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MAINSTREAMING OF SOCIAL COHESION

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Summary

The aim of this report is to present the development of the definition of social rights and social cohesion on the basis of the European Social Charter, gather together what activities the different bodies and committees do, in which way they affect social cohesion in order to contribute to the reaching of a new perspective of and a new way to develop social cohesion. The report aims also at giving indications to member States on different angles they can use to improve social cohesion and access to social rights in their countries.

The terms of reference of the European Social Cohesion Platform for 2016-2017 indicates that the Platform should ensure the integration of social cohesion into all Council of Europe activities, with special attention to ensuring that everyone has access to their social rights as guaranteed by the European Social Charter and other relevant instruments.

I. Introduction to the European Social Charter – Background

The European Social Charter - which has been adopted in 1961 and revised in 1996 - is an integrated set of international standards concerning social rights and a mechanism for monitoring their implementation within the States concerned. **The Charter identifies social rights as fundamental human rights. Respect for fundamental social rights constitutes the best way forward to increase citizens' participation in democratic processes, reinforce their trust in the European construction and combat fundamentalism and radicalisation by promoting inclusion and social cohesion.**¹

The European Social Charter is a treaty system which:

- guarantees a broad range of human rights with respect to everyday essential needs related to employment and working conditions, housing, education, health, medical assistance and social protection;
- lays specific emphasis on the protection of vulnerable persons such as elderly people, children, people with disabilities and migrants. It requires that enjoyment of the abovementioned rights be guaranteed without discrimination;
- is aimed at applying the United Nations' Universal Declaration of Human Rights of 1948 within Europe; for this reason, it is linked to the United Nations' Human Rights Treaty System and the European Union's Charter of Fundamental Rights;
- is based on the principle of universality, indivisibility, interdependence and interrelation of human rights, as set forth in the United Nations' Vienna Declaration of

¹ High-Level Conference on the European Social Charter. General Report. Turin, 2014

1993, which confirms that social rights are human rights on an equal footing with civil and political rights;

- complements at pan-European level the safeguards contained in the European Convention on Human Rights, which specifically refers to civil and political rights;
- is at the heart of the Council of Europe's statutory goals: human rights, rule of law and democracy, which cannot be realised without the respect of social rights.²

By ratifying the Charter states should ensure the attainment of conditions in which the rights and principles may be effectively realised and design policies accordingly.

These rights concern all individuals in their daily lives, with special attention for vulnerable persons and groups:

Housing

- Legal framework providing for housing of an adequate standard (safe, healthy and of adequate size) (31§1)
- Policy and action to prevent homelessness (31§2)
- Provision of adequate emergency accommodation for all homeless persons (31§2, 13§4)
- Provision of affordable housing through social housing of adequate quality and quantity or other means (31§3)

Health

- Ensuring a healthy environment (11§3)
- Promotion of public health through health education and screening(11§2)
- Prevention of diseases and accidents (11§3, 3§2)
- Provision of and effective access to adequate and affordable healthcare (11§1)
- Protection of maternity , access to maternal health services (11§1, 11§2), regulation of working conditions of women in relation to maternity, maternity leave (8)
- Safe and healthy working environment (3§1, 3§2, 3§3, 3§4, 2§4)

Education

- Free quality primary and secondary education [on a basis of equality] for all children (17§1, 7§3)
- Vocational training (including continuing training), apprenticeship and access to higher education based solely on aptitude (10);
- Access of persons with disabilities to mainstream education and, training as well as rehabilitation (15§1, 10§1, 1§4)
- Language education for migrants (19§11, 19§12)

Employment

- Access to employment

² <http://www.coe.int/en/web/turin-european-social-charter/about-the-charter>

- Collective employment relations
- Protection of workers
- Guarantees in case of termination of employment (4§4, 24, 25, 29, 8§2, 27§3)

Social Protection

- Protection from poverty and social exclusion (30)
- Adequate social security (12), including equal treatment of persons moving between the States Parties (12§4)
- Effective quality social services (14§1) in view of the prevention, abolition or alleviation of need (13§3)
- Measures in favour of families (e.g. family counseling, mediation services, protection from domestic violence, family benefits), equality of spouses, protection of parental rights, provision of childcare facilities and services (16, 27§1)
- Protection of minors against physical and moral dangers such as sexual exploitation, misuse of information technologies and other forms of exploitation (7§10), ill-treatment and abuse, including corporal punishment, minors placed in public care, young offenders (17§1), non-discrimination of children born out marriage, children's right to know their origins (16, 17§1)

Integration and Participation in the Society

- Specific protection of elderly people through adequate benefits, services and facilities, housing and health care, including in the framework of institutional care and protection from abuse (23)
- Integration and participation of persons with disabilities through non-discrimination guarantees, policies drafted in consultation with those directly concerned, technical and financial aid to increase autonomy, inclusive measures related to communication, mobility and transport, housing, culture and leisure (15§3)
- Free services and information for migrant workers and protection from misleading propaganda (19§1), guarantees concerning the departure, journey and reception of migrant workers (19§2) and co-operation between social services of emigration and immigration States (19§3)
- Equal treatment of migrant workers regarding remuneration and other employment conditions, membership of trade unions and enjoyment of the benefits of collective bargaining, and accommodation (19§4), as well as in other matters such as taxes and other contributions (19§5) and access to justice (19§7)
- Migrant workers' access to family reunion (19§6) and safeguards against deportation (19§8)

Non-discrimination

The rights of the Charter must be guaranteed to everybody, including foreigners lawfully resident and/or working, without discrimination on any ground such as race, colour, sex, age, language, religion, political or other opinion, national extraction or social origin, health, association with a national minority, birth or other status, including disability (E).

Attaining access to and full enjoyment of the rights mentioned above can contribute to and promote social cohesion.

The European Social Charter can be defined as the basic legal instrument of international standards concerning social rights.

II. Definition and conceptualisation of social cohesion in and beyond the Council of Europe

In October 1997, Heads of State and Government of the member States of the Council of Europe, met for the Organization's Second Summit, identified **social cohesion** as "one of the foremost needs of the wider Europe and ... an **essential complement to the promotion of human rights and dignity**" (Final Declaration).³

According to a discussion⁴ paper prepared in May 2002 by Caroline Beauvais, M.Sc. and Jane Jenson, Ph.D., social cohesion can be defined in any policy as an independent variable, generating outcomes. In addition it can be conceptualised as a dependent variable (or the lack thereof), the result of actions in one or more fields.

The paper identifies

- the factors which undermine social cohesion :
 - external economic factors, globalised markets and new technologies
 - social diversitycommunity stakeholders - capacity of well-designed strategic action; and
- the outcomes of social cohesion:
 - economic performance and well-being
 - better health conditions
 - participation rates and legitimacy of democratic institutions.

The definition of social cohesion is three-fold according to a paper written by the former Directorate General of Social Cohesion of the Council of Europe:

1. shared values and a sense of belonging
2. the commitment and ability to work together
3. the promotion of social bonds and relationships.

Professor Christian Albrekt Larsen suggests that social integration should be defined as the process that leads to social cohesion. Social cohesion can be conceptualised as the belief held

³ The Final Declaration of the Second Summit of the Council of Europe (10 - 11 October 1997, Strasbourg)
<https://rm.coe.int/168063dcef>

⁴ Social Cohesion: Updating the State of the Research. Caroline Beauvais, M.Sc. and Jane Jenson, Ph.D. May 2002.
Canadian Policy Research Networks Inc http://cprn3.library.carleton.ca/documents/12949_en.pdf

by citizens of a given nation-state that they share a moral community, which enables them to trust each other.⁵

According to further developments over recent decades, the Council of Europe identifies social cohesion as “*the capacity of a society to ensure the welfare of all its members, minimizing disparities and avoiding polarization. A cohesive society is a mutually supportive community of free individuals pursuing these common goals by democratic means*”⁶. This term of social cohesion concerns and fosters four aspects: equity, individual and collective dignity, autonomy, participation.

III. Actions contributing to social cohesion in the past and in the present throughout the Council of Europe

The notion and the importance of social cohesion and the intention to improve it, is not new. The term and its conceptualisation have been developed for some time in the Council of Europe.

The European Social Model, characteristic of most west European societies since the early 1960s, confers on its citizens a wide-ranging set of political, civil and social rights, anchored in national and international legal systems and procedures.

However, although the “European Social Model was launched 50 years ago, the phenomena of social exclusion - losing one’s place in society and the ability to fully enjoy civic, political and social rights - are on the rise in Europe. The growing insecurity of a part of the population in terms of access to a decent job, income, housing, health service and education and the feeling of insecurity, which affects an even larger part of the population, are creating the threat of a two-speed society, in which significant sections of the population are consigned to living in poverty and social exclusion.”⁷

The Council of Europe has been working on social cohesion strategies and actions plans which contribute directly or indirectly to social cohesion since 1994. As indicated below, the main aspect(s) of social cohesion have not changed in recent decades.

⁵ Christian Albrekt Larsen: Social cohesion: Definition, measurement and developments.

<http://www.un.org/esa/socdev/egms/docs/2014/LarsenDevelopmentinsocialcohesion.pdf>

⁶ The Council of Europe’s Strategy for Social Cohesion by Gabriella BATTAINI-DRAGONI, Director General and Stefano DOMINIONI, Administrator Directorate General of Social Cohesion. Strasbourg, 2003 Conference on Social Cohesion Faculty of Social Sciences, the University of Hong Kong and the Hong Kong Council of Social Service The University of Hong Kong, 28-29 November 2003, p6

⁷ The Council of Europe’s Strategy for Social Cohesion by Gabriella BATTAINI-DRAGONI, Director General and Stefano DOMINIONI, Administrator. Directorate General of Social Cohesion. Strasbourg, 2003 Conference on Social Cohesion Faculty of Social Sciences, the University of Hong Kong and the Hong Kong Council of Social Service The University of Hong Kong, 28-29 November 2003, p3

IV. Towards a Strategy for Social Cohesion: The Human Dignity and Social Exclusion Project (1994-1998).

The Human Dignity and Social Exclusion Project (HDSE Project), a pan-European initiative launched by the Council of Europe in 1994 and completed in 1998, conducted an analysis of the state of poverty and social exclusion in Europe and submitted proposals for action in five areas: health, housing, employment, social protection and education. It focused mostly on setting up “alarm indicators” which record threats to rights and freedoms, an increase in unemployment, acts of violence and the number of conflicts, the worsening of social and health care services, etc., thereby mapping out the presence of social exclusion⁸.

V. The Council of Europe Second Summit of Heads of State and Governments: committing to a Strategy for Social Cohesion (1998-2002).

The assessment as to what social cohesion entails moved from an approach based on “negative” indicators to one focusing on “positive” ones; this was a crucial step for the active development of social cohesion. The Heads of State and Government instructed the Committee of Ministers to define a social strategy to respond to the challenges in society and to carry out the appropriate structural reforms within the Council of Europe⁹.

The European Committee for Social Cohesion (CDCS) met from 1998 to 2013 and contributed to create a transversal and dynamic vision of social cohesion as "the capacity of society to ensure the well-being of all its members", shared by the member States of the Council of Europe. This Committee was replaced in 2013 by the European Committee for Social Cohesion, Human Dignity and Equality (CDDECS), which was discontinued on 1 January 2016. The European Social Cohesion Platform has been set up for 2016-2017 and it held its first meeting on 27-28 June 2016.

Access to social rights in Europe (2002)

The Council of Europe’s report on “*Access to Social Rights in Europe*” has encountered widespread success among its member States and has been translated as of today in 17 European languages. The report analyses the obstacles to access to different social rights within and across a range of fields. It also gives examples of how obstacles are being overcome, examines integrated measures implemented in the member states of the Council of Europe and identifies the principles on which measures to improve access to social rights

⁸ The Council of Europe’s Strategy for Social Cohesion by Gabriella BATTAINI-DRAGONI, Director General and Stefano DOMINIONI, Administrator Directorate General of Social Cohesion. Strasbourg, 2003 Conference on Social Cohesion Faculty of Social Sciences, the University of Hong Kong and the Hong Kong Council of Social Service The University of Hong Kong, 28-29 November 2003, p4

⁹ New Strategy for Social Cohesion, The Final Declaration of the Second Summit of the Council of Europe (10 - 11 October 1997, Strasbourg) <https://rm.coe.int/168063dcef>

should be based. It develops cross-sectoral policy guidelines aimed at facilitating access to social rights.

VI. The Strategy for Social Cohesion (2010) and the Revised Strategy for Social Cohesion (2004).

The First Strategy for Social Cohesion, was adopted in 2000, this document approved by the Committee of Ministers, represents a statement of intent setting out a precise agenda for the Council of Europe in the social field. It does not define social cohesion as such but seeks to identify some of the factors in social cohesion, like adequately remunerated employment, combat against poverty and social exclusion.

The Second Strategy for Social Cohesion, based on the rule of law, democracy, and human rights, provides the most elements for understanding and confronting the changes in our societies while safeguarding their fundamental principles¹⁰.

VII. The Council of Europe New Strategy and Action Plan for Social Cohesion (2010)

The New Strategy and Action Plan for Social Cohesion which was launched in 2010 defines and conceptualises social cohesion and ways of improving as follows (the definition has been developed since 1994):

“The Council of Europe defines **social cohesion as the capacity of a society to ensure the well-being of all its members – minimising disparities and avoiding marginalisation – to manage differences and divisions and ensure the means of achieving welfare for all members**”. “A cohesive society is a mutually supportive community of free individuals pursuing these common goals by democratic means”¹¹.

Social cohesion is also a “political concept that is essential for **the fulfilment of the three core values** of the Council of Europe: **human rights, democracy and the rule of law**. Social cohesion is a dynamic process and an essential condition for social justice, democratic

¹⁰ The Council of Europe's Strategy for Social Cohesion by Gabriella BATTAINI-DRAGONI, Director General and Stefano DOMINIONI, Administrator Directorate General of Social Cohesion. Strasbourg, 2003 Conference on Social Cohesion Faculty of Social Sciences, the University of Hong Kong and the Hong Kong Council of Social Service The University of Hong Kong, 28-29 November 2003. p5The Council of Europe's Strategy for Social Cohesion. Directorate General of Social Cohesion. Strasbourg, 2003.

¹¹ Recommendation 207(2007) Congress of Local and Regional Authorities on „The development of social cohesion indicators the concerted local and regional approach

security and sustainable development. Divided and unequal societies are not only unjust; they also cannot guarantee stability in the long term¹².”

The new strategy is based on four pillars:

- “reinvesting in social rights and a cohesive society;
- building a Europe of responsibilities that are both shared and social;
- strengthening representation and democratic decision making and expanding social dialogue and civic engagement;
- building a secure future for all.”¹³

VIII. European Commission’s Report ‘Towards Social Investment for Growth and Cohesion’(2013)

In addition to the Council of Europe, the European Union (in particular the European Commission) also deals with social aspects and challenges societies face. The Commission produced a report entitled **“Towards Social Investment for Growth and Cohesion (2013) – including the implementation of the European Social Fund 2014-2020”**.

The report defines the main challenges societies are facing, which are threatening social inclusion and thereby the democratic institutional system and the required measures such as:

1. **demographic changes**, as the younger population is steadily decreasing while the proportion of older people is increasing in almost every EU state. Ageing, rising dependency ratios and a smaller productive population threaten the affordability and sustainability of public budgets for social policies;
2. **the importance of efficiency gains in social policies**: reforms should be well-designed in order to avoid negative repercussions on poverty levels, productivity and economic growth, health of the population and social cohesion. Securing the sustainability and adequacy of social policies requires EU member States to find ways to raise efficiency and effectiveness, whilst addressing key demographic and societal changes;
3. **more effective use of private and third sector resources** to complement public efforts;

¹² The Council of Europe’s Strategy for Social Cohesion by Gabriella BATTAINI-DRAGONI, Director General and Stefano DOMINIONI, Administrator Directorate General of Social Cohesion. Strasbourg, 2003 Conference on Social Cohesion Faculty of Social Sciences, the University of Hong Kong and the Hong Kong Council of Social Service The University of Hong Kong, 28-29 November 2003. p5The Council of Europe’s Strategy for Social Cohesion. Directorate General of Social Cohesion. Strasbourg, 2003.

¹³ New Strategy and Council of Europe Action Plan for Social Cohesion. 2010
http://www.coe.int/t/dg3/socialpolicies/socialcohesiondev/source/2010Strategy_ActionPlan_SocialCohesion.pdf

4. the **need to invest in human capital** throughout life and ensure adequate livelihoods to avoid the reproduction of poverty.
5. gender inequality **must be tackled** in a more coherent and proactive way. On average, more women continue to live in poverty than men.

The European Commission makes the following recommendations:

1. Increase the sustainability and adequacy of social systems through simplification and better targeting

Better reflection on social investment in the allocation of resources and the general architecture of social policy. Simplify benefit systems and their administration for users and providers, reduce administrative burdens as well as fraud and increase take up.

2. Pursue activating and enabling policies through targeted, conditional and more effective support– support adequate livelihoods, improve awareness on social rights

Action is needed by both governments and employers in EU member States to further increase labour force participation specifically by removing remaining obstacles to full participation and to increase job creation and demand for labour. Tax and benefit systems should make work pay and social policies should also secure adequate livelihoods.

Social investment plays a particular role for those people that are disproportionately affected by unemployment, poverty, bad housing and poor health conditions and discrimination. This requires policies that target their needs and offer integrated support. Particular attention should also be paid to closing the gender pay gap and addressing other barriers to women's and other underrepresented workers' participation in the labour market. EU member states should develop specific strategies for social innovation, such as public-private-third sector partnerships and tailored schemes supporting start-ups established by vulnerable people.

3. Social Investment throughout the individual's life, especially investment in children

Support should target specific needs arising throughout an individual's in life.¹⁴

¹⁴ Communication from the Commission to the European Parliament, the Council, the European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions: Towards Social Investment for Growth and Cohesion – including implementing the European Social Fund 2014-2020.

IX. Council of Europe's Action Plan "Building Inclusive Societies" (2016)

The Action Plan on "**Building Inclusive Societies**" was launched in 2016. Its main objectives are to foster and promote enjoyment of and access to fundamental and basic rights (such as social rights) and equality before law to attain an inclusive society. The Action Plan recommends that gender, civil society and social cohesion dimensions be mainstreamed as relevant throughout the activities.

The recommendations in the Action Plan correspond to those in the New Strategy and Action Plan for Social Cohesion.

Both stress the importance of the following areas:

- Education (competences for democratic culture; language skills as a vehicle for integration; recognising the qualifications of refugees and migrants; access to education for migrant and refugee children and young people; recognition of youth and non-formal learning via the so-called Strasbourg process started in 2011)
- Combating intolerance and discrimination ("No Hate Speech Movement" campaign; toolkit for local authorities)
- Support for effective integration policies (guidelines on the protection and promotion of human rights, implement action planes promoting access to social rights for youth, European Social Foundation; New Strategy for the Rights of the Child;
- Promote Intercultural Cities (project for municipalities)
- Strengthening civil society.

X. The Turin process for the European Social Charter (2014)

To reinforce the normative system of the Charter and improving the implementation of social and economic rights, the Secretary General launched the Turin Process in 2014.

The Turin Process aims to tackle challenges relating to the Charter - such as the need for more states to ratify it, as well as the Additional Protocol and Collective Complaints, better follow-up/implementation at the different levels, synergies and tensions between the Charter and the European Union law, the importance of avoiding discrepancies between the two legal orders – and to mobilise political support in order to

1. promote further ratifications of the revised Charter and the collective complaints system as well as identify obstacles to this process;

2. streamline the monitoring procedures;
3. enhance targeted co-operation with Council of Europe Member states in the field of social rights
4. maintain dialogue with the European Union.

According to the **High-Level Conference on the European Social Charter in Turin** the most effective way of enhancing social cohesion and social inclusion can be by boosting a more inclusive labour market, investment in people's skills, reducing poverty and ensuring greater equality.¹⁵

A study was commissioned by the European Parliament's Policy Department for Citizens' Rights and Constitutional Affairs at the request of the Constitutional Affairs Committee which highlights the fact that despite its increased visibility and relevance to fields covered by the European Union (EU) law and cohesion policy, *the European Social Charter has been largely excluded from more recent developments concerning the protection of fundamental rights in the EU legal order, although most of the member States integrated the protection of social right in national legislation*. This increases the risk of conflicting obligations imposed on the EU Member States, and as members of the EU and as States parties to the European Social Charter respectively.¹⁶

XI. The Turin process: reinforcing social rights in Europe" (2017)

The paper maintains that social rights are currently being eroded, resulting in persisting poverty rates and increasing levels of inequality. There is a clear need for action, but the implementation of standards and mechanisms emanating from the Council of Europe and the European Union is not always sufficiently coherent and efficient.

According to the mentioned paper:

The Parliamentary Assembly should call on member States to pursue their efforts initiated under the "Turin Process" at Council of Europe level and the European Pillar of Social Rights currently being devised at European Union level. All member States should ratify the (revised) European Social Charter and the relevant protocols of the Charter treaty system, and actively participate in upcoming parliamentary activities with a view to generating a true pan-European "Parliamentary Dialogue on Social Rights". The Assembly should also call on the Committee of Ministers of the Council of Europe to take a unanimous decision to allow the Assembly to fulfil its appointed function in the Charter's monitoring system under the Turin Protocol. Relevant Council of Europe bodies should be tasked with ensuring appropriate follow-up of the European Pillar of Social Rights.

¹⁵ High-Level Conference on the European Social Charter. General Report. Turin, 2014

¹⁶ <http://www.coe.int/it/web/turin-european-social-charter/-/european-parliament-study-on-european-social-charter>

XII. European Pillar of Social Rights (2017)

On 17 November, the European Pillar of Social Rights was jointly signed by the European Parliament, the Council and the Commission, in Gothenburg, Sweden.

The proclamation of the European Pillar of Social Rights is one of the greatest achievements in the last few years. With this step *“the EU stands up for the rights of its citizens in a fast-changing world”*.

However, despite these steps in the right direction, we are not yet at the point where we can be sure that a socially strong Europe is guaranteed. After this proclamation it is clearer than ever that economic progress does not necessarily translate to social progress. As already mentioned above Europe is facing new trends and challenges therefor there it is urgent to transform pledges into deeds¹⁷.

The Pillar of Social rights includes 20 key areas, which correspond with the areas the Social Charter highlights. The key areas are listed below:

- Education, training and life-long learning
- Gender equality
- Equal opportunities
- Active support to employment
- Secure and adaptable employment
- Decent wages
- Information about employment conditions and protection in case of dismissals
- Social dialogue and involvement of workers
- Work-life balance
- Healthy, safe and well-adapted work environment and data protection
- Childcare and support to children
- Social protection
- Unemployment benefits
- Minimum income
- Old age income and pensions
- Health care
- Inclusion of people with disability
- Long-term care
- Housing and assistance for the homeless
- Access to essential services¹⁸

The importance that access to enjoyment of and social rights appear on the level of the Council of Europe and the European Union should not be underestimated. As well as the

¹⁷ Turning point for social Europe: <http://www.socialplatform.org/news/a-turning-point-for-social-europe/>

¹⁸ https://ec.europa.eu/commission/priorities/deeper-and-fairer-economic-and-monetary-union/european-pillar-social-rights/european-pillar-social-rights-20-principles_en

importance of organisations/bodies and committees fostering access to and enjoyment of social rights with consequent increase of social cohesion.

* * *

Chapter III, IV and V highlight some of the achievements of the Council of Europe in recent decades concerning the definitional changes of social cohesion, better access and enjoyment of social rights and the development of social cohesion. It can be stated that the notion behind the definition of social cohesion and areas of focus did not change significantly since the early 1990s although it has become more precise.

The full enjoyment of social rights and strengthening of social protection promote social cohesion in societies directly and indirectly. There is a widespread support for social rights as shown by the fact that 43 out of the 47 Council of Europe member states are parties to either the European Social Charter of 1961 or the Revised European Social Charter.

In the past, strategies and action plans fostering social cohesion were revised from time to time. Since 2010 there have been many societal changes on these matters the Committee of Ministers' has adopted Recommendations addressed to member States, such as CM/Rec(2011)9 on fostering social mobility as a contribution to social cohesion and Recommendation CM/Rec(2014)1 on the Council of Europe Charter on Shared Responsibilities.

The measures and methodologies implemented in the past to boost and promote social rights and social cohesion have to be revised concerning the new challenges member states face nowadays, such as access to quality education for every child and quality health care for everyone.

Therefore-it may now be time to revise the Action Plan for Social Cohesion and come up with a more holistic approach of social cohesion which affects positive outcomes. It may widen the angles how to ensure access to and enjoyment of rights therefore access to quality and inclusive education, quality health care, social services, better living conditions, benefits and through that avoid segregation, discrimination and social exclusion.

XIII. Social Cohesion throughout the Council of Europe

The European Social Cohesion Platform is instructed to mainstream social cohesion, “The Platform will ensure mainstreaming of social cohesion throughout the Council of Europe by further developing the concept, by contributing to impact assessments of the various activities in the different sectors with regard to achieving social cohesion”¹⁹. And at the same time, “all relevant steering and ad hoc committees are instructed to contribute to the building of cohesive societies”. The following table, which is not exhaustive, summarises the actions and objectives of Council of Europe committees and bodies which contribute to social

¹⁹ PECS Terms of Reference 2016-2017

cohesion and inclusive, cohesive societies. It indicates the targeted groups of relevant actions as well as recent outcomes and results. It could be used as a basis for taking stock of activities relating to social cohesion/social rights within the Council of Europe, including for bodies/committees not listed yet.

“The Platform will ensure mainstreaming of social cohesion throughout the Council of Europe by further developing the concept, by contributing to impact assessments of the various activities in the different sectors with regard to achieving social cohesion”²⁰

The European Social Cohesion Platform could give place to a forum contributing to the social policy debate and rethinking the system. It could also relate to debating the dilemmas and implications that governments have to face when implementing social rights.

“The monitoring and follow-up mechanisms of the Council of Europe are also invited to pay due attention to the social aspect in their work, and co-operation projects will be designed to cover this aspect “(PECS Terms of Reference 2016-2017). At the same time the Platform should take into account the findings of relevant monitoring mechanisms.

As indicated below, every committee and body of the Council of Europe is committed to enhancing the access to and enjoyment of social rights as essential human rights. They should contribute to social cohesion and social inclusion also by promoting access to social rights and the integration of the protection of the rights in domestic legal system, by combating any kind of discrimination, and promoting full participation in the society through better access to the health system, education, labour market, social protection system.

²⁰ PECS Terms of Reference 2016-2017

Committee/body	Activities in the field of social inclusion and social cohesion	Emphasised areas	Target group	Results and effects regarding promoting social cohesion
Department of the European Social Charter	The protection of the substantive social rights set out by the European Social Charter	Protection and promotion of social rights.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - entire society of the member states and esp. vulnerable groups 	The social rights monitoring mechanism established is indispensable to social cohesion and social inclusion.
Steering Committee for Human Rights (CDDH)	The committee's main aim is to work on the protection, development and promotion of human rights in Europe, to contribute to enhancing the protection of human rights and co-ordinate transversal intergovernmental activities.	Examination of various human right problems encountered in our culturally diverse societies, such as relationship between the right to freedom of religion or belief and the right to freedom of opinion and expression, new emerging minorities and their integration into societies, minorities and discrimination; respect for diversity; fighting discrimination and promoting equality; systematic work for implementing human rights at national level – participation, social inclusion and dialogue; integration of diverse societies.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - minorities - migrants and refugees - vulnerable groups 	The committee tackles to improve the effectiveness of the control mechanism established by the European Convention on Human Rights and advises other bodies of the Organisation to ensure that their activities concerning human rights are effective. Its role is to set up standards commonly accepted by the 47 member states with the aim of developing and promoting human rights in Europe.
Commissioner for Human Rights	The Commissioner considers that full enjoyment of and access to all human rights and in particular social rights constitute a prerequisite for social cohesion and social inclusion of all and in particular - vulnerable groups.	The Commissioner stresses the importance of combating racist violence and hate speech; segregation, exclusion, discrimination, negative stereotypes and prejudice and emphasise the importance of promotion of better access to inclusive education and human rights protection.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - All persons under the jurisdiction of member states and in particular : - migrants and refugees - for vulnerable children - person with disabilities - women, - Roma/Travellers - LGBTI persons. 	Based on his country and thematic monitoring work, the Commissioner makes a number of recommendations to member states as how the ensure: full enjoyment of and access to all human rights for all; social inclusion of all vulnerable groups; and successful integration policies.
Committee on Social Affairs, Health and Sustainable Development of the Parliamentary Assembly (PACE)	According to the Committee increasing inequality is exacerbating a variety of social "ills" through different channels which have to be faced. There are evident links, which strongly affect each other, between income inequality, social cohesion and political processes,.	The PACE Committee defines income inequality as a phenomenon which poses a major threat to social cohesion due to widening the gaps between social groups, men and women and it also has negative effects on the democratic system and its institutions.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - disadvantaged people 	The Committee gives recommendations and highlights the importance of putting a greater focus on the inequality matters. In order to address the matter of income inequality in the most effective and comprehensive manner and therefore avoid social exclusion, action will be needed at various levels - the international, the

				European and the national level which has to be harmonised. In a Council of Europe's context, governments should make sure that socio-economic rights are kept at the top of agendas and work programmes of various bodies, as they are closely linked with other human rights categories and trends, such as the rise in xenophobia and racism. ²¹
European Court of Human Rights	The European Court of Human Rights deals with applications/cases related to social and economic rights that have been violated.	Full access to and enjoyment of social and economic rights. The complaints are examined from the perspective of the civil and political rights guaranteed by the Convention and respecting the generally applicable principles of subsidiarity, proportionality and non-discrimination.	- affected groups/persons	Examination of applications and giving decisions and judgements. The ECHR may encourage the parties to set a friendly settlement.
Council of Europe Development Bank	The Bank contributes to build inclusive societies by financing social development projects in its member states. The Bank's main lines of action have been redefined in order to better respond to current social challenges. The aim of the Bank is: "Sustainable and inclusive growth"	Project related to access to the labour market, social and solidarity economy services, housing, local infrastructure and energy efficiency all provide solutions for alleviating vulnerability situations by reducing inequality and poverty.	- vulnerable groups	Financial support for projects promoting social inclusion and social cohesion
European Youth Foundation (EYF)	Activities of the EYF include meetings/seminars/conferences. Special attention is given to support activities with a strong local impact organised by local or national non-governmental youth organisations.	The EYF fosters social cohesion in multicultural settings and peaceful societies,, combating discrimination and anti-gypsyism, responses to radicalisation of the youth.	- youth - young migrants and refugees	The EYF awarded a number of grants to youth projects, half of which focused on building inclusive societies.
Joint Council on Youth (CMJ)	Long-term training courses focused on building up the capacity of local authorities and youth workers at the local level. ²¹ Fighting income inequality as a means of fostering social cohesion and economic development. Committee on Social Affairs, Health and Sustainable Development of Report No. 3421, May 2017.	Access to and enjoyment of social rights.	- youth in disadvantaged neighbourhoods	Supports the implementation of access to social rights recommendation ENTER! and the new Recommendation to the Council of Europe member states on youth work, adopted by the Committee of Ministers on 31 May 2017, etc.
	The CAHROM reviews the	Thematic areas covered by CAHROM thematic	- Roma and	The work of the CAHROM, including the CM

<p>Ad hoc Committee of Experts on Roma and Traveller Issues (CAHROM)</p>	<p>implementation of national Roma inclusion programmes and/or action plans and identifies good practices through thematic exchanges. It assists member States in the development and implementation of effective policies, including social policies, for Roma and Traveller integration and their fight against discrimination and anti-Gypsyism. It prepares recommendations for the Committee of Ministers (e.g. a recent draft recommendation on improving access to justice for Roma and Travellers in Europe).</p>	<p>visits/reports include <i>inter alia</i> social housing, legalisation of informal settlements, halting sites, school desegregation, testing systems for children with alleged mild-mental disabilities, fighting school drop-outs and early marriages, human trafficking, fighting anti-Gypsyism, protection and promotion of the Romani language, mainstreaming Roma women and Roma youth in national policies and strategies, linking national Roma integration strategies and anti-poverty policies, participation in advisory and decision-making bodies, school and health mediators.</p>	<p>Travellers (with specific focus on children, youth and women through the nomination of respective CAHROM rapporteurs)</p>	<p>recommendations it drafted or the thematic reports it produced, contributed to legal and policy change (e.g. new draft Albanian law on social housing introduces a quota for Roma and Egyptian families and measures to prevent forced evictions; Roma school or health mediators developed and institutionalised in several member States; gender and youth components introduced in national Roma integration strategies (Lithuania, Serbia, Croatia, Slovenia, Austria), improvement of the legal aid systems for vulnerable groups, etc.</p>
<p>Gender Equality Commission (GEC)</p>	<p>The GEC steers the intergovernmental work in the field of gender equality. It provides advice, guidance and support to other Council of Europe bodies and to member states. The GEC takes due account of building cohesive societies in the performance of its tasks.</p>	<p>The GEC supports the implementation of the Council of Europe Gender Equality Strategy 2014-2017. All the strategic objectives are relevant for the promotion of social cohesion and social rights. Examples include work to combat gender stereotypes and sexism, including sexist hate speech; to prevent and combat violence against women and girls; to achieve balanced participation of women and men in political and public decision-making; and to ensure women's equal access to justice.</p>	<p>- Women - Girls</p>	<p>Activities, policies and measures aimed at gender equality and at integrating a gender equality perspective in all sectoral policies contribute to the full enjoyment of human rights by women and men, girls and boys, and promote social cohesion.</p>

<p>SRSG on migration and refugees</p>	<p>The SRSG is responsible for gathering information on the protection of the fundamental rights – including social rights – of migrants and refugees in Europe. He conducts fact finding missions and shares his findings in mission reports, in which he makes recommendations as to how the CoE can help improve protection of rights in the state concerned.</p>	<p>Areas within the SRSG’s remit which are of particular relevant to social cohesion include access to accommodation and health care, integration policies, access to education for children, linguistic teaching and support for adults and recognition of qualifications/access to the labour market.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - migrants - refugees - asylum-seekers 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Publication of the thematic report on children identifying areas of concern as regards, <i>inter alia</i>, social cohesion aspects. - Coordination of the formulation and implementation of the CoE Action Plan on Protecting Refugee and Migrant Children in Europe, which sets out concrete projects for CoE action to secure children’s rights. - Publication of mission reports identifying problem areas and proposing CoE assistance to address them; and follow-up activities with the agreement of the state concerned to implement the recommendations.
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XIV. Conclusions and indications

Keeping in mind that social cohesion is a complex system which is affected by many variables, in the last chapter our goal is to give some indications, on requirements which have to be satisfied in order to attain social cohesion and how states can improve social cohesion:

1. the access to and full enjoyment of social rights should be integrated into legislation and social policy strategies. Governmental and non-governmental organisations should be required to incorporate this principle when drawing up measures.
2. societies should implement measures to enjoy social rights in practice and not just on paper.
3. full participation in society not only requires access to the labour market but also to social services, social benefit, quality education, health care system and information.
4. anti-discrimination and equality are additional principles which have to be taken into account every time an action plan is drawn up.

We can identify a society as inclusive if the following requirements come to fruition:

- a. Equal access to and full enjoyment of social rights have to be integrated into and protected by legal acts are taken into account while designing measures.
- b. It ensures access to:
 - i. quality, inclusive education
 - ii. quality health care system
 - iii. quality social services
 - iv. labour market
 - v. adequate housing
- c. It takes the following principles into account when formulating policies:
 - i. equality and reduction of inequalities
 - ii. solidarity
 - iii. democratic security
 - iv. social security
 - v. combat against discrimination, hate-speech, negative stereotypes
 - vi. fighting against segregation
 - vii. fighting against poverty
 - viii. respect of diversity
 - ix. co-responsibility
 - x. improved co-operation between stakeholders at different levels including through social innovations and media developments in the digital world in the 21st century.

It is clear that the committees and bodies of the Council of Europe *could have more impact* on promoting social cohesion and social inclusion in member states than it had in the past. Achievement of a cohesive society depends on the commitment of the member States, the social policy system and of course on the financial situation of the state, and how effective the different funds are distributed.

Most of the elements listed above are closely intertwined and cannot be separated or divided. For example if a government takes measures to combat segregation in education this also means that it fosters access to the education system for everyone without any distinction.

The committees and bodies of the Council of Europe focus mostly on guaranteeing equal access to human rights in general to everyone and prepare reports and recommendations for the benefit of societies.

Ratifying conventions and adopting regulations and legal acts on social rights are not enough to ensure inclusive societies, respect for diversity, and access to public services. States should show strong commitment and elaborate recommendations (on promoting social cohesion, social rights, gender and income equality, etc.) into account when designing national policies.

The ratification of the European Social Charter (revised) proves that the member States of the Council of Europe are committed to promoting access to and enjoyment of social rights.

The Member states recognise the importance of the points listed above although social cohesion is rarely at the heart of measures implemented. The promotion of Social cohesion and its promotion is a co-responsibility of actors on different levels.

Social cohesion cannot be identified *only* as a political concept, it also enhances economic growth and welfare. It can be attained by building a complex system with the principles mentioned above. Social cohesion changes with circumstances or new trends and challenges.

The state has to guarantee access to and protection of social rights to ensure that everyone has access to adequate and high-quality education, social services and the labour market so that everyone can become fully-fledged members of society.

The measures implemented by the states have to consider gender, income equality and equal opportunities for every citizen, as well as solidarity and respect for diversity, especially when it comes to children and young people, people with disabilities, minorities, migrants, refugees. Governments have to combat poverty and segregation. Co-operation between different stakeholders is also indispensable to improve social cohesion and promote the above goals.

Better communication between local authorities, civil society, governments and international organisations can lead to more flexible and more rapid responses to challenges. Cohesion effects legitimacy of democratic institutions and the well-being of every member of the society.

We also consider that society as a whole, and not only vulnerable groups, should be targeted when it comes to mainstreaming social cohesion. Today, the middle-class, which is shrinking, should deserve particular attention as should be the case for the upward mobility of vulnerable groups.

All in all there is a long way to go to reach cohesive societies in Europe but there are already good initiatives and good practices to reduce inequality and discrimination and enhance better access to public services which should be adopted by member states as amendments of the implemented measures already working on local levels.

The following illustration presents the factors which contribute the cohesion of the society and the results this effect.

