

ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL COUNCIL

The law will force to rise by 3.3% salaries below 27,130€ per year

Public transportation is free and the threshold for rent, education and energy is being raised

Diapers and feminine hygiene products have a super reduced IGI of 1%

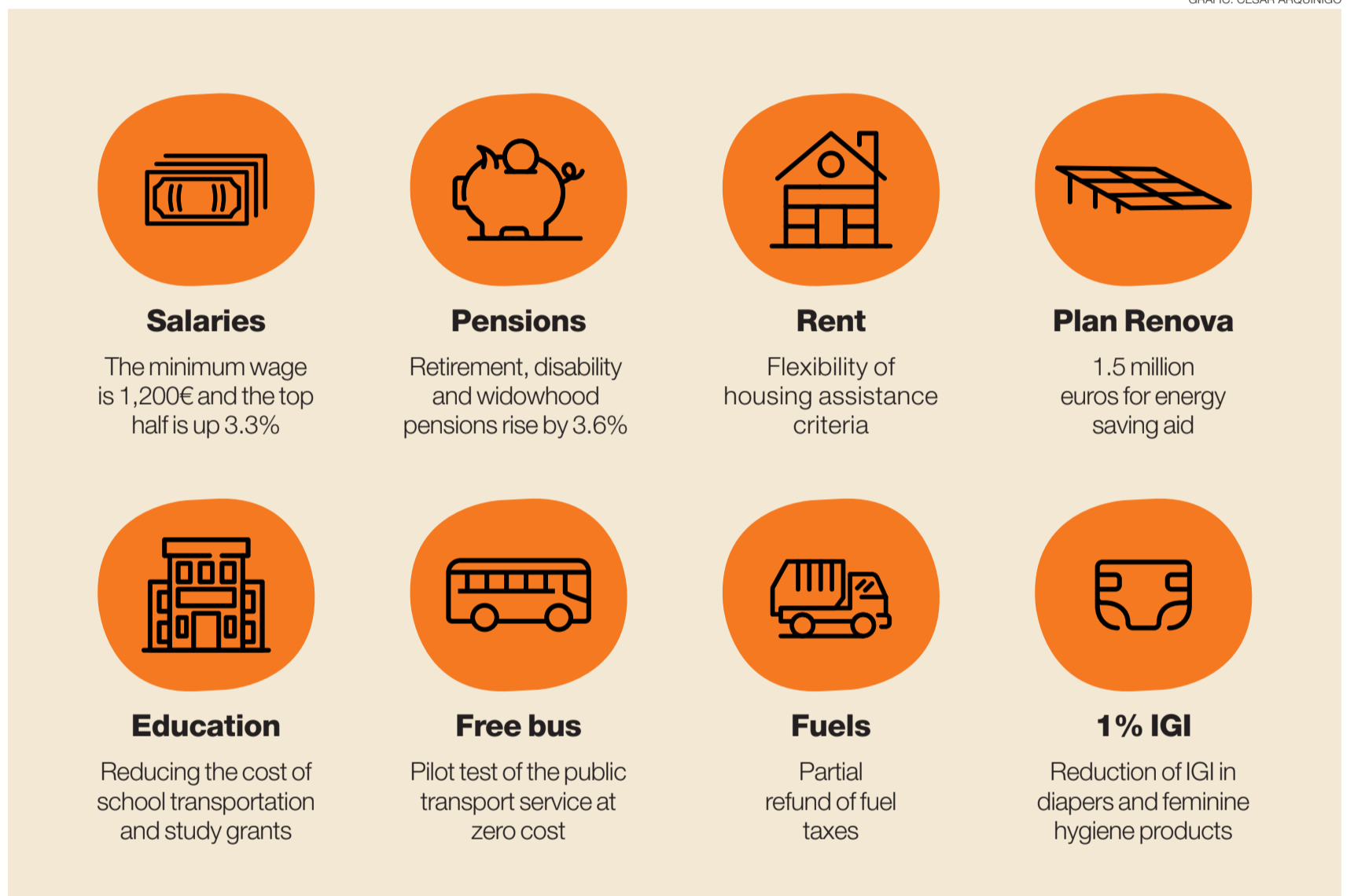
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GRÀFIC: CÉSAR ARQUÍNGO

“Managing a country means that we are all interrelated. If companies work, workers have jobs. And under this premise, the Government presented yesterday the actions to improve the purchasing power of the citizens, the most outstanding measure is the increase of salaries and pensions. On the one hand, all salaries of up to 27,130.44 euros per year (corresponding to about 24,500 people) must be increased by law by 3.3% (according to the CPI and once the text is approved “as quickly as possible by the General Council”) and, on the other hand, the minimum wage will rise, from May 1st, from the current 1,157.47 euros to the “psychological figure” of 1,200 euros. This means, as the head of government, Xavier Espot, recalled that in just four months the minimum wage has increased by 7%, a fact that, although it has a direct impact on many employers, it also means for the coffers of the State - of about 600,000 euros per year - as many non-contributory benefits are indexed to the economic threshold of social cohesion equivalent to the minimum wage. There will also be a 3.64% increase in retirement, disability and widowhood pensions, which will involve a contribution of at least one million euros by the government, but will reach 3,200 people.

In matters of Social Affairs, the Minister Judith Pallarés reported that there will be a new call for aid for rental housing with more flexible criteria, which will reduce from five to three years of residence in the country to access or the family income cap will be expanded. This will allow 65 families who stayed at the door of the benefits this year to be accommodated, as well as a hundred extra families.

The aim of this package of measures is also to promote energy saving and environmental sustainability and, for this reason, the Minister of the Environment, Agriculture and Sustainability, Silvia Calvó, announced a new Renova plan of 1.5



million euros, in addition to the two million this year, in order to «help families in the coming winter with concrete and easy-to-implement actions», such as changes to more efficient heating systems, installation of photovoltaic panels and replacement of windows.

In a similar vein, public transportation will be free with the goal of increasing its use and promotion. No exact date has been set for its launch, but the Minister of the Presidency, Economy and Enterprise, Jordi Gallardo, has calculated that the pilot test will begin in «a month». «With the first tariff reduction, a considerable increase was noticed and we are sure that with a zero cost it will be even more so. We expect an investment of 2.8 million euros,

which will add to the 1.2 already calculated. At the end of the pilot test, according to the assessments of users and companies, we will decide whether to keep it or return to the current system with a subscription of 30 euros per month and a youth bus of 15 euros », said Gallardo, adding that «it is obvious that not only will we improve the infrastructure, timetables and freeware, we will solve the problems of saturation that our road network currently presents ».

In other news, Minister Ester Vilarrubla said that «getting aware that life is getting more and more complicated, we do not want education to be given up in exchange for everyday needs.» Thus, the maximum income threshold is increa-

sed to be able to benefit from study grants, with an additional contribution of 450,000 euros, from which about 250 students must benefit, both compulsory and superior education.

Finally, the Minister of Finance, Eric Jover, announced a reduction in the tax on hydrocarbons for companies, with an additional contribution of 800,000 euros. This is a measure aimed at professionals in the transport of people or goods (transporters, taxi drivers and construction machinery) that will allow them to reduce their logistics costs and which will benefit 1,400 company vehicles. There will also be specific aid to offset the rate of CO2 emissions and rising prices due to the energy crisis, depending on the functi-

ons, size and weight of each vehicle. Jover also announced the reduction of the IGI from 4.5% to 1% for diapers (for babies and adults) and for personal and intimate hygiene products.

All in all, Espot said, it is a historic decision that will cost eight million euros and a debt that «will not be free». «We know that we are mortgaging certain future projects, but the Government's obligation is to set priorities,» he said. Jover warned that a change in the budget framework and strategic management would be «safe».

Except for the increase in the minimum wage, the rest of the measures will enter into force when approved by the General Council, and could be processed by way of maximum urgency. ≡

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HEALTH

Nurses lament that «we're not going anywhere» in the health care system

Speech therapists denounce «a kind of hidden cut» for new services entering the portfolio

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Negotiations for the portfolio of services and the future framework law for the health professions are advancing in parallel but at different rates, as the portfolio is a document open to constant changes, while the law will have to be approved before the end of the current legislature. After this Monday's meeting between the Government and the representatives of the professional associations, the president of the Official College of Nurses of Andorra (COIA), Isabel Vallejo, requests that the law must include «our competencies and functions, because right now we are not going anywhere in the healthcare system», she assured.

According to Vallejo, nurses «want to be heard and valued, and to have the ability to diagnose and intervene.» In this way, the COIA considers that «the fact that we define the specific functions that we do, the self-employed and the delegates, what we can do in management, research and teaching, which are functions that we do that are not normally recognized, it would be a step forward to build the nursing base.

In addition, in terms of the portfolio of services, «we do not go out or are linked to other medical or professional aspects, and nursing care as such is not described,» said Vallejo. In this sense, «we also do not think that there is a contempt for our profession, what happens is that a very old and archaic legislation is in force, while in the field of health it has evolved and modernized a lot and that's why we need to change it.»

As for the final wording of the law, the College of Nurses may study and amend the text, which must be approved before the end of the year in the General Council. «We are interested in not going beyond this legislature, because we have been fighting for 18 years.» So, according to the nurse's president, «I hope our complaints are met, even though we are cautious; We will try to negotiate from all points of view, we are very clear about where we want to go and the door has been opened for us to have a dialogue, and here we have seen the positive side.»



► The joint press conference of the different professional associations in the health field, weeks ago.

Physiotherapists believe the government was «conciliatory» and dietitians say «we are waiting»

From another perspective, the president of the Official Association of Speech Therapists of Andorra, Sara Fité, states that «I want to believe that we are in a rectifiable framework». So, speech therapists are asking to be able to do telematics sessions, because, according to Fité, it had already been achieved and now it does not appear in the portfolio of services. In addition, they are wary of their patients having to go through the referral doctor and the specialist before going to see them. «We are not saying that we do not want any contact with doctors, on the contrary, there are doctors who are necessary,» said Fité.

However, according to the president of the speech therapists, «having introduced new benefits, some of the existing ones will now be cut; they are like communicating vessels, some arrive and others have to cut». In fact, «it's not about being cut off, it's about

getting in the way of access. It's a kind of hidden cut. It is not clearly said or done, but the ultimate goal, although not explained, is to complicate the patient's existence and let him be, as we are adding a third intermediary and in this we see the intention to deter the patient she said. However, according to Fité, «I saw a predisposition to fix these things.»

Nutritionists are one of the new products in the portfolio. In this sense, the president of the Association of Dietitians and Nutritionists of Andorra, Berta Jiménez, considers that «it is positive» to have entered, although «we still do not know the conditions or rates», so for that «we are expecting.» However, «it would have been better if the framework law had been approved first, as it would have been easier for everyone to compete, but it can be done in parallel,» Jiménez said. Similarly, she acknowledged the

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Isabel Vallejo

P. OF THE COLLEGE OF NURSES

«We do not believe that there is contempt, what happens is that there is an old law that needs to be modernized»

Sara Fité

P. OF THE COLLEGE OF SPEAKERS

«We are adding a third intermediary and we see the intention to deter the patient; we believe it is rectifiable»

Berta Jiménez

P. OF THE COLLEGE OF DIETITIANS

«It's good to have entered the portfolio of services, but we still don't know the conditions or the rates»

government's «willingness to engage in dialogue» with the government «to make changes by mutual agreement».

For her part, the president of the Official College of Physiotherapists of Andorra, Meritxell Agromayor, described this Monday's meeting with government representatives as «conciliatory» and was willing to make more specific assessments after the next meeting with the Executive. ≡

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