

UK Submission: High-Level Conference on the European Social Charter

18-19 March 2026, Chişinău, Republic of Moldova

The United Kingdom would like to thank the Republic of Moldova for hosting the upcoming High-Level Conference as part of the Moldovan Presidency of the Committee of Ministers of the Council of Europe and welcomes the invitation to contribute to the conference programme.

The United Kingdom recognises the importance of this High-Level Conference in raising awareness of social rights and the work that the Council of Europe does to protect and progress these rights.

The High-Level Conference in Chişinău presents a unique opportunity to advance social rights, particularly in the context of emerging challenges such as digital transformation, climate change, and economic inequality. By collaborating with member States and stakeholders, we can ensure that the High-Level Conference in Chişinău not only addresses immediate concerns but also lays the groundwork for a sustainable and prosperous future for all Europeans. The United Kingdom looks forward to playing an active role in this important endeavour, reaffirming our commitment to the values and objectives of the Council of Europe.

Increasing commitments under the Charter

The United Kingdom welcomes the planned treaty event which provides a visible opportunity for member States to increase their commitments under the Charter and proved so effective at the High-Level Conference in Vilnius, 2024. The United Kingdom is working to deliver progressive Government reforms to benefit workers and will need to consider if these changes are compliant with any new obligations before making commitments. It is important to emphasise that national sovereignty remains a fundamental component of member States' ability to accept additional commitments under the Charter; any commitments can only be made when the timing and alignment with government policies is appropriate.

This applies in particular to the ratification of the Revised Charter, which would be a significant undertaking. The United Kingdom understands that the Council of Europe would like to continue to encourage the remaining States still bound by the 1961 Charter to Ratify the Revised Charter but questions the value of continuing to single out these member States when there is an existing comprehensive awareness of the reasons to ratify. As ratification is ultimately a decision made by individual member States for a variety of reasons touched on here, we do not think it is appropriate to include this as an action to be taken in any resolutions that all member States would be expected to sign.

Regarding the Amending Protocol of 1991, the United Kingdom recognises the importance of updating and enhancing the framework of the Council of Europe to better address contemporary challenges and uphold our shared values of democracy, human rights, and the rule of law. It is also essential to acknowledge the diverse perspectives and circumstances of member States. The United Kingdom has been engaging with the Council of Europe to review our national position, and we are working extensively to gain a more thorough understanding of this protocol and its implications. We continue to appreciate the Council of Europe's support with this work.

Evaluating Charter Reform Implementation

The United Kingdom remains engaged with the reform process and believes it is important to highlight the successes already made by reviewing the progress.

We look forward to learning more about how the development of an Action Plan for the European Social Charter (2026-2030) would work and how measurable metrics could be agreed by member States.

Addressing contemporary social rights challenges

We think this High-Level Conference will provide a valuable platform to discuss these important issues affecting people across Europe and beyond, with representatives from member States, observers, and social partners to share successes and challenges.

The UK Government's work under initiatives such as the Plan to Make Work Pay, which aims to grow the economy, raise living standards and create opportunities for all, reflects ongoing efforts to address key social issues. The first phase of this is the Employment Rights Bill that will provide the biggest upgrade to employment rights in a generation, covering a broad range of measures that strengthen protections for workers, promote fairness in the workplace, and ensure employment law remains fit for the modern economy. We welcome the opportunity to discuss these issues and other emerging social rights challenges with all member States and the Council of Europe, and how these align with the European Social Charter.

The United Kingdom would like to be clear on the expectations of how member States would 'Reinforce social rights as a pillar of democratic stability and security, highlight the link between social justice, democratic stability, and security' as part of the Conference. This is a very broad aim that reflects many aspects of the Council of Europe's work and so it should be clear what would count as a successful outcome.

We also believe it will be important to ensure that the objective addressing 'social rights shortfalls, inequalities, and crisis impacts to prevent political backlash' avoids calling out specific member States for perceived shortcomings. One of the enduring highlights of the High-Level Conference in Vilnius was the positive tone throughout which led to many constructive exchanges.

Enhancing Institutional Cooperation

The United Kingdom would like clarification on what form 'reinforcing strategic partnerships' would mean, and whether this objective is aiming to increase international actors influence over the Council of Europe.

Supporting member States in the implementation of social rights

We welcome the opportunity to further engage with the Council of Europe and Treaty bodies in the implementation of the Charter. The United Kingdom is open to discussing more about the practicalities of how enhanced dialogues would work considering the heavy workloads of many bodies. We have already worked with the Secretariat to assist us in reaching out to the Treaty Office

for their expertise in regard to questions on the Amending Protocol 1991 and look forward to continuing this working relationship.

Institutionalising High-Level Ministerial Engagement

As our government continues to develop ambitious policies that deliver positive change, we support the principle of showcasing good practices and progress through monitoring outcomes. The United Kingdom complies with reporting obligations and carefully considers findings from monitoring bodies in an effort to ensure clarity and understand areas for further attention.

Expected Outcomes

The United Kingdom welcomes the clear aims presented for this conference and the forward-looking focus, however, would caution that some of these are overly ambitious. While the High-Level Conference in Vilnius gave rise to a number of additional commitments from member States, it is an unsustainable model to regularly expect further commitments to align with conferences.