

Strasbourg, 22 November 2022

CCS(2022)8

Seminar

Social Cohesion: Challenges anew

Council of Europe, European Committee for Social Cohesion (CCS)

Hybrid Seminar, Strasbourg, France, and via videoconference

23 November 2022

Concept Note

The Covid-19 pandemic has had a very significant impact on the enjoyment of a wide range of social rights. The pandemic has posed new challenges to social cohesion in Council of Europe member states that will have lasting effects. This unprecedented crisis has shaken our countries' economy and put a strain on the social fabric of our societies, affecting labour markets, health services, education systems, among others.

This social and economic crisis has magnified systemic difficulties faced by healthcare systems in the vast majority of countries. It has also revealed that the states' response to the pandemic has sometimes brought about unintended consequences. For instance, lockdowns instituted for valid sanitary reasons, but without sufficient supporting and mitigating measures to accompany persons in vulnerable situations have had detrimental effects on them, such as a deepening of social isolation and difficulties in accessing basic health services. In addition, new working patterns (such as remote work, flexible working arrangements and digital economy jobs) introduced and/or accelerated during the pandemic have dramatically transformed our perceptions and the realities of labour relations. This has not gone without impacting families and communities, for example with increasingly blurred lines between professional and private lives and risks of working hours going unchecked. Certainly, the effects of the crisis have already shown to be uneven, with the persons in the most vulnerable situations (such as persons with disabilities, older persons, low-revenue and single-parent households, etc.) being disproportionately affected. All of this poses undeniable challenges in terms of social cohesion and, consequently, of governance in the social field at all levels, whether local or national.

At the same time, responses to the pandemic have triggered financial support plans in the areas of employment and healthcare on a significant scale in order to assist people in getting through this difficult period. The priority given to related social rights should serve as an inspiration for the development of bolder social cohesion policies that are rooted in the principles championed by the Council of Europe around human rights - including social rights -, democracy, and the rule of law, as well as the overarching values of respect and dignity. Investing in social rights and their delivery is instrumental to mitigating the adverse impact of the crisis and accelerating post-pandemic social and economic recovery and is therefore indispensable to social cohesion.

While still in the post-pandemic recovery stage, another crisis has hit Europe as a result of the Russian military aggression against Ukraine. The war in Ukraine has come with new challenges not only in Ukraine, but more widely on the continent. The conflict has triggered a new humanitarian crisis with millions of people fleeing the conflict, which raises significant social and economic challenges for neighbouring and other countries where large number of Ukrainians seek protection. Rapidly increasing prices of gas and disrupted import of wheat, sunflower oil and other basic products, which have resulted from the conflict, have had a significant economic impact in Europe. This has gone hand in hand with growing inflation and is placing persons in vulnerable situations at a particular risk as winter is upon us and energy prices are skyrocketing.

To mitigate the devastating consequences of the war, there is a need for immediate and targeted responses to guarantee refugees access to basic social rights, deal with economic challenges and preserve social cohesion.

At the same time, both the post-pandemic recovery and the energy crisis caused by the war in Ukraine open up opportunities for ambitious public policies to address climate change with a transition to a green economy. Climate change threatens us all but, as with the pandemic or the conflict, its most damaging impact is felt by persons in vulnerable situations. Human rights, not least social rights, offer some protection to guarantee a healthy environment for all and should be at the core of efforts to build a green economy from the ground up, including sustainable infrastructures. It is indeed crucial that this transition is done in a just manner that respects the human dignity of all and leaves no one behind.

Against this background, within the ambit of the European Committee for Social Cohesion (CCS), the Council of Europe is organising a seminar, which will bring together national policy makers, civil servants and other stakeholders, to discuss the current challenges to the social cohesion in Europe and the possible responses thereto.

Objective

The main objective of the seminar is to discuss the current challenges to social cohesion, posed by the Covid-19 pandemic and the on-going war in Ukraine, and to suggest possible policy level responses to mitigate the social and economic consequences. It is also meant to be an opportunity for some forward-thinking about the benefits of the transition to a green economy as one of the ways of overcoming current and future crises.

It will consist of three successive panel sessions.

➤ Panel Session 1: Post-pandemic recovery: Challenges and prospects

During the first session, discussions will focus on the challenges posed by Covid-19 pandemic and post pandemic recovery policies and practices. Participants will discuss (i) national policies, best practices and lessons learnt from the pandemic and (ii) challenges and prospects linked to the post-pandemic recovery phase and how to preserve social cohesion.

➤ Panel Session 2: Current challenges to social cohesion: the social and economic consequences of the Russian aggression against Ukraine

During the second panel session discussions will focus on (i) the challenges to social cohesion resulting from the war in Ukraine. Participants will discuss social and economic problems emanating from this crisis. (ii) Discussions will also focus on the current situation of migration flows and how to integrate Ukrainians into receiving communities. Resilience, reconstruction and recovery plans will be discussed from the perspective of social and economic responses.

➤ Panel Session 3: Transition to a green economy

Third session will derive from the realisation, amplified by the energy crisis linked to the conflict, that (i) transition to a green economy has become a pressing need. But how do we ensure that transition to a green economy does not jeopardise social cohesion? (ii) Developing sustainable infrastructure for greening the economy is high on the agenda. In what way are countries and organisations responding to infrastructure development that is designed, implemented and maintained from a holistic perspective?"

Seminar

“Social Cohesion: Challenges anew” Council of Europe, European Committee for Social Cohesion (CCS)

Wednesday, 23 November 2022, 9.00 – 17.00

Room 10, Palais de l'Europe, Strasbourg, France
and via videoconference

KUDO <https://vmeeting.coe.int/k8/241116414226/join>

Meeting ID: 241116414226

PROGRAMME

9:00-9:15 **Registration of the participants**

9:15-9:45 **Opening and Welcome Address**

Mr Christophe POIREL, Director of Human Rights, Directorate
General Human Rights and Rule of Law, Council of Europe

Mr Joe GERADA, Advisor to the Minister for Social Policy and
Children's Rights, Ministry for Social Policy and Children's Rights
of Malta, and Chair of the European Committee for Social
Cohesion (CCS)

9:45-11:00 **Panel Session 1: Post-pandemic recovery: Challenges and
prospects**

*The main lessons learnt from the pandemic that will prepare us
better for the future in creating more resilient societies, with better
social cohesion, based on human rights – notably social rights -,
democracy and the rule of law. What are the challenges and
prospects for the post-Covid recovery? How can Council of Europe
member states embark on the path of recovery while fully
preserving social cohesion (e.g. by pursuing the Sustainable
Development Goals on poverty, health, education and
employment)?*

Moderator: Mr Joe GERADA, Advisor to the Minister for Social
Policy and Children's Rights, Ministry for Social Policy and
Children's Rights, Malta, and Chair of the European Committee for
Social Cohesion (CCS)

Speakers:

Dr Marie BRIGUGLIO, Senior Lecturer, University of Malta

Mr Olli E. KANGAS, PhD, Professor, Research Director,
Department of Social Sciences, University of Turku

Ms Mary DALY, PhD, Professor, University of Oxford

Dr Mario Thomas VASSALLO, Head of Department of Public
Policy, Faculty of Economics, Management and Accountancy,
University of Malta

Ms Tatiana PUIU, member of the European Committee of Social
Rights (ECSR)

11:00-11:15 Coffee Break

**11:15-12:30 Panel Session 2: Current challenges to social cohesion: the
social and economic consequences of the Russian
aggression against Ukraine**

*The war in Ukraine has added another layer of disruption to our
societies. Can the challenges of energy hikes, higher cost of basic
foodstuff and migration flows be effectively addressed, alongside
the measures that need to be taken as a result of the pandemic?
Are we dealing with two different sets of challenges or are they
different facets of a more global transition?*

Moderator: Ms Rita SKREBISKIENE, Chief Advisor,
Horizontal Policies and Projects Management Group, Ministry of
Social Security and Labour of the Republic of Lithuania and
Vice-Chair of the European Committee for Social Cohesion (CCS)

Speakers:

Mr Michael WINDFUHR, Deputy Director, German Institute for
Human Rights / Expert Member of the United Nations (UN)
Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights

Mr Maksym SHCHERBATYUK, Program Director and Director of
Legal Aid Centers (LAC's) network, Ukrainian Helsinki Human
Rights Union

Ms Martina HUBER, Senior Migration Expert, European Union
Agency for Fundamental Rights (FRA)

Ms Alla FEDOROVA, PhD, Associate Professor, Taras
Shevchenko, National University of Kyiv, Institute of International
Relations

Mr Massimiliano MASCHERINI, Head of Unit, Social Policies Unit, European Foundation for the Improvement of Living and Working Conditions (Eurofound)

12:30-14:30 Lunch Break

14:30-16:30 Panel Session 3: Transition to a green economy

The energy crisis that has erupted as a result of the war in Ukraine has also raised the global question of energy supplies. This goes hand in hand with the broader question of climate change and underlines the need to think in terms of transition to a green economy to make our societies more environmentally resilient. Such a transition must factor in the need to respect human rights, including social rights. What are the major policy decisions required from member states to ensure that transition to a green economy delivers for all and reinforces social cohesion? In what way are countries and organisations responding to infrastructure development, that is designed, implemented and maintained from a holistic perspective?

Moderator: Mr Jerzy CIECHANSKI, Counselor, International Cooperation Department, Ministry of the Family, Labor & Social Policy of Poland and Bureau member of the European Committee for Social Cohesion (CCS)

Speakers:

Dr Philip VON BROCKDORFF, Professor, Council of Europe consultant

Mr Žiga ŽARNIC, Head of Country Reviews, SDGs and Impact Measurement, Centre for Well-Being, Inclusion, Sustainability and Equal Opportunities (WISE), Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD)

Mr Pierre KLEIN, All Together in Dignity, ATD Fourth World International

Ms Anna RURKA, Lecturer and Director of the Department of Education and Training Sciences, University of Paris Nanterre, and Outgoing President of the Conference of INGOs of the Council of Europe

16:30-16:45 Closing of the Seminar

Mr Joe GERADA, Advisor to the Minister for Social Policy and Children's Rights, Ministry for Social Policy and Children's Rights of Malta, and Chair of the European Committee for Social Cohesion (CCS)

16:45-17:00 Networking & Coffee