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## **Austerity measures across Europe have undermined human rights**

Strasbourg, 04/12/2013 - "Many governments in Europe imposing austerity measures have forgotten about their human rights obligations, especially the social and economic rights of the most vulnerable, the need to ensure access to justice, and the right to equal treatment. Regrettably, international lenders have also neglected to incorporate human rights considerations into many of their assistance programmes," said today Nils Muižnieks, Council of Europe Commissioner for Human Rights, while releasing a [research paper](#) about the impact of the economic crisis on the protection of human rights.

The Commissioner points out that austerity measures have undermined human rights in several ways: "National decisions on austerity measures and international rescue packages have lacked transparency, public participation and democratic accountability. In some cases, onerous conditionalities have prevented governments from investing in essential social protection, health and education programmes. When the EU as a central actor in the crisis makes decisions about economic governance in member states and when the Troika sets conditions for rescue packages and loan agreements, the impact on human rights should be better taken into account."

"The economic crisis has had dire consequences on vulnerable groups, in particular on children and young persons. Youth unemployment in Europe has reached record levels, with millions of young people unemployed with scarred futures. Cuts in child and family benefits, health care and education have also added a strain on millions of families. An increasing number of children are dropping out of school to find employment and support their families, risking life-long setbacks in educational achievement, and providing the conditions for job insecurity coupled with the re-emergence of child labour and exploitation."

The Commissioner stresses the urgent need to reinvigorate the European social model based on the foundations of human dignity, intergenerational solidarity and access to justice for all. "Governments should focus on reducing youth and long-term unemployment as a priority and on upholding social protection floors for basic income and health care during the crisis. Effective access to justice for all must be guaranteed during economic downturns by maintaining the judiciary and the legal aid system." Furthermore, governments should carry out systematic human rights and equality impact assessments of social and economic policies and budgets, especially as regards vulnerable groups of people. "Positive measures in favour of disadvantaged groups, including people with disabilities, Roma and women, are needed to address disproportionate and compound effects of the crisis and austerity measures."

Finally, the Commissioner highlights the essential role ombudsmen, human rights institutions and equality bodies play in identifying human rights compliant responses to the crisis and protecting people in need. Demand for services of these national human rights structures has increased, while many institutions have simultaneously experienced budget and staff cuts, the closure of regional offices or mergers into less focused structures. "Governments should strengthen the effectiveness of these structures to handle complaints about social and economic rights while seeking their independent advice in decision making about austerity measures and budgets to better gauge their impact on human rights and equality."

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The Commissioner for Human Rights is an independent, non-judicial institution within the Council of Europe, mandated to promote awareness of, and respect for, human rights in the 47 member states of the Organisation. Elected by the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe, the present Commissioner, Mr Nils Muižnieks, took up his function on 1 April 2012