

Contribution of the Conference of INGOs "Action for Social Rights" Committee to the discussion and political agenda of the High-Level Conference on the European Social Charter scheduled for 3-4 July in Vilnius

We note that progress in the implementation of the revised European Social Charter by Member States is far from satisfactory. Regressions in access to rights have been observed.

Based on :

- the Recommendation of the Conference of INGOs to the Reykjavík Summit of Heads of State and Government of the Council of Europe (CONF-AG[2023] REC 1),
- the Recommendation of the Conference of INGOs on the Right to Social Protection as a Human Right (CONF-AG[2023] REC 3)
- the Recommendation for a Global Approach to the Rights of Refugees and Migrants and the Role of Civil Society [CONF-AG\(2023\)REC2](#)
- the conclusions of the webinar entitled "[Social Justice in Action: Breaking the Perpetuation of Poverty Across Generations](#)", organised by our committee and the International Movement - ATD Fourth World "All Together in Dignity", in February 2024.

In this contribution, we would like to expand on a number of observations and emphasise the systemic basis, which means that the rights set out in the revised European Social Charter and in the Protocol providing for a system of collective complaints must be considered as a whole and ratified as such, in order to effectively combat the vicious circle of inequalities.

We would also like to emphasise that the fight against poverty brings social, economic, political and environmental benefits. It contributes to stable democracy, citizen participation and the development of culturally diverse and more peaceful societies. A more inclusive society reduces the cost of running specific services for vulnerable people. A more inclusive and equitable society reduces the pressure on the carbon footprint, as consumer attitudes are more easily adjusted to ecological requirements.

1. Poverty is much more than the lack of a decent income; it is also the failure to meet basic and ordinary needs (nutrition, housing, access to public services and adequate resources/services, etc.). For example, children from poor families may have high aspirations for the future, but if they face obstacles such as limited educational resources or restricted economic opportunities, their right to education (cultural right), access to culture or other public goods is often compromised.
2. **The perpetuation of poverty** undermines social cohesion, exacts a heavy economic toll, reduces productivity and increases insecurity throughout a country.
3. **Growing socio-economic inequalities persist and are even worsening in many European countries.** They are one of the causes of low social mobility. The greater are the socio-economic inequalities, the lower the level of social mobility is observed. When individuals are confronted with a significant gap between their aspirations and their reality, this can lead to feelings of frustration, despair, distrust of the democratic institutions of the state and low self-esteem. This leads to greater isolation from society, fewer opportunities to develop psycho-social skills and consequently difficult access to the labour market.
4. **Job insecurity:** The rise in precarious work, the lack of flexibility in the jobs on offer and poorly paid jobs represent a major challenge for the protection of social rights, particularly as regards decent working conditions and access to social security and workers' rights.

5. **Access to healthcare:** Access to quality healthcare remains unequal in many European countries, particularly for vulnerable groups such as migrants, the elderly and people on low incomes. In addition, the committee notes an urgent disengagement of the public service when it comes to guaranteeing access to health and social services for the migrant population in an irregular situation, including unaccompanied foreign minors whose protection is the responsibility of the State and local authorities.
6. **Protection of migrant workers' rights:** Migrant workers often face precarious working conditions, exploitation and discrimination in the workplace.
7. **Digitalisation and data protection:** The increasing digitisation of the economy and social services raises challenges in terms of personal data protection, job security and respect for privacy.

To meet these challenges, the Council of Europe should continue to promote the implementation of legal standards and encourage cooperation between Council of Europe member states to ensure that economic and social rights are respected and protected for all European citizens.

1. States should undertake to combat inequalities by ratifying and universally applying the rights set out in the revised European Social Charter of 1996. **The Charter system is a whole.** There are substantial and interdependent links between the articles of the European Social Charter and the Additional Protocol providing for a system of collective complaints, in order to guarantee dialogue with the social players and civil society. Only ratification of the whole set of rights will enable economic and social rights to be fully implemented in the Member States.
2. States Parties should ensure that **social rights are protected in a rapidly changing digital environment**, with an emphasis on data protection, job security and vocational training.
3. States Parties should **recognise the barriers to access to services and rights** by individuals and the impact of non-access on people's quality of life and on democracy.
4. The States Parties **should set themselves short- and long-term quantified targets for** combating inequality and report on it to their citizens on the regular basis.
5. **The criteria for access to social services** should not be restrictive, but open and generalised, allowing for a mix of publics in order to increase access to rights and quality public services.
6. Equal opportunities require an inclusive economy. It is therefore recommended **that the fight against poverty be integrated into all public policies in a systemic and non-sectoral way**, and in particular that adequate resources be ensured by building an inclusive economic model.
7. The States Parties should undertake to **combat discrimination** arising from socio-economic inequalities: "povertism", in the same way as they combat homophobia and racism.
8. States Parties should **strengthen mechanisms for redress of economic and social rights** at the national level: ensure that effective redress mechanisms are in place to enable individuals and groups to claim their social rights in the event of violations. This may include accessible and transparent complaints procedures and effective social justice mechanisms at the national level.
9. **International coordination:** The Council of Europe Conference of Ministers of Social Affairs should be a regular, cyclical event to coordinate efforts in implementing the revised European Social Charter. This should include close cooperation with the EU on legislative accounting and the sharing of best practice in the protection of economic and social rights.

10. Council of Europe member states should **actively involve civil society and citizens in the promotion and defence of economic and social rights**, in particular through the Additional Protocol on collective complaints. Increased citizen participation can help to strengthen social demand for the protection of social rights and increase and strengthen government accountability.
11. **The co-construction of public policies and knowledge** on non-use of rights with people experiencing poverty and exclusion will make social policies more legitimate and more effective.

It is important to note that the revised European Social Charter is an evolving instrument and that ongoing efforts and commitment are required to ensure its effective application and adaptation to the changing needs of European society. This requires a strong political commitment on the part of the Member States, as well as the active participation of civil society and stakeholders to promote and defend economic and social rights in Europe.