republic of Croatia recognizes that the use of parental leave by men depends not only on legal entitlements, but also on social attitudes, workplace practices and the availability of flexible working arrangements. The Labour Act provides possibilities for flexible work organization, including adjustments of working time and other arrangements aimed at facilitating reconciliation of professional and family life.

Croatia continues to improve the availability, accessibility and quality of early childhood education and care services through investments in childcare infrastructure, expansion of capacities and measures aimed at reducing regional disparities. These measures support parents, particularly women, in maintaining their participation in the labour market and contribute to a more balanced sharing of family responsibilities.

Measures supporting work-life balance, parental support and equal participation of women and men in family responsibilities are implemented within the framework of the National Plan for Gender Equality 2021-2027 and the National Plan for Children's Rights in the Republic of Croatia for the period 2022-2026. They are also supported through coordinated demographic policy measures aimed at strengthening support for families and improving conditions for balancing work and family life.

Paragraph 21(e)

Establish a comprehensive care system informed by a gender, intersectional, intercultural and human rights perspective

The Republic of Croatia continues to develop an accessible, inclusive and quality care system based on the principles of equality, non-discrimination and respect for human rights.

The development of care services is aimed at supporting children, older persons, persons with disabilities and other persons requiring assistance, while reducing inequalities in access to care.

The social welfare system is regulated by the Social Welfare Act (Official Gazette, Nos. 18/22, 46/22, 119/22, 71/23, 156/23 and 61/25) which establishes beneficiaries' rights, types of social services and the organization of social welfare provision. The system is further developed through the National Plan for the Development of Social Services for the period 2021-2027, which provides a framework for improving the availability, accessibility and quality of social services, including through the expansion of community-based services and the continuation of deinstitutionalization processes.

Measures aimed at strengthening the care system include:

- development of community-based services and support in the community;
- strengthening support for families and children requiring additional assistance;
- improving access to services for older persons and persons with disabilities; and
- promoting independent living and social inclusion through alternative forms of care.

These measures contribute to reducing reliance on informal care, which is predominantly provided by women, and support more equal opportunities for participation in employment and social life.

The National Plan for Combating Poverty and Social Exclusion for the period 2021-2027 further supports these objectives by promoting social inclusion, reducing inequalities and improving access to services for vulnerable groups.

The Republic of Croatia recognizes that challenges remain, particularly regarding the availability and territorial distribution of care services due to regional differences in service capacities. Further efforts are therefore directed towards improving accessibility and ensuring that services respond to the specific needs of different groups.

The development of care policies considers gender equality considerations, including the need to reduce the disproportionate burden of unpaid care work on women, as well as intersectional, intercultural and human rights perspectives. Recommendations of relevant institutions, including the Ombudsperson of the Republic of Croatia, concerning access to social services and support for vulnerable groups are considered in further policy development.

Right to work

Paragraph 22

Address unemployment among women with lower levels of education and Roma

The Republic of Croatia recognizes the importance of ensuring equal access to employment opportunities and continues to implement measures aimed at reducing unemployment among persons facing barriers in the labour market, including women with lower levels of education and members of the Roma national minority.

Active Labour Market Policies implemented by CES, in accordance with the Labour Market Act, are targeted towards unemployed persons and groups in a disadvantaged position on the labour market. Measures include employment subsidies, support for self-employment, education and training programmes, vocational training, activation measures and individualized employment support.

Attention is given to women with lower levels of education, long-term unemployed persons, persons with limited qualifications and members of the Roma national minority. These measures aim to improve employability, strengthen skills and qualifications, facilitate access to employment and support sustainable labour market integration.

The Republic of Croatia continues to support the social and economic inclusion of Roma through the implementation of the National Plan for the Inclusion of Roma for the period

2021-2027 and related action plans. Employment-related measures include employment incentives, education and skills development programmes, vocational training and support provided through the CES and other competent institutions.

According to the Report on the Implementation of the Action Plan for the Implementation of the National Roma Inclusion Plan for the Period 2021-2027 for 2024 measures aimed at improving the employability of Roma were implemented through education, skills development and employment support. In 2024, 95 unemployed Roma persons participated in programmes aimed at completing primary education, including 48 women. Furthermore, 15 unemployed persons participated in workplace training programmes, including 6 women, while 30 Roma persons participated in voucher-based skills development programmes, including 12 women.

Employment support measures were also provided to employers, with 68 employers using employment support measures and 19 employment subsidies granted for the employment of Roma women. These measures contribute to reducing employment disparities between Roma and the general population by addressing barriers related to low educational attainment, limited qualifications and social exclusion.

Croatia continues to strengthen cooperation between employment, education and social inclusion policies to address structural barriers affecting access to employment. The implementation of measures is monitored through administrative data, regular reporting and recommendations of competent institutions, including the Ombudsperson of the Republic of Croatia and other equality bodies.

The Republic of Croatia remains committed to further improving access to employment for women with lower levels of education, Roma and other groups facing disadvantages in the labour market.

Paragraph 23

Continue efforts to adjust education to meet labour market needs and expand vocational training

The Republic of Croatia continues to implement targeted employment and education measures aimed at improving labour market integration of persons facing barriers to employment and strengthening the connection between education, training and labour market needs.

Active Labour Market Policies implemented by CES are adapted to labour market developments and focus on improving employability, strengthening skills and supporting sustainable employment. Measures include employment subsidies, self-employment support, education and vocational training programmes, workplace training, activation measures and individualized employment support.

Attention is devoted to persons at higher risk of long-term unemployment and social exclusion, including women with lower levels of education, persons without completed secondary education, members of the Roma national minority and other vulnerable groups.

The alignment of education and training with labour market needs is supported through the National Plan for Labour, Occupational Safety and Employment for the period 2021-2027 and the National Plan for the Development of the Education System for the period until 2027. These

strategic documents promote adult education, lifelong learning, skills development and improved access to education and training opportunities.

Through the CES voucher system, unemployed and employed persons have access to education and training programmes aimed at acquiring competencies and qualifications required by the labour market, particularly in occupations where labour shortages have been identified.

The effectiveness of employment and education measures is monitored through administrative data and programme evaluations. Further policy development considers recommendations of relevant institutions concerning barriers to employment, education and lifelong learning.

III. Employment of persons with disabilities

Paragraph 24

Strengthen employment policy for persons with disabilities and address barriers to employment

The Republic of Croatia continues to strengthen measures aimed at increasing the participation of persons with disabilities in the labour market and removing structural barriers affecting their employment opportunities. These measures are implemented in accordance with the principles of equality, non-discrimination and obligations arising from the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities and relevant International Labour Organization standards.

According to data of CES, in 2025 a total of 108,508 persons were employed from CES register, including 3,947 persons with disabilities, representing 3.6% of all persons employed through CES measures. During the same period, 3,458 persons with disabilities were included in active labour market policy measures, including 1,676 women and 1,782 men.

The employment of persons with disabilities is supported through the implementation of the National Plan for Equalization of Opportunities for Persons with Disabilities for the period 2021-2027, which provides a strategic framework for improving accessibility, inclusion and equal participation in all areas of life, including employment.

The legal framework is established by the Act on Vocational Rehabilitation and Employment of Persons with Disabilities (Official Gazette, Nos. 157/13, 152/14, 39/18 and 32/20), which regulates vocational rehabilitation services, employment support measures, employer incentives, quota employment obligations and reasonable accommodation of workplaces and working conditions.

Employers are required to provide reasonable accommodation where necessary, including adjustments related to workplace organization, working conditions, work tasks and recruitment procedures. Measures are also directed towards improving accessibility of workplaces, transportation, support services and employers' awareness of obligations related to reasonable accommodation.

CES, in cooperation with the Institute for Expertise, Vocational Rehabilitation and Employment of Persons with Disabilities, provides support through vocational counselling, assessment of work capacity, training, workplace integration and individualized employment assistance.

Croatia continues to improve employment opportunities for persons with disabilities by strengthening support services, promoting inclusive employment practices and addressing barriers contributing to unemployment and underemployment.

Paragraph 25

Implement an action plan with measurable targets and strengthen employment support for persons with disabilities

The Republic of Croatia continues to strengthen employment policies for persons with disabilities through coordinated measures involving employment services, vocational rehabilitation institutions and employers, with the aim of increasing labour market participation and ensuring equal opportunities.

The implementation of employment policies is supported by the National Plan for Equalization of Opportunities for Persons with Disabilities for the period 2021-2027, which provides a strategic framework for improving inclusion, accessibility and participation of persons with disabilities, including in employment.

Measures aimed at improving employment opportunities include:

- active labour market programmes;
- financial incentives for employers;
- vocational rehabilitation services;
- individualized employment support; and
- workplace adaptation and reasonable accommodation.

Croatia continues to monitor implementation and effectiveness of these measures through administrative data collected by CES and other competent institutions. Monitoring enables assessment of participation in employment measures, employment outcomes and adequacy of support provided in relation to individual needs and abilities of persons with disabilities.

The quota employment system for persons with disabilities contributes to increasing employment opportunities and encouraging employers to develop inclusive workplaces. Employers are also supported through awareness-raising activities promoting equal opportunities, non-discrimination, reasonable accommodation and inclusive employment practices.

Croatia recognizes that increasing employment of persons with disabilities requires addressing not only labour market barriers but also broader accessibility and social barriers. Further policy development therefore considers recommendations of relevant monitoring institutions, including the Ombudsperson for Persons with Disabilities.

Through these measures, Croatia continues to implement obligations arising from the European Social Charter, the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities and relevant International Labour Organization standards.

IV. Right to just and favourable conditions of work

Paragraph 26

Strengthen enforcement of labour legislation and protect migrant workers

The Republic of Croatia continues to strengthen mechanisms for effective enforcement of labour legislation and protection of labour rights for all workers, including migrant workers and other persons in vulnerable situations.

The legal framework for combating undeclared work has been strengthened through the Act on Suppression of Undeclared Work (Official Gazette, No. 151/22 and 69/26), which establishes mechanisms for prevention, detection and sanctioning of undeclared work and contributes to improving labour protection.

The State Inspectorate carries out regular, targeted and extraordinary inspections aimed at ensuring compliance with labour legislation, including employment relationships, payment of wages, working time, occupational safety and protection of vulnerable categories of workers. Attention is devoted to sectors with increased risks of violations, including construction, hospitality and services, transport and food-delivery activities.

Croatia recognizes that migrant workers may face additional challenges, including language barriers, insufficient knowledge of labour rights, dependence on individual employers and difficulties in accessing remedies. Measures undertaken include improvements to the legal framework governing the employment of third-country nationals through amendments to the Aliens Act (Official Gazette, Nos. 133/20, 114/22, 151/22, 40/25 and 55/26), including facilitating changes of employer and improving access to information on rights and obligations.

The integration and access to rights of third-country nationals are further supported through the INCLUDE programme, coordinated by the Office for Human Rights and Rights of National Minorities of the Government of the Republic of Croatia, as well as through measures implemented under the National Plan for the Protection and Promotion of Human Rights and Combating Discrimination until 2027.

Croatia continues to consider recommendations of independent institutions, including the Ombudsperson of the Republic of Croatia, concerning protection of foreign workers against exploitation, discrimination and violations of labour rights.

Paragraph 27(a)

Strengthening labour inspection and enforcement capacities

The Republic of Croatia continues to strengthen the capacities of labour inspection authorities and improve mechanisms for preventing, identifying and effectively addressing violations of labour rights.

The State Inspectorate carries out systematic and coordinated inspection activities, including regular, targeted and extraordinary inspections, aimed at ensuring compliance with labour legislation. Inspections cover, inter alia, employment contracts and registration of workers, payment of wages, working time and rest periods, occupational safety and health requirements, and the protection of workers in vulnerable situations.

Inspection activities are planned and implemented based on identified risks, available information and reported violations, with particular attention devoted to sectors with increased risks of labour rights violations, including construction, services, transport and food-delivery activities, where migrant workers are frequently employed.

According to the Annual Reports on the Work of the State Inspectorate, labour inspection activities continue to be strengthened through maintaining the quality of inspection work, improving staffing and technical capacities, enhancing working conditions and ensuring continuous professional training of labour inspectors.

In 2024, labour inspectors carried out 7,593 completed inspection procedures in the field of employment relations and 5,356 inspection activities in occupational safety and health. These activities contribute to the identification of violations, ensuring compliance with labour legislation and protecting workers' rights.

The Republic of Croatia continues to strengthen cooperation between the State Inspectorate, employment services, migration authorities, occupational safety institutions and other competent bodies to ensure timely identification of violations and effective protection of workers' rights.

Inspection capacities and enforcement mechanisms are continuously improved in accordance with identified needs and changes in the labour market, including increased labour mobility and the employment of third-country nationals.

Paragraph 27(b)

Strengthening wage protection mechanisms

The Republic of Croatia recognizes the importance of ensuring effective wage protection and ensuring that all workers receive their wages in full and within the legally prescribed deadlines.

The legal framework for wage protection is established through the Labour Act and the Minimum Wage Act, which regulate employers' obligations concerning payment of wages, protection of workers' financial rights and the minimum level of remuneration. In addition, the Act on Suppression of Undeclared Work strengthens mechanisms for identifying and addressing situations in which work is performed without a properly regulated employment relationship.

The enforcement of wage protection legislation is ensured through activities of competent authorities, including the State Inspectorate. Labour inspections include supervision of compliance with obligations related to wage payments, employment contracts, lawful employment conditions and other labour rights.

Inspections are conducted through regular and targeted supervision, including based on workers' complaints and information indicating possible violations. Attention is given to sectors where workers, including migrant workers, may be exposed to increased risks of labour rights violations, such as construction, services, transport, hospitality and food-delivery activities.

Where violations are identified, competent authorities undertake measures provided by law, including requiring employers to remedy irregularities and initiating procedures for imposing sanctions against employers who fail to comply with their legal obligations.

In 2024, labour inspectors of the State Inspectorate carried out 7,593 completed inspection procedures in the field of labour relations. Inspections were conducted both ex officio and following complaints and information submitted by workers and other relevant stakeholders. In the area of undeclared work, labour inspectors adopted 406 decisions requiring employers to take measures in accordance with the Act on Suppression of Undeclared Work.

Croatia continues to improve access to information on employment rights and available protection mechanisms, including through measures addressing language barriers and the specific circumstances of foreign workers.

The Republic of Croatia remains committed to further strengthening wage protection mechanisms, improving inspection capacities and ensuring effective access to administrative and judicial remedies for all workers.

Paragraph 27(c)

Accessible complaint mechanisms and protection against retaliation

The Republic of Croatia recognizes that effective protection of labour rights requires that workers can report violations and seek effective remedies without fear of retaliation.

Workers have access to several mechanisms for the protection of their rights, including submitting complaints to the State Inspectorate, judicial protection, administrative procedures before competent authorities and assistance provided by relevant institutions.

The Republic of Croatia continues to improve the accessibility and effectiveness of these mechanisms, particularly for workers who may face additional barriers, including migrant workers. Competent institutions, including the State Inspectorate, CES and other relevant public bodies, provide information on employment rights, complaint procedures and available protection mechanisms.

Information and guidance are increasingly adapted to the needs of foreign workers, including through multilingual materials and measures aimed at overcoming language barriers. Attention is given to ensuring that migrant workers are aware of their rights and available remedies.

The Republic of Croatia recognizes that migrant workers may be vulnerable due to factors such as limited knowledge of the legal framework, language barriers and dependence on a particular employer. Therefore, continued efforts are undertaken to ensure their effective access to protection mechanisms.

Workers who report violations of labour legislation or seek enforcement of their employment rights are protected under the applicable legal framework against unlawful adverse treatment, including unlawful termination of employment or other forms of retaliation.

Workers may also seek judicial protection against unlawful decisions affecting their employment rights.

The Republic of Croatia continues to strengthen institutional cooperation, awareness-raising activities and enforcement mechanisms to ensure that all workers, including third-country nationals, can exercise their labour rights effectively.