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Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights

Information received from Latvia on follow-up to the concluding observations on its second periodic report*

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* The present document is being issued without formal editing.



1. On 5 March 2021, the UN Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights ('Committee') adopted Concluding Observations on the second periodic report of the Republic of Latvia (Latvia) on the implementation of the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights ('Concluding observations') (E/C.12/LVA/CO/2). This document contains follow-up information in response to the Committee's recommendations as requested in paragraph 53 of the Concluding observations, specifically recommendations nos.11 (climate), 33 (poverty) and 41 (healthcare response to the Covid-19 pandemic).

Follow-up information relating to paragraph 11 of the concluding observations (E/C.12/LVA/CO/2)

2. In recommendation no.11, the Committee recommended Latvia to "enhance its efforts to mitigate the adverse impacts of climate change on economic, social and cultural rights, including by taking measures to achieve its nationally determined contribution under the Paris Agreement and for the implementation of its transition to a net zero greenhouse gas emissions economy by 2050."

3. As a member to the European Union, Latvia is bound by the nationally determined contributions ('NDC') of the EU under the Paris Agreement ('PA'), and its legal framework, including the European Climate Law establishing that by 2030 the EU greenhouse gas ('GHG') emissions must be reduced by 55% (compared to 1990), and that by 2050 the EU must become climate-neutral. The EU reviews the compliance of the measures adopted by Latvia with the EU law, and, by extension, the PA. Although Latvia is not a party to Annex II to the UNFCCC, Latvia has voluntarily contributed financially and expertise-wise to assisting other States in achieving climate-neutrality: Ukraine, Azerbaijan, Georgia, Moldova, Uzbekistan, and others.

4. Latvia has adopted 5 policy documents and strategies: Latvia's Climate Neutrality Strategy for 2050; National Energy and Climate Plan until 2030; Latvian National Plan for Adaptation to Climate Change until 2030; National Development Plan 2021–2027; Guidelines for Environmental Policies between 2021 and 2027 establishing Latvia's obligation to become climate-neutral by 2050 and setting out the directions, lines of action, short-term goals, monitoring systems, progress reports (from 2023 onwards), etc. for all sectors to comply with this target¹ Latvia has discussed these policy planning documents and strategies with the non-governmental sector, inviting them to submit comments, amendments, and proposals. The main areas of these documents are: renewable energy resources ('RES'); reduction of consumption of fossil and unsustainable resources; transition to sustainable and innovative use of resources; equal access to energy resources; adoption of new laws, conducting researches, introduction of new procedures, conclusion of agreements with operators, provision of support to them; establishment of a reporting tool, renovation of buildings, development of energy-saving catalogues, improving of energy efficiency and promoting the use of RES in construction, heating, cooling, and industry; promoting the use of non-emission technologies in electricity generation; promoting self-generation, self-consumption and alternative energy communities; promoting the use of alternative fuels and RES technologies in transport; energy security, reducing energy dependency, fully integrating energy markets and modernising infrastructure; improving the efficiency of waste and water-waste management; efficient use of resources and reduction of GHG emissions in agriculture; land use, land use change and forestry; reduction of the use of fluorinated GHG;

¹ Report on Latvia's *Climate neutrality strategy for 2050*, available: https://ec.europa.eu/clima/sites/its/its_lv_lv.pdf; Latvia's *National Energy and Climate Plan*, available https://ec.europa.eu/energy/sites/ener/files/documents/lv_final_necp_main_en.pdf; Latvia's *National Plan for Adaptation to Climate Change until 2030*, available: <https://likumi.lv/ta/id/308330-par-latvijas-pielagosanas-klimata-parmainam-planu-laika-posmam-lidz-2030-gadam>; Latvia's *National Development Plan 2021-2027*, available: https://www.pkc.gov.lv/sites/default/files/inline-files/NAP2027_apstiprin%C4%81ts%20Saeim%C4%81_1.pdf; *The Guidelines for Environmental policies between 2021 and 2027* are available at: <https://likumi.lv/ta/id/335137-par-vides-politikas-pamatnostadnem-2021-2027-gadam>.

improving the “greening” and attractiveness of the tax system for energy efficiency and RES technologies; public awareness-raising, education of the society.

5. Latvia’s domestic legal framework on environmental protection incorporates the precautionary principle, the principle of prohibition of transboundary harm, principle of due diligence, and others. This framework also grants the right to bring *actio popularis* complaints before domestic administrative courts in the case of existing or potential/imminent environmental damage, including issues concerning climate change. The Constitution of the Republic of Latvia establishes a right to a benevolent environment, and the case law of both, the administrative courts and the Constitutional Court is extensive with respect to the protection of the environment.

6. Latvia has adopted several domestic programmes to reduce GHG emissions in the framework of the European Emission Allowance Auction Instrument (EKII).² The project “Support for the use of renewable resources – reduction of the GHG emissions in households” to reduce GHG emissions and improve energy efficiency in households by supporting the purchase of equipment that produces heat and electricity in households, and their connection to the central heating systems (3493 agreements were concluded with providers of equipment that use renewable energy for households. Altogether 4700 projects have so far been submitted)³ Latvia introduced the project “Reduction of greenhouse gas emissions in transportation sector – support for the purchase of non(zer)–emission and small emission vehicles” to facilitate the reduction of GHG emissions by supporting the purchase of electric, hybrid cars (until December 2022, 579 agreements were concluded).⁴ In the project “Reduction of greenhouse gas emissions in objects of State and architectural importance” Latvia adopted measures to reduce CO₂ emissions and improve energy efficiency when restructuring, re-building, renovating, simplifying facades.⁵ The project “Reduction of greenhouse gas emissions in illumination public territories in municipality infrastructures” aims to reduce GHG emissions and improve energy-efficiency in municipalities by applying and introducing environmental-friendly technologies and measures that will reduce the current consumption of electricity.⁶

7. In 2020, Latvia commenced work on a comprehensive *Law on Climate*. The law is still in development, and several public consultations have taken place.⁷ In December 2022, Latvia established the Ministry on Climate and Energy, which is responsible for developing policies in the fields of energy and climate, organizing and coordinating their implementation; developing guidelines and methods to reduce climate change, coordinating the compliance with international obligations in the field of energy and climate, coordinating Latvia’s participation in the EU emission-quota-regimes; supervising Latvia’s compliance with its aims to reduce GHG emissions.⁸

8. According to the Implementing decisions of the European Commission,⁹ in 2013–2019, Latvia met its obligations and goals as set in the Decision no.406/2009/EC on the effort of Member States to reduce their greenhouse gas emissions to meet the Community’s greenhouse gas emission reduction commitments up to 2020. According to the GHG stock-taking of 2022, Latvia achieved its targets for 2020. It is estimated that Latvia will comply with its EU targets for 2013–2030, which is a reduction of GHG emissions by 6% (compared to 2005 levels). The 2021 estimate showed that with the measures already taken by Latvia, the level of GHG emissions will have been reduced by 7% (compared to 2005 levels), and by 9% (compared 2005 levels) with additional measures.¹⁰ Based on the Latvian

² https://climate.ec.europa.eu/eu-action/eu-emissions-trading-system-eu-ets/auctioning_en.

³ <https://likumi.lv/ta/id/330568> and <https://ekii.lv/index.php?page=atbalsts-majsaimniecibam>.

⁴ <https://likumi.lv/ta/id/328761> and <https://ekii.lv/index.php?page=atbalsts-transportlidzekliem>.

⁵ <https://m.likumi.lv/doc.php?id=279830>; https://ekii.lv/index.php?mact=Konkurs,cntnt01,fe_konkurs_detail,0&cntnt01current_id=7&cntnt01returnid=25.

⁶ <https://m.likumi.lv/doc.php?id=334008>; https://ekii.lv/index.php?mact=Konkurs,cntnt01,fe_konkurs_detail,0&cntnt01current_id=10&cntnt01returnid=25.

⁷ https://tapportal.mk.gov.lv/legal_acts/7987de45-93fd-45e3-ac4c-948251c622d9.

⁸ <https://likumi.lv/ta/id/338391-klimata-un-energetikas-ministrijas-nolikums>.

⁹ <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/HTML/?uri=CELEX:32013D0162&from=LV>.

¹⁰ EU Commission, Country Factsheet: Latvia, available: https://ec.europa.eu/clima/sites/default/files/strategies/progress/docs/lv_2020_factsheet_en.pdf.

Environment, Geology and Meteorology Centre's report on 2022, Latvia will likely meet its non-ETS targets for 2030 (-6%), and with the measures currently adopted and implemented, by 2030 the reduction will be -10% (compared 2005 levels), and with additional measures -15% (compared to 2005 levels).¹¹

Follow-up information relating to paragraph 33 of the concluding observations (E/C.12/LVA/CO/2)

9. In paragraph 33 of the Concluding observations, the Committee invites Latvia to intensify its efforts to eradicate poverty, further referring to specific measures, including by adopting a national plan on eradicating poverty, alleviating the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic, etc. In reply, Latvia underlines that its approach in eradicating poverty is horizontal, introducing targets, obligations and measures in sectoral documents so that the experts in the specific field, be it social integration, healthcare, education, or social insurance, etc., are guided by the necessity to reduce and eradicate poverty, and the applicable principles and guidelines are established in the document that directly deals with their field.

10. The National Sustainable Development Strategy until 2030 establishes that the poverty risk index should be reduced by 16% by 2030. The mid-term National Development Plan for 2021–2027 foresees several social inclusion targets in a wider context. The Guidelines for Social protection and Labour Market for 2021–2027 ('Guidelines') establish aims, indexes and measures to increase income for the groups of society that have been at risk of poverty, providing the necessary social services, possibilities to enter into a safe working environment. The mid-term policy target is to facilitate social inclusion, reduce income inequalities, reduce poverty by providing stable and adequate material support to attain economic independence. Aid is provided so that it is adequate and sustainable, but would not reduce motivation to enter labour market. According to the *Guidelines* by 2027:

- The newly-provided pensions will not be smaller than 40% of the average wage subject to social insurance contributions;
- Financial aid by the State will reduce poverty risk by at least 20% overall, including by at least 35% for pensioners; and by 20% for children;
- The number of households with income below the level of needy households will be reduced by 11%.

11. Four action plans to reduce poverty have been adopted focusing on the needs of persons with disabilities, equal opportunities between sexes in employment and employment safety, and the development of social services. The Plan on the improvement of the support system for minimum income for 2022–2024 ('Plan') aims to clarify and improve the parameters for defining the minimum income level according to the economic development of Latvia and their review. It foresees an annual review of the thresholds and methods for determining the minimum income level, and an annual increase of the minimum level of income threshold (as from 2023). The *Plan* establishes that State co-finances local governments in providing basic social support benefits, guaranteed minimum income ('GMI') benefits, and housing benefits. These support measures are applicable to: recipients of the GMI benefit, needy households, low-income households, recipients of the State minimum pension and social security benefits. The new system for establishing the threshold of minimum income will be based on a percentage of the medium minimum income, instead of the current system, which is based on numerical approach, and will enter into force in July 2023. The new threshold will not be lower than 20% of the medium income.

12. In 2021, an allowance was paid to persons/households that experienced loss of income due to the Covid-19 pandemic, which varied among the local governments, but was not less than 80 EUR/month per person, and was increased by 50 EUR/month for each child (up to 18 y/o). Additionally, persons with a completed Covid-19 vaccination course and 60+ y/o received an allowance of 20 EUR/month. A one-time benefit of 500 EUR was paid to a parent/guardian of a child up to 18 y/o (per child), including persons with alternative or

¹¹ <https://reportnet.europa.eu/public/country/LV>.

refugee status in Latvia. A one-time benefit of 200 EUR was paid to seniors and persons with disabilities. A sickness allowance in the amount of 60% of the income subject to social insurance contributions was paid in 2021 to a guardian/parent caring for a child if the parent/guardian could not tele-work and the child was up to 10 y/o (up to 18 y/o for a child with disabilities). This allowance was paid also to caretakers of a person with disabilities over the age of 18 if the person could not go to a day-care centre. The unemployment allowance-period was extended, meaning that persons, who due to the pandemic continued to be unemployed after the period during which unemployment benefits were usually paid, could continue to receive unemployment benefits for up to 4 months in addition. An identical approach was taken in respect of parental benefits. Additionally, an array of measures was introduced to ensure access to different services.

13. To address challenges in the social security system in Latvia, in 2021–2023, Latvia adopted the following measures:

- In 2021, changes to the minimum income thresholds for benefits and pensions. The increase of the minimum income thresholds as from 2021 was the biggest change in such thresholds in the last decade, which in total had a positive impact on more than 100 000 individuals with low and very low income:
 - Increasing the GMI benefit up to 109 EUR for the primary/only bread-winner of the household and to 76 EUR for others (in 2021, positive impact on 25 123 recipients);
 - Increasing the threshold for a needy household to 272 EUR and to 190 EUR, respectively (in 2021, 54 916 individuals qualified for this benefit);
 - The threshold for low-income households was made not higher than 436 EUR and 305 EUR, but not less than that for other persons in a needy household, respectively (in 2021, 31 623 persons qualified this support);
 - A unified legal framework for housing benefits;
- Increased the minimum old-age pension. Since 2021, the base for calculating the minimum old-age pension is 136 EUR (previously: 80EUR), but for persons with disabilities from childhood: 163 EUR (previously: 122,69EUR), with a coefficient 1.1. For every employment year beyond 15 years, the amount increases by 2% of the base. The pension cannot be lower than 149.60 EUR. The increase of the minimum old-age pension affected approx.31 thousand persons a month (2021);
- Increased the minimum disability pension. In detail, see the table below:

Minimum disability pension amount, EUR/month

	<i>Coefficient</i>	<i>In 2020 EUR</i>	<i>In 2021 EUR</i>
<i>Disability since childhood</i>			
Group I	1.6	196.30	260.80
Group II	1.4	171.77	228.20
Group III	Base	122.69	163.00
<i>Persons with disability</i>			
Group I	1.6	128.00	217.60
Group II	1.4	112.00	190.40
Group III	Base	80.00	136.00

Source: Ministry of Welfare

- Increased the minimum benefit for children for the loss of a parent/guardian. The benefit for social support for children up to 6 y/o was increased to 136 EUR (in 2020: 92.50 EUR and 106.72 EUR for a child with disabilities), for a child from 7 y/o: 163 EUR (in 2020: 111 EUR);

- Increased the minimum social support benefit for seniors and persons with disabilities. This affected approx.20 thousand persons a month (2021);

State social security benefit, EUR/month

Persons with disabilities

	Coefficient	2020	2021 (Amount and increase compared to 2020, EUR)	For unemployed in 2021, +30% additional payment for Group I, +20% additional payment for Group II (amount and increase compared to 2020, EUR)
<i>Persons with disability</i>				
Group I	1.3 (2020) 1.4 (2021)	104	152.60 (+48.60)	198.38 (+94.38)
Group II	1.2	96	130.80 (+34.80)	156.96 (+60.96)
Group III	Base	80	109 (+29)	
<i>Disability since childhood</i>				
Group I	1.3 (2020) 1.4 (2021)	159.5	190.40 (+30.90)	247.52 (+88.02)
Group II	1.2	147.23	163.20 (+15.97)	195.84 (+48.61)
Group III	Base	122.69	136.00 (+13.31)	
<i>Retirement age (not eligible to State pension)</i>				
		2020	2021 (amount and increase compared to 2020, in EUR)	
		64.03	109.00 (+44.97)	

Source: Ministry of Welfare

- Increased the benefit for guardians; for children up to 7 y/o: 215 EUR (previously: 107.50 EUR); for children 7–18 y/o: 258 EUR (previously: 129 EUR);
- Provided support to orphans and children without guardians. When starting independent life, the one-time allowance was increased from 128.06 to 218 EUR (for children with disabilities: from 245.38 to 327 EUR), the allowance for monthly payments increased from 64.03 to 109 EUR (for children with disabilities from 122.69 to 163 EUR), allowance for domestic supplies and soft furnishings was increased from 249.71 to 820.05 EUR;
- From 2022, increased the amount and conditions of family benefit. The monthly benefit is now provided to families with children up to 20 y/o depending on the number of children (1 child: 25 EUR; 2 children: 50 EUR/child; 3 children: 75 EUR/child; 4 or more: 100 EUR/child);
- Increased the minimum untaxed income for pensioners from 330 EUR to 500 EUR/month.

14. In 2021, the net income per household member rose by 7.6% with the biggest increase in low-income households. Single-parent households experienced a rise by 13.8% compared to 2020, households with 3 or more children by 10.5%, single-person households (seniors) by 14.5%. In 2021, 22.5% of the population was at risk of poverty, which was 0.9 percentage points lower than in 2020. Since 2020, population at risk due to lack of means was reduced by 3.7 percentage points reaching 11.1%; with respect to serious risk due to lack of means – the number of people has decreased by 1.7 percentage points reaching 5.3%, reaching the

lowest rate in the last decade. Latvia regularly reviews its progress in reaching its sustainable development goals. In 2022, Latvia presented its second Sustainable Development Goals Report outlining Latvia's results in achieving the first goal "No poverty".¹²

Follow-up information relating to paragraph 41 of the concluding observations

15. In paragraph 41 of its Concluding observations, the Committee invites Latvia to provide further information about the healthcare response to the Covid-19 pandemic. In reply, Latvia informs that in order to reduce the spread of the virus and ensure the necessary services, additional funding and information were provided for patient treatment in hospitals. To provide healthcare services for the increasing number of hospitalized Covid-19 patients additional beds, equipment and devices were repurposed and expanded. This prevented patient prioritization.

16. Additional funding from the State allowed for: the expansion of additional beds, including intensive therapy beds; the acquisition of medical equipment necessary for providing Covid-19 treatment; the construction and renovation of oxygen systems, improvement of hospital infrastructure to ensure patient flow segregation and reduce the spread of the infection; the improvement of equipment for patient-care and facilities and resources for disinfection. To motivate healthcare workers and attract additional personnel, Latvia granted bonuses to medical personnel and employees working in stationary healthcare institutions. To provide treatment to Covid-19 patients according to the Covid-19 variant, recommendations and guidelines were developed for their care. To attract additional human resources Latvia:

- Created a platform for exchange of information among hospitals;
- Involved residents and medical students;
- Received aid from private sector healthcare institutions;
- Involved the military for tasks that do not require medical education;
- Involved healthcare professionals from the diaspora;
- Invited healthcare professionals of retirement age to aid.

17. Testing and treatment were funded from the State budget. The capacity for laboratory testing was constantly increased to ensure access to laboratory tests. The testing protocol was adapted to the epidemiological situation and forecasts, including through screening sites with a high risk of Covid-19 spread (educational institutions, healthcare facilities, social care facilities, detention centres, etc.). From December 2020 until April 2021, individuals with acute infection symptoms and without a doctor's referral were permitted to take Covid-19 tests ensuring that people could submit Covid-19 tests during the holidays when it could be difficult to obtain a referral from a doctor. In December 2021, an enhanced Covid-19 testing at the airport for passengers regardless of their vaccination status and a requirement to take a Covid-19 test before entering Latvia were implemented. To ensure the availability of Covid-19 tests Latvia allowed pharmacists and pharmacy assistants to perform rapid antigen testing in pharmacies.

18. The European Commission and the WHO invited States to develop Covid-19 vaccination strategies. The Latvian Immunization State Council initially recommended vaccine uptake for all adult residents, starting with vaccination of risk groups. Latvia developed a Covid-19 vaccination strategy in December of 2020 specifying several priority groups. Covid-19 vaccination campaign began immediately afterwards with the vaccination of medical staff. As vaccines were supplied in limited quantities, the vaccination was carried out in accordance with the vaccination strategy. The vaccination of the entire population began in April 2021 (any resident of Latvia over the age of 18). The vaccination of 16–17-year-olds began in May 2021, but of 12–15-year-olds in June 2021. From December 2021, anyone can receive a Covid-19 vaccine from the age of 5. According to the domestic legal

¹² <https://hlpf.un.org/sites/default/files/vnrs/2022/VNR%202022%20Latvia%20Report%201.pdf>.

framework, all Latvian citizens, regardless of their residence or status, have access to free Covid-19 vaccines. Free vaccination against Covid-19 infection is provided to persons with temporary residence permits, full-time foreign students, employees of foreign diplomatic and consular representations, international organizations and their representatives, their family members, refugees and persons with alternative status, stateless persons, asylum seekers, foreign nationals detained in accordance with the *Immigration Law*, persons, whose presence in Latvia is related to humanitarian considerations, and persons who have received Latvian National Long-Term Type-D Visa.

19. Latvia has created and maintains a Covid-19 informational website,¹³ in both English and Russian, with information about Covid-19, safety measures, vaccination, and answers to FAQs. Covid-19-related statistics are collected and published every week on the website of the Centre for Disease Prevention and Control (CDPC)¹⁴ and in opendata.¹⁵ The National Health Service publishes data about Covid-19 vaccination, base vaccination, State-funded Covid-19 tests, recommendations for people infected, and information on the availability of medical assistance.¹⁶ Reporting to the parliament also takes place. Several informational campaigns with the help of public media (radio, TV, internet, major daily newspapers, weekly/monthly magazines, regional media, environmental advertising throughout the country) were implemented to inform about the Covid-19 pandemic, the need for vaccination, vaccines, their positive impact, the severity of the disease and its consequences if not vaccinated, statistics on infections, etc. The materials were prepared in Latvian and Russian, but, upon request, information in English was also provided.

20. During the pandemic, emergency and urgent medical aid was provided, including oncological treatment, life-saving surgeries, and surgeries that could result in disability if postponed. Healthcare services related to: oncological diseases, HIV/AIDS, tuberculosis, psychiatry, contagious skin diseases, STIs, traumatology, acute and subacute rehabilitation services for individuals for whom postponing the service could pose a risk of disability or loss of work ability, and children, where postponing could significantly worsen their functionality, were ensured in full.

21. In the summer of 2021, the issue of vaccine donation was brought to the forefront. Through diplomatic channels Latvia identified and reached out to potential recipient countries, consequently donating Vaxzevria vaccines to: Tunisia (49,800 doses), Moldova (30,000 doses), Albania (30,000 doses), Kenya (55,200 doses), Vietnam (30,000 doses), and 83,070 doses of *Comirnaty* to Georgia. Additionally, Latvia donated 610,200 doses of Vaxzevria and 73,614 doses of Janssen to the COVAX global vaccine distribution mechanism.

¹³ <https://covid19.gov.lv/>.

¹⁴ <https://www.spkc.gov.lv/lv/covid-19-statistika>.

¹⁵ <https://data.gov.lv/>.

¹⁶ <https://www.spkc.gov.lv/lv/media/15373/download>; <https://www.vmnvd.gov.lv/lv/vakcinacija-iedzivotajiem>; <https://www.vmnvd.gov.lv/lv/balstvakcinacija>; <https://www.vmnvd.gov.lv/lv/valsts-apmaksatas-covid-19-analizes-kam-tas-veic-un-ka-jarikojas>; <https://www.spkc.gov.lv/lv/pacientienu>; <https://www.vmnvd.gov.lv/lv/kur-sanemt-medicinisko-palidzibu>;