

THE CONGRESS OF LOCAL AND REGIONAL AUTHORITIES

Recommendation 207 (2007)¹ The development of social cohesion indicators – the concerted local and regional approach

1. In March 2004, the Council of Europe adopted a revised Strategy for Social Cohesion, in which it defined social cohesion as “the capacity of a society to ensure the welfare of all its members, minimising disparities and avoiding polarisation. A cohesive society is a mutually supportive community of free individuals pursuing these common goals by democratic means;”

2. This approach involves recognition of the human rights codified in the European Convention on Human Rights and the revised European Social Charter and also reflects acceptance of the shared responsibility for the well-being of all members of society, in particular those exposed to poverty or exclusion;

3. Implementing the above definition requires a process of consultation and dialogue involving all stakeholders in society, in which due account is taken of their specific objectives and expectations, combined with the identification of social cohesion indicators which can be used subsequently to assess whether the social policies conducted have satisfied the relevant expectations;

4. This approach is advocated by the Council of Europe in the *Methodological Guide to the concerted development of social cohesion indicators* drawn up by the Directorate General of Social Cohesion of the Council of Europe in order to help develop a common reference framework for member states and foster exchanges and dialogue on concepts and practices between all players concerned with social cohesion;

5. For its part, the Congress is particularly aware of the local and regional dimension of social cohesion and the most

urgent social challenges facing local and regional authorities. It wishes to consider how, in the most pragmatic, proactive and effective way possible, local and regional authorities can develop innovative, participatory and concerted social policies aimed at combating exclusion, especially of the most vulnerable groups in society;

6. Recognising the benefits of giving the methodological guide practical effect at local and regional authority level, the Congress decided, in partnership with the city of Mulhouse, to conduct a local trial of the concerted development of social cohesion indicators, which confirmed the usefulness of the approach put forward in the guide, in particular in terms of social dialogue, citizen participation and local democracy;

7. In the light of the above, the Congress recommends that the Committee of Ministers of the Council of Europe:

a. adopt policy guidelines for the concerted development of social cohesion indicators, taking into account the following methodological elements:

i. development of these indicators should be carried out by a representative co-ordination group comprising the various stakeholders concerned (elected representatives, public services, associations, businesses);

ii. the process should involve citizen participation every step of the way, in particular as regards the identification and validation of indicators, its final objective being the well-being of society as a whole;

b. ask the European Committee for Social Cohesion (CDCS) to propose activities for the practical implementation of the *Methodological Guide to the concerted development of social cohesion indicators*;

c. urge member states to implement projects for the concerted development of social cohesion indicators based on the principles set out in the guide and the first examples of practical application of the principles by local and regional authorities.

1. Debated and adopted by the Standing Committee of the Congress on 27 March 2007 (see Document CG(13)39, draft recommendation presented by V. Prignachi (Italy, L, EPP/CD), rapporteur).