

Social Platform Contribution:

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

The timing of this High-Level Conference on European Social Charter is critical for the progression of Social Rights across the region. Social Platform welcomes the opportunity for Member States from across the Council of Europe to discuss further commitments and the future of work of the European Social Charter, and believes some of the following topics should be placed on the agenda.

Framing of Social Rights & Human Rights

In the current policy context social rights can often be ignored or forgotten. When designing policies at national level, within EU policy making or the Council of Europe, policy makers are consistently reminded of their human rights obligations. However, often human rights are considered to extend to citizenship, democracy, non-discrimination and equality, but social rights are forgotten. Across Europe inequalities are growing, poverty is not reducing while data from the Social Protection Committee indicates the financial distress, energy poverty and severe material deprivation are all rising. Not only are social rights often ignored, but the worsening social situation in Europe makes it increasingly difficult to access human rights.

This high-level conference should be the opportunity to re-affirm the importance of social rights as human rights. State parties should be reminded of the obligations to vindicate the rights enshrined under the European Social Charter, and this should extend to all state parties adopting the revised Charter, and ensuring all provisions are ratified at member state level, including those related to the Collective Complaints Mechanism.

Supporting Civil Society

Civil Society plays an incredibly important role in monitoring the situation of social rights. Social Platform members provide frontline social services to those experiencing poverty, provide care services to children, the elderly, persons with disabilities and represent organisations fighting racism and discrimination and fighting for gender and LGBTIQ equality. We have our finger on the pulse, and know how policies are impacted on the ground, and often see trends before they are captured in reporting.

Civil Society should be seen as key actors in delivering on the rights enshrined in the Charter. This includes capacity building for relevant NGOs to engage with the collective complaints mechanism to bring much needed attention to violations of social rights and training to engage with governance and reporting systems of the Charter.

Alignment to European Union Policy Making

There is significant overlap between EU and Council of Europe work around social rights, however this is also leading to the creation of parallel systems. While the European Pillar of Social Rights references the European Social Charter in the preamble, the two systems remain disconnected.

The high-level conference should be the opportunity to discuss and plot a roadmap for how the European Union can align social policy making closer to the European Social Charter. This should include an open discussion around:

- The EU ascension to the European Social Charter, as requested by the European Parliament.
- How an EU ascension to the Charter would work in practice, and addressing the concerns of sceptics or possible obstacles the process would encounter.
- How to ensure the European Pillar of Social Rights, upholds the rights contained in the European Social Charter.
- How to ensure the revision of the European Pillar of Social Rights Action Plan, planned for 2025, can be supported by data and policies gathered through the Charter's reporting system.
- How to align the European Semester process with the governance and reporting of the Charter, in particular to ensure that both systems are not re-producing the same content, or workload of member states, and to ensure that the social policy landscape that is captured is mutually reinforcing. There is a risk that both systems could inconsistently raise social issues, which would undermine the credibility of both systems.

Addressing Contemporary Challenges

Social rights do not exist in a vacuum. The European region is battling challenges in the green and digital transitions, while looking to reinvigorate Europe's competitiveness and industrial power. While these are three enormous challenges Europe faces, the discussion around social rights and social consequences is lacking.

In order to guarantee an adequate standard of living for all, and ensure Europe is a region of social progress, it is imperative that Social Rights are front and centre in these discussions. Social Rights are unfortunately left as an afterthought. As the region navigates these challenges in the coming years it will be important for member states to be reminded of their social rights obligations.