

High-Level Conference on the European Social Charter
“a step by member States to take further commitments under the Charter”
3-4 July 2024, Vilnius, Lithuania

DRAFT PROGRAMME

Venue: Radisson Blu, Konstitucijos pr. 20, Vilnius, Lithuania
Interpretation: English / French / Lithuanian

Background

The High-Level Conference on the European Social Charter is organised as part of the follow-up to the 4th Summit of the Council of Europe, as a step for the member States to take further commitments under the Charter. The Conference was proposed in the Reykjavik Declaration by the Heads of State and Government who stated that “Social justice is crucial for democratic stability and security and in this regard [reaffirmed their] full commitment to the protection and implementation of social rights as guaranteed by the European Social Charter system.”

The Conference will be organised under the auspices of the Lithuanian Presidency of the Committee of Ministers and will be hosted in Vilnius by the Deputy Secretary General of the Council of Europe and the Minister of Social Security and Labour of Lithuania.

The High-Level Conference will bring together Ministers and high-level officials competent in the field of social rights and social policy, representatives of Council of Europe entities, including the Parliamentary Assembly, the Congress of Local and Regional Authorities, the Commissioner for Human Rights, and the European Court of Human Rights. Other expected participants include representatives from the European Union, the EU Fundamental Rights Agency, ILO, UN, etc., as well as civil society, social partners, academia, and National Human Rights Institutions and Equality Bodies or their pan-European networks. The members of the European Committee of Social Rights and the Governmental Committee of the European Social Charter and the European Code of Social Security will also participate in the Conference.

Theme(s)

To respond to the Reykjavik Declaration, the High-Level Conference will allow Ministers and high-level officials to discuss contemporary social rights challenges. They will be able to reaffirm the crucial importance of the Charter and its monitoring procedures, including the collective complaints procedure, as vectors of good governance. They will also have the opportunity to express support for the realisation of social rights in view of their relevance in preventing democratic backsliding.

Member States will be encouraged to take further commitments under the Charter during a dedicated treaty event.

In Vilnius, Ministers and high-level officials will have the opportunity to take forward the discussion on these issues and also to consider the state of implementation and effectiveness of the Charter and the reform¹ process more generally with a view to further strengthening the Charter system and its relevance.

Finally, the participating Ministers and Heads of delegation will be invited to adopt a forward-looking political declaration reflecting their determination and commitment to social rights and the European Social Charter, proposing any further action they consider necessary or desirable.

Wednesday, 3 July 2024	
Arrival of the National Delegations and other participants	
19.00 – 22.00	Welcome events for Ministers and Heads of delegations and for other participants, hosted by the Lithuanian authorities
Thursday, 4 July 2024	
8.00 – 9.00	Accreditation / collection of badges
9.00 – 9.15	<p>Welcome speeches <i>Alfa Room</i></p> <p>Address by Ms Ingrida Šimonytė, Prime Minister of Lithuania</p> <p>Address by Mr Bjørn Berge, Deputy Secretary General of the Council of Europe</p> <p>Address by Mr Vytautas Šilinskas, Minister of Social Security and Labour of Lithuania</p> <p><i>(Open to Press)</i></p>
9.15 – 10.00	<p>Opening of the Conference <i>Alfa Room</i></p> <p style="text-align: center;">Moderated by Mr Vytautas Šilinskas, Minister of Social Security and Labour of Lithuania</p> <p>Address by Mr Theodoros Rousopoulos, President of the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe</p> <p>Address by Mr Marc Cools, President of the Congress of Local and Regional Authorities, Council of Europe</p> <p>Address by Ms Gabriele Kucsko-Stadlmayer, Vice President and President of Section IV of the European Court of Human Rights, Council of Europe</p> <p>Address by Mr Stefan Olsson, Deputy-Director General, Directorate-General Employment, Social Affairs and Inclusion, European Commission</p> <p>Address by Mr Gerhard Ermischer, President of the Conference of International Non-Governmental Organisations (INGOs) of the Council of Europe</p> <p>Address by Ms Beate Andrees, Assistant Director-General and Regional Director for Europe and Central Asia, International Labour Organization (ILO)</p>

¹ [CM/Del/Dec\(2022\)1444/4.4](#) and, for the details, [CM\(2022\)114-final](#). Also [CM/Del/Dec\(2023\)1460/4.1](#).

	<p>Address by Ms Aoife Nolan, President of the European Committee of Social Rights, Council of Europe</p> <p>Introductory speech by Mr Michael O'Flaherty, Council of Europe Commissioner for Human Rights: Social rights in Europe.</p> <p><i>(Open to Press)</i></p>
10.00 – 10.30	Coffee break / Family Photo
10.30 – 12.00	<p>Session 1: Contemporary social rights-related challenges <i>Alfa Room</i></p> <p style="text-align: center;">Moderated by Mr Guðmundur Ingi Guðbrandsson, Minister of Social Affairs and Labour Market and Minister for Nordic Cooperation of Iceland</p> <p>Short description: This session will assert the importance of social rights (and hence of the Charter) through the lens of contemporary societal challenges. Topical questions could include rising inequality, the future of work and industrial relations, digitalisation, artificial intelligence, as well as human dignity and the gender pay gap, poverty and the cost-of-living crisis, youth rights, climate change, etc.</p> <p>Introduction of the session by the Moderator</p> <p>Keynote Speech Ms Aoife Nolan, President of the European Committee of Social Rights, Council of Europe</p> <p>Statements by heads of national delegations / Exchange of views</p> <p>Responses from other stakeholders (Governor of the Council of Europe Development Bank, youth, academia, ...)</p>
12.00 – 13.30	Lunch
13.30 – 15.00	<p>Session 2: Council of Europe response to the pursuit of social justice – the European Social Charter <i>Alfa Room</i></p> <p style="text-align: center;">Moderated by Mr Alexei Buzu, Minister of Labour and Social Protection of the Republic of Moldova</p> <p>Short description: This session will discuss the importance of the Charter, its implementation and effectiveness. It will also permit to reaffirm the importance of social justice and the value of the Charter system as a means to respond to the erosion of social rights and prevent democratic backsliding. Participants will be able to share their experience and express support for the monitoring arrangements under the Charter, in particular the collective complaints procedure, as good democratic governance tools assisting national authorities in policy shaping.</p> <p>Introduction of the session by the Moderator</p> <p>Keynote Speech Ms Isabelle Schömann, ETUC Deputy General Secretary</p>

	<p>Statements by heads of national delegations / Exchange of views</p> <p>Responses from other stakeholders (International Organisation of Employers, National Human Rights Institutions and Equality Bodies, EIGE,...)</p>
15.00 – 15.30	<p>Treaty event <i>Zeta Room</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Deposit of instruments of ratification or acceptance of further Charter provisions or the collective complaints procedure • Transmission of letters indicating an intention to accept further commitments under the Charter or the collective complaint procedure
15.00 – 15.30	Coffee Break
15.30 – 17.00	<p>Session 3: Reinforcing the Council of Europe’s response (rights, commitments, procedures) <i>Alfa Room</i></p> <p style="text-align: center;">Moderated by Mr Michael Falzon, Minister for Social Justice and Solidarity, the Family and Children's Rights of the Republic of Malta</p> <p>Short Description: This session will analyse the state of implementation of the reform of the Charter system and reflect on ways to further increase its relevance and impact. It will offer participants the opportunity to express their views about the means to reinforce the Council of Europe response, embodied in the European Social Charter, and how to preserve its pertinence and impact in the future. They will be able to discuss the desirability or opportunity of introducing new rights and other longer-term substantive or procedural issues that the reform process did not fully address.</p> <p>Introduction of the session by the Moderator</p> <p>Keynote Speech Mr Aongus Horgan, Chairperson of the Governmental Committee of the European Social Charter and the European Code of Social Security, Council of Europe</p> <p>Statements by heads of national delegations / Exchange of views</p> <p>Responses from other stakeholders (international organisations - CESCR, CCJ, civil society, ...)</p>
17.00 – 17.30	<p>Stocktaking – The Road Ahead <i>Alfa Room</i></p> <p style="text-align: center;">Moderated by Mr Vytautas Šilinskas, Minister of Social Security and Labour of Lithuania</p> <p>Short description: This session will allow a few heads of national delegations to express and explain their support for the Political Declaration of the Conference and for future activities and developments intended to strengthen the Council of Europe response in the area of social rights and the European Social Charter.</p> <p>Introduction of the session by the Moderator</p>

	<p>Statements by heads of national delegations / Exchange of views</p> <p>Interventions by other stakeholders (PACE, EC, UN, ...)</p> <p>Adoption of a Political Declaration by the Ministers and high-level officials</p>
17.30 – 17.45	<p>Closing remarks <i>Alfa Room</i></p> <p>Mr Christos Giakoumopoulos, Director General of Human Rights and the Rule of Law, Council of Europe</p> <p>Mr Vytautas Šilinskas, Minister of Social Security and Labour of Lithuania</p>
18.00 – 18.45	Refreshments will be offered by the host country
18.45	End of Programme
Friday, 5 July 2024	
Departure of the national delegations and other participants	