

The Bureau of the Congress

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Preliminary Draft Congress Recommendation on the role of local and regional authorities in protecting and promoting social rights and fostering social development

Action required: for adoption

¹ This document is classified as confidential until it has been examined by the Bureau of the Congress.

1. On 4-6 November 2025, the United Nations will convene the Second World Summit for Social Development in Doha, Qatar (“the Summit”). This Summit will provide renewed momentum for implementing the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development (“the 2030 Agenda”) and will build on the legacy of the 1995 World Summit for Social Development in Copenhagen.
2. The Summit aims to adopt an action-oriented political declaration, which will advance the implementation of the 2030 Agenda and strengthen international co-operation, fostering inclusive social development and well-being for all. The event will also be a platform for all stakeholders to collaborate on creating policies and strategies that promote inclusivity, equity and sustainability.
3. For the Congress of Local and Regional Authorities of the Council of Europe (“the Congress”), the Summit provides an opportunity to support the role of local and regional authorities in creating an enabling environment that facilitates the promotion of social rights and delivers effective policies for social development at the level of government closest to the citizen.
4. The Council of Europe has been a pioneer in setting social rights standards since the adoption of its first the European Social Charter (ETS No. 35) in 1961 and the European Social Charter (revised) (ETS No. 163) in 1996.
5. The Reykjavik Declaration adopted by the Heads of State and Government of the Council of Europe in May 2023 reaffirmed that social justice is crucial for democratic stability and security and stressed the need for member States to fully commit to the protection and implementation of social rights as guaranteed by the European Social Charter system.
6. Subsequently, the Vilnius Declaration, adopted by the representatives of Council of Europe member States during the High-Level Conference on the European Social Charter held in Vilnius on 3-4 July 2024, affirmed the central position of social rights by calling on member States to promote a rights-based approach to social policy and to share knowledge and good practice in responding to persistent and emerging common challenges.
7. As a political assembly of local and regional authorities from all 46 member States of the Council of Europe, the Congress considers that current and future global challenges in the field of social rights and social developments can only be addressed by harnessing the power of local and regional governments.
8. The Congress draws attention in this regard to the relevant Council of Europe treaties and conventions, and in particular the European Convention of Human Rights (ETS No. 5), the European Charter of Local Self-Government (ETS No. 122), the European Social Charter (revised), the Council of Europe Framework Convention on Artificial Intelligence and Human Rights, Democracy and the Rule of Law (CETS No. 225) as well as the Reykjavik and Vilnius Declarations referred to above.
9. It underlines the particular relevance and importance in this field of the Pact for the Future, adopted by the United Nations General Assembly on 22 September 2024 (A/RES/79/1).
10. It refers in addition to its own previous recommendations in this field, in particular Recommendation 511 (2024) “The UN Pact for the Future: The essential role of local and regional authorities in global sustainable development”, Recommendation 493 (2023) “Localisation of the Sustainable Development Goals, Recommendation 450 (2021), “Youth work: the role of local and regional authorities”, and Recommendation 449 (2020) “Fighting sexist violence against women in politics at local and regional level”. It also refers to the Congress Human Rights Handbook for local and regional authorities, Vol. 2, Social Rights.
11. In the light of the foregoing, the Congress calls on the member States of the Council of Europe to support the role of local and regional authorities in protecting and promoting social rights and fostering social development, by:
 - a. with regard to social development:
 - i. recognising the advantages of local authorities, thanks to their proximity to citizens, in developing policies that are needs-based and geographically and culturally grounded, and the importance of working towards the fair and equal fulfilment of social rights at local and regional levels;

- ii. promoting a rights-based approach to social policy and the sharing of knowledge and good practice in responding to persistent and emerging common challenges, especially in relation to inequalities, low incomes and social exclusion, access to housing and demographic change;
 - iii. accelerating the process of localising the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and ensuring that local and regional authorities have due autonomy for action and decision-making, which includes the necessary competences and the financial and budgetary autonomy required to achieve goals in their respective areas of responsibility;
 - iv. involving local and regional authorities in the design, development and implementation of national SDG action plans – ensuring that no one is left behind and that the needs of persons furthest from experiencing equality are addressed first;
 - v. developing methodologies and tools to allow the monitoring and assessment of the social impacts of digitalisation including data privacy, digital literacy, access to digital technologies, information asymmetry and information security, as well as putting in place indicators capable of measuring the impact of digitalisation on social cohesion, social inclusion, social capital, and social mobility (in line with the requirements of Council of Europe Framework Convention on Artificial Intelligence and Human Rights, Democracy and the Rule of Law);
 - vi. recognising in the above methodologies that no group can be considered as homogeneous and that each individual has different characteristics, including their gender, sexual orientation, gender identity, ethnic origin, religion, age, disability and socio-economic status, which must be taken into account;
- b. with regard to social inclusion, integration and leaving no one behind:
- i. empowering citizens and ensuring all voices are heard, by reaching out to elderly populations, children and youth, persons with disabilities and marginalised groups;
 - ii. guaranteeing equal, safe, secure and low-threshold access to public services for all, without discrimination, while ensuring that social rights are upheld;
 - iii. committing to strengthening multilevel and multistakeholder work towards inclusive societies without marginalisation, exclusion, racism or intolerance;
 - iv. in line with Action 2 of the United Nations Pact for the Future, taking comprehensive and targeted measures to eradicate poverty by addressing the multidimensional nature and intergenerational transmission of poverty, including through rural development strategies and investments and innovations in the social sector, especially education and health, and by taking concrete action to prevent people from falling into poverty, including by establishing well-designed, sustainable and efficient social protection systems for all that are capable of responding to crises;
 - v. creating environments where older persons, hard-to-reach groups and persons with disabilities can live independently and participate fully in all aspects of life;
- c. with regard to the implementation of social rights as human rights:
- i. acknowledging the obligations to recognise, respect, and fulfil economic, social and cultural rights, including by meeting “minimum core” obligations, ensuring non-discrimination, as well as enacting legislative measures, developing appropriate policies and committing the maximum available resources towards the progressive realisation of these rights;
 - ii. affirming a full commitment to the protection and implementation of social rights as guaranteed by the European Social Charter system;
 - iii. establishing relevant indicators and tools that allow local and regional authorities to effectively monitor and assess the implementation of human rights in their activities;

- d. with regard to youth and future generations:
 - i. highlighting the importance of the active, meaningful and inclusive participation of youth in political and public affairs and committing to strengthening effective youth engagement in policymaking and decision-making processes at the local, regional, national and global levels;
 - ii. increasing the involvement of young people in decision-making and in all activities leading to the achievement of SDGs;
 - iii. investing sufficient human and financial resources in youth work, whether provided by the authorities or by non-governmental actors, and integrating a future-proofing approach into their planning, with procedures to regularly assess the impact of legislation, policies and activities related to youth work;
 - iv. preventing premature school dropouts by adopting strategies tailored to the needs of youth in specific communities, facilitating the transition from youth into adulthood for youth in vulnerable situations and taking an interdisciplinary and multicultural approach to municipal educational offers, and introducing sustainable alternatives to traditional educational paths;
 - e. with regard to gender equality:
 - i. promoting inclusive gender equality with equal rights, responsibilities and opportunities for all individuals irrespective of their characteristics including their gender, sexual orientation, gender identity, ethnic origin, religion, age, disability and socio-economic status, to ensure that all individuals live in dignity, safety and security.
 - ii. promoting women's full participation in public and political life and supporting them in accessing active and passive voting rights, at all levels, as an essential precondition for equality and justice;
 - iii. recalling that gender equality and the full, equal and effective participation of women in public and private decision-making processes are essential to the rule of law, democracy and sustainable development;
 - iv. taking action against sexist attacks targeting women, introducing or revising codes of conduct so as expressly to prohibit sexist behaviour and speech in assemblies; being vigilant during election periods with regard to sexist attacks against women and monitoring candidate nomination procedures for inequalities;
 - v. training police officers, social workers and judicial authorities to effectively detect and prevent violence and discrimination against LGBTI people and provide support to LGBTI victims of violence or discrimination, and financing specific programmes to support LGBTI people, including by providing emergency shelters.
12. The Congress will continue its work to promote and support a social rights and social development approach to addressing global challenges at the local and regional levels, in accordance with the principles of the relevant Council of Europe treaties and declarations. It will ensure that citizens remain central to its action and will pursue a collaborative approach including through its involvement in the work of the Committee of Ministers, and other bodies, as well as through co-operation with member States.