

RIGHTS AND RURALITY: CHALLENGES AND OPPORTUNITIES FOR THE FULL REALISATION OF SOCIO-ECONOMIC RIGHTS FOR RURAL COMMUNITIES IN EUROPE

15th Meeting of the
COE-FRA-ENNHRI-EQUINET Collaborative
Platform on Social and Economic Rights

2-3 October 2025 | *Edinburgh, Scotland*





Rafael Benitez

Director of Social Rights,
Health and Environment,
Council of Europe

Rafael A. Benitez holds a Master's in European Law from the College of Europe and degrees in Law and Finance from ICADE - University of Comillas. He studied Political Science at UNED. Currently, he is the Director of Social Rights, Health, and Environment at the Council of Europe, where he has worked since 1994. His previous roles include Director of the Congress of Local and Regional Authorities and Chief of Protocol. Mr. Benitez has expertise in administrative law, international criminal justice, corruption, terrorism, and public international law. He has published works, spoken at international conferences, and lectured at ITI-RI and IIDH in Strasbourg. He speaks Spanish, English, French, and Italian.

Angela O'Hagan

Chair of Scottish Human Rights Commission



Angela O'Hagan was most recently Professor of Equality and Public Policy at Glasgow Caledonian University. She was also Deputy Director of the WISE Centre for Economic Justice. Her career encompasses leadership roles in the community and statutory sectors in Scotland, including as Director of Carers Scotland, and Head of Campaigns and Communications with Oxfam Scotland, after a period with the Equal Opportunities Commission. She has served on a number of advisory and project groups with successive Scottish Governments including previously as a member of the Equality and Human Rights Budget Advisory Group, the National Advisory Council on Women and Girls, and the Commission on Local Tax Reform.



Tatiana Puiu

Vice President of the ECSR,
Council of Europe

Tatiana Puiu is an Attorney at Law in the Republic of Moldova and the Vice-President of the European Committee of Social Rights. Her professional experience in human rights and the rule of law spans legal, policy, and practical fields. Tatiana has served as an expert advisor to a wide range of international and national organizations and bodies working on human rights issues, including the Council of Europe, OSCE, National Human Rights Institutions (NHRIs), and (I)NGOs.

Session 1: The State of Socio-Economic Rights in Rural Europe

Charlotte Altenhoener-Dion

Adviser, Office of the
Commissioner for Human
Rights, Council of Europe



Charlotte Altenhöner-Dion has been Adviser to the Commissioner for Human Rights since 2020. She joined the Council of Europe in 2010, working six years in minority protection (FCNM) and four years on media freedom, internet governance and AI (CDMSI). Previously, she worked for ten years for the UNHCR, mainly in Central Asia and the Balkans, and gained further experience in international human rights protection with the UN, the OSCE, and NGOs in Colombia, the UK and the Netherlands. She studied law in Germany and France and holds an LLM in International Law from Georgetown University, US, where she was a Fulbright scholar.



Ana Winship

Research Fellow,
Scotland's Rural College

Dr. Ana Winship is a human geographer specializing in rural development, migration, and regional policy, with extensive interdisciplinary research experience across Europe and Australia. She focuses on the social and economic impacts of demographic change, land reform, and housing in rural and remote areas. Ana is currently a Research Fellow at the Rural Policy Centre (SRUC), co-leading and contributing to projects funded by the Scottish Government's Strategic Research Programme 2022-2027, British Academy, WHO, and Council of Europe. She also holds honorary and teaching roles at Charles Darwin University and the University of Edinburgh, supporting research and postgraduate education in rural development and ecological economics.



Theona L Morrison

Chair of the Scottish Rural
Action



Theona L MORRISON, is Chair of Scottish Rural Action and lives on a working croft in Uist. A founding director of CoDeL, which led research on rural resilience and the island economy, challenging dominant narratives on peripherality. She regularly shares insights at national and international rural forums.

Session 2: Legal Frameworks and Gaps – Effective protection of social and economic rights in rural areas



Tatjana VLAŠIĆ

Deputy Ombudswoman,
Republic of Croatia



Tatjana Vlašić holds an MA from the University of Zagreb and a joint MA in Democracy and Human Rights from the Universities of Sarajevo and Bologna. As a Fulbright Scholar, she specialized in anti-discrimination policies at UC Berkeley.

From 2008–2015, she worked in the Government Office for Human Rights and National Minorities, later joining the Ombudswoman's Office as advisor until her appointment as Deputy Ombudswoman. Her work has included managing projects, research, training, public campaigns, and international cooperation.

She has collaborated with the UN, UNHCR, Council of Europe, OSCE/ODIHR, and served as Croatia's liaison to the EU's Fundamental Rights Agency. She also teaches on anti-discrimination and constitutional rights, and contributed to the 2019 re-accreditation of the Ombudswoman's Office as a UN Status A institution.



Patrycja Pogodzinska

Project Officer, Equality,
Roma and Social Rights
Unit, FRA

Patrycja Pogodzinska (PhD) is a legal expert at the EU Agency for Fundamental Rights (FRA) in the Equality, Roma and Social Rights Unit. Her expertise covers European human rights law, non-discrimination, LGBTI rights, social rights, business and human rights, citizens' rights, and access to justice.

Before joining FRA in 2016, she worked as a lawyer at the European Court of Human Rights, the Council of Europe, and later at the European Parliament. She is a qualified lawyer with a PhD in international law, author of numerous publications, and recipient of the S. Kutrzeba Human Rights in Europe Award from the Max Planck Institute in Heidelberg.



Jamshid Gaziyeu

Secretary, UN Working
Group on the rights of
peasants and other people
working in rural areas

Jamshid Gaziyeu, Secretary, UN Working Group on the rights of peasants and other people working in rural areas. With over 20 years of experience in international human rights and political affairs, Jamshid Gaziyeu is a Human Rights Expert at the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights, specializing in the right to food. Since 2010 he has worked extensively on issues including civic space, rule of law, foreign debt, health, and the environment. Previously, he served as a Political Affairs Officer at the United Nations Office in Vienna and as a Policy Adviser on Development and Conflict at Global Witness in London.



Luis F Yanes

Policy Officer
ESC Rights Lead
Scottish Human Rights
Commission

Luis F Yanes is an international human rights lawyer and the SHRC's expert in economic, social and cultural rights. For almost two decades, he has worked across Europe, Africa, and the Americas, including at the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights; the Global Business Initiative on Human Rights; University of Essex, the Universidad Católica Andrés Bello; the University of Pretoria; the Program of Action in Education in Human Rights, and various national and international organisations, including the Organisation of American States and the Norwegian Union on Municipal and General Employees.

Parallel working groups - NHRIs and Equality Bodies experiences and good practice in realising socio-economic rights in rural areas

Mariam Rechchad

Policy Officer, EQUINET



Mariam Camilla Rechchad works as Policy Officer focusing on the impacts of Artificial Intelligence and Climate Change/Climate Change Mitigation on equality. She further supports Equinet's work on Economic and Social Rights and their link with equality. Mariam holds a Masters degree in International Relations and Sociology. She has multiple years of interdisciplinary experience researching, monitoring, and advocating around issues of equality and anti-discrimination in academia, civil society, and international NGOs.

Sophie Hale

Policy Officer, EQUINET



Sophie HALE has been with the ENNHRI Secretariat since September 2022. She leads capacity building activities in ENNHRI, including the NHRI Academy, and facilitates ENNHRI's work on AI, business and human rights, and economic and social rights. She holds a European Master's Degree in Human Rights and Democratisation. Previously, she worked for Equinet, the European Network of National Equality Bodies, and supported civil society in the UK.

David Reilly

Head of Communities and Networks, Scottish Poverty Alliance



David Reilly joined the Poverty Alliance from the Scottish Government's Community Empowerment team, where he led on participatory budgeting and community development. Previously, he worked at the Scottish Community Development Centre on ways to share power more equitably, and at the Equality and Human Rights Commission's legal team. He has facilitated the Citizens' Assembly for Scotland and contributed to the Change Team working to End Homelessness Together. In his community, David has volunteered with Whiteinch Housing Association, Govan Community Project and Thornliebank Together. He is currently a practitioner board member of People Powered, a global NGO strengthening participatory democracy.



Alison Hosie

Research Officer,
Scottish Human Rights
Commission

Alison Hosie is the research officer at the Commission. She leads the Commission's research needs by developing and managing external research contracts and undertaking primary and secondary research.

16:40 – 17:10 | *Closing session*

A circular portrait of Nikolaos Papadopoulos, a man with a beard and short dark hair, wearing a grey suit, white shirt, and blue tie. The portrait is set against a blue background with a white Greek letter sigma (Σ) visible. The portrait is framed by a white circular border and is positioned on the left side of the slide, overlapping a red geometric shape.

Nikolaos PAPADOPOULOS

Researcher, lecturer and
practicing lawyer

Dr. Nikolaos (Nikos) Papadopoulos is a researcher, lecturer and practicing lawyer, particularly interested in social law and social rights. He is currently a Lecturer at the European Law and Governance School of the European Public Law Organization. Nikolaos has worked as a research fellow for several universities and other academic institutions, and has provided consultancy services to various international organizations, including the Council of Europe Department of Social Rights. He holds a Ph.D. in Law from Maastricht University with a dissertation on the dynamics of the European Social Charter for the judicial enforcement of economic and social rights at the national level. Nikolaos also serves as the coordinator of the Greek section of the Academic Network on the European Social Charter and Social Rights (ANESC/RACSE).