



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 Rights¹, 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 2023².

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 circumstances of marginalisation and

¹ 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.

² 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.”

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.