

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

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

**1 July 2024**

Radisson Blu Hotel  
Konstitucijos Av. 20,  
Vilnius, Lithuania

***MEETING REPORT***

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## Introduction

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 people. Against this background, the [COE-FRA-ENNHRI-EQUINET Collaborative Platform on Social and Economic Rights](#) discussed at its 14<sup>th</sup> 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 was paid to the protection of young people against poverty and social exclusion, access to housing and employment and youth participation in policy and decision-making related to social and economic rights.

The main objectives of the meeting were:

- 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.
- 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.

The event brought 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.

## Opening

**Jan Malinowski**, Head of Department of Social Rights, Council of Europe, welcomed the participants to an important and timely meeting, noting its significance both in terms of its topic and its proximity to 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 (4 July 2024, Vilnius, Lithuania).

It was noted by the moderator that the members of the COE-FRA-ENNHRI-EQUINET Collaborative Platform on Social and Economic Rights decided to contribute to this conference with a [joint statement by the participating organisations, addressed to the High-Level Conference on the European Social Charter](#).

In its statement, the Platform calls for a renewed commitment by governments to uphold and implement social rights as guaranteed by the European Social Charter system. This appeal aligns with the [Reykjavik Declaration](#) adopted by the Heads of State and Government of the Council of Europe in May 2023. Despite the Charter's framework, significant obstacles remain in realising social rights for all. Economic inequalities, demographic shifts, housing shortages and social disparities have intensified since the 2008 financial crisis, further exacerbated by the cost-of-living crisis following the COVID-19 pandemic and the ongoing Russian aggression against Ukraine. These issues have undermined the well-being and dignity of many Europeans, with poverty and social exclusion preventing full societal participation.

The statement emphasises that poverty, characterised by material deprivation and unmet basic needs, infringes upon human dignity. Addressing these challenges is also critical for combating climate change impacts and ensuring equitable green and digital transitions. Breaking the intergenerational cycle of poverty and ensuring equal opportunities for future generations are key objectives. Experiences of poverty during childhood and adolescence can have lasting negative effects on the enjoyment of social rights throughout life, exacerbated by intersectional risks, gender and age-specific issues and discrimination against marginalised groups such as the Roma, Travellers, ethnic minorities, migrants and individuals with disabilities.

The right to adequate and affordable housing is also highlighted in the statement as fundamental for protecting human dignity, preventing homelessness, promoting health and facilitating education and employment opportunities. Developing and implementing comprehensive social policies that address poverty's root causes and ensure equal access to social and housing assistance is crucial for reducing poverty, fostering social inclusion and supporting democratic values, according to the Platform members.

The European Social Charter, with its monitoring and collective complaints mechanisms, is essential for safeguarding social and economic rights across Europe. The statement advocates for State Parties to the [1995 Additional Protocol to the European Social Charter Providing for a System of Collective Complaints](#) to reconsider the declaration of Article 2, which would allow national non-governmental organisations to submit complaints. This change would enhance the Charter's democratic dimension, improve the legitimacy of state actions and increase civil society engagement.

Finally, the statement urges governments to reaffirm their commitment to the European Social Charter system by ratifying the [Revised European Social Charter](#) and accepting additional provisions, particularly those that reinforce the right to housing and protection against poverty and social exclusion. They should translate their commitments into concrete actions, aligning national policies with the Charter's requirements and the findings of the European Committee of Social Rights. Accepting the collective complaints procedure as a good governance tool and extending the right to submit complaints to national NGOs will further support the protection of economic and social rights, according to the Platform organisations. Enhanced dialogue and cooperation between the Charter organs, States Parties, National Human Rights Institutions, Equality Bodies and civil society organisations are also recommended to advance these goals.

The statement was officially endorsed by the participating organisations at the meeting.

### Welcoming remarks

**Erika Leonaite**, [Parliamentary Ombudsperson, Head of Ombudspersons' Office of Lithuania](#), was absent and her speech was read by a member of her team, **Fausta Victoria**. The speaker welcomed the representatives of the Council of Europe, the European Youth Forum, European networks of national human rights institutions, equality bodies, academics and civil society organisations to Vilnius to discuss the challenges of youth poverty and the exclusion of young persons from decision-making processes, aiming to find effective solutions. The speaker emphasised that the ongoing cost-of-living crisis is particularly impacting young people, who face economic insecurity due to limited access to quality education, stable employment and housing. Eurostat data reveals that nearly 20% of young people in the EU are at risk of poverty and social exclusion, with Lithuania being slightly better at 16%, though Lithuanian pensioners face a 40% risk of poverty.

The speaker highlighted three interconnected aspects illustrating the need to bolster young people's social and economic rights. Firstly, at an individual level, social stability is crucial for young people to realise their potential and develop in a dignified environment free from exploitation, particularly for those from vulnerable groups. Secondly, at the social and economical level, equal access to social rights fosters social cohesion and reduces stereotypes and tensions, enabling empowered young people to contribute positively to society and economy. The voices of young people in defence of European democratic values are vital in the context of democratic backsliding, large-scale conflicts and growing xenophobia and discrimination. Addressing youth poverty is key to sustaining democracy.

The speaker concluded by stressing the urgency and significance of the meeting's discussions, aimed at identifying ways to build resilience, empowerment and equitable opportunities for young people and society at large.

**Jolita Miliuviene**, [Equal Opportunities Ombudsperson a.i. of Lithuania](#), warmly welcomed attendees to Vilnius and stressed the growing importance of the meeting's topic. The speaker emphasised that social and economic rights are fundamental to human dignity and freedom, and essential for true equality and justice. These rights are especially critical during the cost-of-living crisis, which disproportionately affects young people as they transition from adolescence to adulthood. Young people face significant challenges in employment, housing, education, healthcare and social exclusion, which impact their current well-being and future outlook.

The speaker highlighted how digital deprivation adds another layer of difficulty, preventing young people from accessing employment and financial services. Gender disparities further complicate the situation, with young women facing greater disadvantages due to stereotypes, low-wage jobs, job insecurity and a higher burden of unpaid care work. This intersection of gender inequality and the cost-of-living crisis necessitates a comprehensive approach to address both economic and social barriers, in the view of the speaker. Age discrimination also poses a significant challenge, with young people often perceived as inexperienced or unreliable, limiting their access to meaningful employment and professional development.

Despite these challenges, the speaker expressed hope and called for collective action to promote equal treatment, combat discrimination, monitor and address human rights violations and provide support to those affected. By prioritising the social and economic rights of young people, society can support their individual development and contribute to overall stability and progress. The speaker quoted Grammy Award winner Nicole Zuraitis, who emphasised the need for more young people in all areas, not just jazz music, highlighting the value of their unique perspectives and experiences in policy-making and solution-finding. The speaker concluded by urging participants to be bold, innovative and committed to justice and equality.

### **Keynote speech - A Crisis for the Social Rights of Young People? Exploring the Cost-of-Living Crisis**

**Aoife Nolan**, President of the [European Committee of Social Rights](#), Professor of International Human Rights Law and Director of the Human Rights Law Centre, School of Law, University of Nottingham, highlighted, in her keynote speech, the vital work of the Platform in information-sharing and capacity building on issues related to the European Social Charter. The speaker emphasised the importance of addressing the impact of the cost-of-living crisis on the social rights of young people, particularly in light of the 2022 Russian invasion of Ukraine, which exacerbated global inflation, disrupted supply chains and caused price spikes in essential commodities, leading to a severe cost-of-living crisis.

The speaker outlined the protection of young people's social rights under the European Social Charter, explained the effects of the cost-of-living crisis on these rights and described the approach of the European Committee of Social Rights to tackling this crisis. Defining "young people" in the Charter as those up to 25 years old, the speaker underscored the wide range of rights afforded to them, including specific provisions (Articles 7 and 17) and general provisions such as the right to work (Article 1), the right to protection of health (Article 11), the right to social security (Article 12), the right to social and medical assistance (Article 13), the

right to protection against poverty and social exclusion (Article 30) and the right to housing (Article 31), as well as protection against age discrimination (Article E).

In the view of the speaker, the cost-of-living crisis has significantly impacted these rights. The speaker cited Eurostat data showing an increase in the number of young people living in poverty or social exclusion and facing financial difficulties. Disparities in social protection policies across Europe further exacerbate this issue and raise concerns about young people's rights to social, legal and economic protection.

Housing is another critical area affected by the crisis. The speaker pointed to a significant increase in the number of young people facing housing cost overburden and living in overcrowded conditions. The European Social Charter requests states to ensure affordable and adequate housing, but the crisis has worsened existing housing challenges and has contributed to a long-standing housing crisis in Europe.

As emphasised by the speaker, the European Committee of Social Rights is currently addressing these issues through an [ad hoc report on the cost of living crisis](#), introduced as part of the [reform of the Charter reporting system](#). This report aims to provide a comprehensive overview of national situations, refine the legal analysis and offer much needed guidance on the application of the Charter to the cost-of-living crisis.

The speaker concluded by placing the cost-of-living crisis in a broader context of overlapping crises, including the COVID-19 pandemic, the financial crises of the late 2000s, the climate crisis and the Ukraine conflict. These crises have collectively impacted young people's social rights. In conclusion, the speaker called for a systemic approach that includes young people in decision-making processes to effectively address these challenges and secure their social rights now and in the future.

**Jan Malinowski**, Head of Department of Social Rights, Council of Europe, closed the opening session of the meeting by aligning himself with Aoife Nolan in underlining that the current situation is not the result of something that started a couple of years ago; it is the result of decades of neglect on the part of the decision-making authorities that have allowed the situation to drift into the current situation that has been exacerbated by the war.

In conclusion, the moderator emphasised that the discussion was about rights, not merely policies or resources. According to the moderator, it is not the resources that determine the policies, which then determine the rights. Instead, rights must be enshrined in policies, and those policies must be adequately resourced. This is a fundamental duty of the state. The moderator clarified that the issue is not about the availability of resources but about the allocation and prioritisation of those resources. The responsibility of the state is to ensure that rights are prioritised in the allocation of resources, thereby embedding them into effective and well-supported policies.

## **Session 1: Protecting young people from poverty and social exclusion**

**Claudia Pinto**, Policy Officer, Social and Economic Inclusion, [European Youth Forum](#), welcomed the participants to Session 1 of the meeting by highlighting the significance of the existing statistics depicting the current situation of young persons. According to the moderator, young persons are always the first ones losing their jobs in crises and the first to face the impact of social security gaps. This also leads to mental health problems for young persons, which is an important issue that need to be addressed.

### **The impact of the cost-of-living crisis on the social rights of young people under the Charter of Fundamental Rights of the European Union**

**Christina Dimakou**, Seconded National Expert, Equality, Roma and Social Rights Unit, [European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights](#), addressed the pervasive impact of the cost-of-living crisis across EU Member States in her speech. Despite various legislative and policy measures implemented by the EU and its Member States to combat rising prices, FRA research highlights significant gaps in implementation, with many measures being temporary, untargeted and failing to reach vulnerable households.

As the speaker pointed out, the [EU Charter of Fundamental Rights](#) guarantees many rights that are relevant to young persons, including human dignity, non-discrimination, respect for private and family life, housing assistance, social security, access to services, and the rights of children and persons with disabilities. The importance of protecting the social rights of young persons is equivalently reflected in the provisions of both the EU Charter and the European Social Charter, according to the speaker.

FRA's [Fundamental Rights Report 2024](#) (Chapter 1 p. 24-50) underscores the severity of poverty in the EU, with 95.3 million people at risk of poverty or social exclusion in 2022. Of these, 20 million were children at risk of poverty in 2022. The inflation rate reached a historic high of 9.2% in 2022. About 20.2% of those at risk of poverty experienced energy poverty, with housing costs consuming 37.9% of the disposable income of households below the poverty line. In addition, at least 895,000 people were homeless in the EU in 2023. Poverty and social exclusion affecting children and younger generations is a resurfacing matter according to several FRA data and surveys. According to the speaker, the data highlights the intergenerational cycle of poverty, emphasising that children who grow up poor are likely to remain poor into adulthood. Breaking this cycle is crucial for the well-being of future generations in the EU, per the speaker.

Furthermore, severe material and social deprivation affected 6.7% of the EU population in 2023, translating to around 29 million people. The rate is higher for children (8.4%) and young people aged 16-29 (5.9%). Approximately 41% of those aged 15-24 found it difficult to make ends meet. The consequences for children and young persons include mismatched aspirations, health and mental health problems, risk of depression, early school leaving, increased unemployment, reduced social mobility and threats to democracy.

Moreover, energy poverty, defined as the lack of access to essential energy services, disproportionately affects minority groups, with inadequate



disaggregation of data by age and vulnerability. States' measures to combat energy poverty include taxation, price caps, redistribution and direct subsidies, yet there is a lack of targeted measures for youth and clear objectives for consumer empowerment.

In terms of housing, according to the data presented by the speaker, 75% of young persons aged 15-29 live with their parents, with only 16% planning to buy a house within the next year, indicative of a "generation rent". States' measures to protect housing rights have included energy-saving interventions, housing benefits, rent subsidies, rent regulation and protection of tenants from eviction. However, these measures were often temporary and limited to 2022 and 2023.

With regard to social assistance, the speaker reminded that social policy remains a shared competence of the EU and its Member States. Measures taken to ensure access to essential services and social protection have included the indexation of wages and social benefit, tax reductions, direct subsidies and benefits in kind. However, significant policy and financial gaps persist in addressing the cost-of-living crisis for children, with no specific measures identified for young persons and few assessments available of the impact on low-income households and vulnerable groups.

In conclusion, the speaker noted that FRA stresses that policy and legal responses to the cost-of-living crisis should consider the unequal impact on different demographic groups. Protecting younger generations from poverty is essential, as set out in Articles 3 and 3(1) of the Treaty on European Union, Articles 8-10 of the Treaty on the Functioning of the EU, the [European Pillar of Social Rights](#), the [European Child Guarantee](#), and the [EU Youth Strategy 2019-2027](#), supported by relevant EU policies and strategies, as well as the European Social Charter and international instruments such as the [ICESCR](#), the [CRC](#), the [CRPD](#) and the [SDGs](#).

### **European Youth and the right to affordable housing**

**Sergio Perez Barranco**, Policy Lead on Youth Homelessness and LGBTIQ Homelessness, [FEANTSA](#), started his speech by reminding the audience of the role and function of the Federation of National Organisations Working with the Homeless (FEANTSA). Established in 1989, it includes over 130 member organisations across 30 countries, with a strong presence in 22 EU states. This unique organisation, which focuses exclusively on combating homelessness at the EU level, brings together both NGOs and non-NGOs, such as cities and foundations. FEANTSA aims to influence national and European policy agendas to tackle youth poverty, exclusion and homelessness.

To enhance the understanding and measurement of homelessness across Europe, FEANTSA developed the [ETHOS - European Typology on Homelessness and Housing Exclusion](#). This framework categorises homelessness into four types:

- a) rooflessness (without shelter and often alternating between rough sleeping and emergency accommodation),
- b) houselessness (temporary shelter without stable housing),
- c) insecure housing (living under the threat of eviction or domestic violence, often without a legal tenancy) and
- d) inadequate housing (living in makeshift shelters or extremely overcrowded conditions).



These categories highlight the concept of hidden homelessness, where youth often sofa-surf or live temporarily with friends or family, making their homelessness less visible.

Youth homelessness is defined by FEANTSA as affecting individuals aged 13 to 26 who are experiencing rooflessness, houselessness or insecure and inadequate housing without parental or guardian support. This situation has worsened due to socio-economic changes that have increased the risks of homelessness for young people, particularly those from marginalised backgrounds with low social or economic capital. These challenges include transitioning out of state protection systems without adequate support, leaving juvenile justice or adult prison systems without housing solutions and restrictive migration policies affecting unaccompanied minors. Additionally, individual and relational factors such as domestic violence, family breakdown, bereavement and conflicts related to non-normative sexual orientation or gender identity contribute to youth homelessness, according to the speaker.

As highlighted by the speaker, youth homelessness is very different from adult homelessness. Young people are transitioning from childhood to adulthood, often leaving homes defined by dependent relationships with caregivers. Therefore, their homelessness involves not only the loss of stable housing but also the disruption of social in social relationships. Effective youth homelessness strategies must, according to the speaker, address these unique needs and support a healthy transition to adulthood, encompassing social, cognitive, physical, psychological and emotional development.

Statistics reveal worrying trends, as the speaker highlighted. In Finland, 15% of lone homeless individuals were under 25 in 2023; in the Netherlands, 32% of homeless individuals in 2018 were aged 18-29; in Denmark, 30% of homeless individuals in 2019 were aged 18-29; and in Barcelona, 20% of homeless individuals were under 18, with a further 18% aged 18-30.

In spite of this, various initiatives offer solutions, according to the speaker. For example, the Nadeje project in Czechia provides basic services like food and shelter, along with youth-specific activities to enhance social skills and community integration. The NEA Project by the Helsinki Deaconess Foundation focuses on young women experiencing homelessness, leveraging cooperation between social workers and individuals with lived experiences. In Lyon, France, initiatives like Logis Jeunes support access to housing for vulnerable young people, and the Youth Solidarity Income provides financial support to those with low incomes.

Moreover, the Housing First for Youth model emphasises the importance of stable housing as a foundation for addressing other issues. This approach aims to prevent the harmful consequences of temporary housing solutions, such as mental health deterioration and chronic homelessness.

Finally, the speaker paid attention to the crucial role of National Human Rights Institutions and Equality Bodies in conducting studies on youth housing situations, advocating for inclusive youth policies and analysing homelessness from an intersectional perspective. They were encouraged to propose measures to better capture housing exclusion in statistics and policies, “reverse ageism” and address the specific needs of young people in state care or reception centres.

In conclusion, according to the speaker, combating youth homelessness requires a comprehensive, youth-specific approach that addresses the multifaceted

challenges young people face and supports their transition to a stable and independent adulthood.

### **Young people leaving residential care: challenges to effective social assistance**

**Veerle Stroobants**, Collaborator, [Combat Poverty Service, Belgium](#), began her speech by introducing the role of the Combat Poverty Service in Belgium, which views poverty as a violation of human rights and evaluates the effectiveness of human rights in addressing poverty. Engaging in a structural dialogue with individuals living in poverty and various actors combating poverty, the Service produces biennial reports containing findings, analyses and recommendations.

According to the speaker, while poverty in Belgium is slightly decreasing, according to [EU-SILC 2023](#) data, a significant portion of the population remains at risk of poverty or social exclusion. Positive government interventions include a strong social protection system, automatic indexation, temporary measures such as energy cost support and increased allowances. Despite these measures, many people are still struggling with the cost-of-living crisis, which exacerbates their daily financial challenges.

Furthermore, as noted by the speaker, the consumption price index (CPI) often underestimates the impact of inflation on people living in poverty, as their consumption patterns differ significantly from the average. For instance, low-income households spend a larger portion of their budget on housing and energy costs. Additionally, households living in poverty lack the means to cope with rising prices, as they do not have savings or access to cheaper alternatives and extra-legal benefits. Research on bank transaction data shows that while purchasing power increased by 1.4% on average from 2020 to 2024, the lowest income quintile saw a 2.7% decrease in purchasing power in Belgium.

Young people leaving residential care face significant challenges per the speaker. At the age of 18 they are expected to become independent, unlike their peers who often continue to receive support from their families. These young people experience successive ruptures and difficulties across various domains, lacking the societal support needed for a smooth transition to adulthood. Notably, the number of young people receiving subsistence allowances in Belgium has doubled since 2010, reflecting the growing need for support. Many young people experiencing homelessness had previously been in youth care services, underscoring the link between inadequate support systems and homelessness.

Moreover, the speaker noted that the challenges to effective social assistance include legal obstacles related to the age of majority, inconsistencies in how local Public Centres for Social Welfare provide financial aid and the arbitrariness of social support. Minimum income levels are below the poverty line, and young people often face stress related to the conditions and controls associated with their social integration projects. The speaker highlighted the need to better valorise these projects as tools for investing in youth.

Finally, the non-take-up of social integration rights is a significant issue pointed out by the speaker, often due to unclear information and complex procedures. Coordination between youth care services and adult support services is critical for continuous and integrated support, in the view of the speaker. Young people

frequently find themselves uninformed about the benefits they are entitled to and face a confusing array of responsibilities when they start living independently.

Overall, addressing youth poverty and homelessness in Belgium requires comprehensive and coordinated efforts, clear communication of rights and benefits, and a support system that recognises and adapts to the specific needs of young people transitioning to adulthood.

## Q & A

**Konstantinos Bartzeliotis**, Senior Investigator, [Greek Ombudsman](#), pointed out that factors like disability and migration significantly contribute to an individual's vulnerability. He highlighted the challenge of incorporating measures tailored to these specific vulnerability factors when addressing poverty and implementing interventions. The participant noted that different groups experience poverty to different degrees, and that some groups are over-represented in poverty statistics, a fact that has recently been observed.

In response, **Christina Dimakou** observed that horizontal measures aimed at the entire population tend to be populist and often fail to effectively reach the most vulnerable. She acknowledged that while there is no shortage of good intentions, there is a significant lack of tailored interventions for vulnerable groups. She also highlighted the need for both ex-ante (before implementation) and ex-post (after implementation) assessment to improve these interventions. According to the speaker, it is important to recognise the individuals behind the data, rather than just seeing them as numbers.

**Lê Phan-Warneke**, Researcher and Policy Advisor, [German Institute for Human Rights](#), raised a question about the rise of populism and right-wing parties, inquiring how the lack of political will is being addressed in such a challenging environment.

In response, **Veerle Stroobants** acknowledged the enormity of the challenge, admitting that there is no clear solution and that it is a widespread concern. She highlighted that the rise of populism and the associated political dynamics pose significant difficulties in garnering the necessary political will to effectively address these issues.

## **Session 2: Access to employment for young people: challenges and opportunities**

**Matthäus Fandrejewski**, Youth Representative, [Confederation of Independent Trade Unions \(CESI\)](#), introduced the speakers of Session 2 and asked how many of the meeting's participants have done one, two or more internships in their lives. After noting several affirmative responses by the participants, the moderator emphasised the importance of the discussed topic and the need for agile public services to create an efficient labour market.

### **The right to work and protection of young persons at the workplace: the findings of the European Committee of Social Rights**

**Mario Vinkovic**, Professor of Labour Law and Social Security, Holder of the Jean Monnet Chair in EU Labour, Equality and Human Rights Law (2013-2016), Faculty of Law, University of Osijek, Croatia, and Member of the European Committee of Social Rights, started his speech by pointing out that the European Social Charter, particularly its Articles 1, 4, 7, 9, 10, 11, 12, 13, 15, 17, 18, 19, 20, 30 and 31, is highly relevant to young people, addressing their rights across various domains. According to the speaker, over 50 years of monitoring practice have established the Charter as a true human rights instrument. The European Committee of Social Rights (ECSR) interprets it through decisions and conclusions based on values like human dignity, solidarity and non-discrimination. The Charter emphasises the protection of vulnerable groups, including older persons, children, young people, persons with disabilities and migrants. Compliance with the Charter is monitored by the ECSR through the reporting and collective complaints procedures.

In its evaluations, the Committee focuses on specific Charter articles related to young people: Article 1 (the right to work), Article 4 (the right to fair remuneration), Article 7 (rights of children and young persons to protection), Article 9 (the right to vocational guidance), Article 10 (the right to professional training), Article 13 (the right to social and medical assistance) and Article 17 (the right of children and young persons to social, legal and economic protection). As noted by the speaker, Articles 9, 10 and 17 explicitly grant young people rights concerning education and labour market integration. For example, Article 9 ensures free vocational guidance for young people, while Article 10 obligates states parties to provide apprenticeship systems. Article 17 guarantees the social, legal and economic protection of young people, ensuring they receive necessary care and protection from negligence, violence and exploitation. Young people also implicitly benefit from rights related to health (Article 11), social security (Article 12) and social welfare services (Article 14).

Notably, the Committee has addressed vulnerabilities affecting young people, such as age discrimination in remuneration (Article 4), gender discrimination (Article 20), the status of young people with disabilities (Article 15) and migrant issues (Articles 18 and 19). It has also addressed protection against poverty and social exclusion (Article 30) and access to housing (Article 31). The speaker stressed that the various crises that have hit the world in recent years have exacerbated challenges for young people, such as access to higher education due to reduced grants and increased fees, according to the speaker, but also access to employment and fair remuneration.

The Committee emphasises that new measures must consider all social rights-holders, prioritising the most vulnerable, including young people, to avoid discrimination in social rights. Under Article 10 of the Charter, states must ensure access to secondary and higher education and vocational training, emphasising relevance for job market integration. Challenges include insufficient grants and loans for higher education, leading to student debt problems. The Committee stresses that access to higher education should be based on individual merit and that financial barriers, such as high fees, should be avoided.

School dropout rates are another challenging issue, in the view of the speaker, with states obligated under Article 17 to ensure equal access to education, particularly for vulnerable groups. Measures to reduce dropouts include action plans, observatories and programs targeting underprivileged students. For students with disabilities, the Committee has highlighted the need for programs promoting social inclusion, addressing accessibility and improving conditions for personal assistants.

The minimum working age and restrictions on night work for young people are scrutinised under Article 7. States must set 18 as the minimum age for hazardous work and prohibit night work for those under 18, with limited exceptions. The right to fair remuneration (Article 4), as interpreted by the ECSR, allows for lower minimum wages for young people in apprenticeships in certain circumstances but stipulates that these wages must not fall below the poverty level.

Remarkably, national governments and NGOs play a crucial role in addressing these issues. Despite protections, many young people face exclusion from the labour market, leaving school without qualifications or experiencing unemployment and temporary placements. According to the speaker, states must seriously address these difficulties to prevent entire generations from facing poverty and other hardships. Emigration due to economic, social or political problems exacerbates these challenges, impacting national education systems and social security sustainability.

The speaker concluded by stressing that the impact of the European Social Charter and the [European Convention on Human Rights](#) on young people depends on domestic courts' willingness to apply the relevant case law. Young people need to be aware of their rights and the Committee's decisions in order for the Charter to be used effectively in national courts. The sustainability of social rights in the future hinges on addressing these complex and interconnected challenges today.

### **Promising and Transferrable Practices from the national level**

**Inga Balnanosiene**, Director of the Lithuanian [Public Employment Service](#) began by noting that the European Union's overall youth unemployment rate slightly decreased by 0.1 percentage points (p.p.) compared to 2022. However, more than half of the European countries experienced an increase in youth unemployment over the same period. In Lithuania, youth unemployment increased by 1.5 p.p., yet it remains 1.4 p.p. lower than the EU average. As of 1 January 2024, Bosnia and Herzegovina had the highest youth unemployment rate at 23.1%, while Germany had the lowest at 5%.

According to the speaker, Lithuania is a European leader in tertiary education attainment, and the country's early school leaving rate is below the EU average.

Despite these achievements, Lithuania struggles with a low number of graduates in STEM and related fields.

As highlighted by the speaker, the role of the Public Employment Service (PES) has evolved to include training programmes, internships and career guidance. In line with this, a new structural measure aims to integrate NEETs (young people not in education, employment or training) into the green economy. This measure, based on piloted projects, features an outreach strategy, career counselling, tailored activation, training and workplace experience in green jobs. The project, which involves organisations from six different countries, has produced significant results: 84 NEETs gained employment, 166 gained work experience in green companies, and 15 trainers were trained. The project also involved over 80 employers and produced surveys, data analysis and recommendations for future initiatives. The media has recognised the project, with coverage in newspapers and TV news.

The [atWork4NEETs](#) project aims to implement policy changes that will empower young people and help them overcome challenges to positively contribute to society. This project will create an active and promising future for Europe's youth, according to the speaker.

Additionally, the Employment Service facilitates student internships in the public sector, acting as an intermediary and coordinator. It provides students with personality and career interest assessments and career counselling services, aiming to attract young talent to the public service and encourage careers in the sector.

In order to promote youth return migration, the initiative "Maybe to Lithuania?" aims to inform Lithuanians living abroad about career opportunities in Lithuania, future in-demand professions and promising employers in various business sectors. The speaker noted that this initiative has revealed that the target group needs more emotional, psychological and informational support rather than financial incentives.

Finally, Regional Career Centres (RCCs) play a significant role in promoting career management, lifelong learning and labour market integration for jobseekers and employees across the country, according to the speaker. These centres target individuals from grade 8 to senior citizens and have an impact on regional employment and economic development indicators. RCCs offer career counselling, labour market information and promote lifelong learning. They also foster partnerships and cooperation with local employers, educational institutions, social partners, and organisations. The impact of RCCs includes increasing employment, meeting labour market needs, reducing social exclusion and promoting economic development, as highlighted by the speaker.



## Promoting the socio-professional inclusion of young people through work integration social enterprises

**Baptiste Vasseur**, Policy Officer, [European Network of Social Integration Enterprises \(ENSIE\)](#), presented the work of the Network, which was established in 2001. It currently includes 31 national, regional and local networks across 27 European countries. It holds the vice-presidency of Social Economy Europe and is an active member of several significant European Commission groups and initiatives.

ENSIE's primary mission includes transferring relevant information from the EU level to its national, regional and local members, exchanging good practices, developing European projects, representing the interests of Work Integration Social Enterprises (WISEs) at the EU level and raising awareness about WISEs and their social and economic impact. WISEs are enterprises that focus on the socio-professional integration of vulnerable groups, are deeply embedded in the economic system and possess a strong pedagogical dimension. They emphasise the socio-professional integration of young people and the promotion of social entrepreneurship among youth.

As noted by the speaker, WISEs align with several articles of the Revised European Social Charter, particularly Article 1, which asserts the right to work for all. They also align with Articles 9, 10, 14, 15, 17, 19, 22, 20 and 30, and contribute to their implementation through their daily activities. A work contract facilitated by WISEs is a crucial step for individuals to access social protection and security, enabling them to become active citizens. WISEs also often promote participatory governance practices within their organisations, enhancing worker's sense of justice, citizenship and empowerment. They work with various target groups, including migrants and people with disabilities.

According to the speaker, notable examples of WISEs' good practices include CRE8 from the Netherlands and Eina Activa from Spain. CRE8, in collaboration with the Streetcornerwork Foundation, offers a work-study programme for young people in Amsterdam, providing them with structure, guidance and training in digital production techniques such as 3D printing and laser cutting. Eina Activa in Catalonia focuses on creating, developing and boosting inclusion projects for young people and those at risk of exclusion. Their methodology involves training, support and mentoring, with a "Personal Inclusion Plan" for each individual, covering different areas of work such as eco-delivery, repairing recycled pallets, handling veterinary products and services such as reception and cleaning.

Despite these efforts, challenges persist, according to the speaker. There is a lack of successful support policies targeting the professional integration of young people in countries like Serbia, Croatia and Latvia. In France, Hungary and Italy, there are public policies aimed at integrating young people, but these groups often remain invisible to state mechanisms. In Azerbaijan, low education levels and high experience requirements create barriers for young graduates. Sweden faces challenges related to workplace norms and expectations, while in Romania, young people lack basic practical skills and face stigmatization for blue-collar jobs. In Croatia, young people often return home after school without support or inclusion mechanisms. The Dutch labour market remains conservative, favouring experienced workers over the young and inexperienced. Finally, Hungary's financial crisis has exacerbated these issues, forcing young people into precarious jobs or repeated training programmes.

To address these challenges, the speaker made a number of recommendations, including integrating entrepreneurship education into school curricula from an early age, fostering partnerships between youth social enterprises and larger entities and ensuring the implementation of the European Social Charter, SEAP and Council recommendations on social economy framework conditions. The speaker also recommended better implementation of Directive 2014/24/EU on public procurement, facilitating access to funding for social enterprises/SMEs, conducting transparent consultations with civil society organisations when defining national policies and developing “one-stop-shop” services in communities through public-private partnerships to enhance the relevance of services and reduce delays in providing support to young people in need.

## Q & A

**Claudia Pinto**, Policy Officer, [European Youth Forum](#), raised a question about the recognition of lower minimum wages for young people by the European Committee of Social Rights’ (ECSR), which she argued could be discriminatory. **Mario Vinkovic** responded by acknowledging that the current approach of the ECSR is influenced by cases related to apprenticeship, where there are differences in minimum wage standards between Member States. He concurred with Pinto’s concerns but expressed the hope that the ECSR would adapt its stance in the light of significant labour market and social protection challenges. In addition, he indicated that while case law of the ECSR addresses some of these issues, there is no specific definition of intersectional discrimination due to challenges of interpretation.

**Lê Phan-Warnke**, German Institute for Human Rights, inquired whether data had been collected on early school dropouts, unemployed individuals or non-ethnic Lithuanians, and whether there were noticeable gaps in this data. **Inga Balnanosiene** added that the discussion on social exclusion often referred to rural families rather than non-ethnic Lithuanians and emphasised the importance of case management by municipalities to provide comprehensive support to both young people and their families.

**Konstantinos Bartzeliotis**, Greek Ombudsman, questioned the financial status of social enterprises, asking whether they are financially self-sufficient, enjoy tax privileges and participate in the market. **Baptiste Vasseur** clarified that social enterprises typically operate with a hybrid economic model, where a combination of income from economic activities and external funding supports their operations. The ability of funded social enterprises to offer extensive support services to vulnerable individuals and contribute to their integration into the social economy was highlighted, as was the promotion of young people’s autonomy.

**Olena Kolobrodova**, Representative for Social and Economic Rights of the [Ukrainian Parliament Commissioner for Human Rights](#), raised concerns about the challenges posed by the ongoing war in Ukraine, including the migration of the working-age population and difficulties with vocational training. **Inga Balnanosiene** responded that in Lithuania, Ukrainian migrants are welcomed and effectively employed, while in Croatia there is a lack of kindergartens, particularly in rural areas. **Tanya Montanari**, Department of Social Rights, Council of Europe, shared an example from France, where family kindergarten initiatives provide flexible childcare solutions to support parents, highlighting an approach to addressing similar challenges.

### **Session 3: Fostering youth participation in policy making related to social rights**

**Anja Jokić**, Bureau Member, [Advisory Council on Youth \(CCJ\)](#), [Council of Europe](#) initiated the discussion by emphasising the need to improve the involvement of young people in shaping and implementing policies that affect them. The moderator emphasised that it is not enough to design and implement youth policies, but that they must be actively co-implemented, co-monitored and co-evaluated by young people themselves. This participatory approach ensures that policies are better aligned with the real needs and experiences of youth.

A critical point raised by the moderator was the definition of the age category for “young people”. The challenge is to determine which age range should be considered to effectively address and include the concerns of all relevant youth. Most countries define young people as those aged between 15 and 24 or 30. However, according to the moderator, people who do not fall into these age groups are excluded from discussions and policies that directly impact their lives. It was emphasised that to address these issues, a more inclusive and adaptable approach to defining and engaging with youth is essential.

#### **Young people's participation in policy and decision-making processes, in particular relating to social rights issues**

**Maurizio Cuttin**, Bureau Member, [Advisory Council on Youth \(CCJ\)](#), [Council of Europe](#), argued that the co-management structure within the Council of Europe Youth Department is designed to integrate young people into the organisation's work, ensuring their voices are equally valued alongside government structures in decision-making processes. This approach involves co-deciding and co-drafting policies and recommendations. There has been significant progress, according to the speaker, in advocating for youth rights, including recent seminars focused on youth engagement. However, due to ongoing crises, young people are under increasing pressure, leading them to question the tangible effects and legal significance of co-management recommendations, which are classified as soft law resulting from standard-setting.

The Council of Europe uniquely employs a multi-level co-management system, which recognises the inclusive [ladder of young persons' participation](#). This ladder ranges from non-participatory levels like manipulation, decoration and tokenism, to varying degrees of genuine participation, including stages where young people are assigned roles but are informed, consulted and involved in informal decision-making. The highest levels of participation involve youth initiating and directing projects, either independently or in partnership with adults.

In this co-management framework, both youth stakeholders and government representatives are equal partners and make decisions together. National Human Rights Institutions (NHRIs) and Equality Bodies are encouraged to ensure that young people not only participate in discussions but also actively function in decision-making sessions. Meaningful participation is essential, per the speaker, and it should be a permanent fixture rather than sporadic or ad hoc. However, there is a noted lack of effective implementation regarding access to rights.

In 2015, the [Committee of Ministers recommended improving access to social rights for young people from disadvantaged neighbourhoods](#), addressing long-standing issues identified by the Advisory Council on Youth. The speaker argued that the challenge now is to implement these recommendations and hold governments accountable. To advance co-management projects, young people should be involved in creating and evaluating projects continuously, rather than offering occasional advice. It was also noted by the speaker that a climate recommendation is currently pending.

In conclusion, despite the slow pace of co-management, it has the potential to achieve significant outcomes, per the speaker. For instance, the [Youth progress index](#) is a tool designed to measure young people's access to social rights, and engagement with this evaluation mechanism is recommended to initiate meaningful processes and improvements in youth participation and rights.

### **How to successfully plan and implement a project on youth participation – an example from France**

**Louise Savri**, [French National Consultative Commission on Human Rights](#), stressed that half of the world's population is under the age of 30, and it is difficult to justify excluding such a significant part of humanity from policy-making processes. According to the speaker, despite the differences in definitions on a global scale, there is a pressing need to shift our perspective and value experience regardless of its origin or the time elapsed. International treaties like the Convention on the Rights of the Child highlight the importance of children's participation in decision-making, thus granting them a form of status. Similarly, the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women emphasise the participation of youth and young girls. There are also stipulations concerning child labour.

In the view of the speaker, National Human Rights Institutions (NHRIs) should set an example by incorporating youth participation into their activities. In France, the older non-governmental organisations (NGOs) have adopted a universal approach to combating racism, while younger NGOs prefer intimate and secure meetings, illustrating the varied approaches within the country. Activities with students in France underscore the necessity of not only to listen to young people but also to involve them in daily practice.

Furthermore, the Youth Initiative of 2024 aims to develop human rights education and solicit ideas from young people from diverse backgrounds, including those who are disabled, part of the LGBTIQ community, affected by climate change or otherwise disadvantaged. Integrating these perspectives is essential for a genuine discussion on human rights.

The implementation of such initiatives, however, faces challenges, as argued by the speaker. Within the French NHRI, there was initial scepticism about involving young people. As a solution, a one-year experimental process was launched, which led to the formation of a youth working group tasked with generating ideas and projects. The main issue is to ensure meaningful participation, which requires support for young people to understand the role of NHRIs, according to the speaker. To strike a balance, youth were allowed to work on a project focusing on disability and human rights, with their ideas to be shared with an NHRI member. This initiative offers them a space to develop a project, which will be evaluated to

determine if young people can become members of the Commission or be part of a group.

The speaker concluded that a major challenge is effective communication, ensuring that youth are engaged in the Commission's work and that their contributions are valued. The aim is not for them to speak on behalf of the Commission, but rather to incorporate their dynamic input, as evidenced by their numerous meetings.

**Youth and policymakers' engagement in policy development, policy evaluation and policy revisions based on the principles of co-management and co-production**

**Ognjen Markovic**, Team Leader, [Western Balkans Youth Policy Lab](#), mentioned that the project he leads demonstrates that young people are pivotal to European integration and act as catalysts for change. In the Western Balkans, young people comprise 22% of the population, with a notable 71% supporting the EU accession process and 92% eager to be involved. Despite this enthusiasm, actual participation remains limited, according to the speaker, posing a significant challenge for their present and future engagement.

In 2019, the Youth Policy Lab was established, inspired by the Council of Europe and the European Youth Forum, with the ambitious goal of fostering equal partnership discussions to create, implement and evaluate policies collaboratively. However, policy makers often fail to grasp the importance of youth participation, and young people themselves sometimes lack accountability, leading to disengagement from these processes.

Since 2020, the Youth Policy Lab has held multiple sessions, with the second and third labs marking significant progress. For the first time, the Western Balkans made regional progress by bringing together young people and government representatives, highlighting common issues across different regions. The Lab supports regional recommendations and activities, funding working groups that present their findings at a final conference after 1.5 years.

Improved networking has revealed the benefits of working with young people, empowering them and fostering better collaboration. Draft national strategies and laws have been developed, although they often struggle to gain proper attention and implementation, according to the speaker. The Western Balkans face significant challenges, such as brain drain and high unemployment rates.

To address these issues, the Lab tested the Youth Lab Methodology by bringing together young people and ministries responsible for youth, focusing on unemployment. This led to initiatives like the Youth Guarantee in North Macedonia, which brought best practices and lessons learned closer to implementation. In Albania, a National Roadmap from Education to Employment was developed collaboratively with young people, yielding tangible results.

A notable success was the unemployment insurance reform in North Macedonia, where a law was adopted 2.5 years after the Lab's involvement, showcasing the impact of youth advocacy. In Bosnia and Herzegovina and Kosovo, the Youth Guarantee emphasised the need for social protection for youth, recognising how unemployment and lack of housing negatively affect mental health. The COVID-19 pandemic exacerbated these issues, highlighting that the labour market is not



youth-friendly, with young people in the Western Balkans taking an average of 2.5 years to enter the labour market.

Finally, the speaker mentioned again the example of North Macedonia, where a National Strategy on Mental Health was recently adopted through co-management with young people, after the Ministry of Health withdrew, and was taken up by the Ministry of Social Protection and parliamentarians. Albania also developed a National Mental Health Strategy and other youth-centred actions. These efforts underscore the vitality, innovative ideas and dedication to youth-friendly policies that go beyond mere statistics.

## Q & A

The discussion began with a comment from **Almir Pružljanin**, Advisor to the [Commissioner for the Protection of Equality in Serbia](#), who shared positive experiences from his work. He highlighted that the Commissioner had issued recommendations to local municipalities to involve young people in policy-making processes. This approach had received encouraging feedback, particularly from municipalities that had embraced youth participation, bringing fresh ideas into decision-making positions. Additionally, Serbia has a Youth Council within the Serbian Equality Body that conducts monthly workshops and educational sessions on important topics. Notably, there is a city in Serbia that is recognised as the youngest in Europe, which is also home to highly active NGOs engaged with youth issues.

**Sergio Perez Barranco**, Policy Lead on Youth Homelessness and LGBTIQ Homelessness, FEANTSA, raised concerns about the annual conference of FEANTSA in Vienna, which addressed the issue of youth participation. He pointed out a significant issue: while efforts are made to include vulnerable groups in discussions, actual participation remains problematic for those from socially disadvantaged backgrounds. Often, representatives in high-level youth positions come from more privileged social backgrounds, which can skew perspectives and decision-making.

In response to this concern, panellists suggested that co-management could be a solution to ensure more inclusive and continuous engagement with marginalised youth communities. By focusing on intersectionality, particularly incorporating the perspectives of LGBTIQ youth, the approach aims to address the diverse needs of disadvantaged groups. The CCJ has criteria in place to support disadvantaged youth to obtain positions, thus helping to balance representation and ensure that a broader range of experiences and perspectives are considered in policy-making.

## Working Group sessions wrap-up and discussion

Rapporteurs of *Working Group 1: Protecting young people from poverty and social exclusion*, **Daris Lewis Recio**, Legal and Policy Officer, [EQUINET](#), and **Lê Phan-Warne**, Researcher and Policy Advisor at the [German Institute for Human Rights](#), analysed how the discussion in the group focused on the social rights of all individuals, addressing challenges, best practices and future directions in this area.

One of the primary challenges highlighted was the low priority given to social rights within National Human Rights Institutions (NHRIs), states and civil society



organisations (CSOs). This low prioritisation often stems from a lack of expertise and resources, leading to a focus on vulnerable groups rather than a broader approach to social rights. There is also a notable lack of intergenerational understanding and dialogue, with different generations often unaware of each other's issues. The fragmentation of policies across different sectors further complicates efforts, as activities involving young people are not harmonised, per the rapporteurs. Another significant issue stressed by the rapporteurs is the low level of awareness of social rights, including the difficulty of translating these rights into local contexts and identifying them as human rights issues. NGOs also often feel they lack the capacity or knowledge to appeal effectively to international bodies.

Despite these challenges, several promising practices were discussed. Shadow reporting and cooperation with networks have shown effectiveness, with examples from Germany illustrating successful approaches. Capacity-building activities funded by the Council of Europe provide essential training and materials. Understanding and utilising reporting mechanisms, such as coordinating shadow reports and distributing topics to maximise synergies, have also been beneficial. An institutionalised method of consultation with NGOs involves their participation in NHRI meetings, which is particularly useful when providing recommendations.

Looking forward, the working group suggested several strategies to improve the social rights framework. There is a need for meaningful engagement and dialogue with youth organisations at the national level to raise awareness and foster cooperation. Working with social workers can also help bridge gaps and provide better support. Strategic litigation, utilising the European Committee of Social Rights procedures, can be an effective tool to advance social rights. Additionally, securing financial resources and mobilising public support are crucial to prevent budget cuts that could shrink the democratic space. These efforts collectively aim to elevate the priority of social rights and ensure more comprehensive and effective advocacy and implementation.

Rapporteur of *Working Group 2: Access to employment for young people: challenges and opportunities*, **Sophie Hale**, Human Rights Officer, [ENNHRI](#), stressed that the key takeaway from the working group discussions is that National Human Rights Institutions (NHRIs) do not specifically address youth employment. Access to employment is often perceived as more challenging for people over 50 compared to younger people, though this might be a matter of perception. Young people living in poverty struggle significantly to find employment, highlighting the need to build trust in institutions and train professionals to better understand poverty. Age discrimination tends to affect older persons more, but there is a critical need for intersectional approaches in addressing these issues.

According to the rapporteur, the conflict in Ukraine has had a significant impact on the labour force, with many women remaining in the country and facing employment challenges. In Lithuania, much of the employment-related work is carried out by municipalities and the State Employment Agency, with NHRIs playing a lesser role. Despite high demand for jobs, there is a limited supply, and changing employers' attitudes towards employment is essential for improving the situation. This includes addressing diversity and the pay gap.

The working group identified several challenges, such as the broad focus on labour issues rather than specifically on youth, and the intersectional nature of many

problems. Youth representation in trade unions is insufficient, contributing to a disconnection and lack of trust in institutions among young people. There is also a lack of coordination between various authority programmes, and young people face issues related to mental health, undeclared work, limited access to remedies, gender inequalities and criminalisation.

According to the rapporteur, solutions include raising self-awareness among young people and involving them in discussions. Forming partnerships with universities, youth councils, the private sector and trade unions is crucial, although many young people are unaware of the existence of trade unions. This comprehensive approach aims to address the multifaceted challenges faced by young people in the labour market.

Rapporteur of *Working Group 3: Fostering youth participation in policy and decision-making processes*, **Klara Fält**, Junior expert, [Human Rights Centre, Finland](#), noted that the discussion on youth participation in the group focused on past projects and strategies for effectively engaging young people. Branding of institutions is crucial to attract young people and to ensure that the same groups do not participate repeatedly. Communication needs to be in terms that young people understand. Resource allocation is also a challenge, emphasising the need for strategic investment in youth.

A significant issue identified by the working group participants is the overlapping mandates of various departments, leading to confusion, lack of synchronisation and duplication of efforts. To address this, it is essential to identify parameters for youth participation and to prioritise accordingly. While including young people in every project may not be practical, selecting specific projects for their involvement is more logical, according to the rapporteur. It is essential to involve diverse young representatives to prevent the same individuals always participating.

Furthermore, collaborating with NGOs and institutions that have similar mandates can enhance efforts. Rebranding and utilising social media are effective ways to raise awareness and reach a broader youth audience. Training educators is another key strategy, such as providing rule of law training to law students who then teach high school students.

Finally, NHRIs can support each other through knowledge sharing, developing guidelines, checklists and indicators and sharing bad practices and lessons learned. Creating spaces for sharing experiences and resources is fundamental to improving youth participation initiatives, according to the rapporteur.

## Closing session

**Tanya Montanari**, Coordinator of the COE-FRA-ENNHRI-EQUINET Collaborative Platform on Social and Economic Rights, Council of Europe, thanked the participants for the fruitful discussion on a subject of great relevance for the Council of Europe. She pointed out that with the Reykjavik Declaration, adopted at the 4<sup>th</sup> Summit of Heads of State and Government (16-17 May 2023), the Council of Europe is moving forward by integrating a youth perspective in the intergovernmental work of the Organisation and further strengthening the participation of young people in decision-making in democratic life. This will increase the effectiveness of public policies and strengthen democratic institutions through open dialogue and the role of young people's civil society networks. This means that bodies like the Governmental Committee of the European Social Charter, which reviews the conclusions of the European Committee of Social Rights and makes recommendations to the Committee of Ministers, should in the future consider youth-related aspects. While some CoE committees already engage in this work, challenges remain, such as incorporating intersectionality and addressing specific issues like access to healthcare for young LGBTIQ persons.

She also referred to the CoE cooperation project "[Enhancing employment rights in the Republic of Moldova](#)" which includes a component on education and vocational training for young people. This project involves collaboration with youth representatives, social workers and unemployment agencies to help young people complete their education, integrate into the labour market and develop policies to curb youth emigration.

The moderator also referred to the results of the Survey on Youth Participation Initiatives Among NHRIs and Equality Bodies, shared ahead of the Platform's meeting. The survey revealed that 19 institutions from various countries, including Austria, Belgium, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Cyprus, Estonia, Finland, Georgia, Germany, Greece, Kosovo, Latvia, the Netherlands, Poland, Serbia, Scotland, Slovakia, Sweden and Türkiye, responded. Fifteen of these institutions reported working with young people. According to the survey responses, definitions of "youth" vary widely, with some institutions having a specific age range (e.g., 15-30 in Bosnia and Herzegovina, 7-26 in Estonia) and others having no fixed definition, highlighting the fluid and context-dependent nature of the term (e.g. Greece and Poland).

National institutions work on a variety of issues related to young people's social and economic rights, including poverty, discrimination, education and housing. For example, housing efforts address unaffordable prices and age-based discrimination, while education initiatives focus on accessibility and safety for students with disabilities. Employment and social protection efforts include unemployment activation and integration allowances. Anti-discrimination work aims to ensure equality in all areas of society.

Several institutions, such as those in Georgia, Sweden, Belgium and Finland, focus on supporting young people leaving residential care. Many institutions engage with universities, offering training, internships and educational campaigns to involve young people in human rights work.

Furthermore, as noted by the moderator, survey responses indicate that challenges to working with young people on economic and social rights include a lack of awareness among youth about their rights, resource constraints and

difficulties in engaging marginalised groups. Legislative and structural issues, such as old-fashioned legal procedures and participation barriers, also pose significant challenges. Additionally, the impact of external factors like the COVID-19 pandemic and the Russian invasion of Ukraine has exacerbated these challenges.

Despite these obstacles, the responses to the survey indicate that institutions are employing various strategies to improve youth participation. These include rebranding efforts, leveraging social media, training educators and enhancing collaboration with NGOs and other institutions. Sharing knowledge, developing guidelines and creating spaces for exchange are also essential components of these efforts. Ultimately, NHRIs and Equality Bodies aim to empower young people, protect their rights and include their voices in policy-making and advocacy work.

### Concluding remarks

**Nikolaos A. Papadopoulos**, Council of Europe Consultant, Research Fellow at the University of Turin, Coordinator of the Greek section of the [Academic Network on the European Social Charter and Social Rights](#) (ANESC), in his concluding remarks, thanked the participants for their contributions and emphasised Aoife Nolan's point that the cost-of-living crisis is part of a broader polycrisis that significantly threatens social rights, especially for vulnerable groups such as young people. Against this backdrop, the European Committee of Social Rights and the Governmental Committee of the European Social Charter have commendably called for an ad hoc report on the cost-of-living crisis from all States Parties to the European Social Charter, aiming to develop a legal framework to evaluate state action, including for young people.

As noted by the speaker, the meeting had several main objectives. The first was to explore the potential of the European Social Charter and other European human rights instruments in protecting young people's social rights. It was emphasised in that regard that the European Social Charter is a fundamental treaty with specific provisions for young people, addressing vulnerabilities such as age discrimination in remuneration and intersectionality, considering gender, disability and migrant status. At the EU level, the Charter of Fundamental Rights of the European Union also protects young people in the workplace and promotes equality and non-discrimination on the grounds of age. Measures to address the cost-of-living crisis for young people should be framed within a rights-based context, according to the speaker, embedding fundamental rights considerations in their design and implementation, thus enhancing the potential of the European Pillar of Social Rights to promote the rights of young people.

The second objective was to discuss strategies to protect young people from poverty and social exclusion amid rising living costs, including access to affordable housing. As discussed, EU measures to address the cost-of-living crisis have significant implementation and resource gaps and often fail to reach vulnerable households. Only a few countries explicitly focus on youth, with a general tendency for young people not to take up entitlements due to a lack of clear information and coordination between sectors. Nonetheless, several good practices were highlighted at the meeting, including automatic indexation in the social protection system, projects aimed at improving social skills, empowering young people and supporting their access to housing. The need to address hidden homelessness among young people was also emphasised at the meeting.

The third objective was to analyse the challenges faced by young people in accessing employment during the cost-of-living crisis. Good practices mentioned at the meeting included the integration of young people in the green and digital economy, the promotion of youth return migration to combat brain drain and the establishment of regional centres to support career management and labour market integration. However, challenges persist, such as prejudice in the workplace, a mismatch between young people's skills and labour market needs and insufficient support policies for professional integration.

The fourth objective was to explore mechanisms to enhance the meaningful participation of young people in policy and decision-making processes related to social rights. There was a consensus that young people's participation in democratic life should be meaningful and permanent, supported by both soft and hard law instruments. Engaging and empowering young people to take accountability is crucial, with strong evidence of many inspirational initiatives and positive achievements at the national level in several countries.

The fifth objective was to examine the long-term impact and lifelong consequences of early shortfalls on young people's enjoyment of their social rights. According to the speaker, welfare systems are to some extent incompatible with the realities and challenges faced by young people. This issue needs to be addressed to ensure the survival of the European social model and to keep young people engaged in the European project. Greater state recognition and responsiveness to young people's social rights would ensure resilience to market shocks and prevent long-term impacts, per the speaker.

The final objective of the Platform's meeting was to discuss the role of human rights defenders in preventing, mitigating and monitoring the impact of the cost-of-living crisis on young people. As highlighted by the speaker, effective and independent National Human Rights Institutions and Equality Bodies play a critical role through studies, research, investigations, collaboration, advice and proposals. They can contribute to facilitating smooth transitions from education to the labour market, modernising social security and protection systems, promoting housing policies tailored to young people's needs, encouraging green and social economy initiatives and fostering active social citizenship by supporting young people's meaningful participation in policy development.

In conclusion, the speaker expressed confidence that the meeting had achieved its objectives, providing rich ideas and directions for future youth advocacy activities among stakeholders in these critical times. He thanked the participants for their attention and contributions.

## Appendix I – Platform Joint Statement

### Social Rights at a crossroads: Strengthening the European Social Charter

**Joint statement by the participating organisations of the COE-FRA-ENNHRI-EQUINET Collaborative Platform on Social and Economic Rights<sup>1</sup>, addressed to 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 (4 July 2024, Vilnius, Lithuania).**

In view of the forthcoming High-Level Conference on the European Social Charter (4 July 2024, Vilnius, Lithuania), the Platform appeals to governments to “reaffirm their full commitment to the protection and implementation of social rights as guaranteed by the European Social Charter system”, in line with the Reykjavik Declaration adopted by the Heads of State and Government of the Council of Europe in May 2023<sup>2</sup>.

Significant challenges remain in ensuring the full realisation of social rights for all individuals in our societies. Economic inequalities, demographic challenges, housing shortages, and social disparities have deepened since the 2008 financial crisis and in recent years by the cost-of-living crisis in the aftermath of the Covid-19 pandemic and the on-going Russian war of aggression against Ukraine. These developments undermine the well-being and dignity of many people across Europe.

Poverty and social exclusion prevent individuals from fully exercising their rights and participating in society. Millions of people in Europe experience severe material and social deprivation, homelessness, housing insecurity, and inadequate living conditions. Poverty is characterised by a lack of material resources and an inability to fulfil basic needs, which also infringes the fundamental right to human dignity.

Safeguarding and promoting social rights is a cornerstone for combatting the impact of climate change and for ensuring a just green and digital transition. It is crucial to break the intergenerational cycle of poverty and to provide equal opportunities for our future generations. Experiences of poverty in childhood and adolescence is proven to have a long-lasting negative impact on the full enjoyment of social rights throughout life. Furthermore, its adverse effects are exacerbated by intersectionalities, gender and age-specific risks, as well as by prevailing

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<sup>1</sup> The establishment of the [COE-FRA-ENNHRI-EQUINET Collaborative Platform on Social and Economic Rights](#) is the result of the joint conference of the Council of Europe, the European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights ([FRA](#)), the European Network of National Human Rights Institutions ([ENNHRI](#)) and the European Network of Equality Bodies ([EQUINET](#)), which took place in October 2013 in Vienna. The conference set the scene for closer cooperation among national networks and between national and international bodies for advancing social and economic rights and socio-economic equality.

<sup>2</sup> The [4th Summit of Heads of State and Government of the Council of Europe](#) took place in Reykjavík, on 16 and 17 May 2023. 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.”



circumstances of marginalisation and discrimination against specific groups and individuals, including the Roma, Travellers and other ethnic minorities, migrants and persons with disabilities.

The right to adequate and affordable housing is essential for upholding and protecting the core right to human dignity, preventing homelessness, promoting health and well-being, facilitating education and employment opportunities. Prioritising the development and implementation of comprehensive social policies and systems that address the root causes of poverty and ensure equal access to efficient social and housing assistance contributes to advancing poverty reduction and sustainable development, combating discrimination, fostering social inclusion, empowering marginalised communities, and therefore nurturing social cohesion and the protection of democracies.

The European Social Charter, with its monitoring mechanism and the collective complaints procedure, embodies a crucial framework for safeguarding social and economic rights of all individuals in Europe. Also, State parties to the 1995 Additional Protocol should reconsider making the declaration of Article 2 and allow national non-governmental organisations to submit complaints, to strengthen the democratic dimension of the Charter's system as a good governance tool, the legitimacy of state action and the participation and engagement of civil society.

We recognise that particular attention should be paid to fundamental social and economic human rights, such as the right to protection against poverty and social exclusion (Article 30 ESC) and the right to housing (Article 31 ESC), that serve as gateway rights for the enjoyment of other human rights protected under the European Social Charter, but also under the European Convention of Human Rights and the European Union Charter for Fundamental Rights.

Governments should therefore reaffirm their commitment to the European Social Charter system by:

1. Recognising the fundamental importance of the Charter as a Council of Europe human rights treaty upholding human rights and promoting social justice across the continent by ratifying the Revised European Social Charter and accepting additional provisions.
2. Accepting the provisions of the Charter that reinforce the right to housing and the right to protection against poverty and social exclusion as fundamental human rights essential for the enjoyment of other human rights and the overall well-being of individuals and families.
3. Ensuring implementation of commitments by transforming them into concrete action, including taking the necessary measures to bring national situations into conformity with the Charter requirements and the findings of the European Committee of Social Rights.
4. Accepting the collective complaints procedure as an effective good governance mechanism to assist national authorities in their endeavour to uphold economic and social rights and extending the right to bring complaints to national non-governmental organisations.
5. Enhancing dialogue and cooperation between the Charter organs and States Parties as well as amongst all relevant stakeholders, including National Human Rights Institutions, Equality Bodies and civil society organisations.

## Appendix II – Programme

### 09:00 – 09:30 Opening

***Moderated by Jan Malinowski, Head of Department of Social Rights, Council of Europe***

#### **Welcoming remarks**

- *Erika Leonaitė, Parliamentary Ombudsperson, Head of Ombudspersons' Office of Lithuania*
- *Jolita Miliuviene, Equal Opportunities Ombudsperson a.i. of Lithuania*

#### **Keynote speech - A Crisis for the Social Rights of Young People? Exploring the Cost-of-Living Crisis**

- *Aoife Nolan, President of the European Committee of Social Rights, Professor of International Human Rights Law and Director of the Human Rights Law Centre, School of Law, University of Nottingham*

### 09:30 – 10:30 Session 1: Protecting young people from poverty and social exclusion

***Moderated by Claudia Pinto, European Youth Forum***

#### **The impact of the cost-of-living crisis on the social rights of young people under the Charter of Fundamental Rights of the European Union**

- *Christina Dimakou, Seconded National Expert, Equality, Roma and Social Rights Unit, European Agency for Fundamental Rights*

#### **European Youth and the right to affordable housing**

- *Sergio Perez Barranco, Policy Lead on Youth Homelessness and LGBTIQ Homelessness, FEANTSA*

#### **Young people leaving residential care: challenges to effective social assistance**

- *Veerle Stroobants, Collaborator, Combat Poverty Service, Belgium*

#### **Q&A session**

***10:30 – 11:00 Coffee and refreshments***

### 11:00 – 12:00 Session 2: Access to employment for young people: challenges and opportunities

***Moderated by Matthäus Fandrewski, Confederation of Independent Trade Unions (CESI) Youth Representative***

**The right to work and protection of young persons at the workplace:**

### **the findings of the European Committee of Social Rights**

- *Mario Vinkovic, Professor of Labour Law and Social Security, Holder of the Jean Monnet Chair in EU Labour, Equality and Human Rights Law (2013-2016), Faculty of Law, University of Osijek, Croatia, Member of the European Committee of Social Rights*

### **Promising & Transferrable Practices from the national level**

- *Inga Balnanosiene, Director of the Public Employment Service of Lithuania*

### **Promoting the socio-professional inclusion of young people through work integration social enterprises**

- *Baptiste Vasseur, Policy Officer, European Network of Social Integration Enterprises*

### **Q&A session**

#### **12:00 – 13:00 Session 3: Fostering youth participation in policy making related to social rights**

*Moderated by Anja Jokić, Bureau Member of the Advisory Council on Youth (CCJ), Council of Europe*

### **Young people's participation in policy and decision-making processes, in particular relating to social rights issues**

- *Maurizio Cuttin, Bureau Member of the Advisory Council on Youth (CCJ), Council of Europe*

### **How to successfully plan and implement a project on youth participation – an example from France**

- *Louise Savri, French National Consultative Commission on Human Rights*

### **Youth and policymakers' engagement in policy development, policy evaluation and policy revisions based on the principles of co-management and co-production**

- *Ognjen Markovic, Team Leader of the Western Balkans Youth Policy Lab*

### **Q&A session**

#### **13:00 – 14:30 Lunch & Lobbying**

#### **14:30 – 15:45 In-parallel Working Group sessions**

The working group sessions will explore more in depth the three thematic areas deliberated upon by the panellists. While panel discussions were focused on the general presentation and assessment of the actual situation for young people in Europe during the last years and the key challenges to effectively safeguarding and promoting their social rights, in the working groups participants will have an opportunity to convene and pinpoint good practices, lessons learnt from their

activities, ways forward, resources and capacities needed to effectively promote and ensure the full enjoyment of young people's social rights across European countries in the future. Each Working Group will appoint a rapporteur who will be invited to present the results of the discussion during the closing session of the meeting.

**WG1: Protecting young people from poverty and social exclusion**

*Moderated by Daris Lewis Recio, Legal and Policy Officer, EQUINET*

**WG2: Access to employment for young people: challenges and opportunities**

*Moderated by Sophie Hale, Human Rights Officer, ENNHRI*

**WG3: Fostering youth participation in policy and decision-making processes**

*Moderated by Margo Vorykhava, Vice-Chair of the Advisory Council on Youth (CCJ), Council of Europe*

**15:45 – 16:15 Coffee and refreshments**

**16:15 – 17:00 Working Group sessions wrap-up and discussion**

**Presentation of the results of the discussions of the Working Groups by their rapporteurs**

- Rapporteur of Working Group 1 (5')
- Rapporteur of Working Group 2 (5')
- Rapporteur of Working Group 3 (5')

**17:00 – 17:30 Closing session**

***Moderated by Tanya Montanari, Coordinator of the COE-FRA-ENNHRI-EQUINET Collaborative Platform on Social and Economic Rights***

**Concluding remarks**

- *Nikolaos A. Papadopoulos, Council of Europe Consultant, Research Fellow at the University of Turin, Coordinator of the Greek section of the Academic Network on the European Social Charter and Social Rights (ANESC/RACSE)*

## Appendix III – List of participants

### SPEAKERS

**Erika LEONAITĖ**

Parliamentary Ombudsperson  
Head of Ombudspersons' Office of Lithuania

**Jolita MILIUVIENE**

Equal Opportunities Ombudsperson a.i. of Lithuania

**Aoife NOLAN**

President of the European Committee of Social Rights; Professor of International Human Rights Law and Director of the Human Rights Law Centre, School of Law, University of Nottingham, United Kingdom

**Christina DIMAKOU**

Seconded National Expert, Equality, Roma and Social Rights Unit, European Agency for Fundamental Rights, Austria

**Sergio PEREZ BARRANCO**

Policy Officer, FEANTSA (European Federation of National Organisations Working with the Homeless), Belgium

**Veerle STROOBANTS**

Collaborator, Combat Poverty Service, Belgium

**Mario VINKOVIC**

Professor of Labour Law and Social Security, Holder of the Jean Monnet Chair in EU Labour, Equality and Human Rights Law (2013-2016), Faculty of Law, University of Osijek, Croatia, Member of the European Committee of Social Rights, Croatia

**Inga BALNANOSIENE**

Director of the Public Employment Service, Lithuania

**Baptiste VASSEUR**

Policy Officer, European Network of Social Integration Enterprises (ENSIE), Belgium

**Maurizio CUTTIN**

Bureau Member of the Advisory Council on Youth (CCJ), Council of Europe, United Kingdom

**Louise SAVRI**

Policy Officer, Coordinator of the Youth Initiative, French National Consultative Commission on Human Rights (CNCDH), France

**Ognjen MARKOVIC**

Team Leader, Western Balkans Youth Policy Lab, Bosnia and Herzegovina

**Nikolaos A. PAPADOPOULOS**

Council of Europe Consultant; Research Fellow at University of Turin; Coordinator of the Greek section of the Academic Network on the European Social Charter and Social Rights (ANESC), Greece

**MODERATORS****Jan MALINOWSKI**

Head of Department of Social Rights, Council of Europe, France

**Claudia PINTO**

Policy Officer, Social and Economic Inclusion, European Youth Forum, Belgium

**Matthäus FANDREJEWSKI**

Confederation of Independent Trade Unions (CESI) Youth Representative, Germany

**Anja JOKIĆ**

Bureau Member of the Advisory Council on Youth (CCJ), Council of Europe, Serbia

**Daris LEWIS RECIO**

Legal and Policy Officer, EQUINET, Belgium

**Sophie HALE**

Human Rights Officer, ENNHRI, Belgium

**Margo VORYKHAVA**

Vice-Chair of the Advisory Council on Youth (CCJ), Council of Europe, Belarus/Lithuania

**Tanya MONTANARI**

Coordinator of the COE-FRA-ENNHRI-EQUINET Collaborative Platform on Social and Economic Rights, Council of Europe, France

**PARTICIPANTS****ALBANIA**

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Adviser, Commissioner for protection from Discrimination

**ARMENIA**

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Deputy Head of Research, Educational and Expertise Centre, Human Rights Defender's Office of Republic of Armenia

**AUSTRIA**

Melisa KRAWIELICKI

Staff (Lawyer), Austrian Disability Ombudswoman

**BOSNIA AND HERZEGOVINA**

Selma JAHIC



Expert advisor, Human Rights Ombudsman of Bosnia and Herzegovina

**CROATIA**

Sanja SALKIĆ

Human rights promotion officer Office of the Ombudswoman

**CYPRUS**

Theodora NATSI

Officer, Office of the Commissioner for Administration and the Protection of Human Rights

**ESTONIA**

Marje KASK

Adviser, Chancellor of Justice

**FINLAND**

Riikka JACKSON

Senior Legal Adviser, Office of the Parliamentary Ombudsman

Klara FÄLT

Junior expert, Human Rights Centre

Pursimo MIKKO

Junior Expert, Human Rights Centre

**FRANCE**

Mélina MARCOUX

Intern, International Advocacy Office of ATD Fourth World ATD Fourth World

**GEORGIA**

Mariam TAVDGIRIDZE

Head of International Relations Unit, Office of Public Defender (Ombudsman) of Georgia

**GREECE**

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Legal Officer/Chair of the ENNHRI ESCR WG, Greek National Commission for Human Rights (GNCHR)

Konstantinos BARTZELIOTIS

Senior Investigator, Greek Ombudsman

**GERMANY**

Lê PHAN-WARNKE

Researcher & Policy Advisor, German Institute for Human Rights

**IRELAND**

Connor KING

Policy and Research Officer, Irish Human Rights and Equality Commission (IHREC)

**KOSOVO**

Vlora VESELI

Legal Adviser, Ombudsperson Institution of Kosovo

## **LATVIA**

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## **LITHUANIA**

Greta BYLAITĖ

Chief Specialist, Human Rights Division, Parliamentary Ombudspersons' Office

Goda JUREVICIUTE

Advisor of the Human Rights Division, Parliamentary Ombudsperson's Office

Fausta Viktorija OSIČNAITĖ

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Jurkute MINTAUTE

Head of Discrimination Prevention and Communication Group, Office of the Equal Opportunities Ombudsperson

Ruta JUODELYTE

Senior advisor, Office of the Equal Opportunities Ombudsperson

## **MALTA**

Jurgen CASSAR

Head of Communications and Research Office of the Ombudsman

## **MOLDOVA**

Carolina BAGRIN

Member of the Equality Council Equality Council, Republic of Moldova

Dumitru DAREA

Head of Department, People's Advocate Office

## **NETHERLANDS**

Michelle JANSEN

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## **POLAND**

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## **PORTUGAL**

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Legal Adviser, Provedor de Justiça de Portugal

## **ROMANIA**

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Researcher-translator, Romanian Institute for Human Rights

**SERBIA**

Dragana MARINKOVIĆ

Advisor, The Protector of Citizens of the Republic of Serbia

Almir PRUŽLJANIN

Advisor, Commissioner for Protection of Equality

**SLOVAK REPUBLIC**

Katarína MEDŤOVÁ

Head of International Relations, Slovak National Centre for Human Rights

**SLOVENIA**

Mateja JAKŠA

Advisor, The Human Rights Ombudsman of the Republic of Slovenia

**SWEDEN**

Emma MELANDER BORG

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Tarık VURAL

Assistant Expert on Human Rights and Equality, Human Rights and Equality Institution of Türkiye

**UKRAINE**

Olena KOLOBRODOVA

Representative for Social and Economic Rights, Parliament Commissioner for Human Rights, Secretariat of the Parliament Commissioner for Human Rights

Kateryna PROKHORENKO

Head of Unit on Cooperation with International Organisations and European Integration, Secretariat of the Parliament Commissioner for Human Rights

**UNITED KINGDOM**

Luis F. YANES

Policy Officer (ESC Rights Lead), Scottish Human Rights Commission

**COUNCIL OF EUROPE****Jan MALINOWSKI**

Head of Department of Social Rights

**Tanya MONTANARI**

Coordinator of the COE-FRA-ENNHRI-EQUINET Collaborative Platform on Social and Economic Rights

**Charlotte ALTENHOENER-DION**

Adviser, Office of the Commissioner for Human Rights

**Valentyna KRYVNKOVA**

Administration and logistics