

COUNCIL OF EUROPE



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A rights-based approach to combating poverty in Europe:
between policy and (good) practice

5th Meeting

of the CoE-FRA-ENNHRI-EQUINET Collaborative Platform

on Social and Economic Rights

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MEETING REPORT

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Introduction

The Collaborative Platform on Economic and Social Rights between the Council of Europe (CoE), the European Network of National Human Rights Institutions (ENNHRI), the European Network of Equality Bodies (EQUINET) and the European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights (FRA) held its 5th meeting in Riga, at the initiative of the Ombudsman of the Republic of Latvia. It aimed in particular at initiating discussion on the implementation of particular articles of the European Social Charter (ESC) whilst the previous Platform meetings focused on the Charter in general. In this context, an entire session was devoted solely to Article 30 of the Charter - the right to protection against poverty and social exclusion. The meeting also continued the discussion on the European Pillar of Social Rights and took note of the legal framework of the Council of Europe for the protection of social rights. An exchange of views was held on the Platform's online co-operation.

Opening

Juris Jansons, Ombudsman of the Republic of Latvia welcomed the participants. His introduction was as follows:

"I am delighted that Platform on social and economic rights meeting is being held in Riga. And I am even more delighted that the topic of the meeting is poverty.

Poverty is a social phenomenon which exists in every country, however the level of poverty differs in each country. Why is it? What is being done differently?

The United Nations has considered the reduction of poverty as one of the main targets in Millennium goals and also in SDGs¹. Also, Article 30 of the European Social Charter (revised) sets the obligation for States Parties to take measures to decrease poverty.

Thus the reduction of poverty equals increase of welfare.

However, understanding of welfare is very individual. Especially if referring to welfare as a philosophical notion. The welfare threshold is individual and mainly depends on the value system and life quality of each person. In the context of human rights, welfare is a socially economic term.

There are many international human rights documents which refer to welfare as a value, standard, guarantee that the States Parties have to ensure to their inhabitants. These documents indicate the necessity to increase the welfare level continuously.

Another aspect is the minimum standard. The minimum standard of social rights refers to a certain standard of living that can be reconciled to the minimum standard of welfare, that is:

¹ Sustainable development goals.

- each person has to have a standard of living that includes food, clothing, housing, medical treatment and social services necessary to maintain the person's and his/her family health;
- each employed person has to be provided with a salary that ensures a life compatible with the human dignity of the person and his/her family;
- social security and the realisation of the rights necessary to maintain self-respect and free development;
- right to continuous improvement of living conditions.

The minimum standard of welfare is mainly directed towards the person to ensure that his/her living standard would be compatible with human dignity, as well as to provide an opportunity to everybody, in line with the principle of equality, to live an adequate, suitable and fulfilling life, and to ensure free development and independence of the person.

If we analyse poverty from a practical point of view, the United Nations has pointed out that the global poverty rate has been halved since 2000.² It shows a positive trend.

However, almost every day, as an Ombudsman, I receive applications from seniors, persons with disabilities and families with children with questions: "How can I survive with such low income? How can I support my family?"

In cases like this, people do not inform me about the lack of money for presents for friends or the inability to go on a week-long trip abroad. They talk about insufficient income to provide food, clothing, housing, medical treatment and social services. They are people who work, who want to support themselves; who do not want to live on social benefits; however, most salaries do not guarantee a life compatible with human dignity.

In the case of seniors in Latvia, it is survival rather than the enjoyment of old age and a decent life.

In the case of persons with disabilities, Latvia has recently received recommendations from the UN CRPD Committee³ to ensure an adequate standard of living for persons with disabilities and their families, including the guarantee that social protection and poverty reduction programmes take into account the additional costs related to disability.

There are several preconditions for the development of welfare in Latvia:

- Latvia is an independent and democratic state;

² Sustainable development knowledge platform: <https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/sdg1>

³ Committee on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, Concluding Observations in relation to the initial report of Latvia:

http://tbinternet.ohchr.org/_layouts/treatybodyexternal/Download.aspx?symbolno=CRPD%2fC%2fLVA%2fCO%2f1&Lang=en

- Latvia is located on the crossroads between West and East, on the Baltic Sea shore which is a favourable precondition for economic development;
- Latvia is a member of international organisations (EU, CoE, NATO, UN, OECD, etc.) oriented towards welfare, life in peace and safety;
- the principle of a socially responsible country has been included in the Constitution of the Republic of Latvia.

Thus, it is appreciable that the United Nations can advise about progress in decreasing poverty. However, I believe that theory and practice are still in conflict, even in countries which have preconditions for improving welfare.

Therefore, why do we still have to talk about poverty? Has the international society done enough to decrease poverty? Have responsible institutions done enough to reduce poverty at the national level? What instruments have been used to reduce poverty? Which instruments are efficient and which are not? What more can we do?

I hope to find answers to some of these questions today.

I wish everybody fruitful discussions with valuable lessons learned for your home countries and institutions."

Danuta Wiśniewska-Cazals from the Department of the European Social Charter, Council of Europe, pointed out that the meeting aimed in particular at initiating a debate on the implementation of particular articles of the European Social Charter, in this case Article 30 of the Charter - right to protection against poverty and social exclusion.

She congratulated the Ombudsman of the Republic of Latvia for initiating a meeting on a theme which was in line with the Council of Europe's major concerns, namely the promotion and guarantee of human rights to all and throughout whole Europe. On behalf of the Platform, she thanked Mr Juris Jansons for inviting and hosting the meeting and for supporting this nascent tradition of organising the Platform's meetings in the Member States.

Furthermore, she thanked the team of the Ombudsman, namely Anete Ilves and Evita Berke, for their important efforts in organising the meeting.

She also welcomed Mr Ingus Alliks, State Secretary at the Ministry of Social Protection of the Republic of Latvia, here representing the European Platform for Social Cohesion, a platform for intergovernmental cooperation also managed by the Department of the European Social Charter of the Council of Europe.

Danuta Wiśniewska-Cazals then presented the programme of the day, speakers and panellists.

As regards the point on the European Pillar of Social Rights, she recalled that the Secretary General of the Council of Europe has submitted its opinion to the European Commission (EC) as part of the consultation process on the Pillar. He asked that the provisions of the European Social Charter be formally integrated into

the Pillar as a common reference point for States to guarantee social rights. The Secretary General also proposed that the Collective Complaints procedure be recognised by the Pillar. The Pillar elaborated by the European Commission sets out a series of principles and rights aimed at contributing to the proper functioning and fairness of labour markets and social protection systems. The Commission's proposal makes reference to the Charter, but in a rather superficial way and does not fully integrate the proposals of the Secretary General. We hope that the EU Social Summit in Gothenburg later this year (17 November 2017) and the process of implementation of the Pillar will result in a more robust consideration of the Charter as an integral part of the Pillar.

Danuta Wiśniewska-Cazals stressed that the identification of good practices in the implementation of tools to eradicate poverty, in particular the European Social Charter, was the main focus of the meeting. She recalled that this right was a fruit of the reform of the 1961 Social Charter which led, in 1996, to the adoption of the Revised Charter that added a new series of rights, including Article 30 on the right to protection against poverty and social exclusion. The introduction of this new Article 30 reflected the feeling of the Council of Europe member States that living in a situation of poverty and social exclusion undermined the dignity of the human being. This article is the first binding provision in the field of human rights that provides protection against poverty and social exclusion. She added that among the obligations under Article 30, it is up to the States to provide for the implementation of various measures, which may or may not involve pecuniary aids and which concern both excluded persons and those at risk of being excluded.

Finally, she thanked all the main partners of the Platform for their commitment in preparing this meeting. She welcomed all participants, both those who have been faithful since the first meeting and the newcomers.

Katrine Steinfeld (Equinet) reminded participants of the issues tackled by the platform in Strasbourg on 28 March 2017. These included enriching input on the abovementioned Council of Europe opinion on the European Pillar of Social Rights, and a review of concerns raised by NEBs and NHRIs regarding the Pillar in the public consultations, including reactions by the European Commission. Platform participants received a review of the decisions of the European Committee of Social Rights in 2016, as well as an update on progress under the Turin process. There were fruitful discussions on how to define an indicator for effective monitoring of social and economic rights, and a review of the use of the online SharePoint for sharing materials and retaining contact between meetings.

The ambition to engage directly with national developments identified by platform members desirous to host the platform in their countries was reaffirmed based on the experience of the first such meeting in Belgrade on 10 October 2016, and preparations were made for the current Riga meeting which we are grateful to the Latvian Ombudsman for initiating and hosting.

Towards efficient protection of social and economic rights in Europe

Turning the principles and rights enshrined in the European Pillar of Social Rights into reality

The main principles of the European Pillar of social rights were presented by Agnese Agile, Economic Advisor to the Representation of the European Commission in Riga. She recalled the main objective of the Pillar of Social Rights which is to contribute to social progress by supporting fair and well-functioning labour markets and welfare systems. The Pillar was elaborated to respond to the new realities of the labour market and the changing attitudes of employees and employers by delivering new and more effective rights for citizens : from the right to fair wages to the right to health care; from lifelong learning, a better work-life balance and gender equality to minimum income. The Pillar should provide concrete tools and methods to member States and other stakeholders to respond to the current trends such as aging of the population, low fertility rates, more single person households, persisting gender gaps in education, representation, pensions, wage and employment, and others.

The European Pillar of Social Rights is divided into three main chapters. Each of these contains a number of policy domains, to which 20 different principles are attached:

- ✓ Chapter I: Equal opportunities and access to the labour market

This includes skills development, education and training, life-long learning and active support for employment in order to increase employment opportunities, facilitate transitions between different employment statuses and improve the employability of individuals.

- ✓ Chapter II: Fair working conditions

The objective is to establish an adequate and reliable balance of rights and obligations between workers and employers to facilitate job creation, job take-up and the adaptability of firms, and promoting social dialogue, healthy and safe working conditions.

- ✓ Chapter III: Social protection and inclusion

This includes access to health, social protection benefits and high quality services, including childcare, healthcare and long-term care, which are essential to ensure a dignified living and protection against life's risks in order to enable citizens to participate fully in employment and, more generally, in society.

Transforming the Pillar's principles into reality is a joint responsibility. While most of the tools to deliver on the Pillar are in the hands of member States, as well as

social partners and civil society, the European Union institutions – and the European Commission in particular – can help by setting the framework and giving the direction, building on the existing and new EU social law. In addition, the Commission has put forward a number of legislative and non-legislative initiatives related to [work-life balance](#), the information of workers, access to social protection and working time.

The [proposal for a Directive on work-life balance](#), for instance, aims at modernising the existing EU legal framework in the area of family-related leaves and flexible working arrangements in order to enable parents and other people with caring responsibilities to better balance their work and family lives and to encourage a better sharing of caring responsibilities between women and men. Some of the legislative measures in the new Directive include the introduction of at least 10 working days of paternity leave around the time of birth of the child, compensated at least at the level of sick pay; the introduction of 5 days per year of carers' leave for workers caring for seriously ill or dependent relatives, compensated at least at sick pay level, the extension of the right to request flexible working arrangements (reduced working hours, flexible working hours and flexibility in place of work) to all working parents of children up to 12 and carers with dependent relatives, etc.

Concerning the information for workers, Agnese Agile underlined that the Directive on the employer's obligation to inform employees of the conditions applicable to the contract or the employment relationship ([Directive 91/533/EEC](#) of 14 October 1991), represents an opportunity to open a debate on the minimum safeguards for workers employed in flexible or precarious working conditions. The Directive obliges employers to ensure workers receive enough information about their working conditions in a timely manner.

With regard to the access to social protection, Agnes Agile mentioned that one of the main concerns for the EU would be how to provide as many people as possible with social security cover in the current situation when more flexibility on the labour market is required and there is a real risk of more precarious jobs and inequalities.

The [Working time Directive 2003/88/EC](#) establishes individual rights for any worker in the EU and thus gives concrete expression to Article 31 of the Charter of Fundamental Rights of the European Union which recognises as part of 'EU primary law' the right of every worker to '*working conditions which respect his or her health, safety and dignity*' and to '*limitation of maximum working hours, daily and weekly rest periods, and annual paid leave*'. Indeed, the Working time Directive lays down minimum safety and health requirements for the organisation of working time in respect of periods of daily rest, breaks, weekly rest, maximum weekly working time, annual leave and aspects of night work, shift work and patterns of work. The interpretative Communication on the Directive explains the legal basis and purpose of the text and aims to provide greater certainty and clarity to national

authorities to better apply the Directive's provisions in the context of new and flexible working arrangements.

The Pillar should serve as a compass for a renewed socio-economic convergence within the euro area⁴. In this framework, the Pillar is supported by a 'social scoreboard' which will monitor employment and social performances of EU member States in 12 areas and will feed into the [European Semester](#) of economic policy coordination, in particular in the Joint Employment Report.

The scoreboard serves as a reference framework to monitor 'societal progress' and it should detect in a timely way the most significant employment and social challenges as well as progress achieved over time. This monitoring tool would allow, as well benchmarking, successful outcomes to ensure overall improvement.

Along with the European Pillar of Social Rights, the European Commission has launched a debate on the future of Europe by issuing a [White paper on the future of Europe](#) in March 2017. Agnese Agile presented the main aspects of the White paper which maps out the drivers of change in the next decade and presents a range of scenarios for how Europe could evolve by 2025. The five scenarios should help steer a debate on the future of Europe, but the starting point for each scenario is that the EU member States move forward together as a Union. The European Commission is committed to deepening and broadening the discussion on the future of Europe by putting forward the question of the role and the added value of the EU instruments for citizens and what challenges to tackle together.

Between the writing of this Report and meeting of the Platform in September 2017, the European Pillar of Social Rights was proclaimed and signed by the European Parliament, the Council of the EU and the Commission during the Gothenburg Social Summit for fair jobs and growth on 17 November 2017.

The full presentation of [Agnese Agile](#) can be found [here](#).

The European Pillar of Social Rights was commented on by [Marco Cilento](#), representative of the European Trade Union Confederation (ETUC) via Skype. He emphasised that ETUC supports the efforts of the European Union to address social rights among member States through a set of rights which cover the entire life of people and are addressed to everyone.

In particular, ETUC strongly supports the initiative to improve work-life balance, including paid paternity and careers' leave, believes self-employed and 'non-standard' workers must have access to social protection and wants the [Written Statement Directive](#) to be revised in order to cover the workers, including the self-employed, trainees and apprentices.

⁴ The Pillar is primarily conceived for the euro area, but is open to all EU member States wishing to participate.

The Pillar provides also an opportunity for the EU to review and renew some of the existing legislation relating to social rights.

Nevertheless, he underlined that the new realities on the labour market (different types of employment contracts, frequent change of employer, city or country etc.) request an adequate and coordinated approach at European level in order to respond to the preoccupations of workers today that have been waiting since the crisis for concrete action to improve their standard of living. Concretely, ETUC demands a revision of the European Semester, making sure that the social dimension and social rights are at the core of the European integration process, a proposal for employment Directives to make the rights in the Pillar real for all workers in all workplaces, including a 'Directive on effective enforcement of workers' rights'. In addition, the EU and member States should do more to promote collective bargaining and encourage pay rises to drive growth and tackle inequality – including the east-west pay gap.

The Pillar came out with a new set of benchmarks and indicators structured around the three main dimensions: equal opportunities and access to the labour market (covering aspects of fairness related to education, skills and lifelong learning, gender equality in the labour market, inequality and upward mobility, living conditions and poverty, and youth), dynamic labour markets and fair working conditions (covering labour force structure, labour market dynamics, and income) and public support/social protection and inclusion (covering fair outcomes through public support and/or social protection). The main concern for ETUC is how the indicators are organised and are they pertinent enough when measuring progress within different areas of social policy in different countries.

Marco Cilento emphasised that there is a need to propose and support an action plan for the implementation of the 20 principles, to set out a timetable for legislative changes and other initiatives, and allocate budget for implementation where needed. In addition, he said that a strong social dialogue between the EU institutions and all social partners is essential to build up a road map for implementation. He confirmed ETUC and national trade unions, together with the other social partners, are ready to actively contribute to implementation through institutional dialogue, social dialogue, collective bargaining and workers' participation, at the relevant levels. To conclude, Mr Cilento said that trade unions want a stronger Pillar, a member States commitment to implement, and the full involvement of trade unions and employers.

Legal framework of the Council of Europe for the protection of social rights

Cipriana Moraru from the Division of Human Rights Intergovernmental Co-operation, Council of Europe, presented the legal framework of the Council of Europe for the protection of social rights, in particular with regard to the fight against poverty and social exclusion.

She presented in particular the [European Convention on Human Rights](#) (“the Convention”) as applied by the [European Court of Human Rights](#) and supervised by the [Committee of Ministers](#) of the Council of Europe.

If the Convention provides direct protection for certain social rights (prohibition of slavery, servitude and forced labour, freedom of association and the right to education), it only indirectly protects against poverty and social exclusion, essentially under Articles 3 (Prohibition of torture) and 8 (Right to respect for private and family life) of the Convention.

It should be noted, however, that through a dynamic and constructive interpretation of the text of the Convention, the Court has developed indirect protection for many other social rights. Moreover, as of 2008, the European Court of Human Rights, in its Grand Chamber judgment [Demir and Baykara v. Turkey](#) of 12 November 2008 (§84) indicated the willingness of States to “strengthen the mechanism of the European Social Charter and that nothing prevents the Court from taking into account this when interpreting the provisions of the Convention”. The Court thus implicitly recognises the complementarity and interdependence of the Convention and the Charter. Thus, in its judgment [Luczak v. Poland](#) of 27 November 2007, the Court has made reference to Article 12 of the Charter, considering that the exclusion of a person from a social security scheme, in this case because of his nationality, cannot deprive him of any social security, thus threatening his means of subsistence.

With regard to Article 3 of the Convention, the Court has delivered several judgments on the condition of retention of migrants (Grand Chamber judgment [M.S.S. v. Belgium and Greece](#) of 21 January 2011), on living conditions of migrants (*V.M. and others v. Belgium* of 7 July 2015), on living conditions in an institution for persons with mental disorders (Grand Chamber judgment [Stanev v. Bulgaria](#) of 17 January 2012), on the protection of minors ([V.K. v. Russia](#) of 7 March 2017).

With regard to Article 8 of the Convention, Cipriana Moraru mentioned two judgments concerning the placement of children due to the indigence of their parents ([Wallova and Walla v. Czech Republic](#) of 26 October 2006; [A.K. and L. v. Croatia](#) of 8 January 2013). In the judgment [Saviny v. Ukraine](#) of 18 December 2008, aimed at taking care of children by their parents, both blind, on the grounds that they did not provide them with adequate care and housing, the Court considered that it was only a material deficiency that the authorities could have compensated by means other than the total separation of the family (ultimate measure for the most serious cases), the role of social welfare authorities being precisely to help people in precarious situations to overcome their difficulties.

Apart from the two major treaties, the European Social Charter and the European Convention on Human Rights, the Council of Europe has adopted other binding legal

instruments, which also have implications for the protection against poverty and exclusion by focusing in particular on vulnerable groups.

Cipriana Moraru mentioned then the Convention on Action against Trafficking in Human Beings ([CETS No. 197](#)), the Council of Europe Convention on preventing and combating violence against women and domestic violence ([CETS No. 210](#)), the Committee of Ministers Recommendation No. [R\(2000\)3](#) to member States on the Right to the Satisfaction of Basic Material Needs of Persons in Situations of Extreme Hardship, the Committee of Ministers Recommendation No. [R\(93\)1](#) to member States on effective access to the law and to justice for the very poor.

The Platform's participants agreed that further synergies between the different international standards were needed in order to improve their impact on national social policies, but also a better knowledge of the European case law related to social rights.

The full presentation of [Cipriana Moraru](#) can be found [here](#) (French only).

Identification of good practices in the implementation of tools to eradicate poverty, in particular the European Social Charter

In his introductory remarks, [Grigorios Tsioukas](#) from the European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights recalled that the aim of the session was to move from the general context of protecting and promoting social rights to a discussion focusing on the implementation of certain rights, in particular of the right to protection against poverty and social exclusion, which is enshrined in article 30 of the European Social Charter (revised).

The idea to tackle specific provisions of the ESC was put forward by our host, the Ombudsman of the Republic of Latvia, during the last meeting of the platform in Strasbourg 6 months ago. The starting point of this suggestion was that the elaboration and exchange of views and experiences on particular articles of the ESC would be a valuable and useful tool in the effort of Equality Bodies and National Human Rights Institutions to promote and monitor social rights at the national level contributing in that way in their implementation.

And why choose the fight against poverty and Article 30 of the Charter as the main subject of this meeting? Because a quarter of the population in Europe lives at risk of poverty and social exclusion. In some countries like Latvia the share of the population living in poverty conditions might even be higher. Such a social situation not only restricts the enjoyment of a whole spectrum of rights, reaching far beyond social rights and including also civil and political rights, but contradicts the social contact and undermines confidence to democratic institutions giving space and opportunity to populist movement and radicalism to gain influence.

Finally, Grigorios Tsioukas pointed out that to discuss this issue of critical importance, prominent scientists, experts and active members of civil society were present and willing to share their experiences.

Article 30 of the European Social Charter and the decisions and conclusions of the European Committee of Social Rights regarding the right to protection against poverty and social exclusion

Professor Lauri Leppik from the Tallinn University, former General Rapporteur of the European Committee of Social Rights, pointed out that this Committee was of the opinion that living in a situation of poverty and social exclusion violated the dignity of human beings; poverty means deprivation due to a lack of resources. In the light of the interpretation given by the European Committee of Social Rights, Article 30 of the ESC requires States to adopt an overall and coordinated approach, which should consist of an analytical framework, a set of priorities and measures to prevent and remove obstacles to access fundamental social rights. There should exist monitoring mechanisms involving all relevant actors, including civil society and persons affected by poverty and social exclusion. This approach must link and integrate policies in a consistent way, moving beyond sectoral or target group approach.

The measures taken must promote and remove obstacles to access to fundamental social rights, in particular employment, housing, training, education, culture and social and medical assistance. They should address the multidimensional phenomena of poverty and social exclusion and strengthen access to social rights, their monitoring and enforcement, improve the procedures and management of benefits and services, improve information about social rights and related benefits and services, as well as combat psychological and socio-cultural obstacles to accessing rights.

The European Committee of Social Rights stressed in its case law that as long as poverty and social exclusion persist, there should be an increase in the *resources deployed* to make social rights possible. Adequate resources should be allocated to attain the objectives of the strategy.

In 2013, the European Committee of Social Rights adopted its statement of interpretation of Article 30 in which it pointed out that the economic crisis should not result in the reduction of the protection of the rights recognised by the Charter. Governments are bound to take all necessary steps to ensure that the rights of the Charter are effectively guaranteed at a period of time when beneficiaries most need protection. It also underlined that the protection of persons living in vulnerable situations is a horizontal issue covered not only by Article 30, but by several other provisions of the Social Charter, e.g. articles 4§1, 12§1, 13§1, 15, 16, 23, 31. As a

result, it became clear that the application of art. 30 and other relevant Social Charter provisions depend on the countries acceptance of these provisions⁵.

Participants also noted that no collective complaint addresses Article 30 alone, but always in conjunction with other provisions of the Charter.

The full presentation by Lauri Leppik can be found [here](#).

⁵ Only 18 Council of Europe members States have ratified Article 30 of the ESC – Andorra, Belgium, Estonia, Finland, France, Greece, Ireland, Italy, Latvia, The Netherlands, Norway, Portugal, Serbia, Slovakia, Slovenia, Sweden, Turkey, Ukraine.

The contribution of EQUINET and ENNHRI to tackling poverty and inequality at national level

Socio-economic status as a ground of discrimination in Europe

Katrine Steinfeld, Policy Officer in EQUINET recalled the EU relevant legislation, namely Article 9 of the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union, and Article 21 of the Charter of Fundamental Rights. She pointed out that the most recent comprehensive overview of equality legislation, prepared for the European Network of Legal Experts in gender equality and non-discrimination, shows that legislation in 20 European countries provides protection against discrimination on a ground related to socio-economic status. She further observed that discrimination on the ground of socio-economic status was often combined with discrimination on other grounds, resulting in additional harm and social exclusion. As most legal systems are ill-equipped to deal with multiple and intersectional discrimination, this also means that less cases are taken on the socio-economic status ground, especially if jurisprudence on the other ground(s) is well-established.

Furthermore, Katrine Steinfeld presented the Equality Body's work on poverty: legal work on protected ground (14 jurisdictions), measuring poverty, monitoring access to rights, issuing Recommendations and building partnerships.

The full presentation of Katrine Steinfeld can be found [here](#).

Findings and recommendations on human rights based approach to measuring poverty in Europe, including in the context of sustainable development goals

Laurence Bond, Chair of the ENNHRI Working Group on economic, social and cultural rights, created in January 2016, presented the upcoming survey which explores more closely the relation between poverty measurement in Europe by national governments and poverty under the Sustainable Development Goals (Goal No. 1 being "End poverty") from a human rights based approach. One of the difficulties encountered, he said, was to approach some groups and capture their experiences. Therefore, new approaches for the participation of people at risk have to be developed in order to engage rights holders' participation in the poverty monitoring process.

The voice of civil society in the fight against poverty

Peter Verhaeghe, representative of the Conference of INGOs of the Council of Europe (COING) underlined that the struggle for social justice and access to social rights and against extreme poverty and social exclusion has always been a core theme for the COING.

The Working Group on Extreme Poverty of the COING was set up in the nineties of the last century and prepared studies and reports which contributed to the introduction of new Articles 30 and 31 in the revised ESC.

Since 2011, the Working Group organises, together with people experiencing poverty, a reflection day on 17 October, International Day for the Eradication of Poverty, with the participation of various CoE bodies. The first event, in 2011, was a conference on the occasion of the 50th anniversary of the ESC, co-organised with members of the European Committee of Social Rights, on the theme *“Human Rights in the context of the crisis; the contribution of the ESC”*.

In 2012, the joint [declaration](#) *“Acting together to eradicate extreme poverty in Europe”* was signed by the 4 pillars of the CoE ([Committee of Ministers](#), [Parliamentary Assembly](#), [Congress of Local and Regional Authorities](#) and [COING](#)).

In 2014, the COING organised its annual conference in Turin, back to back with the High Level Conference on the ESC. The participants, including people experiencing poverty, adopted a [message](#) which was presented to the High Level Conference: *“Gathering in the same city, at the same time and for the same cause, European institutions, national governments and NGOs must firmly commit to working together to move beyond the barriers and conclusions about powerlessness to secure the implementation of policies and measures advocated for by people who know from experience how the fight for human dignity and against exclusion should be conducted, for themselves and with others”*.

In 2015, the conference focused on child and family poverty, in support of the adoption by the Committee of Ministers of the Strategy for the Rights of the Child.

The theme of last year’s conference was disadvantaged youth, in particular people not in employment, education or training (NEETs), in support of Recommendation [CM/Rec\(2016\)7](#) of the Committee of Ministers to the member States on young people’s access to rights.

After the Turin Conference, the COING set up a Coordination Committee in support of the Turin Process and the ESC. The Committee brings together INGOs working both at CoE and EU level: ATD 4th World, European Social Action Network, Justice and Peace Europe, European Action of the Disabled (AEH) and Caritas Europa. The objective of the Committee is to increase the awareness of the COING members (and their members) of the ESC as well as their involvement in its promotion and monitoring, including the reporting procedure and use of the collective complaints procedure. The Committee also promotes the full inclusion of the ESC in the EU proposal for a European Pillar of Social Rights and promotes awareness of the possibilities of positive interaction between the two instruments for the promotion of social rights in Europe.

As a consequence of the work done by the Coordination Committee in support of the Turin Process and the ESC, the COING Working Group on the Rights of the Child has decided to encourage and coordinate INGO contributions to the 2015 reporting

under Thematic Group 4 of the ESC: Children, Families and Migrants (Articles 7, 8, 16, 17, 19, 27 and 31).

Caritas Europa produces thematic country reports and a European report on a regular basis. The first reports aimed at influencing social policy making at national and EU level, but increasingly included a reference to the ESC and were based on [Caritas "roadmap" for social justice and equality in Europe](#) (also available in [BG](#), [HR](#), [FR](#), [DE](#) and [ES](#)).

These reports are combined with Caritas Europa capacity building initiatives aiming at

- increasing advocacy efforts of the member organisations for the ratification of the revised ESC, for the acceptance of all relevant provisions that could have a decisive impact on the lives of the most deprived (including article 30) and for acceptance of the collective complaints procedure by more member States;
- increasing the collection and use of Caritas data and grass-roots information (country reports) as contribution to the ESC reporting procedure and to prepare collective complaints.

Given the fact that since 1996, only 18 Member States have ratified Article 30 of the ESC and even less accepted the collective complaints procedure, it is needless to say that a lot of advocacy for ratification has yet to be done before the procedure becomes a tool across CoE member States. Peter Verhaeghe concluded saying that the ESC was indeed the Social Constitution of Europe, efforts needed therefore to be continued to ensure that it does not become the best kept social secret of Europe.

Round table: Ending poverty

During the Round table on ending poverty, participants from the Netherlands, Belgium, Lithuania and Latvia presented some facts and figures but also good practices to reduce poverty in their respective countries.

[Jan de Vries](#) from the Netherlands Institute for Human Rights provided statistics on poverty in the Netherlands, including insufficient resources to acquire goods and services that are basic to function in society and homelessness. The full presentation of Jan de Vries can be found [here](#).

[Veerle Stroobants](#), from Combat Poverty, Insecurity and Social Exclusion Service of Belgium advised that in 1999 the federal, regional and community governments of Belgium signed a Cooperation Agreement which was approved by all parliaments. This Agreement forms the legal ground of the Combat Poverty, Insecurity and Social Exclusion Service whose mission is to evaluate the effectiveness of the fundamental rights of people living in poverty. The premise is that situations of

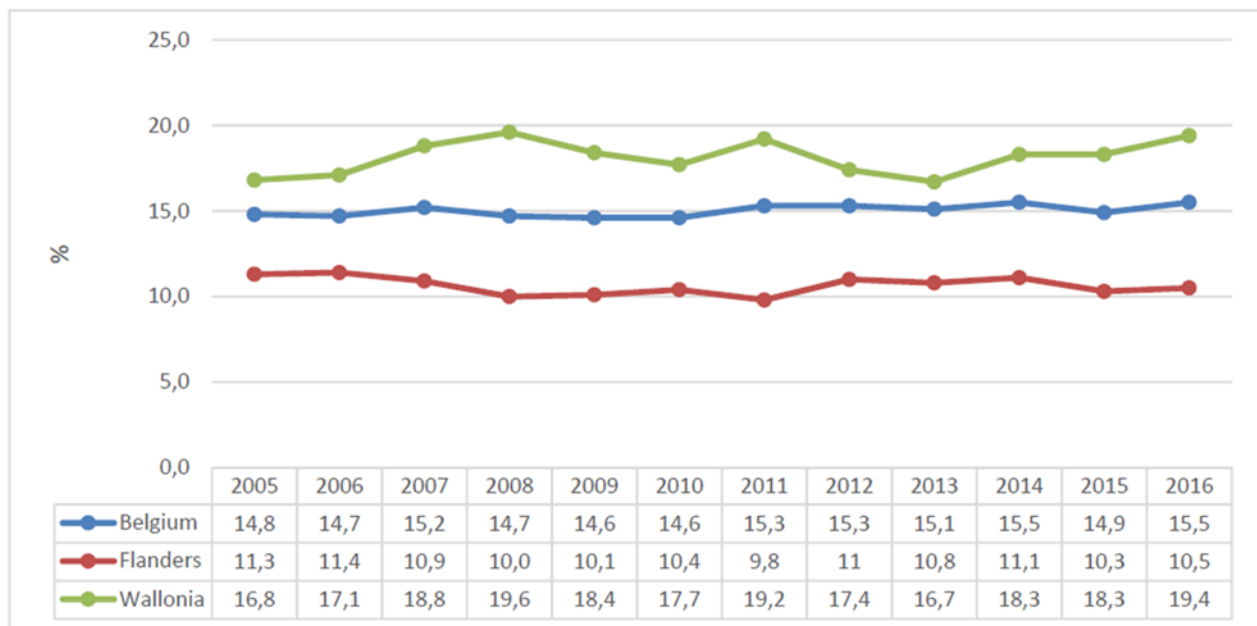
poverty endanger the effectiveness of fundamental rights and that the participation of people who live in these situations is necessary to evaluate the effectiveness of their rights and to restore the conditions in which their rights can be realised. On the basis of a structural dialogue with people who live themselves in poverty, social assistance groups, the administrations, civil society, politics, scientists and others. The Service every two year publishes a report with recommendations to the authorities: <http://www.luttepauvrete.be/>; <http://www.combatpoverty.be/>.

1. Overview of poverty in your country

Who is affected by poverty in your country? How does poverty affect people's ability to exercise their rights? What laws, policies and programs has the government used to tackle poverty?

The at-risk-of-poverty rate in Belgium is 15,5% (figures EU SILC 2016 with results for 2015). This number is rather stable over time, but there are differences between the different regions in Belgium.

Figure A3.1.2. At-risk-of-poverty rate per Region (2005-2016, in %)



Source: EU-SILC, EUROSTAT Statistics Belgium

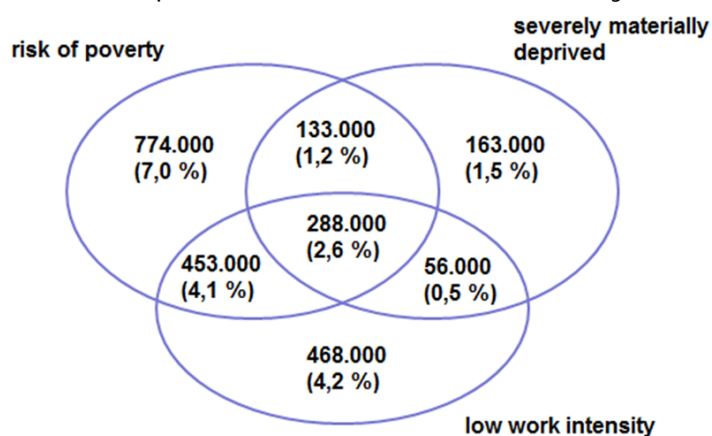
This means that 15,5% of the Belgian population has an income below 60% of the individual median disposable income (at-risk-of-poverty threshold). Today the at-risk-of-poverty threshold for a single person is 1.115 €/month, for a family with two adults and two children it is 2.341 €/month. Most benefits are below this threshold (1 September 2017).

Table A2.1. Minimum social protection allowances in % of at-risk-of-poverty threshold (60% of median)

	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017
Social assistance for the elderly								
Single person	92	94	91	93	93	95	93	93
Couple	82	84	80	83	83	84	82	83
Allowance replacing income for persons with a disability								
Single person	74	76	73	75	76	77	75	77
Couple with two children	66	67	65	66	67	67	66	67
Social assistance								
Single person	74	76	73	75	75	77	76	77
Couple	66	68	65	67	67	68	68	68
Couple with two children	67	68	66	67	67	68	67	67
Single parent with two children	88	89	86	88	88	89	89	88
Minimum Unemployment allowance (after 6 months)								
Single person	86	89	85	88	88	89	87	89
Couple	68	70	68	70	70	71	69	71
Couple with two children	69	70	68	69	69	70	68	70
Single parent with two children	86	88	85	87	87	88	86	87
Minimum invalidity allowance								
Single person	102	105	101	104	104	105	101	102
Couple with two children	81	83	80	82	83	83	80	80

Source : SPF Social Security

Next to an indicator for monetary poverty, Eurostat uses also indicators as severe material deprivation and low work intensity.

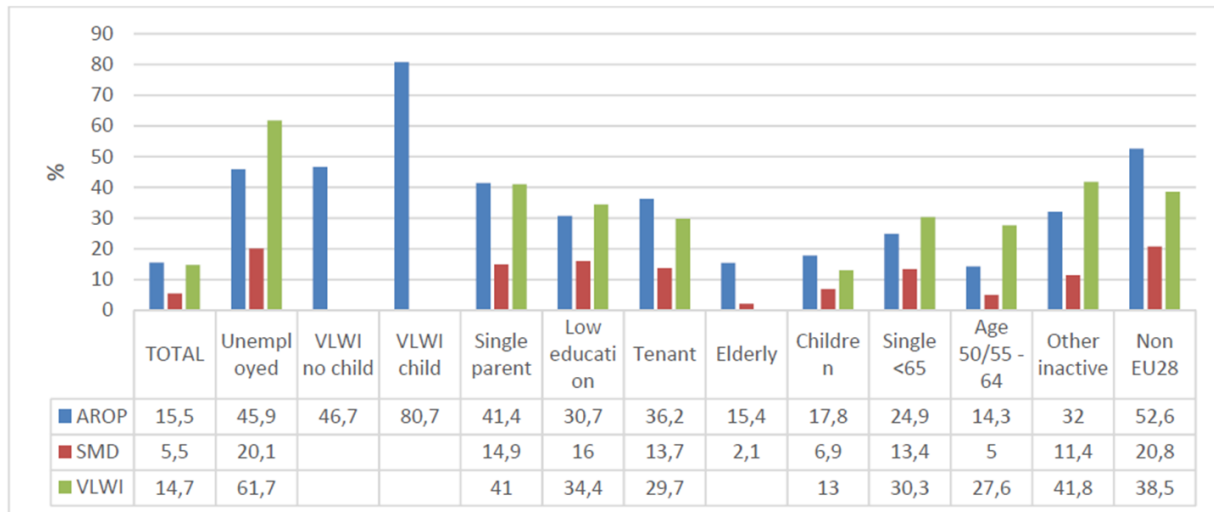


Intersections of Europe 2020 Poverty Target Indicators, Belgium, SILC 2015, Eurostat.

It is important to use a variety of indicators to measure poverty which allow uncovering the various realities people living in poverty face. Another way to show

the variety behind the figures of poverty is looking at disaggregated numbers. It becomes clear that some groups are more affected by poverty than others. The evolution over time shows that these proportions are rather stable, only for people with low education. The gap between them and the others is getting larger.

Figure 3.2.2. quarter. Incidence of poverty or social exclusion by high risk and policy relevant social categories, Belgium, 2016



Source : EU-SILC, EUROSTAT, Statistics Belgium

Poverty puts into danger the fundamental rights of people because of their difficult socioeconomic situation their fundamental rights are not effective. Poverty makes that people do not or do no longer think of themselves as people with rights/ subjects who are entitled to rights. This is very clear in this contribution of one of the participants at our meetings.

"Vivre dans la pauvreté, c'est vivre dans la peur. Peur d'être identifié et de se faire expulser.

Peur que cela se retourne contre toi, contre ta famille. Si tu dis les difficultés que tu vis, tu risques d'être repéré: il ne peut pas élever un enfant dans ces conditions. Alors, on place ton enfant.

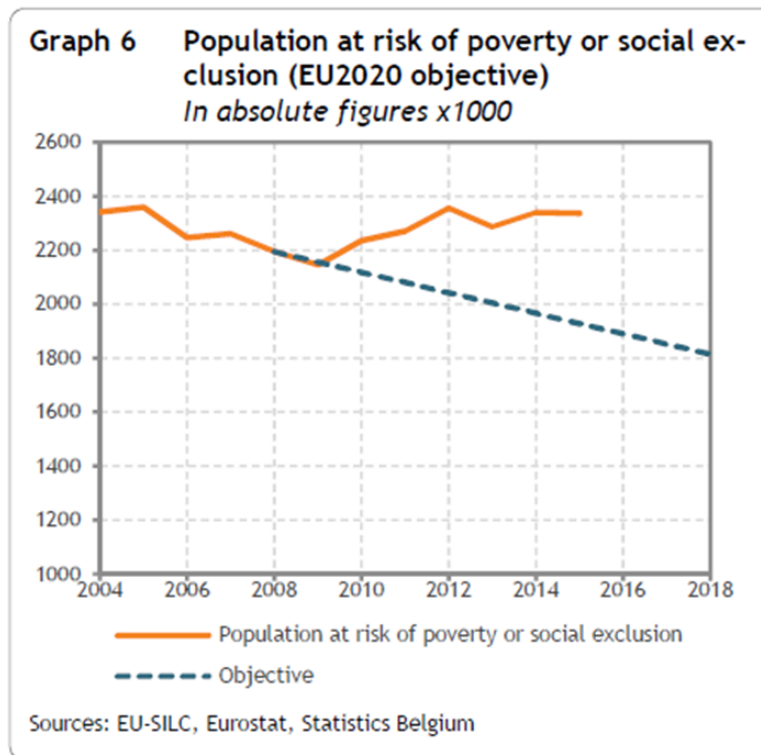
Peur de se révolter et de se mettre en colère, et que les enfants en pâtissent. C'est pour cela que, par exemple, certains parents préfèrent ne pas aller aux réunions de parents de l'école de leurs enfants.

Peur de perdre ses revenus. Peur de représailles si on se révolte contre ceux dont dépendent nos revenus.

Peur d'être rabaissé parce qu'on n'a pas fait d'études et qu'on ne comprend pas ce que les autres disent, peur d'être laissé de côté, peur de revivre l'exclusion qu'on a déjà vécue, peur d'être sans droits."

In Belgium the different policy levels have their own policy plan to fight against poverty. The aim is to reach the Europe 2020 target and to reduce the number of

persons at risk of poverty or social exclusion by 380.000 compared to 2008. When the same policy is held on, the target will not be reached.



There is a focus on

- Activation: having a job is seen as the way to get out of poverty. People who are out of a job are pushed to find another job by making their allowance degressive over time, people who live from a subsistence allowance are obliged to sign an activation contract;
- Fight against child poverty: the government wants to invest in the early childhood period to enhance the chances of children and youngsters in their studies and work. They seem to forget that poor children are children living in poor families;
- Quid pro quo: the number of conditions and obligations that people need to fulfil increases, before they are entitled to something.

2. Lessons learned about a human rights based approach to tackling poverty

What added value do you see in addressing poverty as a human rights issue?

Has framing poverty as a human rights issue impacted public discourse? If so, how? If not, why not?

The added value of a human rights approach is that it shows that the reality of the lives of people living in poverty is complex, intertwined and multidimensional. A policy to fight against poverty thus has to be integral and transversal, which is not

easy when different ministers are responsible for different policy domains. Even when we have a federal coordinating minister for the fight against poverty, there is no budget and no authority to impose a policy.

A human rights perspective has a focus on the effectiveness of rights for the most vulnerable groups. It can uncover the real impact of policy measures on the lives of people living in difficult circumstances, for example the activation strategy. Numbers show that compared to 2005, the amount of people in work is now 10% higher and the amount of unemployed people 9% lower. The authorities consider this finding as a confirmation of their strategy. But if you look at disaggregated figures it becomes clear that the rise in employment has been fully absorbed by people in households where other members were already working. Moreover if you look at the quality of the newly created jobs, the conclusion is that more jobs are part-time, temporary, badly paid, far from home, etc. The new jobs are of insufficient quality to lift workers out of poverty. What's more, the income poverty among the unemployed has significantly increased as a result of severe austerity measures. These measures go together with increased conditions, sanctions and suspensions as a result of which people disappear from the statistics.

A human rights perspective reminds us of the human rights standards to achieve. In the fights against poverty the notion of 'rights' is more central than it used to be. Policy makers are introducing the right to child care, the right to child benefits, the right to energy and they are putting forward a strategy to make the attribution of rights (such as for energy discount) as automatic as possible to avoid non-take-up of rights. At the same time however the quid pro quo discourse is stronger than the human rights discourse and fundamental rights are being undermined. More and more the debate is about:

- the right to a subsistence allowance instead of the right to live in dignity;
- the right to go to food aid instead of the right to qualitative food;
- the right to being accompanied in the search for housing instead of the right to a decent and affordable house;
- the right to visit your child in an institution instead of the right to the protection of your family life.

Moreover these 'fake' rights have to be earned and people have to prove that they are entitled to them.

3. Examples and case studies of how your institution has addressed poverty in its work

In different ways we try to reflect the real situations in which people in poverty live, because their lives and experiences show us whether their rights are being realised or not.

We have developed a large set of indicators that reflect a diversity of situations of poverty: the impact of debts on the household budget, the notion of 'available budget', the right to water and energy, job quality, visit to food banks, the difference between poverty in cities and in the countryside:

<http://www.luttepauvrete.be/publicationsserviceindicateurs.htm>

We insisted on research to integrate homeless people and undocumented migrants in the EU SILC Survey, some 'forgotten' groups, not taken into account in surveys: <http://www.luttepauvrete.be/publicationsrecherche.htm#> (Sous-représentation des plus pauvres dans les banques de données (SILC-CUT)).

We recorded that often people in poverty have no access to, or do not make use of, certain benefits, services or instruments that are meant to contribute to the effectiveness of their rights. A dominant explanation is that people are not informed, are not capable to take the necessary steps. We focus on the different causes of the non-take-up of rights, which are, next to the individual level, also situated at the policy level (conditions, complexity, perception, target groups), at the level of services (lack of information, accessibility, administrative procedures): <http://www.luttepauvrete.be/themenontakeup.htm>.

Vytautas Valentinavičius, Chief Public Relations Counsellor in the Seimas Ombudsmen's Office of the Republic of Lithuania, provided some statistics regarding poverty in Lithuania: the at-risk-of-poverty rate was the highest in the age group of 65 and older: in 2016, it stood at 27.7 per cent and, against 2015, grew by 2.7 percentage points. The growth was conditioned by an increase in the at-risk-of-poverty threshold, caused by an increase in labour income, and a relatively small increase in old-age pensions. In 2016, the at-risk-of-poverty threshold was EUR 282 per month for a single person and EUR 593 per month for a family consisting of two adults and two children under 14. Compared to 2015, due to an increase in the disposable income of the population, the at-risk-of-poverty threshold grew by 9 per cent. The retired and inactive persons became more exposed to poverty.

In Lithuania, most affected by poverty were individuals older than age of 64 (retired), children, people with disabilities, individuals living in rural areas of the country and employed people with a minimum wage.

The documents directed to combat poverty and social exclusion are the following: the Resolution of the Government of the Republic of Lithuania on the Implementation of the Poverty Reduction Strategy of the Republic of Lithuania in 2002-2004, the National Action Plan of the Republic of Lithuania for Combating Poverty and Social Exclusion in 2004-2006 and the Plan for the implementation of the programme of the Government of the Republic of Lithuania, approved in 2017 of which one of the directions of the priorities was: "Reducing poverty, social exclusion and income inequalities, and promoting employment".

Vytautas Valentinavičius finished his presentation by indicating measures taken by Ombudsmen to address the poverty such as engagement into a dialogue with the Government on the measures to be taken to reduce poverty, social exclusion and income inequalities (2017) and participation in an ENNHRI project on rights of elderly: *The Human Rights of Older Persons and Long-term Care* (2015-2017).

The full presentation of Vytautas Valentinavičius can be found [here](#).

Anete Ilves from the Ombudsperson's Office of the Republic of Latvia presented the situation with regard to poverty in Latvia. She underlined that the Constitution of Latvia, as well as different national initiatives, aim at protecting persons against poverty. The Constitution of Latvia, for instance, cover rights such as the right of equal treatment and the prohibition of discrimination, the right to receive, for work done, commensurate remuneration which shall not be less than the minimum wage established by the State, the right to social security in old age, for work disability, for unemployment and for other cases stipulated by the law, a guarantee of a basic level of medical assistance, free primary and secondary education without charge, primary education is compulsory. The Republic of Latvia relies also on international legal standards to combat poverty such as the European Social Charter, the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, the EU Charter of fundamental rights, the UN Convention on the Rights of persons with disabilities, the UN Convention on the Rights of Child etc.

Anete Ilves presented the current situation in Latvia, pointing out that 28,5% of the Latvian population is exposed to poverty risk and social exclusion, that the number of persons with disabilities at risk of poverty is increasing, the social minimum has not changed since 2005 and the determination of the status of a poor person has not changed since 2001. For example, the difference between the wealthy and poor is one of the most explicit in Latvia. In 2012, the wealthiest people (10% of population) received 26% of the total income in Latvia. Furthermore, she stressed that the guaranteed minimum income (GMI) benefit, 49.80 Euros, is extremely low and has not changed since 2013, although living standards in Latvia are comparable to those in Western European countries.

The Ombudsman of Latvia is carrying out different activities to address the issue, namely issuing reports on poverty, communicating with national and international institutions including the Council of Europe, organising meetings and conferences, ensuring media coverage and contributing to a national debate on the ratification of the revised European Social Charter by Latvia. The Office has also developed a pilot project on real life stories to raise awareness and encourage decision makers to adopt adequate policies.

The full presentation of Anete Ilves can be found [here](#).

Ilmārs Šņucins, Deputy State Secretary on Tax Policy Issues, Ministry of Finance of the Republic of Latvia, presented the changes in the framework of the tax reform in Latvia which were adopted by the Saeima (Parliament of Latvia) in July 2017 and entered into force in January 2018.

Some of the most important changes are the introduction of a differentiated personal income tax, the increase of the rate of the mandatory state social insurance contributions, the increase of the minimum monthly wage and changes regarding corporate income tax and micro enterprise tax.

Changes made to the individual (personal) income tax measures include new "progressive" income tax rates, as follows:

- 20% for annual income not exceeding €20,004
- 23% for annual income from €20,005 to €55,000
- 31.4% for annual income exceeding €55,000

The individual income tax rate on income from capital and capital gains is increased from the current rates of 10% and 15% to a unified rate of 20%.

The standard social security contribution rates will increase by 0.5% for both employees and employers, resulting in an 11% rate for employees and a 24.09% rate for employers. The additional income will be allocated to healthcare. The income on which social security contribution is paid is capped, with the cap being increased from €52,400 per year to €55,000.

For income above the standard social security contribution cap, a "solidarity tax" is payable at the same rate as the standard social security contribution. From 2018, the solidarity tax revenues will be "split", with part being allocated to cover the upper tax rate increase of 8.4% (thus, employees will not be subject to extra tax from the increase of the tax rate) and part allocated to the taxpayer's pension fund, resulting in what is being viewed as a personal benefit for the taxpayer and for what is hoped to be decreased motivation to avoid this tax.

Because the changes to the corporate income tax and individual income tax systems will form a unified system, changes have been made to the taxation of

dividends. The individual income taxation of dividend income and income from other profit distributions will not change when:

- Corporate income tax is paid on the distributed profits in Latvia or
- Corporate income tax is paid in a foreign country where the tax was withheld at source

Since retained earnings as of the end of 2017 will not be subject to the new corporate income tax regime, there will be a two-year transition period so that in 2018 and 2019, distributions of such profits will be subject to an individual income tax rate of 10%, but from 2020 onwards, the rate will be 20%.

The reform aims at attaining a sustainable economic growth in Latvia, attaining an average annual growth of at least 5%. The Government Action Plan aims at reducing the income inequality for employees, combating the shadow economy, increasing the total amount of taxes revenues in 2008 (30% of the Gross Domestic Product), improving the tax administration etc.

The Government expects that the measures taken under the reform should have a positive impact on the social policy of the country in general.

The full presentation of Ilmārs Šņucins can be found [here](#).

General discussion on ending poverty in national contexts

The results arising from the discussion were that some groups were much more vulnerable to poverty than others. These groups include single-parent households and especially women and women with children, elderly, people with disabilities, but also more and more people who work are considered poor according to the at-risk-poverty rate because of low salaries, the type of contract or limited access to social services. Receiving social allowances is subject to an increased number of conditions.

Participants agreed that addressing poverty through the human rights based approach facilitates the development of more effective and equitable responses to the multiple dimensions of poverty. From a human rights perspective, poverty is not only a matter of income, but also, more fundamentally, a matter of being able to live a life in dignity and enjoy basic human rights and freedoms. It describes a complex of interrelated and mutually reinforcing deprivations, which impact on peoples' ability to claim and access their civil, cultural, economic, political and social rights. The human rights based approach is used as a tool to raise awareness of institutions, social workers and society as a whole, but also to teach persons in need how to know and claim their rights.

Working methods of the CoE-FRA-ENNHRI -EQUINET Collaborative Platform on Social and Economic Rights

The Platform's web page was discussed following the replies of a questionnaire on the use and efficiency of the page, prepared by the Department of the European Social Charter and distributed to the Platform's members prior to the meeting. Tanya Montanari from the Department of the European Social Charter summarised the results of the questionnaire, pointing out the following:

- ✓ the web page of the Platform seems to be easily accessible by most of the members. There was a suggestion to make a separate link from the main Council of Europe web page under "Ensuring Social Rights" or to insert a link from the top banner of the European Social Charter web site. Tanya Montanari explained that the top banner of the Charter's web site is only dedicated to the Charter and its Committees and therefore, it is not possible to include the Platform there. Regarding a direct link from the main web page of the Council of Europe, only links to main administrative CoE entities and intergovernmental bodies can be published;
- ✓ the purpose of the web page is clear and the provided information is pertinent enough, but it was nevertheless suggested to publish additional reports, studies and documents in general which can be of use to other stakeholders. The Platform's members were then invited to submit any relevant document to the Department of the European Social Charter;
- ✓ the navigation is intuitive enough and the design aesthetically appealing.

Regarding the accessibility of the web page for persons with visual impairments, it was clarified that this requires a special IT development which is expensive and cannot be afforded by the Charter's Secretariat. In addition, computers of persons with visual impairments are usually equipped with special software which allows them to read different web sites.

It was also reminded that the web page is a public space managed by the Department of the European Social Charter only, and the SharePoint is a restricted area where all the Platform members can publish documents and interact. It became clear from the discussion that both web page and SharePoint are usually visited before each Platform's meeting. Therefore the Council of Europe encourages the Platform's members to be more proactive and publish relevant reports or studies which can be of use for the Platform.

Concluding remarks by Katrien Meuwissen (ENNHRI):

“I’ll end where we started this morning: with thanking you!

Thanks goes out of course in particular to our host the Ombudsman of Latvia – both in organisation and substance. The CoE Department of the European Social Charter also deserves a special applause as they remain the dedicated driving force behind this Platform we are happy to facilitate together also with the colleagues of EQUINET and the EU FRA and our special guest facilitator Mihir Mankad from the Centre for Economic and Social Rights in New York. And above all I want to thank you, the members of the Platform for bridging the European instruments with national realities. I really very much enjoyed the debate with all of you.

This Platform has been a great illustration of the need for close engagement amongst many partners to ensure that what we do across our different contexts (CoE/EU/national) is of the benefit to persons whose rights are in peril, such as the increasing group of persons living in poverty.

The cross-cutting message I take away from today is that in order to tackle the multi-dimensional problem that poverty is, we need to foster ‘interlinkages’. Interlinkages between partners, frameworks (legal and policy frameworks) and also: the inclusion of persons living in poverty in order to empower them, to take away stigmas and to raise the awareness that persons living in poverty are rights holders.

We heard early this morning from the EC that the European Social Pillar will be interlinked with existing monitoring frameworks and the European Semester in particular, which would entail the institutionalisation of recommendations of the EC to EU member States in the area of social rights, even if the competence of the EU in the area is very limited.

We have been warned by the European Trade Union Confederation that the European Social Pillar is on a roundabout, so let’s try to ensure through our involvement in the process that it won’t be a return to where we come from but a steady drive ahead. We need to be vigilant that a concrete action plan with roadmap to implement the Social Pillar will be elaborated and its implementation monitored.

The Council of Europe presentation reminded us that the ECtHR – even if targeting mainly civil and political rights because of the nature of the European Convention on Human Rights, has delivered important judgments in the area of social rights, including also poverty.

Professor Lauri Leppik showed how the European Committee on Social Rights in its 2013 interpretation of Article 30 of the European Social Charter fleshes out human rights based approach to poverty. This is really relevant as the Charter is the only

legally binding instrument referring to poverty explicitly. The interlinkage of poverty with other rights is apparent also in the collective complaints-handling of the Committee. While there is scope for launching a complaint on the basis of Article 30 specifically this has not occurred so far. Maybe the lack of such collective complaint can be an indication that protection against poverty and social exclusion is still not easily conceived as a human rights issue.

Katrine Steinfeld presented the impressive work of EQUINET and highlighted the intrinsic interlinkage between poverty and anti-discrimination: discrimination leads to poverty and social exclusion, while poverty / social exclusion contribute to the underreporting of discrimination. This was confirmed also by what Veerle Stroobants from the Belgian anti-poverty Service showed us with the short movie on the 'non-take up' of rights by persons living in poverty.

ENNHRI's work was presented by Laurence Bond, Chair of the ENNHRI working Group on economic, social and cultural rights. He highlighted ENNHRI's ongoing work on poverty measurement, including also under the Sustainable Development Goals. The Sustainable Development Goals constitute yet another framework which can be used when holding governments to account to fulfil their obligations and commitments to combat poverty and social exclusion. Careful attention is especially needed to ensure human rights based approach to the Sustainable Development Goals through the disaggregation of data which make vulnerable groups visible - in line with the Sustainable Development Goals motto 'to leave no one behind'. We also were reminded by Laurence Bond that vulnerable groups are 'easy to ignore' by governments rather than 'hard to reach' – with the increasing poverty rates in Europe, the poor are, sadly enough, indeed increasingly easy to reach.

Peter Verhaeghe from the Conference of INGOs of the Council of Europe highlighted further that the participation of persons living in poverty is generally limited. In order to increase the participation of persons living in poverty when we are addressing their rights in our work, we should also think of innovative approaches. An interesting example mentioned was the establishment of cooperation of NHRIs with social workers who engage with people living in poverty on a daily basis.

The lively panel of the afternoon further illustrated the diversity of approaches that national institutions are taking to tackle poverty today. We heard inspiring testimonies from Belgium, the Netherlands, Lithuania and Latvia. The contributions gave us insights into the role NHRIs play as human rights bridge-builders: connecting human beings – persons in poverty - to their rights. We also got a very lively Latvian illustration of how NHRIs can hold governments to account in this area, including through the presentation, followed by questions and answers, of the representative of the Ministry of Finance of Latvia. The integration of local stakeholders beyond Platform partners and members is a good practice which I hope we can repeat in future Platforms.

We ended the day by making sure that this meeting today is not the end, but a continuation of our cooperation – through the online SharePoint platform but also through meeting each other in real life. I think this meeting here in Riga today in a rather informal venue with interactive debate is really a nice and creative approach taken, which we should consider again for future Platforms. I am also really excited that proposals have been tabled by our members to host the next Platform meeting. I think this is a great indication that the Platform meetings create a positive impact on the work we do individually and collectively on a daily basis, to enhance the enjoyment of economic and social rights by persons across Europe.”

APPENDIX I PROGRAMME

PROGRAMME

- 08.30 – 09.00 Registration
- 09.00 – 09.30 Welcome by
Juris Jansons, Ombudsman of the Republic of Latvia
Danuta Wiśniewska-Cazals, Department of the European Social
Charter, Council of Europe
Opening remarks, including summary conclusions of the 4th
meeting and identified objectives by Katrine Steinfeld, Policy
Officer, European Network of Equality Bodies (EQUINET)
- Towards efficient protection of social and economic rights in Europe
- Moderator: Katrien Meuwissen, European Network of National
Human Rights Institutions (ENNHRI)
- 09.30 – 10.15 Turning the principles and rights enshrined in the European Pillar
of Social Rights into reality
- Presentation by Agnes Dagile, representative of the European
Commission
Presentation by Marco Cilento, representative of the European
Trade Union Confederation (ETUC)
Discussion
- 10.15 – 10.45 Legal framework of the Council of Europe for the protection of
social rights
- Presentation by Cipriana Moraru, Division of the Human Rights
Intergovernmental Co-operation, Council of Europe
Discussion
- 10.45 - 11.00 *Coffee break*

Identification of good practices in the implementation of tools to eradicate poverty, in particular the European Social Charter

Moderator: Grigorios Tsioukas, Seconded National Expert, Equality and Citizens' Rights Department, European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights

11.00 – 11.30 Article 30 of the European Social Charter and the decisions and conclusions of the European Committee of Social Rights regarding the right to protection against poverty and social exclusion

Presentation by Lauri Leppik, Professor, Chair of Social Policy, Tallinn University, former member and former General Rapporteur of the European Committee of Social Rights

Discussion

11.30 – 11.50 The contribution of EQUINET and ENNHRI to tackling poverty and inequality at national level

Socio-economic status as a ground of discrimination in Europe

Presentation by Katrine Steinfeld, Policy Officer, EQUINET

Findings and recommendations on human rights based approach to measuring poverty in Europe, including in the context of sustainable development goals

Presentation by Laurence Bond, Chair of the ENNHRI working group on economic, social and cultural rights

11.50 – 12.05 The voice of civil society in the fight against poverty

Presentation by Peter Verhaeghe, representative of the Conference of INGOs of the Council of Europe

12.05 – 12.30 Discussion

12.30 - 14.00 *Lunch break*

14.00 – 15.00 Round table: Ending poverty

Facilitators: Mihir Mankad, Centre for Economic and Social Rights (New York)

Panelists:

Jan de Vries, Netherlands Institute for Human Rights

Veerle Stroobants, Combat Poverty, Insecurity and Social Exclusion Service, Belgium

Vytautas Valentinavičius, Seimas Ombudsman's Office of the Republic of Lithuania

Anete Ilves, Ombudsman's Office of the Republic of Latvia

15.00 – 15.20 Reducing the income inequality in Latvia by tax reform; Article 30 of the European Social Charter

Presentation by **Ilmārs Šņucins**, Deputy State Secretary on Tax Policy Issues, Ministry of Finance of the Republic of Latvia

15.20 – 16.00 General discussion on ending poverty in national contexts

- Which practices from today could you apply in your national context?
- Which additional practices from your national context, which were not discussed today, could be added to examples?
- How could CoE / ENNHRI / EQUINET / FRA assist you in applying / developing these practices?

16.00 – 16.15 *Coffee break*

Working methods of the CoE-FRA-ENNHRI -EQUINET Collaborative Platform on Social and Economic Rights

Moderator: Danuta Wiśniewska-Cazals, Department of the European Social Charter, Council of Europe

16.15 – 16.30 Website and SharePoint of the Platform – comments and suggestions for improvement

Presentation by Tanya Montanari, Department of the European Social Charter, Council of Europe

- 16.30 – 16.45 Further capacity building needs to be followed up in 2018 and outline for the next meeting of the Platform
General discussion
- 16.45 – 17.00 Conclusions by Katrien Meuwissen (ENNHRI)

APPENDIX II LIST OF PARTICIPANTS

A rights-based approach to combating poverty in Europe:
between policy and (good) practice
5th Meeting
of the CoE-FRA-ENNHRI-EQUINET Collaborative Platform
on Social and Economic Rights
26 September 2017
Library of the University of Latvia, Kalpaka bulv. 4, Riga, LV-1050, Latvia

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