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**Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights****Concluding observations on the initial report of the Lao People's Democratic Republic\***

1. The Committee considered the initial report of the Lao People's Democratic Republic<sup>1</sup> at its 46th and 47th meetings,<sup>2</sup> held on 18 and 19 September 2025, and adopted the present concluding observations at its fifty-eighth meeting, held on 26 September 2025.

**A. Introduction**

2. The Committee welcomes the submission of the State Party's initial report and the supplementary information provided in the replies to the list of issues.<sup>3</sup> The Committee expresses appreciation for the constructive dialogue held with the State Party's delegation.

**B. Positive aspects**

3. The Committee welcomes the legislative, institutional and policy measures taken to increase the protection of economic, social and cultural rights in the State Party, such as the adoption of the National Health Insurance Law (2019), the Law on Social Security (as amended in 2018), the ninth national socioeconomic development plan (2021–2025), the smooth transition strategy for least developed country graduation in 2026 and beyond, and the strategy on the development of labour and social welfare to 2025. The Committee welcomes the improvements made in reducing the poverty rates and, to a certain degree, food insecurity, and the measures mentioned in the present concluding observations.

**C. Principal subjects of concern and recommendations****Domestic application of the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights**

4. While noting the State Party's dualist legal system and welcoming the primacy of treaty obligations over national laws, as proclaimed in the law on treaties and international agreements (2017), as well as the legislative and policy measures taken by the State Party to protect and uphold economic, social and cultural rights, the Committee is concerned that the provisions of the Covenant have not yet been fully incorporated into the domestic legal order. It is also concerned about the lack of adequate legal remedies for violations of economic, social and cultural rights. Furthermore, it is concerned that awareness of and knowledge about the Covenant among public officials, including judges and prosecutors, as well as

\* Adopted by the Committee at its seventy-eighth session (8–26 September 2025).

<sup>1</sup> E/C.12/LAO/1.

<sup>2</sup> See E/C.12/2025/SR.46 and E/C.12/2025/SR.47.

<sup>3</sup> E/C.12/LAO/RQ/1.



among lawyers, appear to remain limited, and that there are no examples of court decisions referring to the Covenant in the application or interpretation of domestic law.

**5. The Committee recommends that the State Party undertake a comprehensive review of its domestic legislation with a view to identifying any potential gaps or conflicting provisions with the Covenant, and ensure that all Covenant rights are given full legal effect in its domestic legal order. It also recommends that the State Party take all measures necessary to ensure that victims of violations of economic, social and cultural rights have full access to effective legal remedies. Furthermore, it recommends that the State Party enhance training for public officials, including judges and prosecutors, as well as for lawyers, on the provisions of the Covenant and their justiciability, and effectively raise awareness of the Covenant among rights holders. In this regard, the Committee draws the attention of the State Party to its general comment No. 9 (1998) on the domestic application of the Covenant.**

#### **National human rights institution**

**6. The Committee acknowledges the existence of various governmental bodies with mandates relating to human rights, including the National Committee on Human Rights, the National Commission for the Advancement of Women, Mothers and Children, the National Committee for Persons with Disabilities and the Elderly and the National Committee on Countering Trafficking in Persons. It is, however, concerned that the State Party has yet to establish a national human rights institution in full compliance with the principles relating to the status of national institutions for the promotion and protection of human rights (the Paris Principles).**

**7. The Committee recommends that the State Party establish a national human rights institution, or restructure an existing body, with a broad mandate to promote and protect human rights, including economic, social and cultural rights, and ensure that it is provided with sufficient human, technical and financial resources to enable it to discharge its functions effectively and independently and in full compliance with the Paris Principles. In this regard, the Committee recalls its general comment No. 10 (1998) on the role of national human rights institutions in the protection of economic, social and cultural rights.**

#### **Independence of the judiciary**

**8. While noting the constitutional and legal provisions entrenching judicial independence, the Committee is concerned about reports that the judiciary lacks independence owing to interference in its functioning, including in the selection, appointment, removal and disciplining of judges and prosecutors, which could have an adverse impact on the protection and enforcement of economic, social and cultural rights.**

**9. The Committee recommends that the State Party safeguard, in law and in practice, the full independence, impartiality and effectiveness of the judiciary, ensuring that it is free from any kind of pressure or undue interference from other bodies. In doing so, it should ensure that the procedures for the election, appointment, promotion, suspension or removal of judges and prosecutors comply with relevant international standards, including the Basic Principles on the Independence of the Judiciary and the Guidelines on the Role of Prosecutors.**

#### **Human rights defenders and civil society activists**

**10. The Committee expresses its deep concern about reports that human rights defenders and representatives of civil society working on economic, social and cultural rights, including defenders of Indigenous and tribal peoples' rights and the environment, trade union leaders, leaders of peasant movements and anti-corruption activists, have been subjected to intimidation, threats, harassment, arbitrary arrest and detention, cases of unjustified criminal prosecution, violations of fair trial guarantees, enforced disappearance, extrajudicial killing and repression, including transnational repression, as a result of their activities for the protection of economic, social and cultural rights. It is also concerned about the insufficient efforts of the State Party to provide these persons with adequate protection and to conduct**

prompt, effective and impartial investigations and punish perpetrators with appropriate penalties.

11. **Recalling its statement on human rights defenders and economic, social and cultural rights,<sup>4</sup> the Committee recommends that the State Party:**

- (a) **Strengthen the protection of human rights defenders, journalists and activists working on economic, social and cultural rights and of their family members;**
- (b) **In order to prevent impunity, ensure that all violations are promptly, effectively and impartially investigated, prosecuted, sanctioned and remedied;**
- (c) **Ensure that legislation is not used to unduly limit and repress activities of government critics, human rights defenders and activists, who are indispensable for the realization of economic, social and cultural rights.**

#### **Business and human rights**

12. Noting the information provided during the dialogue with the delegation of the State Party, the Committee is concerned about the inadequacy of legal obligations for businesses under the State Party's jurisdiction to exercise human rights due diligence in the conduct of their operations, as well as the absence of a national action plan for business and human rights. It is also concerned by reports that business activities and large-scale development projects, in particular with regard to extractive activities, the construction of dams and hydropower plants and the establishment of special economic zones, have resulted in environmental degradation, water and air pollution, the loss of biodiversity and deforestation, thereby adversely affecting the enjoyment of economic, social and cultural rights, especially by Indigenous and tribal peoples, ethnic minority groups and other local communities. While taking note of the provisions of the Decree on Environmental Impact Assessment (2019), the Committee is concerned by reports that environmental and social impact assessments and consultations with affected local communities conducted before the realization of investments and the implementation of development projects are often insufficient and fail to prevent violations of obligations under the Covenant (arts. 2 (1), 11 and 12).

13. **With reference to the Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights: Implementing the United Nations "Protect, Respect and Remedy" Framework, the Committee recommends that the State Party:**

- (a) **Adopt a national action plan on business and human rights while ensuring that both the formulation and implementation processes involve all interested parties, including representatives of businesses, civil society organizations, Indigenous and tribal peoples and the most affected communities;**
- (b) **Adopt appropriate legislative and administrative measures to ensure that business entities operating or domiciled in the State Party conduct human rights due diligence so as to prevent or mitigate any negative impacts of their activities on the exercise of economic, social and cultural rights;**
- (c) **Take all measures necessary to ensure accountability for violations of economic, social and cultural rights resulting from business activities and development projects, and that appropriate remedies, including adequate compensation, are provided to victims;**
- (d) **Systematically carry out prior and meaningful consultations with affected local communities, including Indigenous and tribal peoples and ethnic minority groups, and independent human rights and environmental impact assessments, before undertaking business activities, implementing development projects and granting concessions for the economic exploitation of lands, territories and natural resources. In this regard, the Committee draws the State Party's attention to its general comments No. 24 (2017) on State obligations under the International Covenant on Economic,**

<sup>4</sup> E/C.12/2016/2.

**Social and Cultural Rights in the context of business activities and No. 26 (2022) on land and economic, social and cultural rights.**

**Climate change and environmental protection**

14. While welcoming the adoption of the national strategy for addressing climate change by 2030, the Law on Disaster Management (2019) and the national strategy on disaster risk reduction (2021–2030), as well as the State Party’s commitment to reduce greenhouse gas emissions, the Committee is concerned that current emission-reducing policies may not be sufficient for the State Party to fulfil its obligations under the Paris Agreement. It is also concerned about the country’s reliance on energy sources with high environmental risk, and the increased deforestation in recent years. The Committee is further concerned about the insufficiency of adaptation measures taken to counter the country’s relatively high vulnerability to the impacts that climate change, including extreme weather events such as floods, droughts, storms, shifts in rainfall patterns and increasing temperatures, has on the enjoyment of Covenant rights, in particular for disadvantaged and vulnerable groups, such as ethnic minorities, Indigenous and tribal peoples, farmers, pastoralists and disaster-displaced communities (arts. 2 (1), 11 and 12).

15. **The Committee recommends that the State Party take measures to achieve its nationally determined contributions under the Paris Agreement by, inter alia:**

- (a) **Expanding investment in renewable energy, especially solar and wind, to diversify the energy mix beyond hydropower and coal;**
- (b) **Ensuring that natural resources, including forest resources, are used in accordance with a fair and equitable conservation policy developed in consultation with the communities concerned, including Indigenous and tribal peoples and ethnic minorities, civil society organizations and the authorities responsible for conservation;**
- (c) **Combating illegal logging and putting an end, to the extent possible, to other non-sustainable uses of natural resources, including forests;**
- (d) **Developing a national adaptation plan, taking into account the needs of marginalized and disadvantaged groups, in particular ethnic minorities, Indigenous and tribal peoples, farmers, pastoralists and disaster-displaced communities, and by ensuring that the plan incorporates adaptation and mitigation measures for climate change that reflect respect for economic, social and cultural rights, taking into consideration the Committee’s statement on climate change and the Covenant;<sup>5</sup>**
- (e) **Increasing its efforts to obtain international support, including financial and technical assistance, to secure funding for the implementation of emission-reduction targets and for climate adaptation measures.**

**Rights of Indigenous and tribal peoples**

16. While welcoming that article 8 of the Constitution enshrines the right of all ethnic groups to protect, preserve and promote the fine customs and cultures of their own tribes and of the nation, and noting the explanation provided by the State Party that no special status is granted to any ethnic group, the Committee is concerned that Indigenous and tribal peoples are not recognized as such by the State Party, which has an adverse effect on the enjoyment of their rights under the Covenant. The Committee is particularly concerned about reports of forced displacement and relocation of Indigenous and tribal peoples, including the Hmong ethnic minority group, from their land and territories, as a result of land-grabbing and land concessions for development projects. It is also concerned about reports that such forced displacement and relocation often take place without adequate consultation of Indigenous and tribal peoples with a view to obtaining their free, prior and informed consent, or without adequate compensation or relocation sites. Finally, the Committee is concerned about the limited access of Indigenous and tribal peoples to healthcare, education and other basic services (arts. 1, 2 (1) and 11–15).

<sup>5</sup> E/C.12/2018/1.

17. **The Committee recommends that the State Party:**

- (a) **Uphold the right of everyone, alone or in association with others or as a community, to choose his or her own identity, including the right to identify as belonging to an ethnic group or to an Indigenous or tribal people, in accordance with the person's customs and traditions, in line with articles 9 and 33 of the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, which was endorsed by the State Party on 13 September 2007;**
- (b) **Adopt an adequate legal framework that provides effective recognition and protection for the right of Indigenous and tribal peoples to own, use, control and develop the lands, territories and resources that they have traditionally owned, occupied or otherwise used or acquired, and ensure that effective mechanisms are in place to ensure the enforcement of such a legal framework;**
- (c) **Adopt and implement, in consultation with Indigenous and tribal peoples, an appropriate procedure to ensure that prior consultations are conducted in a systematic and transparent manner in order to obtain the free, prior and informed consent of Indigenous and tribal peoples in the context of decisions likely to affect them, particularly before the granting of licences for development projects and business activities in the lands and territories that they have traditionally owned, occupied or otherwise used or acquired;**
- (d) **Ensure that Indigenous and tribal peoples participate in any process concerning their relocation, and that such relocation is carried out with the provision of adequate relocation sites and respect for their traditional lifestyle and, where applicable, their right to ancestral land; and provide adequate compensation when relocation is not possible;**
- (e) **Take all measures necessary to ensure the full access of Indigenous and tribal peoples to healthcare, education and other basic services, taking into account the Committee's general comments No. 26 (2022) on land and economic, social and cultural rights and No. 21 (2009) on the right of everyone to take part in cultural life;**
- (f) **Ratify the Indigenous and Tribal Peoples Convention, 1989 (No. 169) of the International Labour Organization (ILO).**

**Maximum available resources**

18. While noting the State Party's recent economic growth, the Committee is concerned about the overall low level of social spending on food, water and sanitation, social security, education, healthcare and housing. The Committee is also concerned about the narrow tax base and limited progressivity of the income tax system, which constrain the State Party's capacity to mobilize resources for social spending. It is further concerned about the high level of public debt and the significant share of the budget allocated to debt servicing, which reduces fiscal space for the realization of Covenant rights. Moreover, it regrets the lack of clarity on whether the State Party intends to review royalty rates and concession fees for natural resources to ensure fair terms that reflect environmental and social costs and provide for benefit-sharing (arts. 2 (1), 9 and 11–14).

19. **The Committee recommends that the State Party increase the budget dedicated to social spending, particularly in the areas of social security, food, water and sanitation, housing, healthcare and education, and generally improve its capacity to mobilize domestic resources for the progressive realization of economic, social and cultural rights and the reduction of inequalities in the enjoyment of these rights. To this end, the Committee recommends that the State Party:**

- (a) **Broaden the tax base, make the tax system more progressive and combat tax evasion and avoidance, especially by foreign corporations and the wealthiest segments of the population, guided by the Committee's statement on tax policy and the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights;<sup>6</sup>**

<sup>6</sup> E/C.12/2025/1.

- (b) **Review royalty rates and concession fees for natural resources, including with regard to land, mining and hydropower, to ensure fair, transparent and equitable terms that reflect environmental and social costs and provide for benefit-sharing;**
- (c) **Take adequate measures, in liaison with key creditors, to ensure that commitments arising from public debt and servicing do not constrain the budgetary space needed for education, healthcare, adequate food and water, and social security;**
- (d) **Uphold the obligation of both lenders and borrowers to conduct human rights impact assessments prior to engaging in lending and setting their conditions, and consider the Committee's 2016 statement on public debt, austerity measures and the Covenant.<sup>7</sup>**

### **Corruption**

20. While noting the information provided by the State Party regarding efforts to combat corruption, the Committee is concerned about reports that high levels of corruption and impunity persist in the State Party, perpetuated by political patronage and bribery affecting many sectors of the economy, including public procurement, concessions for investments and development projects, land and tax administration, and the health and education sectors. It is also concerned about allegations of corruption in the judicial system and other accountability mechanisms, which hinders access to justice for violations of economic, social and cultural rights. It is further concerned about reports that anti-corruption bodies, in particular the State Inspection and Anti-Corruption Authority, lack independence and sufficient human, technical and financial resources to investigate all allegations of corruption effectively. Lastly, the Committee is concerned about the lack of adequate protection for those reporting cases of corruption and the restrictions on access to information of public interest (arts. 2 (1), 9 and 11–14).

21. **The Committee recommends that the State Party take all measures necessary:**

- (a) **To prevent and eradicate corruption at all levels, including in the judicial system, and to ensure transparency and accountability in the public administration;**
- (b) **To ensure the strict enforcement of the Anti-Corruption Law with a view to combating impunity;**
- (c) **To ensure the full independence of anti-corruption bodies and provide them with sufficient human, technical and financial resources to enable them to effectively and independently discharge their mandates;**
- (d) **To adopt adequate legislative and administrative measures to provide effective protection to victims of corruption, their lawyers, activists who campaign against corruption, whistle-blowers and witnesses.**

### **Non-discrimination**

22. While noting the prohibition of discrimination in articles 8 and 35 of the Constitution and in other laws, the Committee is concerned about the lack of a comprehensive anti-discrimination legal framework that covers all grounds of discrimination prohibited under the Covenant. It is also concerned about reports of discrimination against ethnic minority groups and Indigenous and tribal peoples, in particular the Hmong people, and on the basis of individuals' actual or perceived sexual orientation and gender identity, and about the lack of effective legal remedies to protect those groups, peoples and individuals from discrimination (art. 2 (2)).

23. **The Committee recommends that the State Party:**

- (a) **Enact comprehensive anti-discrimination legislation that provides for full and effective protection against discrimination in public and private spheres and explicitly includes all prohibited grounds of discrimination;**

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<sup>7</sup> E/C.12/2016/1.

(b) Adopt policies to prevent and combat discrimination against and social and economic exclusion of Indigenous and tribal peoples effectively, with the aim of ensuring their enjoyment of economic, social and cultural rights on an equal basis with others;

(c) Take effective measures, including legislative measures, to combat discrimination, social stigmatization and prejudice against persons on the basis of their actual or perceived sexual orientation and gender identity. In this regard, the Committee draws the State Party's attention to its general comment No. 20 (2009) on non-discrimination in economic, social and cultural rights.

#### **Equality between men and women**

24. While noting the inclusion of the principle of gender equality in article 37 of the Constitution, and welcoming the adoption of the Law on Gender Equality (2019), as well as the national strategy for gender equality (2016–2025) and the fourth national action plan on gender equality (2021–2025), the Committee is concerned about the persistent inequality between men and women, which is deeply rooted in gender stereotypes regarding the roles and responsibilities of women and men in the family and in society, impeding women from fully enjoying their economic, social and cultural rights. The Committee is, in particular, concerned about the large gender disparity in labour market participation, mainly owing to the unequal sharing of family responsibilities between women and men, the disproportionate burden of unpaid care work on women, the persistent gender wage gap, the overrepresentation of women in the informal economy and in low-skilled and low-paid jobs, and the lack of effective legal protection against sexual harassment and related misconduct in the workplace (arts. 3, 6 and 7).

25. The Committee recommends that the State Party take all measures necessary:

(a) To eliminate patriarchal attitudes and gender stereotypes about the roles and responsibilities of women and men in the family and in society, bearing in mind the Committee's general comment No. 16 (2005) on the equal right of men and women to the enjoyment of all economic, social and cultural rights;

(b) To ensure the effective enforcement of the Law on Gender Equality and article 224 of the Penal Code, which criminalizes discrimination against women;

(c) To advance women's employment by ensuring their equal participation in sectors where they are underrepresented and supporting their transition from informal to formal work;

(d) To consider developing and implementing a comprehensive national care policy aimed at redistributing unpaid care responsibilities, with a view to alleviating the disproportionate care burden on women; such a system should ensure adequate support for children, persons with disabilities and older persons and for self-care, in line with the principles of gender equality and social protection;

(e) To address the persistent gender wage gap by effectively enforcing the principle of equal pay for work of equal value, and promote women's access to higher-paid and non-traditional jobs;

(f) To amend the Labour Law (2013) to explicitly prohibit sexual harassment and related misconduct in the workplace, and ensure that victims have access to effective remedies and adequate support services.

#### **Right to work**

26. While noting the various initiatives adopted by the State Party to promote access to employment, the Committee is concerned about the lack of opportunities for decent work and the predominance of informal employment, which drive many to migrate abroad in search of work. It is further concerned that these challenges disproportionately affect young persons, women, persons with disabilities and persons in rural areas (art. 6).

27. **The Committee recommends that the State Party:**

(a) Take effective measures to expand opportunities for decent work, including in rural areas;

(b) Take the measures necessary to facilitate the transition of workers from the informal to the formal sector, paying special attention to women, young persons, persons with disabilities and persons living in rural areas, taking into consideration the Transition from the Informal to the Formal Economy Recommendation, 2015 (No. 204) of ILO. In this regard, the Committee recalls its general comment No. 18 (2005) on the right to work.

#### **Right to just and favourable conditions of work**

28. The Committee is concerned that persons working in the informal sector, particularly in agriculture, forestry, fisheries and domestic work, are not adequately covered by labour law protections. It is further concerned about reports of inadequate labour protection and exploitative practices, including trafficking in persons, forced labour, passport confiscation, debt bondage and coercive working conditions, for both Lao and migrant workers, especially women and children, in special economic zones (art. 7).

29. **The Committee recommends that the State Party:**

(a) Take the measures necessary to ensure that all workers, including those in the informal sector, are covered by the Labour Law and provided with adequate protection, including with regard to working time and paid leave, occupational safety and health, protection from harassment and violence, and access to effective remedies;

(b) Strengthen protection for Lao and migrant workers in special economic zones, in particular in the Golden Triangle Special Economic Zone, from risks of trafficking in persons, forced labour and other exploitative practices, including by ensuring access to effective, independent and confidential complaint mechanisms for reporting violations without fear of retaliation and by prosecuting and punishing those responsible for such offences; in this regard, the Committee recalls its general comment No. 23 (2016) on the right to just and favourable conditions of work.

#### **Minimum wage**

30. It is also concerned that, despite recent adjustments to the statutory minimum wage, the current level remains insufficient to secure a decent standard of living for workers and their families, particularly in the light of persistent high inflation and the ongoing depreciation of the local currency (art. 7).

31. **The Committee recommends that the State Party take the steps necessary to ensure that all workers are covered by minimum wages and that minimum wages are regularly adjusted to the cost of living, and to reinforce employers' compliance with the minimum wages through labour inspections and complaint mechanisms.**

#### **Child labour**

32. The Committee is concerned that child labour remains prevalent in the State Party, particularly in agriculture and forestry. It is also concerned about reports that most children engaged in child labour have dropped out of school or never attended, which impedes their enjoyment of the right to education and future access to decent work. While noting that the Labour Law sets the minimum age for employment at 14, the Committee is concerned that an exception is made for light work from the age of 12, which is inconsistent with international standards (arts. 6, 7 and 13).

33. **The Committee recommends that the State Party amend article 101 of the Labour Law to raise the minimum age for admission to employment so that it fully complies with international standards, including the ILO Minimum Age Convention, 1973 (No. 138). It also recommends that the State Party take all measures necessary to ensure that child labour, in particular its worst forms, is prevented effectively and adequately sanctioned. It further recommends that the State Party raise awareness in**

**schools and communities about the harmful effects of child labour and about the value of education, and provide adequate support to families, in particular those living in poverty and rural areas, so that children are able to attend and remain in school rather than engaging in labour.**

#### **Labour inspection**

34. The Committee is concerned by the limited capacity and resources to conduct labour inspections with sufficient coverage and frequency throughout the State Party, in particular in informal workplaces and special economic zones (art. 7).

**35. The Committee recommends that the State Party ensure that the labour inspection mechanisms can operate independently of employers and that they have the human, technical and financial resources to provide adequate protection to all workers, including those in the informal sector and in special economic zones.**

#### **Lao migrant workers abroad**

36. The Committee is concerned about the poor working conditions faced by Lao migrant workers abroad and the lack of adequate mechanisms to ensure that they enjoy equal labour and social protection (art. 7).

**37. The Committee recommends that the State Party take appropriate measures to ensure that Lao migrant workers are provided with the same level of labour and social protection as national workers in countries of destination, including through the conclusion and effective implementation of bilateral agreements.**

#### **Trade union rights**

38. The Committee is concerned about reports that the right to form and join trade unions remains severely restricted in law and in practice, that most unions are affiliated with the Lao Federation of Trade Unions, and that there is no genuine possibility to form independent trade unions. It is also concerned that the Labour Law does not explicitly prohibit anti-union discrimination or recognize the right to strike, and that, in practice, restrictive conditions continue to impede the exercise of the rights to strike and to collective bargaining. Furthermore, it is concerned by reports of trade union leaders and workers being subjected to reprisals, including disciplinary sanctions and dismissals, for exercising their union rights (art. 8).

**39. The Committee recommends that the State Party take all measures necessary to ensure that the trade union rights of workers, in particular the right to freely establish and join independent trade unions of their choice, including outside of the Lao Federation of Trade Unions, are fully respected, and that trade union members and leaders are able to exercise their activities in a climate free of intimidation, harassment and reprisals. The Committee also recommends that the State Party amend its Labour Law to explicitly recognize the rights to strike and collective bargaining, and to prohibit anti-union discrimination, taking into account the Committee's joint statement with the Human Rights Committee on freedom of association, including the right to form and join trade unions.<sup>8</sup>**

#### **Right to social security**

40. While noting the positive efforts made by the State Party in expanding its social security system, including through the implementation of the National Social Protection Strategy (for the period 2020–2025), the Committee is concerned that the system is still based mainly on persons in formal employment and that over 80 per cent of the population, including workers in the informal economy and persons belonging to the most disadvantaged and marginalized groups, are not covered by the system. It also expresses concern at reports that members of ethnic minority groups and Indigenous and tribal peoples, in particular the

<sup>8</sup> [E/C.12/66/5-CCPR/C/127/4](http://E/C.12/66/5-CCPR/C/127/4).

Hmong people, face obstacles in accessing social security due to the denial of identification documents (art. 9).

**41. The Committee recommends that the State Party expand social insurance to cover persons in the informal economy, and take appropriate measures to establish a social protection floor for all, with a view to guaranteeing income security and access to basic services, paying particular attention to disadvantaged and marginalized groups, including low-income households, children, older persons, persons with disabilities and informal workers. It also recommends that the State Party take all measures necessary to ensure that members of ethnic minority groups and Indigenous and tribal peoples, in particular the Hmong people, are able to obtain identification documents to have access to basic social services, including social protection schemes. The Committee draws the State Party's attention to its general comment No. 19 (2007) on the right to social security and to its statement entitled "Social protection floors: an essential element of the right to social security and of the sustainable development goals".<sup>9</sup>**

#### **Child marriage**

42. The Committee notes with concern that, despite the prohibition of marriage below 18 years old set out in the Penal Code, child marriage remains highly prevalent, especially among girls belonging to ethnic minority groups and living in rural areas. It is also concerned that article 9 of the Family Law (1990) provides for exceptions allowing marriage from the age of 15 years in "special and necessary cases", without defining these cases (arts. 3 and 10).

**43. The Committee recommends that the State Party amend article 9 of the Family Law to remove any exceptions from the minimum age of marriage of 18 years and strictly enforce the provisions of the Penal Code criminalizing child marriage. It also recommends that the State Party strengthen awareness-raising campaigns on the harmful effects that child marriage has on the rights to health and education of children, targeting girls and boys, households, communities, local authorities, traditional leaders, judges and prosecutors, and the media.**

#### **Violence against children**

44. While welcoming the adoption of the Law on Combating and Preventing Violence against Women and Children (2014), which prohibits all forms of violence against women and children in all settings, as well as the National Plan of Action on the Prevention and Elimination of Violence against Women and Children (2021–2025), the Committee is concerned about the high prevalence of physical, sexual and psychological violence against children, as well as the continued widespread use of corporal punishment, particularly in homes and schools. It is also concerned that support for victims of violence against children remains inadequate, as many organizations responsible for providing such support face persistent shortages of qualified staff (arts. 10 and 12).

**45. The Committee recommends that the State Party ensure that all cases of violence against children, including corporal punishment, are thoroughly investigated and that those responsible are duly prosecuted and, if found guilty, adequately punished. It further recommends that the State Party establish accessible, child-friendly complaint mechanisms to encourage the reporting of physical, sexual or psychological violence, and increase the number of trained professionals working with or for children, to ensure adequate and effective support for child victims.**

#### **Protection of children in post-conflict areas**

46. The Committee is deeply concerned that, despite all efforts, the number of child victims of unexploded ordnance remains high, mostly among children living in rural areas (arts. 10 and 12).

**47. The Committee urges the State Party to step up its efforts to demine former conflict areas, including through international cooperation; strengthen the information**

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<sup>9</sup> E/C.12/2015/1.

**and early warning systems and mine-risk education programmes; and increase its assistance to and rehabilitation services for child victims of unexploded ordnance.**

#### **Poverty**

48. While taking positive note of the measures taken by the State Party to alleviate poverty, including the adoption of the Law on the Promotion of Small and Medium-sized Enterprises (2011), the establishment of the Poverty Reduction Fund, the implementation of rural microfinance projects and the provision of low-interest loans, the Committee is concerned that the rates of poverty and extreme poverty remain particularly high, especially among ethnic minority groups, Indigenous and tribal peoples and disadvantaged and marginalized populations living in rural areas. It is also concerned about the impact of the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic and recent inflation rates on the economy and therefore on the reduction of poverty in the State Party (arts. 1, 2 (2), 9 and 11).

**49. The Committee recommends that the State Party intensify its efforts to combat poverty, in particular extreme poverty, by, among other things, reviewing and adapting its poverty eradication strategy to address current challenges and support recovery after the COVID-19 pandemic. The new strategy should include clear and measurable objectives, allocation of adequate resources for its implementation and effective mechanisms for coordination among the various actors, and should be implemented in accordance with human rights standards and principles, taking into account the needs of the most disadvantaged and marginalized individuals and groups. In this regard, the Committee recalls its statement on poverty and the Covenant.<sup>10</sup>**

#### **Right to food**

50. While acknowledging that some progress has been made by the State Party in reducing the levels of malnutrition, hunger and food insecurity, including through the implementation of the National Nutrition Strategy (2016–2025) and the corresponding National Plan of Action on Nutrition (2021–2025), the Committee is deeply concerned about the high level of chronic malnutrition, severe food insecurity and child stunting in the State Party. It is also concerned about persistent challenges, such as poverty, the limited availability of nutritious food, the reduction of public spending on agriculture and the impacts of climate change and natural disasters on agricultural production, which result in disparities in access to and the affordability of nutritious food, in particular in rural and remote areas (art. 11).

**51. The Committee recommends that the State Party:**

**(a) Intensify its efforts to protect the right to adequate food, in order to tackle food insecurity and malnutrition in an effective and comprehensive manner, particularly in the regions most affected by hunger and malnutrition, including by establishing programmes to increase the level of minimum income support and promote healthier diets; incorporate trade, land management, education and fiscal policy elements into those efforts; set clear, time-bound targets; and establish appropriate mechanisms for assessing the progress made;**

**(b) Increase public investment in local agricultural production to advance towards food self-reliance, and also provide support such as seeds, greenhouses and livestock, and improve the resilience of subsistence farming and of female-headed households through income diversification and disaster preparedness, taking into account the Committee's general comment No. 12 (1999) on the right to adequate food;**

**(c) Facilitate access to productive resources, such as land and water, and at the same time protect the security of tenure of peasants and other persons living in rural areas, ensuring that the allowances for foreign investors do not conflict with tenure rights and traditional land rights of rural and urban populations and taking into consideration the Committee's general comment No. 26 (2022) on land and economic, social and cultural rights;**

<sup>10</sup> [E/C.12/2001/10](http://www.un.org/documents/1809801/E/C.12/2001/10.htm).

(d) **Strengthen its cooperation and coordination with the World Food Programme and the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations.**

#### **Right to water and sanitation**

52. The Committee is concerned that the proportion of the population using safely managed drinking water services reached only 17.9 per cent in 2022.<sup>11</sup>

53. **The Committee recommends that the State Party substantially increase public investment in the country's water and sanitation systems, in order to provide access to water and sanitation services, particularly in rural areas and for the more vulnerable groups. It also recommends that the State Party maintain systematic records on the coverage of these services, including disaggregated data for informal urban areas and rural areas.**

#### **Right to physical and mental health**

54. While noting positively the adoption of the Law on Public Health (2023), the National Health Insurance Law and the Health Sector Reform Strategy (2021–2030), as well as the establishment of the National Health Insurance Fund, which have contributed to expanding access to healthcare services and reducing inequalities, the Committee is concerned that challenges in accessing healthcare services, in particular mental healthcare, remain for the most disadvantaged groups; that high out-of-pocket payments at the point of care continue to impose a heavy burden on low-income households; and that financial barriers likely contribute to delays in accessing, or the non-use of, essential maternal and child health services. It is also concerned about persistent disparities in the quality and availability of healthcare services between urban and rural or remote areas, and between ethnic minority groups and Indigenous and tribal peoples as compared to the general population, as well as about the generally inadequate healthcare infrastructure. Furthermore, it is concerned that the neonatal and under-5 mortality rates are still very high and that the majority of deaths are preventable (arts. 1, 2 (2) and 12).

55. **The Committee recommends that the State Party:**

(a) **Pursue its efforts to allocate sufficient resources to the healthcare sector with a view to guaranteeing and improving the accessibility, availability and quality of healthcare services, including mental healthcare, bearing in mind the Committee's general comment No. 14 (2000) on the right to the highest attainable standard of health;**

(b) **Continue to implement measures to reduce inequalities and regional disparities in access to the right to health by, for example, extending health insurance coverage to the most disadvantaged and marginalized groups living in rural and remote areas;**

(c) **Increase the number of healthcare professionals and improve their access to quality training, and develop programmes in local languages to respond to the needs of different ethnic groups;**

(d) **Effectively implement existing programmes aimed at reducing child mortality and morbidity rates, including by improving the skills of midwives and adopting quality standards for maternal and newborn care.**

#### **Sexual and reproductive health**

56. The Committee is concerned about insufficient access to sexual and reproductive health services, in particular in rural areas and for the most disadvantaged and marginalized groups, as well as high rates of teenage pregnancy. It is also concerned that abortion is legal only in cases of medical complications, rape, contraceptive failure, having more than four children, poverty, or young age, and about the reported prevalence of unsafe abortions, which put women's lives and health at risk and contribute to maternal mortality (arts. 3 and 12).

<sup>11</sup> Global Sustainable Development Goal Indicators Database, Lao People's Democratic Republic, Goal 6 (available at <https://unstats.un.org/sdgs/dataportal/countryprofiles/LAO#goal-6>).

57. **The Committee recommends that the State Party:**

- (a) Ensure effective and safe access to abortion, at a minimum in cases where the life or health of the pregnant woman or girl is at risk, when the pregnancy results from rape or incest and in cases of severe fetal anomalies rendering the pregnancy non-viable, and legalize and decriminalize abortion in all cases, in order to end dangerous clandestine practices and ensure respect for women's rights to bodily integrity, autonomy and dignity;
- (b) Ensure the availability and accessibility of high-quality sexual and reproductive health services, including post-abortion care, in conditions of confidentiality and without discrimination, paying particular attention to women living in rural areas, women in poverty, women with disabilities, women belonging to Indigenous and tribal peoples and women who are members of ethnic minorities, bearing in mind the abortion care guideline of the World Health Organization, as updated in 2022;
- (c) Strengthen and increase the number of education programmes on sexual and reproductive health for women, men and adolescents, and ensure that women and adolescent girls have access to appropriate sexual and reproductive health services throughout the country, including appropriate and affordable contraception.

**Right to education**

58. While noting that access to preschool and primary education has been improved in the State Party, the Committee is concerned about:

- (a) The high level of school dropout rates, especially in secondary education and among students belonging to disadvantaged and marginalized groups, in particular ethnic minority groups and Indigenous or tribal peoples;
- (b) The insufficient quality of education at all levels and the shortcomings in the quality of school infrastructure, including the lack of sanitation facilities affecting, in particular, girls' access to education;
- (c) The shortage of trained teachers, their inadequate working conditions, including very low wages, and the practice of deploying military personnel as substitute teachers, which may have a negative impact on the quality of education and undermine the civilian and neutral character of schools;
- (d) Restrictions faced by students belonging to ethnic minority groups and Indigenous and tribal peoples regarding their right to receive education in their own languages and use their languages, history and culture, and the practice of providing education to these children in remote boarding schools far from their ancestral land and communities (arts. 1, 13 and 14).

59. **The Committee recommends that the State Party:**

- (a) Adopt appropriate measures to reduce the school dropout rates at all levels of education, especially at the secondary level and among students belonging to marginalized and disadvantaged groups;
- (b) Evaluate, adopt and implement adequate measures to improve school infrastructure and learning materials, and ensure that all schools have access to electricity and sanitation;
- (c) Adopt the measures necessary to improve the quality of education, in particular with regard to increasing the number of qualified teachers and their participation in continuous training programmes, improving their working conditions and increasing their salaries, and abolishing the practice of deploying military personnel as substitute teachers;
- (d) Phase out the practice of boarding schools and develop alternatives that do not require children to leave their communities, and ensure that minority and Indigenous languages are systematically taught in schools populated by ethnic minority and Indigenous and tribal students.

## D. Other recommendations

60. The Committee encourages the State Party to accede to the Optional Protocol to the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights.

61. The Committee recommends that the State Party consider acceding to the core human rights instruments to which it is not yet a Party, namely the International Convention on the Protection of the Rights of All Migrant Workers and Members of Their Families, the Optional Protocol to the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, the Second Optional Protocol to the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, aiming at the abolition of the death penalty, the Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women, the Optional Protocol to the Convention against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment, the Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child on a communications procedure and the Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities. The Committee also recommends that the State Party ratify the International Convention for the Protection of All Persons from Enforced Disappearance, which it signed in 2008.

62. The Committee also recommends that the State Party take fully into account its obligations under the Covenant and ensure the full enjoyment of the rights enshrined therein in the implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development at the national level, including in the recovery from the COVID-19 pandemic, with international assistance and cooperation when needed. Achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals would be significantly facilitated by the State Party establishing independent mechanisms to monitor progress and treating beneficiaries of public programmes as rights holders who can claim entitlements. Moreover, the Committee recommends that the State Party support the global commitment of the decade of action to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals. Implementing the Goals on the basis of the principles of participation, accountability and non-discrimination would ensure that no one is left behind. In this regard, the Committee draws the State Party's attention to its statement on the pledge to leave no one behind.<sup>12</sup>

63. The Committee further recommends that the State Party take steps to progressively develop and apply appropriate indicators on the implementation of economic, social and cultural rights in order to facilitate the assessment of progress achieved by the State Party in complying with its obligations under the Covenant for various segments of the population. In that context, the Committee refers the State Party to, *inter alia*, the conceptual and methodological framework on human rights indicators developed by the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights.<sup>13</sup>

64. The Committee requests that the State Party disseminate the present concluding observations widely at all levels of society, including at the national, provincial and district levels, in particular among parliamentarians, public officials and judicial authorities, and that it inform the Committee in its next periodic report about the steps taken to implement them. The Committee emphasizes the crucial role that the parliament plays in implementing the present concluding observations and encourages the State Party to ensure its involvement in future reporting and follow-up procedures. The Committee encourages the State Party to continue engaging with non-governmental organizations and other members of civil society in the follow-up to the present concluding observations and in the process of consultation at the national level prior to the submission of its next periodic report.

65. In accordance with the procedure on follow-up to concluding observations adopted by the Committee, the State Party is requested to provide, within 24 months of the adoption of the present concluding observations (30 September 2027), information

<sup>12</sup> E/C.12/2019/1.

<sup>13</sup> HRI/MC/2008/3.

**on the implementation of the recommendations contained in paragraphs 13 (b) (business and human rights), 43 (child marriage) and 51 (a) (right to food) above.**

**66. The Committee requests the State Party to submit its second periodic report in accordance with article 16 of the Covenant by 30 September 2030, unless otherwise notified as a result of a change in the review cycle. In accordance with General Assembly resolution 68/268, the word limit for the report is 21,200 words.**

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