



PRESIDENCY OF LITHUANIA  
Council of Europe  
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PRÉSIDENCE DE LA LITUANIE  
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MINISTRY  
OF SOCIAL SECURITY AND LABOUR  
REPUBLIC OF LITHUANIA



European  
Social  
Charter

Charte  
sociale  
européenne



**High-Level Conference on the European Social Charter**  
*“a step by member States to take further commitments under the Charter”*  
3-4 July 2024, Vilnius, Lithuania

## VILNIUS DECLARATION

1. In the Reykjavik Declaration (May 2023), the Heads of State and Government of the Council of Europe confirmed that “[s]ocial justice is crucial for democratic stability and security” and “reaffirm[ed their] full commitment to the protection and implementation of social rights as guaranteed by the European Social Charter system”. They proposed the holding of a high-level conference on the European Social Charter (ETS No. 35, (revised) ETS No. 163, “the Charter”) “as a step to take further commitments under the Charter where possible”.
2. At the 133rd Ministerial Session on 17 May 2024, the Committee of Ministers reiterated that social justice and the Council of Europe’s action on social rights play a crucial role for democratic stability and security. The Ministers restated their commitment to the European Social Charter system and, in their decisions, underlined the importance of the Charter and its monitoring procedures, and welcomed the organisation of a high-level conference.
3. Following the principles set out in the Vienna Declaration and Programme of Action (adopted in 1993 at the World Conference on Human Rights), all “human rights are universal, indivisible, interdependent and interrelated”. These rights include social rights, such as rights related to work, education, housing, social protection, health and well-being, and the human rights aspects of the environment. Combating inequality and social exclusion is vital for all, especially for disadvantaged individuals. It is also crucial for the implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals as defined by the United Nations 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.
4. The Council of Europe was established in the belief “that the pursuit of peace based upon justice and international co-operation is vital for the preservation of human society and civilisation”. Social progress was enshrined in the Statute of the Council of Europe (ETS No. 1) as a cornerstone of lasting peace. The Russian Federation’s ongoing war of aggression against Ukraine has had both immediate and lasting fallout as regards the enjoyment of human rights, including social rights for Ukrainians and all persons affected, and, very significantly, for women and children. The repercussions were and continue to be felt across Europe and throughout the world, including on the global economy and trade, particularly with increases in the cost of living and worsening food insecurity.
5. Social justice and the respect for, and the protection and implementation of social rights, as guaranteed in particular by the European Social Charter system, are crucial for promoting democratic security and stability. It is also very important to respond to new or emerging challenges and avoid the risk of further erosion of social rights protection and increasing inequalities, in order to maintain social cohesion in our societies.
6. Through its monitoring, reporting and collective complaints mechanisms, the Charter provides effective governance inputs, through both the European Committee of Social Rights and the Governmental Committee of the European Social Charter and European Code of Social Security (“the Governmental Committee”), in the pursuit of social justice and the protection of social rights.

7. On the occasion of this High-Level Conference, which coincides with the 25th anniversary of the entry into force of the revised European Social Charter and the 75th anniversary of the Council of Europe, the representatives of Council of Europe member States:

- a. underline the importance of having a robust and responsive social rights framework across Europe, underpinned in particular by relevant treaty law, including the European Social Charter system. It is the collective duty of member States to promote respect for, and the continuing development of, social rights, both as human rights and also as vectors of economic growth, social progress and social cohesion, peace, security and stability;
- b. affirm that military aggression and breaches of peace are incompatible with States' human rights obligations in general, and, in particular, with their social rights obligations; in this context, welcome the solidarity shown towards the people of Ukraine and the social protection offered by Council of Europe member States to those who are temporarily displaced;
- c. acknowledge the possibility offered by the Charter for States Parties to increase progressively their commitments aimed at respecting, protecting and implementing social rights, a process that can and should be further strengthened through constructive and enhanced dialogue between the competent national authorities and the organs of the Charter, together with social partners;
- d. welcome the commitment of member States of the Council of Europe to promote social justice and, in particular, the efforts made by member States to accept a high level of commitment to social rights, and the effective action taken by the States Parties to the European Social Charter to address the findings and conclusions of the European Committee of Social Rights when necessary;
- e. recall that the Council of Europe Development Bank, in line with its unique social mandate, contributes to strengthening social cohesion through projects with social value in its member countries;
- f. welcome the decisions adopted by the Council of Europe Committee of Ministers to improve the implementation of the Charter system and its monitoring arrangements. This includes an invitation to the European Committee of Social Rights to apply, where possible, the existing Charter provisions to new and emerging social policy challenges and to strengthen the role of the Governmental Committee in respect of follow-up and reflection;
- g. acknowledge the crucial role of national executives and legislatures in strengthening the protection of social rights through legislative action, in particular the part parliaments play in the ratification process of international treaties, and the acceptance of additional commitments under the Charter.

8. Consequently, the representatives of Council of Europe member States:

- a. commit to respect, protect and implement social rights in general and, for the States Parties to the Charter, to pay continued attention to the challenges and opportunities to implement the Charter's requirements and, to this end, encourage States Parties to make full use of all available possibilities for enhanced dialogue between the organs of the Charter, States Parties and social partners;
- b. encourage member States to consider ratifying the revised European Social Charter (1996) in an effort, alongside the policy approaches of member States, to support the Council of Europe's stated aim of facilitating economic and social progress;
- c. propose to keep under review the possibilities for acceptance of additional commitments under the Charter, including the collective complaints procedure;
- d. invite the Committee of Ministers of the Council of Europe to:
  - i. enable further discussions with national as well as competent local and regional authorities, and social partners, in order to promote a rights-based approach to social policy and the sharing of knowledge and good practice in responding to persistent and emerging common problems and challenges. The following areas might be covered:

- inequalities, low incomes and social exclusion, housing and demographic change;
  - any form of discrimination having an impact on the full enjoyment of social rights;
  - the social rights dimension related to the Reykjavik Declaration commitment “to [strengthen the] work on the human rights aspects of the environment”;
  - persistent and emerging challenges in the area of work, with the necessary attention being paid to freedom of association and collective bargaining, new forms of employment, the transition to a green economy, digitalisation, including the advent of artificial intelligence, technological change, work-life balance and, very significantly, the questions of participation and dignity (such as the protection against all forms of harassment, including sexual harassment) in the workplace;
- ii. give increased priority to co-operation activities in the field of social rights with a view to improving the implementation of the Charter in the light of the monitoring outcomes of the European Committee of Social Rights and related Committee of Ministers recommendations. The “social rights” component of the Council of Europe Action Plan for Ukraine “Resilience, Recovery and Reconstruction” 2023-2026, is an inspiring example of such activities;
  - iii. ensure co-operation among Council of Europe entities and committees in the area of social rights, and continue to work together while exploring possibilities to increase co-operation with other international organisations as well as with the European Union in promoting social rights as guaranteed by the European Social Charter and its protocols;
  - iv. remain open to considering possible measures for further optimising the Charter system;
  - v. explore regularly the need to convene this High-Level Conference to address contemporary social policy challenges, also taking into account the expected outcomes.