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Spring is here

author of the photo: © Max Rubisch

A Message from the President



Dear readers of our Newsletter,

in my last Editorial in February, I reported on our Seminar on “Poverty of Children and Families” in Vilnius. For detailed information about the Seminar please read the Summary and the abstracts of the speakers in

our last Newsletter or read the Summary of the Seminar in the ICSW Global Newsletter from February.

In the Seminar, our Board member *Kathleen Wabrowetz* from Germany reported on the plan of the German government to introduce a “Basic Child Support” with the beginning of 2025. Last week the Austrian Minister of Social Affairs announced that his ministry will elaborate a plan for a “Basic Child Support” until summer this year. My impression is that governments are more and more aware that poverty of children and families is a growing problem that has to be approached.

That was the good news.

The bad news is that we are in the middle of a climate crisis. February and March this year were the hottest since the beginning of the meteorological data survey. During the last days – in the first half of April – we had temperatures until 30 degrees in Central Europe.

It is obvious that there is a close relationship between climate policy and social policy – our member organizations named this issue as one of their priorities for the coming years. The people most at risk of poverty are children, young persons, women, elderly persons, migrants, ethnic minorities and unemployed persons. Exactly the same groups are the most hit by the climate crisis. Especially in the big cities there are more and more “heat islands”. Poor people are living often in big cities and mostly have no gardens, balconies or summer houses where they can escape from the heat. Most of them live in

small apartments in very hot areas and don't have the financial means for holidays. So the climate policy and the transition to a green and sustainable economy has always to take into account the social aspects.

In this context I want to refer also to the articles from Social Platform at pp. 8 to 11 in this Newsletter.

But I want to close with another good news: A Swiss association, *Verein KlimaSeniorinnen Schweiz*, whose members are concerned about the consequences of global warming on their living conditions and health, filed an action to the European Court of Human Rights (ECHR) in Strasbourg. They consider that the Swiss authorities are not taking sufficient action to mitigate the effects of climate change. In his judgment on 9 April, the Court held that there had been a violation of the right to respect for private and family life (Article 8 of the European Convention on Human Rights) and that there had been a violation of the right to access to the court. The Court found that the Swiss Confederation had failed to comply with its duties (“positive obligations”) under the Convention concerning climate change.

This is a very important judgment – for the first time, climate protection and the right to a clean, healthy and sustainable environment was recognized as a Human Right. The ruling is binding and can trickle down to influence the law in 46 countries in Europe – and it will lead to many more complaints by NGO's fighting for climate justice.

I wish you all a nice and cool spring time!

Max Rubisch

President of ICSW Europe

ICSW Europe Members



ICSW seminar about child poverty in the Scandinavian countries

On 1–2 March 2024, in Malmö, ICSW Sweden held a seminar on child poverty in the Nordic region. Representatives from Sweden, Norway, and Denmark were among the participants from civil society and academia.

The seminar aimed to provide an overview of the current situation regarding child poverty in each represented country and then formulate common recommendations for how the work within the Nordic network should be structured.

Sweden

Senior Professor *Tapio Salonen* began with an extensive presentation on the situation in Sweden, starting from the UN definition of child poverty and the work led by UNICEF in a global context within the “Global Coalition to End Child Poverty” alliance. The alliance has developed a policy agenda to support countries in their efforts to reduce child poverty.

In a European context, using the EU's measure of “social exclusion,” the Nordic countries rank low. In UNICEF's ranking, which also measures changes between 2012 and 2021, it is evident that child poverty has increased in Denmark and Norway, despite these countries ranking highest. Sweden remains stable at 20th place, with child poverty decreasing slightly in absolute terms. Despite relative stability compared to other Nordic countries, increased income inequality and decreased prioritization of economic family policies have led to reduced access to support for families, especially those with poorer finances. The general picture for Sweden is contradictory, with increased relative poverty and almost unchanged absolute poverty. Professor *Salonen* highlighted the need for both

reactive and proactive measures at both national and local levels to address this challenge.

Save the Children's annual report on child poverty in Sweden indicates that around 196,000 children in Sweden were living in poverty in 2019, which corresponds to 9.2 per cent of all children in Sweden. This represents a decrease from 2011 by 1.5 percentage points or 17,000 children. Meanwhile, the redistributive effect of economic family policy and its percentage to GDP has significantly decreased during the same period, indicating diminishing universality in the Swedish welfare systems. Over time, almost half of all children born in 2000 have experienced economic vulnerability at least at some point during their upbringing, 47.4 per cent. Most of these (34%) have grown up in households experiencing economic hardship for a more limited period, up to five years. However, 13% in this cohort have experienced economic poverty for a significant part of their childhood, at least six years. Particularly relevant in this context is the high duration of economic vulnerability among children who arrived in Sweden during their upbringing.

The pandemic has, in turn, increased economic inequality, and thereafter, an inflation-driven economy has further worsened the situation for the most vulnerable. This is reflected, among other things, in increased pressure on civil society's support activities and increased indebtedness at the Enforcement Authority. At the same time, the number of households applying for social assistance has decreased by about 25% since 2014. This phenomenon is still unexplored, but one hypothesis is that many of the refugees who arrived in 2015 have now established themselves in the labour market. There are also reports of higher thresholds for social services. People who would otherwise be entitled to support do not seek it due to social, ethical, moral, and cultural differences. Politically, trends indicating continued low prioritization in family policy during this parliamentary term can also be observed.

Professor *Salonen* concluded by emphasizing the importance of clarifying efforts against child poverty with a clear purpose, focus, strategy, and level of intervention. Similarly, he stressed the need to translate the Global Coalition to End Child Poverty into a national perspective.

Norway

In Norway, the term “children in poor families” is used instead of child poverty as in the other Nordic countries. This means that parents are seen as the main recipients and target group for support measures based on their responsibility for the children. Approximately 12% of children live in poor families. A large portion of these come from immigrant families and families with low educational levels. The number is highest in the larger cities.

The challenges faced by these families are numerous. They include poor living conditions, overcrowding, and a lack of access to activities outside of school. For immigrant families and families where parents are on early retirement or have disabilities, the situation is particularly worrying. Social organizations in Norway have stepped up their efforts, and food queues are now visible in several cities, shedding light on poverty that was previously hidden.

In the Norwegian government, there is no Minister of Social Affairs; instead, the work on poverty is handled by the Minister of Health and Care Services. Despite this, the current government has expressed a desire to address the issue of children in poor families. The government has expressed the goal of reducing poverty and implementing more equalizing measures. One proposal on the table is to increase significantly and tax child benefits. This redistribution policy reform could have a significant effect. The proposal is under consultation, but decisions will not be made until after the next election, in autumn 2024. The state also has agreements with the municipalities with the most children in poverty to improve their living environments. Parks and playgrounds are being refurbished to reduce social exclusion in the lived environment.

The Norwegian social services are centralized and should operate throughout the country but are not present in all municipalities. The local perspective is often lost, creating obstacles to effectively meet the specific needs of different local communities.

A challenge within social services is that the focus on children's needs, health, and well-being is prioritized at the expense of the relationship with the parents. Not seeing the children in a broader context, especially considering the perspective of poverty, can lead to overlooking important factors such as

economic resources and social conditions. For example, it is concerning that problems identified in health check-ups do not lead to the involvement of the parents. There are also concerns regarding the perception of poverty and support. Policies do not speak favourably about those seeking support, and there are changes in the rhetoric surrounding economic aid. Public attitudes and perceptions of these welfare issues are influenced and can lead to stigmatization and decreased trust.

Denmark

In Denmark, relative child poverty is among the lowest in Europe. In 2015, statistics on child poverty were reintroduced in Denmark. Since then, there has been a decrease in the number of poor children. In 2017, 64,500 children were living in poverty, but by 2022, the number had decreased to 47,200 children, representing a decrease of 4.2 per cent. Geographically, child poverty is more widespread in southern Denmark, smaller municipalities, rural areas, and the outskirts of larger cities. In Copenhagen, the proportion of poor is relatively lower compared to the rest of the country.

Politically, there is an aversion to research on child poverty in Denmark. Decisions are sometimes made based on political opinions rather than evidence-based research, which can lead to solutions not being sufficiently research-based. The distribution of poverty in Denmark is also interesting to analyze:

- 55% of poor children have Danish origins.
- 24% have immigrant backgrounds (non-Western).
- 12% have non-Western backgrounds.
- Only 1% have Western backgrounds.

This should be compared to the fact that 6% of the population has a foreign background, but they constitute 24% of the total share of the poor. The proportion of poor children aged 10–14 is higher among those with non-Western backgrounds (38%). Over 100,000 children in Denmark grow up in poverty.

The discussion on poverty in Denmark focuses on housing policy and efforts to revitalize entire areas where neighbourhoods are torn down and people are relocated to new areas to create a more integrated environment. An important debate concerns immigration policy and its impact on integration and

poverty, where labour market integration for immigrants is lower. Denmark's social policy has a strong focus on economic factors and the labour market, with restrictions on social assistance often tied to employment requirements.

Reflections

Despite similarities, the Nordic countries are marked by significant differences that affect their political landscapes and thus the conditions for social interventions. Although they follow global trends of increased individualism and reduced state intervention in welfare, they exhibit different political realities that can shift priorities and strategies for addressing challenges such as child poverty.

Particularly in Sweden, a shift has been noticed where strategies to combat child poverty are lacking. An interesting thought is that restructuring child benefits could be a way forward without necessarily increasing costs. Demographic changes seem to have minimal impact on policy, and the principle of proportional universalism is highlighted as a way to benefit the most vulnerable through broad reforms.

In the housing sector, the debate about “social housing” is discussed, where municipalities are expected to provide housing for those in need while the market is expected to handle the rest. It is emphasized that everyday life for the economically weak may involve different priorities and that the path out of poverty is challenging.

To address these challenges, measures such as securing social benefits, promoting reforms with a clear distribution profile, and clarifying the public's responsibility towards civil society are proposed. It is emphasized that the role of civil society should not replace that of the public sector and that it is necessary to prioritize the Nordic welfare model once again as a platform for successful social interventions and models. Particularly emphasized is the need for reform-optimistic policies and avoiding a withdrawal of the public sector leading to increased reliance on civil society.

At the same time, it is essential to reflect on the public sector's increasing dependence on civil society's resources, which is not considered

sustainable or desirable in the long run as it can delay political reforms. With this in mind, the focus should be on visions and broader reforms rather than getting stuck in local political and real-political conflicts.

Finally, the need to strengthen Nordic cooperation is highlighted, where countries can learn from each other's successes and work together to address social challenges at an overarching level. It is emphasized that progress can be achieved by using existing channels and believing in the possibility of change.

Recommendations

The Nordic welfare model should take precedence again – the conditions exist for successful interventions and models. There is a lack of reform-optimistic policies/tones.

- 1) Safeguard social benefits across the board.
- 2) Promote reforms with a clear distribution profile. Proportional universalism.
- 3) Civil society should not take over the public sector's responsibility. Clarify the public sector's responsibility.

Participants

From Norway:

Randi Reese
Njål Petter Svensson
Bente Moseng

From Denmark:

Marianne Skytte

From Sweden:

Eva Holmberg-Herrström
Tapio Salonen
Bert Åberg
Emmeli Wulfstrand
Bodil Eriksson

(source: ICSW Sweden)

In the continuity of my reflections about the social activities in France, I would like to underline some aspects as follows:

1) Although the family branch remains an essential player in family policy, it is no longer the only one, dominating a larger share (cf. national and local taxation – notably the remaining “housing tax” which has been progressively cancelled for all the households and the actions of local authorities). We also need to specify the AES, major NGOs and associations. And the family branch now manages a larger financial mass to combat poverty (with the reinforcement of the so called “activity allowance” paid in addition to a monthly activity income up to a maximum) than that devoted to family policy *stricto sensu*.

It should be noted that, although the creation of the “activity allowance” was voted in with the expectation of a low number of beneficiaries, the CNAF (National Social Security Family Allowance System) was able to integrate the reform into its IT system, and the number of beneficiaries is in fact higher than forecast.

2) It would appear that a “universal activity income” would be a major reform, even if the details of the scheme would require a great deal of political and technical negotiation, and apart from maintaining and strengthening the “disabled adults' allowance”, would raise the question of the RSA (“Revenu de Solidarité Active” which guarantees to citizens a minimum of income according to the size of the household). Its relationship with unemployment insurance on this point would also need to be analyzed. Voluntary idleness and its possible link with disability insurance should also be examined. It's worth noting that, in Sweden, this often precedes retirement.

Who remembers that, as early as the Liberation (Immediate Post-War period), the only people excluded from entitlement to family allowances were those who were voluntarily idle? This project is in fact

questionable, even if the left wing coalition presently called Nupes would undoubtedly be in favor of it, but not necessarily the Socialist Party, or even the Ecologists. The extreme right wing Party (“Rassemblement National”), on the other hand, wants above all to close borders, and not enter into a European process that is itself complex.

The measure would be in total contradiction with:

- ⇒ The government's new focus on educating young people, the welcome rise in apprenticeships, and efforts to get more young teachers into schools.
- ⇒ Business schools, on the other hand, are extremely expensive, and social inequalities are bound to widen in this respect.
- ⇒ The surge in private crèches of very poor quality, despite state funding, appears catastrophic. So, question: what has become of the CAF “service benefits” created after the Liberation by *René Rio*, the French founder of that provision within the Social Security system?

3) 2018 and the start of 2019 are more about healthcare spending and pension reform than family policy.

Societal debates, as with marriage for all, will undoubtedly come to the fore, both for PMA (Assisted Reproductive Technology), and possibly for GPA (Surrogacy). It's true that the “women's equality” issue will also affect labor law and civil service law, among others.

Maintaining the AVPF (Specific old age pension scheme for parents in care of a disabled person at home), whose financial data show a more than substantial rise (cf: *Chadelat* report), will raise the following questions: who manages? Who finances it? How should it be linked with the other two family pension systems?

4) Will paternity leave, whether extended or not, continue to be financed by the CNAF, whereas it is managed by the Health insurance scheme? It was the former Minister for Family (2000–2002) Mrs *Ségolène Royal* who extended parental leave from 3 days to two weeks.

More? But then, what kind of work do women actually do, and what kind of pensions?

5) We can't ignore the increase in aid for large families and single-parent families, and the fact that the AAH (Social allowance for Adult Disabled persons) and minimum old-age pension are now so close. Resource base merged at last?

No more formalities to switch from one to the other.

6) The 2019/2022 Multi Annual Management Contract between the State and the Social Security System is weak regarding family policy. It falls far short of the needs for childcare presented by the HCFEA – National High Council for Family, Childhood and Ageing policies (+2% in social action versus the requested +5% per year). Only a too little focus on quality, leisure facilities, assistance beyond the child's 3rd birthday, and – last but not least – a focus on young people, provide any satisfaction. But extreme attention paid to crèches hardly take into account the aging trend in childminders, despite the fact that they take care of twice as many children under the age of three. Another good thing is the inclusion of disabled children.

7) The new characteristics of CAF "products" require ever more information for beneficiaries, despite the best efforts of the CNAF and CAFs (Territorial levels of the CNAF), but the complexity remains. And violence, often at reception, weighs heavily on technicians. Digital technology obscures some of the rules of law, and requires a greater commitment to the MEANING of national and local management.

It would be essential to re-establish, as we have done, a mediation office to deal with legal errors, in view of the continuing complexity of the legislation, and the need to train staff, who often have to learn the integrated rules by computer. But this "horizontal" law does not always respect pre-existing "vertical" law.

And yet, how many parliamentary "jousts" on this vertical law.

8) Successful examples of unity: Canada's unique central social agency, well-organized, respectful of local players, digital technology in Estonia, the Carrefour Bank in Belgium, all need to be re-examined if we are to achieve our goal of a one-stop shop.

Already, the family branch needs to think more in terms of "Social Protection" than Social Security, even if this means thinking differently:

- Its governance;
- its relationship with the HCFEA (see above);
- and also its financing. Hence, among other things, the question of whether or not to merge income tax and CSG ("Contribution Sociale Généralisée", a tax created in 1991 to specifically contribute to the financing of the Social Security System which is traditionally and mainly based on social contributions). The CSG is currently subject to income tax, so it is somewhat progressive according to income.

9) President *Macron's* program is relatively weak, in his book "Révolution" on family policy as a whole. Although his debate in Bordeaux with single women was excellent. But also remarkable in his chapter on young people. On the other hand, the deteriorating demographic situation in France is pushing back the frontiers of the need for workers, and the return on investment of a good family policy, including in economic terms. The question of housing subsidies between person based subsidies (Former Prime Minister *Raymond Barre's* 1977 option) and collective subsidies for building deserves clarification. Personal aid included in a minimum social benefit? Personal assistance as part of a single family benefit? We proposed this to CAF directors at the time. The only feature we reject is the inclusion of childcare subsidies in the single benefit.

10) On the territorial level, we need to decide whether to partner with the Region for an economic share, or with the Département (Sub-Regions of France), municipalities and other forms of cooperation between them. The CAFs possess invaluable data, as demonstrated by the CAF du Morbihan (a Département in the Western part of France) in its time, for example, on the overall service offer, and the CAF du Cher (a Département in the Centre of France), which is innovative in its approach to young people. And they have long been alerting local authorities and encouraging partnerships. It's one thing to respect the fact that a Département is in charge. But it offers a major role in local regulation.



We also need to put a stop to management control, which is currently still abusive, and do a better job of identifying local innovation and its specific features, rather than focusing on pure “applicators”. EN3S (Professional high school dedicated to Social Security management) must train people to manage well.

It's also worth noting the excellence of the CAF du Var (Département in the Southern part of France) in ensuring the coherence of the Department's major social players!

11) It is of great interest to notice that the current government and the President are returning to education, in a situation where the “Bac” (A level exam) hardly secures real employment.

This is perhaps my last contribution to ICSW since the CFADS has closed its activities.

Kind regards to all my colleagues!

The worldwide climate crisis is today the highest challenge for all of us.

Philippe Steck

Chairman of CFADS

2024 EU Elections: Social Platform's “Vision for Social Europe”

In June 2024, citizens of the European Union will elect the members of the European Parliament for a new five-year term. In March, Social Platform – the platform of European Social NGOs – published its position paper [“2024–2029 – A Vision for Social Europe”](#), demanding a renewed commitment to social progress by the European Union. As the largest, leading organisation working on social issues on the EU level, Social Platform advocates for prioritising social policy and putting people first, where initiatives that champion eradicating poverty, promoting progress and building inclusive societies are top of the policy agenda.

Representing tens of thousands of organisations and hundreds of millions of people in Europe – children, young and older people, women, LGBTI people, people with disabilities, undocumented migrants, Roma and others from persecuted ethnic or religious backgrounds, carers and the people that provide invaluable services to these people – Social Platform is calling for people to be at the heart of EU policy-making to guarantee social progress for the 2024–2029 mandate of the European Parliament and of the new European Commission that also will come into office for a five-year term following the EP elections.

At the heart of the position paper's demands are five topics: the continued delivery of the European Pillar of Social Rights, a Framework Directive on Adequate Minimum Income, a Multiannual-Financial Framework that promotes social progress, a renewed and more social approach to the Just Transition to a climate-neutral society and a strengthened Civil Dialogue to ensure structured, regular and meaningful engagement of Civil Society in policy-making. Concerning the mandate and structure of the new European Commission, Social Platform asks for European Commissioners explicitly responsible for Social Rights, Equality, the Just Transition and the

Social Economy as well as a Commission Vice-President specifically responsible for Civil Dialogue.

In addition to its own campaign and position paper, Social Platform draws attention to its members' manifestos, positions and demands for the 2024 EU elections:

<https://www.socialplatform.org/what-we-do/championing-social-rights-in-the-eu-elections-2024/>

author of the text:

Britta Spilker

Deutscher Verein für Öffentliche und private Fürsorge e.V.

Social Platform's 14 Recommendations to rebalance the European Green Deal

The presented position paper is the result of exchanges between Social Platform members since January 2024. The text was approved on 12 February 2024. ICSW Europe voted in favour of the document.

1 The Social Climate Fund must ensure that those living in energy poverty and homes targeted for retrofitting have the support to manage the transition, e.g. climate housing allowances. Legally binding social safeguards for tenants like housing cost neutrality after retrofitting and social safeguards like rent caps after renovation must be implemented in the EPBD and national energy and rent laws.

2 Social Platform calls for 100% of revenues from ETS2 to fund the Social Climate Fund to adequately mitigate the negative social consequences of the European Green Deal.

3 Member States should have meaningful engagement with civil society, not-for-profit social services providers, social economy actors and the people directly impacted, in the development of Territorial Just Transitions Plans to ensure the needs of groups living in vulnerable situations are met with the use of the funds. Engagement with not-for-profit social services providers and social economy actors can support the implementation of Article 8 to foster social inclusion.

4 The Just Transition Fund, and all other components of the European Green Deal, should be delivered in full alignment of the European Pillar of Social Rights. This should extend to the assessments of Territorial Just Transition Plans ensuring they integrate the Principles of the EPSR when working towards a Just Transition.

5 The scheme should ensure no funds are allocated, directly or indirectly, to large for-profit corporations, including extractive industries. These should be asked to contribute to the fund, instead of benefiting from it through grants under research and innovation.

6 The EC should publish guidance around the development of national plans for accessing the Social Climate Fund and Just Transition Fund to Member States with specific regard to not-for-profit social service providers and social economy actors.

7 To facilitate their access to funding, the EC should recognise social service providers and social economy actors as important stakeholders and beneficiaries within the JTF procedures.

8 In addition, Member States must prioritise both the social and green dimensions of the public procurement processes, by enforcing the implementation of the 2014 EU Public Procurement Directive, and not consistently awarding the lowest bid.

9 The EC should establish a tracking methodology linked to the Social Scoreboard in order to analyse the employment and social impacts along with environmental impact of policies.

10 Before proceeding with the next stages of a Green Deal, the Commission should include for all environmental legislation a socio-economic impact assessment to understand the social consequences of the Green Deal and ensure there are adequate resources to manage the social risks.

11 Social Platform continues to call for fairer and more equitable fiscal rules that enable Member States to finance the Just Transition.

12 Social Platforms calls for investments in green, social and affordable housing.

13 Social Platform advocates for the creation of basic safety nets, and adequate wages, for all people to ensure that everyone can live in dignity at all stages of life. To achieve this, as it is part of the EPSR, the EC should present a proposal for an EU framework Directive on Minimum Income.

14 Social Platform reiterates the demand for structured civil dialogue at EU, national, and local level to ensure a Just Transition.

(source: Social Platform: Social Platform's 14 Recommendations to rebalance the European Green Deal. [E-mail]. [cit. 2024-4-05])

High-Level Conference on the European Pillar of Social Rights

On the 15th and 16th of April 2024, the Belgian Presidency of the Council of the EU organises a High-level Conference on the European Pillar of Social Rights in La Hulpe. This two-day conference serves as the overarching culmination of the work of the Belgian Presidency within the EPSCO Council configuration and has as its highlight the signing of an interinstitutional declaration on the future social agenda of the EU.

The European Pillar of Social Rights as a compass

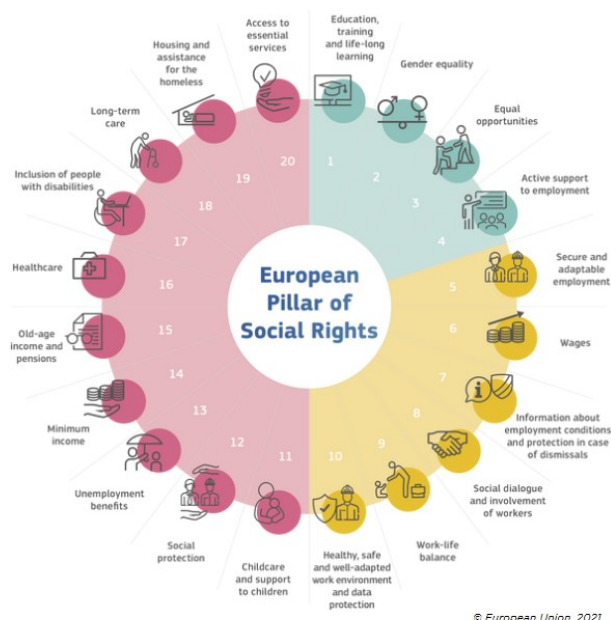
During the past years, the European Union and its citizens have been exposed to several crises, including the COVID-19 pandemic and the cost-of-living crises. These crises reminded us of the critical importance of strong social welfare states to show resilience and boost fast recovery and showed the importance of European cooperation to confront common

challenges.

In the future, climate change, the green and digital transitions, demographic changes and geopolitical instability will pose new challenges to our economies, societies and welfare states.

To prepare our welfare states for these challenges and to mitigate their impact on our citizens, the further implementation of the European Pillar of Social Rights is key.

The European Pillar of Social Rights provides a comprehensive framework of principles that guide our EU and national policies on equal opportunities and access to the labour market, fair working conditions, and social protection and inclusion. Strengthening the implementation of its principles is crucial to achieve a Europe that cares, prepares and protects.



Objectives and topics discussed at the Conference of La Hulpe

The goal of the High-Level Conference on the European Pillar of Social Rights is to bring together policymakers, stakeholders and experts to deliberate on the further implementation of the European Pillar of Social Rights. Through engaging discussions, insightful panels, and collaborative workshops, participants will explore possible venues and actions to consolidate the Pillar's principles and ensure its further implementation in the years to come, making a difference in the daily lives of Europeans.

In the plenary discussions, ministers of employment and social affairs from member states will tackle pivotal questions about future challenges and priorities: How can social and employment policies foster human capital development, increase competitiveness, and innovation, and make our societies more inclusive? How can we achieve a fair and just transition? How can we strengthen upward social convergence and solidify the EU social level-playing field?

The break-out sessions will delve into selected topics, such as:

- A gender equal access to the labour market with an intersectional perspective
- Ensuring access to social protection for all in a changing labour market
- Fair working conditions: AI and algorithmic management
- Achieving the Porto targets by 2030: the role of analysis, monitoring and statistical capacity
- Labour market policies for a fair transition: the right to upskilling and reskilling
- The EU Child Guarantee: investing in children, for high social, education and economic returns

The Interinstitutional La Hulpe Declaration on the Future of Social Europe

The final objective of the Conference is to adopt an interinstitutional Declaration signed by the EU institutions (Commission, Parliament and Council of the EU), social partners and civil society. The aim of the declaration is to prepare the future social agenda of the 2024–2029 period and to reconfirm the European Pillar of Social Rights as the EU social policy compass for years to come.

(source: beEU – Belgian presidency, Council of the European Union: High-Level Conference on the European Pillar of Social Rights. From Porto to La Hulpe: Shaping the future of social Europe. [E-mail]. [cit. 2024-4-05])

Time for an ambitious European Long-Term Care Platform

Joint Statement - Brussels, 8th of April 2024.

#RoadToLaHulpe #LongTermCarePlatform #EUElections

In view of the [High-Level event of the Belgian presidency of the EU on the European Pillar of Social Rights](#) taking place in La Hulpe on 15 and 16th April 2024, as well as the upcoming European elections, 16 European organisations call on EU policy makers to enhance the implementation of Pillar principle 18 on the right to long-term care under the next 2024–2029 legislature, starting with the creation of a European Long-Term Care Platform. This is an essential first step to coordinate the urgent measures needed to address underinvestment, inadequate social protection, lack of person-centredness and staff shortages in long-term care. Finally, in line with the call by the High-Level Group on the Future of Social Protection, long-term care must be supported by economic policies which prioritise care expenditure not as a cost, but as an investment to ensure sustainability of Europe's economy. [1]

The Belgian Presidency of the EU, held in the first half of 2024, coincides with the ending of the 9th legislative term of the European Parliament and of the mandate of the *Von der Leyen* Commission. It also coincides with the EU Economic Governance Review and the beginning of the revision of the European Pillar of Social Rights Action Plan, that is foreseen to be completed for 2025. This puts the Presidency in a strategic position to take stock of the past and contribute to the setting of the agenda for the next term (2024–2029).

[1] 29th October 2023 Joint statement of 17 European organisations: *Building up European care capital – sustainable investments, not burdensome costs* <https://coface-eu.org/joint-statement-building-up-european-care-capital/>

We warmly welcome the initiative of the Presidency to strengthen the European Pillar of Social Rights, and **we invite policy makers to put long-term care at the heart of their discussions, thus acknowledging the vital importance of care providers and receivers in our societies.** In line with Pillar Principle 18 on the right to long-term care, we have great expectations that this High-Level meeting in La Hulpe and its recommendations will inspire substantive actions across the European Union to ensure the full implementation of the [2022 Council Recommendation on access to affordable high-quality long-term care](#) in all Member States.

The Council Recommendation, and the broader European Care Strategy, form a common strategic framework that paves the way for the transformation of the care sector and the creation of a person-centred, community-based care and support system in all Member States. It lays the foundation for a system that will respect the rights and dignity of persons in need of care and support, and their families as well as carers, both professional and informal. This strategy needs to be fully and adequately implemented to address EU Member States' realities through ambitious national measures to be submitted to the European Commission by June 2024. These national measures must be **appropriately funded, ambitious, time-bound, targeted and measurable** to improve the affordability, accessibility and quality of care services. They must expand home and community-based care options; consolidate support systems for informal carers; provide parents and families with freedom of choice regarding the care options that suit them best; support quality employment and fair working conditions; and finally, improve professionalisation and address care staff shortages.

We urgently call on the European Union to **set up a European Long-Term Care Platform under the next legislature as part of the European Pillar of Social Rights Action Plan.** This Platform would gather national coordinators on long-term care, national and EU-level civil society organisations representing and supporting persons in need of care and their families, and service providers, as well as social partners. As organisations concerned with the well-being of persons who draw on care and support services, and service providers, we stand ready to support this process and to ensure the Platform contributes to an

effective implementation of the Council Recommendation on Long-Term Care.

It is only through the establishment of such an enhanced formal dialogue with civil society and social partners that we can hope to achieve satisfactory monitoring of investments in long-term care, since civil society is in the best position to inform decision makers on how their policies are received by their targeted groups. The Platform should be a key channel for sharing of information about the European monitoring and evaluating procedures regarding national measures on long-term care; cross-sectoral working with EU funding programmes; following investments in long-term care via the European Semester process and Economic Governance Reform; as well as to develop practical guidelines for the development of human rights-based long-term care service models at local level.

Signatories:

AGE Platform Europe
Autism Europe
COFACE Families Europe
Caritas Europa
Eurocarers
Eurodiaconia
European Anti-Poverty Network
European Association of Service providers for Persons with Disabilities
European Federation for Family Employment and Home Care
European Federation for Services to Individuals
European Federation of Food, Agriculture and Tourism Trade Unions
European Public Service Unions
Make Mothers Matter
PICUM
Social Platform
UNI Europa

[Read the full statement here.](#)

(source: COFACE Families Europe: Joint Statement. [E-mail]. [cit. 2024-4-8])

Start of the 2024 European Semester Cycle SP's Recommendations for a more social Europe

In response to what the European Commission presented in its 2024 Autumn Package, Social Platform highlighted specific concerns and made recommendations to the Social Protection Committee (SPC) and the Employment Committee (EMCO).



For millions of people across the EU, staying above the poverty line is a daily struggle. It is both unsurprising and unacceptable that in the run-up to the EU elections, [Eurobarometer](#) found that on the cost of living 65% surveyed were not satisfied with the measures taken by their national government, and 57% were dissatisfied with the measures taken by the EU.

The European Commission's [2024 Autumn Package](#), published end of last year, offers guidance on how Member States should try to tackle current challenges, like the cost of living, in the coming year. With so much on the line for people fighting against poverty and social exclusion, there is no doubt that stronger measures are needed to build a more 'social' Europe. In response to what the European Commission has presented in its 2024 Autumn Package, Social Platform, together with some of our members, highlighted specific concerns and made recommendations to the Social Protection Committee (SPC) and the Employment Committee (EMCO). We call to further unlock the social potential of the European Semester process and implement much-needed social change.

[Read our reaction.](#)

(source: Social Platform: Start of the 2024 European Semester Cycle – SP's Recommendations for a more social Europe. [online]. [cit. 2024-4-14]. Available at: <<https://www.socialplatform.org/blog/start-of-the-2024-european-semester-cycle-our-recommendations-for-a-more-social-europe/>>)

European Anti Poverty Network



EU 2023 Poverty Watch towards a sustainable Social Welfare for the people



2023 European Poverty Watch report offers a distinctive analysis of fiscal justice. It bridges the gap between the needs and demands of people experiencing poverty and the actions or plans of Member States in forthcoming economic reforms.

2023 European Poverty Watch report focuses on fiscal justice. It monitors budgetary and fiscal decisions and reforms aimed at investing in sustainable welfare states and the implementation of the European Pillar of Social Rights Action Plan, monitored through the European Semester.

The drafting of the 2023 European Poverty Watch report coincides with an anticipated return to austerity measures, as Member States are compelled to adhere to the 3% deficit to GDP ratio under the Stability and Growth Pact. This means Member States will not be able to invest sufficiently in social measures or the green and digital transitions. The temporary flexibility in fiscal rules given since the COVID-19 pandemic that allowed increased public expenditure will most likely be ceased. Consequently, EAPN has advocated for social and green investments to be excluded from the 3% deficit to GDP ratio.

The launch event was hosted on April 8 at the European Economic Social Committee. It spotlighted the austerity reforms at the national level driven by the new economic governance review and included EU and national-level recommendations. It was also

an opportunity for EAPN to present its key findings on the choices of public expenditure by European Member States and put forward our recommendations on how to sustainably finance welfare states. Through our recommendations, we advocate for an end to austerity, profit-driven greed, and social cuts. The main target audience for our recommendations are EU Member States, Presidencies of the Council of the EU, the next European Commission, and the members of the European Parliament and the European Economic and Social Committee.

(source: EAPN: EU 2023 Poverty Watch – Towards a sustainable social welfare for the people. [E-mail]. [cit. 2024-4-10])

The Civic Space, Democracy and Artificial Intelligence: how do they intersect?



The Conference of INGOs hosted an event to celebrate World NGO Day on 27 February in Strasbourg and online on the topic **“The Civic Space, Democracy and Artificial Intelligence: how do they intersect?”**

Watch the full video recording in replay at the following link:

<https://vimeo.com/921963741>

(source: source: NGO-Unit. [E-mail]. [cit. 2024-2-29])

Council of Europe



Study on Stigmatisation of NGOs in Europe

The Expert Council on NGO Law of the Conference of INGOs has just released a [study on stigmatisation of NGOs in Europe](#).

[The Expert Council on NGO Law publishes a Study on Stigmatisation of NGOs in Europe – Conference of INGOs \(coe.int\)](#)

More information about the work of the Expert Council and previous studies can be found on the dedicated web page: [Expert Council on NGO Law \(coe.int\)](#).

(source: NGO-Unit. [E-mail]. [cit. 2024-3-21])

Outcome of the spring Session of the Conference of INGOs



The [outcome \(news only for now\) of the Spring session of the Conference of INGOs](#) held from 8 to 10 April in Strasbourg, as well as the [communication on migration and the electoral context](#) adopted on this occasion, are available on the [website](#).

As mentioned at the session, we herewith also share with you the links to:

- the recently adopted Committee of Ministers' [Recommendation to member States CM/Rec \(2024\)2 on countering the use of strategic lawsuits against public participation \(SLAPPs\)](#); see also [here](#) what the European federation of Journalists says about it;
- the Secretary General's Roadmap on the Council of Europe's engagement with civil society 2024–2027 ([SG/Inf\(2023\)28](#)), which was published on 15 December;
- the Council of Europe's [new gender equality strategy](#) 2024–2029 that could serve as a reference document for the work of those INGOs particularly interested in the subject, and for the preparation of CINGO's own policy on this in the framework of its forthcoming strategic plan for 2025–2027;
- and last but not least, [links](#) to the recent 3 decisions of the European Court of Human Rights linked to climate change.

As also announced during the session, the [12th World Forum for Democracy](#) will take place in Strasbourg (France) from 6 to 8 November 2024. This year, the theme is “Democracy and Diversity – Can we transcend the divides?”.

A call was made for expressions of interest on innovative initiatives, from all over the world, aiming at enhancing democracy and contributing to sustainable peace.

If you would like to propose an initiative, please refer to the [following web page](#).

Submission should be made by answering [the questionnaire](#) and sending it to forum_democracy@coe.int by 17 May 2024.

(source: Council of Europe: Outcome of CINGO Spring session and other news. [E-mail]. [cit. 2024-4-20])

Useful Links

Social Platform's position paper “2024–2029 – A Vision for Social Europe”:

<https://www.socialplatform.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/03/A-vision-for-social-europe.pdf>

Social Platform – manifestos, positions and demands for the 2024 EU elections for SP members:

<https://www.socialplatform.org/what-we-do/championing-social-rights-in-the-eu-elections-2024/>

COFACE Families: Joint statement: Time for an ambitious European Long-Term Care Platform:

<https://coface-eu.org/joint-statement-long-term-care-platform-2024/>

The Expert Council on NGO – a Study on Stigmatisation of NGOs in Europe:

<https://www.coe.int/en/web/ingo/-/the-expert-council-on-ngo-law-publishes-a-study-on-stigmatisation-of-ngos-in-europe>

Colophon

ICSW Europe registered office is located at the municipality of Utrecht (the Netherlands).

The name of the Association is: International Council on Social Welfare Europe, abbreviated to: ICSW Europe.

The Newsletter of ICSW European Region is published quarterly. Material may be freely reproduced or cited provided the source is acknowledged. Contributions on social welfare from all sectors of the international community are welcome.

Contributions and comments can be sent to:

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