

UNITED FOR SOCIAL RIGHTS: 10 YEARS OF THE COE- FRA-ENNHRI- EQUINET PLATFORM



About the Platform

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 Vienna in October 2015. The conference set the scene for closer cooperation among national human rights networks and between national and international bodies for advancing social and economic rights and socio-economic equality.

Main objectives

The main objective of the Platform on Social and Economic Rights is to support and strengthen National Human Rights Institutions (NHRIs) and National Equality Bodies in their work on the implementation of international instruments relating to social and economic rights and address fundamental rights challenges in Europe.

In this respect, the Platform provides an opportunity to discuss how the [European Social Charter](#) and other international standards relating to social and economic rights are taken into account in the design and implementation of national legislation and practice. With regard to the European Social Charter, the Platform focuses on enhancing the implementation of the Charter at national level, promoting wider [acceptance of the provisions of the Charter](#) and the [collective complaints procedure](#), and encouraging the ratification of the Revised Social Charter by states still bound by the 1961 Charter. National Human Rights Institutions and National Equality Bodies have a crucial role to play in this effort.

Also, the Platform aims to:

Enhance cooperation among NHRIs, Equality Bodies, civil society and European institutions.

Facilitate exchange of good practices and lessons learned.

Strengthen the capacity of national institutions to promote and protect social rights, enabling them to prevent, mitigate and respond effectively to current challenges.

Advance the implementation of European and international social rights standards at national level.

The Platform and the monitoring system of the European Social Charter

National Human Rights Institutions and Equality Bodies have become vital partners for the work of the European Committee of Social Rights in both the reporting system and the collective complaints procedure within the European Social Charter. They provide data and evidence which helps the Committee to assess national situations and detect possible violations of the Charter. NHRIs and Equality Bodies are bridge-builders between governments and civil society.

Collective complaints procedure

As per Rules 32 and 32A of the [Rules of the European Committee of Social Rights](#), it is possible for NHRIs and Equality Bodies to intervene in the proceedings related to a collective complaint in which they otherwise have no direct involvement.

Under Rule 32A, the European Committee of Social Rights may invite any organisation, institution or person it deems appropriate, to submit observations as third parties, including NHRIs, Equality Bodies and their networks [ENNHRI](#) and [EQUINET](#).

Third-party observations must be submitted within a deadline set by the Committee (usually around two months). They should be clear, concise, and focus only on the issues raised in the complaint. Observations are shared with both the respondent State and the complainant organisation. NHRIs, Equality Bodies, and their networks may also express interest in submitting such observations by contacting the Secretariat of the European Social Charter.

Reporting procedure

In the framework of the reporting procedure, NHRIs and Equality Bodies can provide comments on national reports submitted by States Parties to the Charter on the accepted provisions ([Rule 21A of the Committee's Rules](#)).

Comments on national reports must be submitted to the Secretariat of the European Social Charter by 30 June of the year the report is examined (with possible exemptions if reports are delayed). Deadlines and details are published on the Charter website.

There is no set format, but the Committee welcomes submissions that address its targeted questions, refer to provisions accepted by the country, provide specific, in-depth information missing from the national report, and are submitted on time.

Key Platform activities:

- ▶ **Annual thematic workshops** (e.g., on digitalisation and social rights, poverty and social rights, justiciability of social rights, housing, etc)
- ▶ **Reports and publications** on cross-cutting issues
- ▶ **Capacity building** and training activities
- ▶ **Institutional dialogue** with Council of Europe and European Union stakeholders.



National human rights institutions and Equality bodies in action for social rights

BELGIUM – Study on Begging Bans

In 2023, the Combat Poverty Service and the Federal Human Rights Institute of Belgium examined local police rules on begging in 581 Belgian municipalities. They found restrictions in 305 municipalities: 87 imposed outright bans, 54 restricted begging in specific places (tourist zones, shops, cemeteries), and 17 limited it to certain times. Many also targeted “types” of begging, such as with animals, children, or by showing injuries.

The study concluded that most bans likely breach European and Belgian case law, since begging alone does not threaten public order. It stressed that restrictions must be proportionate and only address genuinely disruptive conduct.

Findings informed ENNHRI interventions before the European Court of Human Rights and the European Committee of Social Rights.

FRANCE – Equal Access to Education

The French Defender of Rights has acted to protect children facing socio-economic discrimination in education. In 2020–21, a mayor refused to enrol 20 children from non-French families in public school and canteen services. In 2024, the Defender of Rights ruled this was discrimination based on socio-economic status, ethnic origin, and residence, ordering immediate enrolment and changes to municipal regulations.

In 2025, the Defender of Rights published a report on secondary school orientation, highlighting how socio-economic status, compounded by gender and ethnic bias, shapes students’ educational pathways. Recommendations included training teachers on inequality, removing financial barriers, improving access to social support, and empowering students to make informed choices.

GEORGIA – Monitoring Free Canteens

The Public Defender's Office of Georgia monitored 59 free canteens in 25 municipalities, which provide vital meals for vulnerable groups. The visits revealed poor hygiene, limited meal variety, accessibility barriers for persons with disabilities, and long travel distances for rural beneficiaries.

Accompanied by a nutritionist, the Office assessed whether meals met health and dietary needs. It recommended adopting national food standards, increasing municipal budgets, and collecting better data on beneficiaries, including children, older persons, and people with disabilities.

SCOTLAND, UNITED KINGDOM – Monitoring Economic, Social and Cultural Rights

The Scottish Human Rights Commission (SHRC) has developed a new model visits, interviews, and research.

Its first report, *Economic, Social and Cultural Rights in the Highlands and Islands (2024)*, drew on a seven-week fact-finding trip to 20 towns with 146 interviews. It revealed major gaps: minimum core obligations were unmet, signs of retrogression were found, and no rights fully met adequacy standards under international law.

The SHRC issued eight recommendations, sparking debate in the Scottish Parliament. The approach is now being extended to other regions.

Why the Platform matters?



Strengthen synergies between multiple stakeholders by bringing together key European actors to foster a coherent and complementary approach to social and economic rights in law, policy and practice.



Support national implementation of social rights through thematic events, training, peer learning, and guidance, enabling national institutions to address systemic gaps and reinforce domestic protection.



Promote coordination by ensuring a collective voice in addressing complex contemporary challenges and in sharing good practices.



Bridge law and practice by translating legal commitments into concrete measures and reinforcing accountability mechanisms.



Encourage rights-based responses to emerging societal challenges that directly affect the enjoyment of social and economic rights.



More Information

[Council of Europe](#)

[FRA – European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights](#)

[European Network of National Human Rights Institutions \(ENNHRI\)](#)

[European Network of Equality Bodies \(EQUINET\)](#)

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www.coe.int

The Council of Europe is the continent's leading human rights organisation. It comprises 46 member states, including all members of the European Union. All Council of Europe member states have signed up to the European Convention on Human Rights, a treaty designed to protect human rights, democracy and the rule of law. The European Court of Human Rights oversees the implementation of the Convention in the member states.