



14th Meeting of the COE-FRA-ENNHRI-EQUINET Collaborative Platform on Social and Economic Rights

Young people's access to social and economic rights: Addressing the impact of the cost-of-living crisis

1 July 2024 (9:00-17:30 local time)
Vilnius, Lithuania

Venue: Radisson Blu Hotel, Meeting Room Lambda

CONCEPT NOTE

Largely driven by the Covid-19 pandemic and the war in Ukraine, the cost-of-living crisis is a growing concern across Europe and has a significant impact on the enjoyment of fundamental rights by young people¹. Rising living costs, inflation, precarious jobs, and low wages, as well as limited access to affordable housing and energy poverty, have created significant barriers to economic security and social inclusion for young people. Furthermore, the lack of meaningful engagement deprives young people of the chance to voice their perspectives, concerns and aspirations and effectively contribute to policy and decision-making processes that directly have an impact on their lives. Therefore, the [COE-FRA-ENNHRI-EQUINET Collaborative Platform on Social and Economic Rights](#) has decided to discuss, at its next meeting, the multiple **impacts of the cost-of-living crisis on young people** and how National Human Rights Institutions (NHRIs) and Equality Bodies can support young people in accessing their **social and economic rights**. Particular attention will be paid to the protection of young people against poverty and social exclusion, housing, access to employment, and youth participation in policy and decision-making related to social and economic rights.

The Platform meeting will be held a few days before the High-Level Conference on the European Social Charter, organised under the auspices of the Lithuanian Presidency of the Committee of Ministers of the Council of Europe on 4 July 2024 in Vilnius. The organisation of the High-Level Conference was decided at the [4th Summit of Heads of State and Government](#) of the Council of Europe, held in Reykjavik in May 2023, where the Heads of State and Government confirms the commitment of Council of Europe member states to the protection and implementation of social rights as guaranteed by the European Social Charter system².

The main objectives of the meeting are:

- To consider the potential of the **European Social Charter** and other European human rights instruments and standards to protect young people's social and economic rights;
- To discuss strategies to protect young people from **poverty and social exclusion** in the context of rising living costs, including their access to affordable housing solutions.

¹ Please note that the United Nations refers to young people as persons aged 15 to 24, the European Union refers to persons aged 15 to 25 and the European Social Charter refers to young people under 18 and young adults over 18.

² The [Reykjavik Declaration](#) by the Heads of State and Government states that "Social justice is crucial for democratic stability and security and in this regard [reaffirmed their] full commitment to the protection and implementation of social rights as guaranteed by the European Social Charter system."

- To analyse the specific challenges young people face in accessing **employment** in the context of the cost-of-living crisis.
- To explore mechanisms to enhance the **meaningful participation of young people in policy and decision-making** processes in relation to social and economic rights.
- To examine the **longer-term impact and lifelong consequences** of these early shortfalls on young people's enjoyment of their social and economic rights.
- To discuss the **role of human rights defenders** in preventing, mitigating and monitoring the impact of the cost-of-living crisis on young people and their ability to propose possible solutions to mitigate its negative impact on young people's social and economic rights.

Based on the most recent Eurostat data, in 2022 the EU has recorded the highest level of **inflation** since the introduction of the Euro (9.2%). This resulted in a sharp increase in consumer prices for private households. At the end of 2022 the rising cost of living was the most pressing worry for 93% of Europeans, followed by the threat of **poverty and social exclusion** (82%). Although inflation in the EU decreased in 2023 to 3.1%, the impacts of the crisis persist and have significant implications for the socio-economic rights of young people. Together with other groups in vulnerable socio-economic situations, they are at higher risk of experiencing poverty and social exclusion. The figures speak for themselves.³

Rising **housing prices** are a major obstacle for young people seeking to live independently. Affording rent or home ownership becomes increasingly difficult. A report by the EU Agency Eurofound shows that the cost-of-living crisis with increased bills and rental prices specifically resulted in young people not leaving their parental home, in addition to its consequences for the general population, namely homelessness, housing insecurity and inadequacy and financial strain.⁴

Economic pressures and social inequalities resulting from the cost-of-living crisis can contribute to feelings of **social exclusion and isolation**. Those who cannot afford to participate in social activities or participate in community events may experience loneliness and disconnection from their peers and wider society.

Financial constraints can also affect young people's **access to health** services. Rising healthcare costs, coupled with limited insurance coverage, may prevent young adults from seeking necessary medical treatment or preventive care, jeopardising their health and well-being. Demand for youth mental health services has surged dramatically amid the covid-19 pandemic and ongoing cost-of-living crisis. The lack of timely and appropriate mental health support can have a detrimental effect on young people's ability to engage with education and employment opportunities.

In this situation, stable and decent **employment opportunities** and tailored social security schemes are essential for many young people. Unfortunately, many face precarious work arrangements, low wages, and difficulties entering the labour market, exacerbating youth unemployment and underemployment rates. Many young persons are deprived of a living wage through unpaid internships or false low-paid traineeships disguising real employment. High living costs may also deter young people from pursuing higher education or vocational training. Affording tuition fees, textbooks, and living expenses can be prohibitive, leading to reduced access to education and training programs essential for personal and professional development.

Economic challenges and disillusionment with the political system may lead young people to disengage from civic and political participation. Feeling marginalised and unheard, they may withdraw from **democratic processes**, reducing their interest of and influence on **decision-making and policy development**. Young people may be tempted by anti-system political offerings, including populism and its false promises.

³ "In 2022 an estimated 24.5 % of European Union (EU) youth (aged 15-29 years) - or some 17.4 million people - were at risk of poverty or social exclusion. This rate for young people varied between 37.9 % in Romania and 10.5 % in Czechia", according to Eurostat, [Young people - social inclusion](#), February 2024

⁴ Dubois, H., Nivakoski, S., [Unaffordable and inadequate housing in Europe](#), Eurofound, Publications Office of the European Union, 2023

According to a report by the Bennett Institute for Public Policy at the University of Cambridge⁵, across the globe, younger generations have become steadily more dissatisfied with democracy – not only in absolute terms, but also relative to older cohorts at comparable stages of life. However, the “populist wave” of 2015 to date signals a possible trend reversal, according to the report. Nonetheless, it is essential to support young people’s participation in democratic processes – whether at national, regional or local level – and to increase their involvement in the development of inclusive and peaceful societies.

In this context, **effective and independent NHRIs and Equality Bodies** have a critical role to play in the prevention, mitigation, and oversight of the immediate and longer-term impact of the cost-of-living crisis on the socio-economic rights of young people.⁶

PARTICIPANTS

The event will bring together representatives of the Council of Europe, including the European Committee of Social Rights, the European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights, National Human Rights Institutions and Equality Bodies and civil society organisations working with youth and active in the promotion and protection of social rights.

FORMAT / WORKING LANGUAGE

The programme will feature plenary sessions, working groups organised according to the key themes of the event and Q&A sessions. The working language will be English only.

Relevant resources can be found in a separate document.

⁵ Foa, R.S., Klassen, A., Wenger, D., Rand, A. and M. Slade. 2020. “[Youth and Satisfaction with Democracy: Reversing the Democratic Disconnect?](#)” Cambridge, United Kingdom: Centre for the Future of Democracy, October 2020

⁶ In 2024, the European Committee of Social Rights will be examining States Parties to the European Social Charter reports on the cost of living crisis and will publish its ad-hoc report at the beginning of 2025.