

Council of Europe

HIGH-LEVEL CONFERENCE ON SOCIAL RIGHTS

The European Social Charter

18-19 March 2026

*Palatul Republicii,
Chişinău, Republic of Moldova*



COUNCIL OF EUROPE



Building on the 2023 Reykjavík Declaration and the 2024 Vilnius Declaration, the 2026 High-Level Conference on the European Social Charter will focus on strengthening the protection and implementation of social rights across Europe. The Conference aims to promote wider ratification and acceptance of the Charter, reinforce political commitment and partnerships, and highlight the Charter's role as a foundation of the European human rights system.

Discussions will examine the contribution of social rights to democratic stability and security, efforts to reduce inequality, and the prevention of democratic backsliding, including in the context of the New Democratic Pact for Europe. Participants will also address key challenges linked to the future of work, particularly those arising from technological change.

Ministers and senior officials will review progress in the ongoing Charter reform process, with the opportunity to take on further commitments during a dedicated treaty event.

The Conference will conclude with the adoption of a Declaration reaffirming the collective commitment to social rights and to the European Social Charter.



PROGRAMME

Wednesday, 18 March 2026

09:30 – 13:00 Side events

14:00 – 17:30 Side events

18:30 – 22:00 Welcome event hosted by the Moldovan authorities and the Council of Europe, Palatul Republicii, Chişinău

Thursday, 19 March 2026

Large Hall 2nd floor

08:00 – 09:00 Accreditation

09:00 – 09:20 OPENING SESSION

(Open to the Press)

*Moderated by **Ms Natalia Plugaru**, Minister of Labour and Social Protection of the Republic of Moldova*

- ▶ **H.E. Maia Sandu**, President of the Republic of Moldova
- ▶ **Mr Alain Berset**, Secretary General of the Council of Europe

09:20 – 10:00

- ▶ **Ms Petra Bayr**, President of the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe
- ▶ **Mr Marc Cools**, President of the Congress of Local and Regional Authorities, Council of Europe
- ▶ **Mr Mattias Guyomar**, President of the European Court of Human Rights, Council of Europe
- ▶ **Mr Michael O'Flaherty**, Council of Europe Commissioner for Human Rights
- ▶ **Mr Carlo Monticelli**, Governor of the Council of Europe Development Bank
- ▶ **Ms Aoife Nolan**, President of the European Committee of Social Rights

10:00 – 10:30 Coffee break / Family Photo

Moderated by

- ▶ **Mr Michael Falzon**, Minister for Social Justice and Solidarity, the Family and Children's Rights of the Republic of Malta

This session will emphasise the crucial role of social rights, as guaranteed by the European Social Charter system, in building stable and resilient democracies.

In the framework of the New Democratic Pact, Ministers and high-level officials will highlight the link between social justice and democratic stability and security, examining how social rights act as safeguards against democratic erosion and as foundations for inclusive, sustainable societies reinforcing public trust in democratic institutions.

Having regard to contemporary societal challenges, the session will address social rights shortfalls, socio-economic inequality and the cost-of-living crisis and their potential for creating political backlash.

Introduction of the session by the Moderator

Setting the scene

- ▶ **Mr Olivier de Schutter**, UN Rapporteur for Extreme Poverty and Human Rights and member of the European Committee of Social Rights

Statements by heads of national delegations/Exchange of views

Responses from other stakeholders

European Commission – DG EMPL

United Nations Populations Fund – UNFPA

European Economic and Social Council – EESC

Council of Europe Advisory Council on Youth

Unión General de Trabajadores – UGT

Moderated by

- ▶ **the RH Dame Diana Johnson MP**, Minister for Employment for the Department of Work and Pensions of the United Kingdom

This session will examine the impact of rapid technological change and environmental risks including artificial intelligence, platform work, and non-standard employment, as well as transition to a green economy, on the future of work and social rights. Ministers and high-level participants will reflect on the challenges these transformations pose to fairness, security, and dignity at work.

The discussion will also address the need to foster open and transparent dialogue between workers and employers. Participants will further consider how to ensure that technological innovation goes hand in hand with the protection of human rights and will consider environmental risks.

Introduction of the session by the Moderator

Setting the scene

- ▶ **Mr George Theodosis**, Vice-President of the European Committee of Social Rights

Statements by heads of national delegations/Exchange of views

Responses from other stakeholders

Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development – OECD

European Institute for Gender Equality – EIGE

International Labour Organization – ILO

European Youth Forum – EYF

International Trade Union Confederation – ITUC

15:30 – 17:00 SESSION 3: STRENGTHENING SOCIAL RIGHTS IMPLEMENTATION – STOCKTAKING OF THE CHARTER SYSTEM REFORM

Moderated by

- ▶ **Ms Trini Marín González**, Minister of Social Affairs of Andorra

This session will reflect on ways to further increase the Charter's relevance and impact, exploring how social rights can shape and support State efforts to tackle key contemporary challenges, notably the cost of living, ageing societies and climate change.

Introduction of the session by the Moderator

Setting the scene

- ▶ **Ms Tatiana Puiu**, Vice-President of the European Committee of Social Rights
- ▶ **Mr Aongus Horgan**, President of the Governmental Committee

Presentation of Stocktaking report

- ▶ **Mr Giuseppe Palmisano**, Vice-Chair of the UN Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights

Statements by heads of national delegations/Exchange of views

Responses from other stakeholders

European Trade Union Confederation – ETUC

Conference of International Non-Governmental Organisations of the Council of Europe – CINGO

Academic Network on the European Social Charter and Social Rights – ANESC

European Network of National Human Rights Institutions – ENNHRI

17:00 – 17:30 CLOSING SESSION: THE ROAD AHEAD - ADOPTION OF THE DECLARATION

Moderated by

- ▶ **Ms Natalia Plugaru**, Minister of Labour and Social Protection of the Republic of Moldova

This session will allow a few heads of national delegations to express and explain their support for the Conference Declaration and for future activities and developments intended to strengthen the Council of Europe response in the area of social rights and the European Social Charter.

- ▶ *Statement by* **Ms Natalia Plugaru**, Minister of Labour and Social Protection of the Republic of Moldova
- ▶ *Statement by* **Mr Gianluca Esposito**, Director General of Human Rights and the Rule of Law, Council of Europe

17:30 – 17:45 CLOSING OF THE HIGH-LEVEL CONFERENCE

- ▶ **H.E. Alexandru Munteanu**, Prime Minister of the Republic of Moldova

18:00 – 19:00 Refreshments



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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.



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ȘI PROTECȚIEI SOCIALE
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PRESIDENCY OF THE
REPUBLIC OF MOLDOVA
COUNCIL OF EUROPE
NOVEMBER 2025 - MAY 2026
PRESIDENCE DE LA
RÉPUBLIQUE DE MOLDOVA
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NOVEMBRE 2025 - MAI 2026

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