

Contribution to the High-Level Conference of the European Social Charter (Moldova 2026):

“COMPLETING THE CIRCLE: SOCIAL RIGHTS FOR ALL – EVERYWHERE AND NOW”

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1. Time to deliver, not to deliberate

This is not the time for cautious progress or incremental reforms. The High-Level Conference in Chisinau must become a turning point, where Member States move from commitment to ratification, from observation to implementation, from silence to bold defence of social rights. Across Europe and beyond, the cost-of-living crisis, post-pandemic inequalities, authoritarian backsliding, digital exploitation, climate emergency and systemic racism, genocide and atrocities, are eroding public trust in our democratic, human rights-based and rule-of-law grounded European model.

Social rights are not an optional add-on to democracy, but they are its foundation. A democracy without strong social rights is fragile, exposed and ultimately unsustainable. We cannot afford another decade of fragmented commitments, delayed ratifications or overlooked populations.

The Reykjavík and Vilnius Declarations opened the door; thus, Chisinau must walk through it decisively.

2. Treaty Event in Chisinau: close the gaps in the democratic ‘House of Europe’

We strongly support the organisation of a **formal Treaty Event during the Conference**, where States should undertake the following:

- **Publicly reaffirm the binding force of the European Social Charter as an international treaty**
- **Ratify the 1996 Revised Charter** (six States still pending)
- **Ratify the 1991 Amending Protocol** (four States still pending)
- **Accept the Collective Complaints Procedure.**

This is not mere housekeeping. It is about ensuring the Charter serves as a **legally coherent and universally applicable framework**. Fragmentation has paralysed progress. Unity is now a geopolitical and democratic imperative.

3. Territorial inclusion: social rights must cross oceans

The failure to fully extend the European Social Charter to **Overseas Territories (OTs)** is a structural injustice. Millions of people, many of them racialised or marginalised, live without full access to the protections the Charter guarantees. This is a blind spot in Europe's human rights architecture.

Drawing on our work in France and its OTs, we urge that the 2026–2030 Action Plan should include:

- **An audit of Charter applicability in Overseas Territories** across all Member States
- **A structured dialogue with OT-based civil society** and affected communities
- **A pathway for extending monitoring mechanisms** and participatory access to those territories, calling for a **Declaration**, for concerned Member States, **to extend the territorial scope of the Charter System (the Revised Charter and its Protocols) to all OTs**
- Accepting the **Collective Complaints Procedure generally and in all OTs**
- Draw inspiration from mechanisms such as the [European Citizens' Initiative for a Water-Smart and Resilient Europe](#), which illustrate the power of accessible participatory frameworks, even if only in the EU, to elevate voices otherwise left unheard.

Europe must stop drawing invisible lines between its peoples. The Charter must reach every part of the European family.

4. Reform implementation: from Reykjavík and Vilnius to real life

We call for an urgent review of the **2022–2023 reform decisions** of the Committee of Ministers. These must not fade into procedural memory. We propose:

- **A mid-term public report on reform implementation**, prepared with civil society input
- A structured process for **embedding civil society expertise and foresight tools** in reporting cycles, including youth voices and local actors
- A framework of **measurable indicators** to translate the Reykjavík and Vilnius Declarations into actionable obligations.

The **BRIDGE** project led by Volonteuropé, in close cooperation with the Conference of INGOs, and funded by the Council of Europe, has shown how participatory foresight, bottom-up monitoring, and civic dialogue can revitalise abstract rights into concrete, lived protections. These approaches must be mainstreamed into the Charter's future monitoring model.

5. Future-proofing the Charter: green, digital and democratic Transitions

The Charter must be read in the context of contemporary challenges. Our democracies are at risk of becoming hollowed out not only by repression but by economic abandonment and ecological collapse.

We recommend:

- Clarifying the Charter's scope in relation to **democratic stability and developments, environmental justice and digital inequality, epistemic justice and AI-driven labour changes**.
- Issuing **interpretative statements or general comments** to connect existing provisions with the realities of the green and digital transitions
- Anchoring all new interpretations in the Charter's social justice foundation.

The price of inaction is rising, not just for rights, but for democracy itself.

6. Side event proposal: “Beyond the mainland – securing social rights in all territories”

We propose to co-organise a side event titled: **“Beyond the mainland: ensuring social rights in overseas and marginalised territories”**.

This session will:

- Explore the legal and practical exclusion of Overseas Territories from Charter protections, including the case study of the right to access to safe and reliable sources of water.
- Present findings from our work with civil society actors in France's OTs and similar regions
- Feature lived experiences, Charter-based legal commentary, civil society and social partner responses
- Propose specific, time-bound measures to be integrated into the 2026–2030 Action Plan.

The Social Rights Committee of the CINGO, together with Volonteuropa and partners, will coordinate the event. We request visibility support, funding, and the participation of the Council of Europe representatives to ensure these insights feed into the final Conference report.

We also support the proposals being submitted by individual members of the CINGO to the Chisinau Conference organisers, whether for panel discussions or side events, on topics

ranging from looking at the links between the revised European Social Charter and the revised European Pillar of Social Rights Action Plan; to social rights being pillars of national and European anti-poverty strategies. This support is reaffirmed by the members of the Standing Committee of the CINGO who hold the elected mandate to represent and support the membership.

7. Conclusion: social rights cannot wait

We cannot speak of “shared European values” while millions live without access to basic social rights, whether because of geography, racial inequality, disability, precarity or political neglect. This is not about technocratic reforms or diplomatic language. It is about urgency, dignity and survival.

Nor can we credibly promote democracy, social rights or justice, while failing to condemn and act against the perpetration of acts of forced human suffering, atrocities and destruction of human lives, and the erosion of international humanitarian norms. Silence and inaction betray the very principles the European Social Charter claims to uphold. If we are serious about social justice, then we must uphold it consistently, across all geographies and for all peoples.

We repeat what we stated at the High-Level Conference in Vilnius in July 2024 and in December 2024 at the ‘Social Rights are Human Rights: The European Social Charter and the European Pillar of Social Rights in the follow-up to the Vilnius and La Hulpe Declarations’ event: **rights denied are democracy denied**. Let Chisinau be the moment when we stop managing decline and start enforcing justice.

The European Social Charter must become a beacon, otherwise it risks becoming a ‘political museum’ piece. We are ready to work with you to ensure it lights the way forward.