



Doc. 13636

27 October 2014

Social exclusion – a danger for Europe's democracies

Report¹

Committee on Social Affairs, Health and Sustainable Development

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Summary

Social exclusion, a growing and serious danger for Europe's democracies, is the exclusion of certain people from participating fully in democratic and civil life, due to poverty, lack of basic competencies and learning opportunities, or as a result of discrimination. Social exclusion has been exacerbated by the impact of the financial crisis and austerity measures, leading to rising unemployment, decreasing social benefits and difficulties in accessing housing, education and health services.

The strong correlation between social exclusion and low levels of democratic participation may call into question the legitimacy of democratic institutions, for example through low electoral turn-out or the rise of extremist parties. Self-determined political participation is already decreasing among young people, women and minorities, and the gap between the poor and the rich is widening.

The State should contribute to breaking "cycles of disadvantage" by helping the very poorest, improving access to education and training, and guaranteeing a minimum family income. There should be targeted measures for groups in need of special protection – such as migrants, ethnic minorities and people with disabilities. Finally, there should be determined efforts to bring marginalised people into the democratic mainstream by setting up participatory mechanisms and bodies at local level, promoting "easy to understand" communication and ensuring basic social and political rights.

1. Reference to committee: [Doc. 12599](#), Reference 3780 of 20 June 2011.



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A. Draft resolution²

1. Social exclusion is a growing and serious danger for Europe's democratic societies. Social exclusion is often linked to poverty, even though not all people who are socially excluded are poor and not all people who are poor are socially excluded. Often, members of certain societal groups, such as minorities, migrants or the disabled, are excluded from full participation in society for non-material reasons linked to discrimination, xenophobia, intolerance or legal status. However, many poor people manage to overcome material obstacles to participation in society – often through education.

2. Whatever the root causes, the exclusion and marginalisation of certain categories of the population has always been an issue, even in the most prosperous societies. In recent years, social rights and democracy have been increasingly under threat, notably under the impact of the financial and economic crisis, as highlighted by the Parliamentary Assembly in its [Resolution 1884 \(2012\)](#) "Austerity measures – a danger for democracy and social rights".

3. In times of crisis, many find it difficult to break cycles of disadvantage and improve their income and quality of life, and social exclusion in all its forms is often perpetuated and passed on from one generation to the next. Early intervention measures therefore need to be reinforced in order to provide equal life and development opportunities to all from a very early age.

4. Moreover, policies aimed at fighting exclusion and marginalisation often neglect one crucial aspect: democratic participation as a civil and political right. If those who are disadvantaged have less influence in political decision-making processes because they tend to be less involved or under-represented, future public policies may not be in their favour either. This leads to a vicious circle where situations of social exclusion go hand in hand with political under-representation.

5. Many of the measures that can be adopted to overcome situations of poverty, social exclusion and marginalisation have already been pointed out by the Assembly and other Council of Europe bodies. When considering current threats to social rights and democracy, member States are therefore invited to consult these texts.

6. Against the background of current challenges and the need for targeted action, the Assembly suggests that member States take the following measures to uphold the highest standards of democracy and good governance:

6.1. develop and implement comprehensive national action plans aimed at fighting social exclusion, including:

6.1.1. targeted measures for different age groups: children, young people, working-age adults and the elderly, thus following "life-cycle approaches";

6.1.2. gender-sensitive approaches considering the specific situation of women, notably working women and single mothers;

6.1.3. early intervention strategies aimed at preventing poverty and social exclusion and breaking "cycles of disadvantage";

6.2. give priority to policy areas regularly identified as determinant in fighting poverty and social exclusion, including education and training, the creation of quality jobs guaranteeing social rights and inclusion in social security systems, the guarantee of minimum family incomes and the reform of social security systems to face current challenges (for example demographic developments);

6.3. develop targeted measures for groups in need of special protection and support, who are often particularly threatened by social exclusion in a given national context and disproportionately hit by the crisis (or austerity measures), in particular migrants, ethnic minorities and people with disabilities, preventing phenomena of "ghettoisation" wherever possible;

6.4. develop specific measures fostering democratic participation across society and reaching out to those who are marginalised or at risk of social exclusion, including by:

6.4.1. developing and implementing national agendas for inclusive democracy, aimed at ensuring democratic participation for marginalised groups;

6.4.2. promoting principles of good governance, such as openness, transparency and citizen participation, as minimum standards of any democracy;

2. Draft resolution adopted unanimously by the committee on 2 October 2014.

- 6.4.3. fostering and developing participatory mechanisms and bodies, in particular at local level, allowing all inhabitants to get actively involved in developments concerning them, to express their needs and to stimulate new developments themselves;
- 6.4.4. providing education for democratic citizenship to all children from an early age and via official school curricula;
- 6.4.5. promoting “easy to understand” communication about any political decisions, structures and processes, including through close co-operation with the media sector;
- 6.4.6. making use of new communication technologies to make community involvement more accessible and attractive for all, especially young people;
- 6.4.7. supporting and fostering civil society organisations and the voluntary sector in order to reach out to those excluded in a proactive and effective manner.

B. Draft recommendation³

1. Referring to its Resolution ... (2015) “Social exclusion – a danger for Europe’s democracies”, the Parliamentary Assembly recommends that the Committee of Ministers deepen its commitment to the creation of a true area of common principles of protection of social and economic rights, notably by further promoting the signature, the ratification and the implementation of the European Social Charter (revised) (ETS No. 163) by all member States
2. The Committee of Ministers should moreover take into account the proposals addressed to member States in the above resolution in the framework of the intergovernmental work on social cohesion currently undertaken within the European Committee for Social Cohesion, Human Dignity and Equality (CDDECS).
3. In particular, the Assembly recommends that the CDDECS receive a clear mandate for developing a “Policy agenda against social and political exclusion”, which clearly takes into account current threats to social cohesion and democracy as observed across Europe. Such a policy agenda should be followed by the development of a streamlined set of policy guidelines, tools and performance indicators to be used as reference materials by national governments and other stakeholders.
4. In addition, the Assembly recommends that the new European Committee on Democracy and Governance (CDDG) be urged to pursue its work on a possible reference text on democracy and to examine to what extent the twelve principles set out in the “Strategy for Innovation and Good Governance at Local Level”, adopted by the Committee of Ministers in March 2008, may be used in this respect.

3. Draft recommendation adopted unanimously by the committee on 2 October 2014.

C. Explanatory memorandum by Mr Hancock, rapporteur

1. Introduction

1. In the current context of an enduring economic and financial crisis, protection against social exclusion deserves the particular attention of the Council of Europe member States and of their national parliaments. Member States are continuing to adopt budgetary restrictions and austerity programmes to achieve budgetary consolidation. However, most stakeholders have recognised in the meantime that the impact of the crisis and of the austerity measures involved (be it as a root cause or a consequence of some of the crisis symptoms) has been considerable: rising unemployment in many countries, abolition or non-renewal of posts in the public sector, decrease in social benefits, difficulties in accessing housing, education and health services – to name just a few of the consequences observed.

2. Next to the social rights guaranteed by the European Social Charter (revised) (ETS No. 163), every genuine democracy⁴ also relies on the exercise by its citizens of civil and political rights as stipulated by the European Convention on Human Rights (ETS No. 5). However, in practice, social exclusion also has a considerable impact on the possibility to exercise these rights.

3. The Parliamentary Assembly, for its part, has adopted several texts relating to social exclusion, social cohesion or social rights in recent years – one of the most relevant with regard to the present concern certainly being [Resolution 1884 \(2012\)](#) “Austerity measures – a danger for democracy and social rights”.

4. With regard to the activities undertaken at Council of Europe level in recent years, it will be interesting to explore to what extent strategies and measures taken for more social cohesion could be an effective answer to social exclusion. The focus of the present report, however, will be the impact of increasing social exclusion on democratic institutions and participation. Recalling the principle of the indivisibility of human rights, I would like to base my work on the following assumption: the respect of social rights, and in particular the protection against social exclusion, is a necessary condition for the full exercise of civil and political rights, in particular democratic participation. The issue is a crucial one as it not only concerns those excluded or marginalised at an individual level, but threatens democracy as such. Democracy is clearly lacking in legitimacy if larger shares of national populations cannot fully participate in democratic processes and life.

2. Social exclusion: an obstacle to the exercise of democracy

2.1. Definition and causes of social exclusion

5. Social exclusion is strongly linked to poverty, but not all people who are socially excluded are poor and not all people who are poor are socially excluded. Thus, members of certain societal groups – for example, minorities, migrants or the disabled – may be excluded to some extent from full participation in society (and its democratic and governance expressions) for non-material reasons linked rather to discrimination, xenophobia, intolerance or legal status. At the same time, some poor people manage to overcome material obstacles to participation in society – education is often key. However, it is obvious that in most cases the deeper the poverty, and the wider the chasm between the poor and the rest of society, the stronger the social exclusion.

6. There are enough definitions of social exclusion to fill meters of shelf-space. Common to all of them is the emphasis on social exclusion as a dynamic, multidimensional concept which takes into account cumulative and enduring disadvantage, a sort of dissociation from mainstream society – in contrast to the more static (but sometimes more easily measurable) concepts of poverty and deprivation.⁵ The most recent definition used by the Council of Europe⁶ is the following:

“Social exclusion is a process whereby certain individuals are pushed to the edge of society and are prevented from participating fully by virtue of their poverty, or lack of basic competencies and lifelong learning opportunities, or as a result of discrimination. This distances them from job, income and educational opportunities, as well as social and community networks and activities. They have little access to power and decision-making bodies and thus often feel powerless and unable to take control over decisions that affect their day-to-day lives.”⁷

4. Defined as “a system of government by the whole population or all the eligible members of a State, typically through elected representatives” by the Oxford Dictionary, www.oxforddictionaries.com/definition/english/democracy.

5. See, for example, definitions by Graham Room, Jos Berghman, José Nun, Anne Power, Hilary Silver, S.M. Miller and others.

7. Before looking at the consequences of social exclusion on democratic life, I believe it is necessary to briefly touch upon some of the causes and the current evolution of social exclusion trends. First, in my own country, the United Kingdom, there has been a debate on the “deserving” versus the “undeserving” poor spanning more than two centuries, from the “Poor Law” in the 18th and 19th centuries, over the “underclass” of the first half of the 20th century to the concept of “welfare junkies” today. What may have changed in the last two decades is the increasing popularity of the notion that practically everyone is at risk of poverty and social exclusion today: everyone can lose their job (or not find one in the first place), can fall ill, have an accident, not be able to save enough money for comfortable retirement, etc., and no-one can be certain anymore that the social welfare net will make up the difference and save you from ending up poor and “out”.⁸ This is an interesting development, as it makes social exclusion a more “democratic” problem in effect.

8. Second, the question of voluntary⁹ versus involuntary social exclusion may arise. In general, only involuntary social exclusion (whether caused by poverty or discrimination) is seen as a problem, but in connection with the democracy aspect, voluntary social exclusion can also be problematic. Thus, certain groups may voluntarily choose to live so far apart from mainstream society that social solidarity becomes so far undermined that it creates problems for democratic politics.¹⁰ In this respect, we must not forget that inclusion and exclusion may be two sides of the same coin. Social networks (including ethnic or religious ones) may be enabling as well as limiting, including in terms of employment.¹¹

2.2. Consequences of social exclusion on democratic life

9. Social exclusion is not simply a “social phenomenon”: there is a strong correlation between social exclusion on the one hand, and the low level of democratic participation and the calling into question of the legitimacy of democratic institutions on the other. Social exclusion can have effects not only on access to socio-economic rights (from the right to work to access to benefits), but also on civil rights (such as the right to justice or the freedom of expression) and political rights (participating in the exercise of political power).

10. In my view, the core problem which social exclusion creates for people regarding democratic life is the lack of self-determined, political participation as a stakeholder in the democratic process. This political participation is not limited to turning out to vote in elections every few years; it is not even limited to formal political participation such as membership of political parties. Membership of trade unions, participation in non-governmental organisations (NGOs) and other expressions of civil society down to neighbourhood help and grass-roots initiatives can also be effective indicators of participation in democratic life.¹²

11. The United Kingdom Electoral Commission published a most interesting report in November 2005 on social exclusion and political engagement, the conclusions of which certainly remain largely valid. The report, based on research and discussion papers from several sources, suggests that political disengagement and social exclusion consolidate and drive each other, with social instability and insecurity generating a lack of faith in politics and the ensuing political disengagement breaking social and societal bonds even further.

6. The (older) explanatory report of the (revised) European Social Charter defines social exclusion as follows: “The term ‘social exclusion’ refers to persons who find themselves in a position of extreme poverty through an accumulation of disadvantages, who suffer from degrading situations or events or from exclusion, whose rights to benefit may have expired a long time ago or for reasons of concurring circumstances. Social exclusion also strikes or risks to strike persons who without being poor are denied access to certain rights or services as a result of long periods of illness, the breakdown of their families, violence, release from prison or marginal behaviour as a result for example of alcoholism or drug addiction.”

7. Definition originally developed by the European Commission in 2003, cited by Ms Danielle Dierckx, Consultant, in: *Strengthening social cohesion*, Kevin P. O’Kelly and Caroline Corr (ed.), Council of Europe Publishing, August 2010, p. 55.

8. See, for example, José Nun’s Chapter on the problematic of social exclusion, in: *Democracy – government of the people or government of the politicians?*, Rowan and Littlefield Publishers, United States, 2003, pp. 89 ff.

9. Voluntary exclusion is not the same as personal responsibility for exclusion. Thus, a drug addict may be personally responsible for his/her social exclusion without that exclusion being voluntary.

10. This is, for example, the thinking of Brian Barry. For a discussion of this hypothesis see: Julian Le Grand, Individual Choice and social exclusion, in *Justice and Democracy: Essays for Brian Barry*, Cambridge University Press (United Kingdom) 2004, pp. 170 ff.

11. Andrew Norton (ODI) and Arjan de Haan (IDRC), Social Cohesion: Theoretical Debates and Practical Applications with Respect to Jobs, Background Paper for the World Development Report 2013, World Bank, http://siteresources.worldbank.org/EXTNWDR2013/Resources/8258024-1320950747192/8260293-1320956712276/8261091-1348683883703/WDR2013_bp_Social_Cohesion_Norton.pdf.

12. See, for example, relevant studies by the German Institut für Sozialforschung und Gesellschaftspolitik (Institute for social research and societal politics), such as: Dr Dietrich Engels: *Armut, soziale Ausgrenzung und Teilhabe an Politik und Gesellschaft* (Poverty, social exclusion and participation in politics and society), Köln (Germany), 2004.

12. Several sub-problems were identified: one is “ghettos” of social exclusion. This is illustrated by another researcher, Anne Power: “Being poor in an area with many poor people and poor conditions generates a gradual loss of confidence in ‘the system’. In the largest poverty cluster in Newcastle for example, only one in ten people vote.”¹³

13. Secondly, there is a rising disaffection among young people. Young people were found to be the least likely to turn out and vote and to be the most likely to claim that they felt powerless in the electoral process [at the 2001 general election].¹⁴ The situation has probably worsened since, as was also underlined by the Assembly in its [Resolution 1885 \(2012\)](#) “The young generation sacrificed: social, economic and political implications of the financial crisis”.

14. Thirdly, a lack of political engagement could be observed amongst minority communities, in particular of migrant origin. The United Kingdom Electoral Commission’s first “Audit of political engagement” found, for example, that only a quarter (23%) of those from BME communities [Black and Minority Ethnic] said they had discussed politics or political news with someone else in the last two to three years, compared to almost two in five (39%) of white people.¹⁵

15. Fourthly, gender plays a role in political participation. Overall, political interest is often found to be higher among men than women, with women generally found to be significantly less politically active than men, even though they are more likely than men to participate in “cause-oriented” actions such as signing petitions and boycotting or buying products for ethical reasons.¹⁶

16. Finally, experts in other contexts argue that political exclusion also involves the notion that the State, which grants basic rights and civil liberties, may not be a neutral agency and may thus discriminate between social groups. As such, political exclusion can include the denial of citizenship rights such as political participation and the right to organise, and also of personal security, the rule of law, freedom of expression and equality of opportunity.¹⁷ This shows how different forms of exclusion may be linked and how political influence may be determined by belonging to a certain social strata, and it illustrates the great responsibility of the State. These phenomena are certainly to be observed to a greater or lesser degree in all Council of Europe member States.

17. Similar problems to those identified in the United Kingdom have been reported from other countries more recently. German experts observing the link between social exclusion and democracy confirm that persons having lower education and income levels participate less in political processes, and that the gap between the poor and the rich has even increased in recent decades.¹⁸ The problem is evidently self-reinforcing because the less socially disadvantaged people articulate their needs or participate in votes, the fewer will be those political representatives (in our parliaments for example) who defend their interests. This trend may, in the long term, even pose a problem of legitimacy of elected officials. Those who retract from political processes will be increasingly frustrated by decisions taken by “those above” and become less and less confident in their elected representatives and political institutions.¹⁹

18. As an intermediate conclusion on how social exclusion affects democratic participation, we can therefore note that:

- ghettos of social exclusion may accentuate the problem of lower civic participation;
- due to reduced opportunities for economic inclusion via access to the labour market, young people especially tend to disengage from political processes;

13. Anne Power, Poor Areas and Social Exclusion, in “Social Exclusion and the Future of Cities” Case paper 35, Centre for Analysis of Social Exclusion, LSE, London (February 2000): http://eprints.lse.ac.uk/6470/1/Social_Exclusion_and_the_Future_of_Cities.pdf.

14. The Electoral Commission: Social exclusion and political engagement, Research report, November 2005, London, p. 12, www.electoralcommission.org.uk.

15. *Ibid.*, p. 15.

16. *Ibid.* and studies by the German Institute for social research and societal politics.

17. Ajit Bhalla and Frederic Lapeyre, Social Exclusion: Towards an Analytical and Operational Framework, *Development and Change*, Volume 28, Issue 3, pp. 413-433 (1997).

18. Thomas Petersen et al, *Gespaltene Demokratie* (Divided democracy), *Politische Partizipation und Demokratiezufriedenheit vor der Bundestagswahl 2013* (Political participation and satisfaction with democracy before the elections to the Bundestag in 2013), Bertelsmann Foundation, Gütersloh, 2013.

19. *Mehr Demokratie e.v.* (Association “More Democracy”): *Themen 22 – Direkte Demokratie und soziale Exklusion* (Themes 22 – Direct Democracy and Social Exclusion), Berlin, July 2013, www.mehr-demokratie.de/fileadmin/pdf/Themen22_Direkte_Demokratie_und_soziale_Exklusion.pdf.

- ethnic or religious minorities often show a lack of political engagement or feel under-represented;
- poverty and exclusion affect the democratic participation of men and women in different ways;
- those living at risk of poverty and social exclusion in the long term and lose faith in political institutions and tend to further retract from them or to turn to extremist movements;
- in the light of these issues, the State has an important role to play in ensuring social cohesion and access to civil and political rights for everyone.

3. Means of action to fight social exclusion and foster political participation

3.1. European legal standards and action

19. The Council of Europe has developed relevant legal standards to fight social exclusion, most notably the European Social Charter (revised). In addition to this legally binding instrument²⁰ comes a large range of “soft law” instruments created by the Council of Europe. It goes without saying that their effectiveness hinges on the extent of their implementation at national level, as well as monitoring of commitments entered into at European level. It has become evident most recently that the regular non-conformity between standards existing at Council of Europe level, in particular the European Social Charter, and judgments expressed by the European Court of Justice on the application of relevant European Union directives, represents another obstacle to effective implementation of social rights.²¹

20. I believe it useful to recall here the most important provision of the European Social Charter (revised):²²

“Article 30 – The right to protection against poverty and social exclusion

With a view to ensuring the effective exercise of the right to protection against poverty and social exclusion, the Parties undertake:

a. to take measures within the framework of an overall and co-ordinated approach to promote the effective access of persons who live or risk living in a situation of social exclusion or poverty, as well as their families, to, in particular, employment, housing, training, education, culture and social and medical assistance;

b. to review these measures with a view to their adaptation if necessary.”

21. Several bodies of the Council of Europe deal with the promotion, implementation and monitoring of social rights, the main one being the European Committee of Social Rights (ECSR).

22. The European Union has also been expending considerable energy on fighting poverty and social exclusion. The year 2010 was the “European Year for Combating Poverty and Social Exclusion” – a report analysing its results has recently been adopted by the European Commission.²³ The European Union has adopted a strategy (“Europe 2020”) which has made reducing poverty a main target (“20 million fewer people in or at risk of poverty”).

23. However, with regard to the present report, it is the European Commission Recommendation of 3 October 2008 on the active inclusion of people excluded from the labour market²⁴ which sets up both more realistic and more concrete avenues for fighting social exclusion and fostering political participation: integrated active inclusion policies; expanding and improving investment in human capital through inclusive education and training policies, including effective lifelong strategies; adapting education and training systems in

20. 32 Council of Europe member States are bound by the revised European Social Charter, 11 by the original Charter (ETS No. 35), 4 are bound by neither (Liechtenstein, Monaco, San Marino nor Switzerland).

21. See the 2013 Laval case in Sweden: www.etuc.org/press/council-europe%E2%80%99s-european-committee-social-rights-strengthens-collective-rights-sweden%E2%80%99s-laval.

22. In addition, the European Social Charter (revised) protects the following rights of interest in the framework of this report: Article 12 – The right to social security; Article 15 – The right of persons with disabilities to independence, social integration and participation in the life of the community; Article 16 – The right of the family to social, legal and economic protection; Article 17 – The right of children and young persons to social, legal and economic protection; Article 19 – The right of migrant workers and their families to protection and assistance; Article 23 – The right of elderly persons to social protection. See full text: www.conventions.coe.int/Treaty/en/Treaties/Html/163.htm.

23. <http://ec.europa.eu/social/main.jsp?langId=en&catId=751&newsId=1235&furtherNews=yes>.

24. C(2008)5737, <http://eur-lex.europa.eu/LexUriServ/LexUriServ.do?uri=CELEX:32008H0867:EN:NOT>.

response to new competence requirements; the need for digital skills and taking the necessary measures to ensure that all, including the least privileged, are informed of their rights and of the support available, with the aid, where appropriate, of information technologies.

3.2. Fighting social exclusion from different ends

24. Some policy approaches are meant to address the issue of “social exclusion” through broader “social cohesion” policies. Whilst “social exclusion” is generally defined as “a process whereby certain individuals are pushed to the edge of society ...” (see chapter 2.1 above on definitions), “social cohesion” is a broader concept referring to the individual and collective feeling of belonging to a certain society. It therefore tackles the problem from the other end.

25. At Council of Europe level, and in particular through the New Strategy and Council of Europe Action Plan for Social Cohesion,²⁵ social cohesion is defined as “the capacity of a society to ensure the well-being of all its members – minimising disparities and avoiding marginalisation – to manage differences and divisions and ensure the means of achieving welfare for all members”. Although this definition seems relatively complete at first glance, the Committee on Social Affairs, Health and Sustainable Development has already made it clear on several occasions that it was missing certain notions, such as those of solidarity, tolerance or responsibility.²⁶

26. Some of these concepts can, however, be found in relevant definitions by the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), also promoted by United Nations bodies, which I entirely agree with. According to these, “a cohesive society is one where people are protected against life risks, trust their neighbours and the institutions of the State and can work towards a better future for themselves and their families”, and “fostering social cohesion is about striving for greater inclusiveness, more civic participation and creating opportunities for upward mobility. It is the glue that holds society together”.²⁷

27. In consequence, promoting more social cohesion is one of the “bricks” of policies aimed at preventing the social exclusion of certain marginalised groups. Furthermore, the OECD definition introduces a dynamic element into the debate on social cohesion which is defined as being built around three key values: social inclusion, social capital and social mobility. In this understanding, social inclusion refers to the degree to which all citizens can participate on an equal footing in economic, social and political life (including protection in times of need); social capital refers to the trust between people and in institutions and the sense of belonging to a society; social mobility refers to equality of opportunity to get ahead. OECD experts are convinced that public policies can make a difference by investing more resources in social development, whilst rethinking social and economic policies to ensure that all citizens have a voice, by fostering civic participation and strengthening democratic institutions.²⁸

28. An interesting approach to fighting social exclusion at different levels can also be found in the action plan that was prepared and implemented by previous British governments. The Action Plan on Social Exclusion of 2006 was based on a most interesting “life-time approach” developing measures for different stages of the life course (childhood, youth and working-age adulthood) and suggesting three dimensions of action for fighting social cohesion: resources, participation (including political participation) and quality of life.

The Bristol Social Exclusion Matrix (B-SEM)

Resources	Material/economic resources
	Access to public and private services
	Social resources

25. Texts approved by the Committee of Ministers on 7 July 2010, www.coe.int/t/dg3/socialpolicies/socialcohesiondev/source/2010Strategy_ActionPlan_SocialCohesion.pdf.

26. According to the contribution made on behalf of our committee by my colleague, Ms Carina Ohlsson (Sweden, SOC), to the 2nd Council of Europe Conference of Ministers responsible for Social Cohesion, held in Istanbul on 11-12 October 2012 (available from the committee secretariat upon request).

27. United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs: “Perspectives on social cohesion – the glue that holds society together”, news item on the seminar on “Social cohesion in a shifting world”, held on 27 January 2012 in New York, www.un.org/en/development/desa/news/policy/perspectives-on-social-cohesion.html.

28. Ibid.

Participation	Economic participation
	Social participation
	Culture, education and skills
	Political and civic participation
Quality of life	Health and well-being
	Living environment
	Crime, harm and criminalisation

29. In my view, in order to create truly cohesive societies, in which all members may enjoy their full set of social and economic, but also civic and political rights, broader social cohesion policies and more specific measures taken against the social exclusion (of certain risk groups) need to complement each other.

3.3. European and national strategies against social exclusion and their contribution to ensuring broad democratic participation

30. Strategies against social exclusion are developed and implemented in various contexts: At the level of the European Union, poverty and social cohesion are addressed by funding tools such as the European Social Fund (ESF) and complementary instruments. From 2014 to 2020, about 80 billion euros will be injected into the ESF, amongst others with the purpose of reaching a level of 75% of 20-64 year-olds in employment and at least 20 million fewer people in or at risk of poverty and social exclusion. In this context, special attention is paid to vulnerable groups like migrants and the Roma, and certain long-term challenges, such as “up-skilling” the workforce in an increasingly complex economy, addressing the requirements of an ageing society and labour market, ensuring that all women are free to re-enter the labour market after a break and offering support to people with disabilities.²⁹

31. In the intergovernmental sector of the Council of Europe, a Methodological Guide to the Concerted Development of Social Cohesion Indicators was developed in 2005, containing a comprehensive set of questions and a large number of indicators to understand and measure social cohesion on the whole, by area of life and for specific vulnerable groups (minorities, migrants, children, the elderly, people with disabilities and women).

32. National strategies often set out a broad range of measures against social exclusion, involving various vulnerable groups or groups in need of special protection, but do not always tackle the issue of civic participation. An example in this respect is the latest National Social Report prepared by the Department of Work and Pensions of my own government in May 2012. According to this document, supporting families, young people from disadvantaged backgrounds and the most disadvantaged adults is amongst the United Kingdom priorities against poverty and social cohesion, but it does not mention at all that civic participation is one of the issues to be addressed. This is a loophole to be overcome by future policies in this field.

4. Recommended action: guiding principles and concrete measures

33. I would now like to establish some guiding principles and propose measures to be applied by member States with a view to fighting social exclusion in general and with regard to specific vulnerable groups, as well as to foster the democratic participation of those excluded or at risk of exclusion.

34. In making concrete proposals for action, I would like to refer to some of the concepts and assumptions explored above. Resources, participation (including political participation) and quality of life are important dimensions of social cohesion. In order to strive for equal opportunities for all in these dimensions, public policies should combine broader approaches promoting social cohesion and more specific action aimed at fighting against social exclusion, to be differentiated for different stages of the life-course (childhood, youth, working-age adulthood, later life) and according to gender criteria. Targeted measures should be applied for particularly vulnerable groups, notably minorities, migrants and people with disabilities. Finally, coming back to the main focus of this report, access should be guaranteed to democratic processes for those in situations or at risk of social exclusion to ensure that they may express their needs and find adequate policy responses.

29. European Commission, Directorate-General for Employment, Social Affairs and Inclusion, “Investing in people: European Union funding for employment and social inclusion”, *Social Europe guide*, Volume 7, June 2014.

35. According to Article 30 of the European Social Charter (revised) (“The right to protection against poverty and social exclusion”), effective access for all must be guaranteed to employment, housing, training, education, culture and social and medical assistance. Public policy responses to problems of social and economic exclusion should therefore fully cover these categories individually and through transversal action wherever appropriate. The purpose of this report will not be to provide exhaustive programmes of action and solutions to fight against social exclusion, but just to raise some general principles that could be applied to make policies more effective.

4.1. Measures following the life-cycle approach

36. According to the life-cycle approach that I would like to strongly support here, political measures and public assistance and services should be specially designed for each “stage of life” or age group. These could, for example, include the following measures:

- *Children*: inclusion through early childhood education, for example language teaching for migrant children;
- *Youth*: active training and employment policies helping young people to prepare for and integrate into the labour market;
- *Working-age adulthood*: measures for training the long-term unemployed, facilitating the reintegration of women into labour markets or increasing family income (see more details below);
- *Later life*: reforms of pension systems to ensure adequacy and sustainability of old-age pensions.

37. Such life-cycle approaches allow measures for different age groups to be distinguished from those for vulnerable groups, by avoiding stereotypes and systematically mingling children or the elderly in general with other social categories. Crossovers are frequent, for example among migrant children, single mothers or the elderly poor, but not all children, women or the elderly are necessarily vulnerable. Issues concerning women should also be covered in a transversal gender perspective, distinguishing measures required for women and men, or set in their respective socio-economic context.

38. One of the difficulties of public policies aimed at fighting social exclusion and its consequences is that many of the resources are spent on managing and alleviating the symptoms of exclusion. Instead, policies should be based, to a much greater extent, on preventive measures aimed at breaking “cycles of disadvantage” with appropriate measures for specific categories of population. In this respect, early intervention is of particular importance, as already promoted by the Assembly in its [Resolution 1995 \(2014\)](#) on ending child poverty in Europe.

39. Further specific measures against poverty and social exclusion for different age groups were put forward by the Assembly in its [Resolutions 1800 \(2011\)](#) on combating poverty, [1828 \(2011\)](#) on reversing the sharp decline in youth employment, [1882 \(2012\)](#) on decent pensions for all, or [1885 \(2012\)](#) “The young generation sacrificed: social, economic and political implications of the financial crisis”. I recommend that all governments should once again consult these texts in order to complete their policies against social exclusion (in particular of the young and the elderly).

4.2. Income-related measures

40. Some experts present minimum income security schemes as the “panacea” for fighting social exclusion. However, very often, different notions are confused in the political discourse and therefore “sell” more or less well to the general public. You will find a definition of the different categories of minimum income and security schemes in the Appendix.

41. Minimal incomes aimed at preventing poverty can be provided through various means. Although minimum wage laws are in effect in many jurisdictions, different views exist about their benefits and drawbacks (for employment levels, standards of living or attitudes to work). Whatever the approach followed, I am convinced that every State should find its way to guaranteeing minimum levels of family income, either by providing an overall legal minimum wage or by facilitating sector agreements achieved through social dialogue (which is considered a core element of the European Social Model).^{30 31} Guaranteed minimum income schemes or living wage concepts can be complementary approaches, as first experiences show. Basic

30. Daniel Vaughan-Whitehead, The European Social Model in times of Economic Crisis and Austerity Policies, International Labour Organization (ILO), February 2014, see the executive summary: www.ilo.org/wcmsp5/groups/public/---europe/---ro-geneva/---ilo-brussels/documents/publication/wcms_236720.pdf.

income or citizen income schemes are considered too utopic by many. In the public debate, such concepts are less popular than in the 1980s or 1990s; Swiss voters explicitly rejected the idea in a referendum in 2013.³²

42. However, the level of income is not the only determinant of social inclusion; another essential element of inclusive labour-market policies is the redistribution of work amongst the working population through education and training – in a context of increasing technology-orientation and complexity of work processes, “up-skilling” the workforce is essential. Also needed are growth strategies which not only lower unemployment levels, but create quality jobs allowing participation in social security systems. Those who are obliged to work part-time for many years and pass from one precarious contract to the next, often interrupted by periods of unemployment, may not find economic stability in the long term. Inclusion must therefore not only be understood as a concept for guaranteeing social rights and security for present working-age persons but also follow transgenerational and long-term approaches, for example pursue sustainable development strategies.

4.3. Measures for groups in need of special support

43. In practice and with a view to preventing social exclusion and intervening at an early stage, overall life-cycle approaches need to be closely linked to certain vulnerable groups, as some of the above examples already show (for example migrant children). In recent times of financial and economic crisis, various groups have regularly been identified as being in need of special support.

44. The Council of Europe Commissioner for Human Rights, in his recent issue paper on “Safeguarding human rights in times of economic crisis”, identifies migrant workers, ethnic minorities (for example the Roma), working women, children and young people and people with disabilities amongst those who feel the impact of the crisis disproportionately.³³

45. Of course, such groups may vary over time and in specific national contexts. Action plans aimed at fighting social exclusion and marginalisation and improving the situation of the most vulnerable, therefore need to be developed at national levels and should be updated very regularly, based on close monitoring of national developments. They should also cover the key areas identified as determining for the social status and inclusion of any person, namely education and training, the creation of quality jobs and equal access to social rights and social security systems.

46. With regard to minorities in particular, phenomena of “ghettoisation” are to be prevented wherever possible, even though social networks of any kind (including ethnic or religious ones) may have enabling and limiting consequences, as already mentioned earlier. The fact that certain communities are geographically “regrouped” in specific urban areas may be instrumental in order to reach out to them in a proactive manner through inclusive action (for example social work, education, employment and other measures). Civil society organisations certainly have a particular responsibility in this field, as the Assembly already highlighted in its [Resolution 1778 \(2010\)](#) on promoting volunteering in Europe.

4.4. Measures aimed at ensuring and promoting democratic participation of those at risk of exclusion

47. Promoting the democratic participation of those who are marginalised or at risk of exclusion (for various reasons) is a complex challenge and cannot be undertaken by one-dimensional responses – action must be taken at different levels and by different players simultaneously and in the most coherent manner. A starting point could be national action plans which specifically address this issue. A good example for the format of such programmes could be the Disability Agenda of the Disability Rights Commission in the United Kingdom in 2007 and in which detailed measures were listed for different stakeholders (governments, social and health-care services, local authorities, NGOs etc.) to increase democratic participation and active citizenship of persons with disabilities.³⁴

31. Two reports relating to social dialogue are currently in preparation in the Parliamentary Assembly: “Towards a new European Social Model” (rapporteur: Maria de Bélem Roseira, Portugal, SOC) and “Protection of the right to bargain collectively” (Rapporteur: Andrej Hunko, Germany, UEL).

32. Worldfinance, Will unconditional basic income solve Europe’s problems? 2013: www.worldfinance.com/infrastructure-investment/government-policy/will-unconditional-basic-income-solve-europes-problems.

33. Issue Paper by the Commissioner for Human Rights, November 2013: <https://wcd.coe.int/com.instranet.InstraServlet?command=com.instranet.CmdBlobGet&InstranetImage=2530030&SecMode=1&DocId=2144886&Usage=2>.

48. Whilst I have highlighted some of the challenges linked to the democratic participation of those who are socially excluded in this text, I am not in a position to outline the exact pathway for designing inclusive democratic structures and processes due to the great complexity of the subject matter. Such processes certainly need to be further discussed and developed in each national context. Next to measures aimed at generally fighting poverty and social exclusion, and thus improving the socio-economic position of people (including their level of education and subsequent sustainable employment opportunities), some experts recommend further structural and early intervention measures.

49. With a view to improving the democratic participation of those groups of population which are disadvantaged or excluded in some way, it is possible to mention: 1) the introduction of elements of direct democracy, thus allowing civil society organisations in touch with disadvantaged groups of the population to reach out to their “clients” and defend their interests; 2) civic education starting at an early age; 3) the promotion of an “easy to understand” communication about political decisions and processes; 4) as the most “extreme” measure, the introduction of compulsory voting.³⁵ In order to find the most appropriate measures for their national context, governments should dedicate time to the exchange of best practice in this field and find inspiration in the innovative approaches tried elsewhere which might already have proved effective.

50. As the Commissioner for Human Rights stated in his Issue Paper,³⁶ civil and political rights, such as the right to participate in public affairs and to transparency through the provision of timely, accessible and relevant information, have suffered as a result of the crisis. He further noted that the frequent failure to consult with the people, for example on austerity measures, had provoked large-scale demonstrations, especially in Spain, Portugal and Greece, and that harsh reactions to social unrest might engender mistrust in the democratic system as such.

51. Indeed, it seems of utmost importance to uphold the highest standards of democracy and good governance even, or especially, in crisis situations. Some guidance in this respect can be found in an instrument developed by the Council of Europe for the local level and which has been promoted by the Assembly on previous occasions: the twelve principles set out by the “Strategy for Innovation and Good Governance at Local Level”, as adopted by the Committee of Ministers in March 2008.³⁷ These also refer to important concepts such as openness and transparency or human rights, cultural diversity and social cohesion and make them well worth being promoted at European level.

52. Standards related to the participation of citizens in local public life are also provided in Committee of Ministers Recommendation Rec(2001)19 on the participation of citizens in local public life, as well as amongst some of the more recent texts adopted by the Congress of Local and Regional Authorities of the Council of Europe, such as Resolution 326 (2011) on citizen participation at local and regional level in Europe, Resolution 332 (2011) on education for democratic citizenship or, very recently, Resolution 366 (2014) on empowering Roma youth through participation: effective policy design at local and regional levels. Of course, the local level plays a particular role when it comes to improving the democratic participation of disadvantaged or marginalised groups of the population because these are the best known to local decision-makers and social services may reach out to their “problematic” groups and areas in the most effective manner. On the side of the Parliamentary Assembly, the most relevant texts in this field are [Resolution 1618 \(2008\)](#) “State of democracy in Europe: Measures to improve the democratic participation of migrants” and [Resolution 1964 \(2013\)](#) on good governance of large metropolises.

5. Conclusions

53. With regard to fighting social exclusion, the provisions of the European Social Charter (revised), the legally binding instrument of the Council of Europe to protect social and economic rights, are key. In order to develop throughout Europe an area of common principles of protection of social and economic rights, it is necessary to further promote the signature, the ratification and the implementation by member States of the Charter, of the 1991 Protocol amending the European Social Charter (ETS No. 142, “Turin Protocol”), and the

34. UK Disability Rights Commission: Increasing democratic participation and active citizenship – Creating an alternative future, February 2007. NB: Through the Equality Act of 2006, the Commission was replaced by the Equality and Human Rights Commission (EHRC) for England, Scotland and Wales, www.equalityhumanrights.com.

35. *Mehr Demokratie e.v. / Association More Democracy: Themen 22 – Direkte Demokratie und soziale Exklusion / Themen 22 – Direct Democracy and Social Exclusion*, Berlin, July 2013, www.mehr-demokratie.de/fileadmin/pdf/Themen22_Direkte_Demokratie_und_soziale_Exklusion.pdf.

36. Issue Paper by the Commissioner for Human Rights, November 2013, see footnote 62.

37. As also promoted by [Resolution 1964 \(2013\)](#) on good governance of large metropolises.

Additional Protocol of 1995 Providing for a System of Collective Complaints (ETS No. 158). All member States should in particular accept the provisions of Article 30 of the European Social Charter (revised) on the right to protection against poverty and social exclusion, and fully implement its provisions.

54. However, the fight against social exclusion is not limited to the promotion of social rights, but also implies more broadly the promotion of civil and political rights, on which every democracy relies. There are no standard “recipes” for achieving social cohesion and fighting social exclusion or for ensuring the democratic participation of those at risk of exclusion. Once the European challenge described in this report has been recognised by all stakeholders, namely that democracy as such is at stake if social rights are not guaranteed, appropriate policies need to be developed at the national level where decision-makers will know which “policy mix” to follow to ensure inclusion and outreach to marginalised groups.

55. In the light of the links between social exclusion and democracy highlighted by the present report and some of the concrete measures suggested above, I would like to propose that the Assembly submit a catalogue of action to member States’ governments. These should be based on the three main categories developed above: general measures against social exclusion; specific measures for marginalised groups or those at risk of social exclusion (involuntary or voluntary); and specific measures aimed at strengthening the democratic participation of those excluded in particular.

56. Many substantial ideas for legislative and political action are drawn from texts already adopted by the Parliamentary Assembly, where the situation of specific age groups, groups in need of special protection or support or other aspects of social cohesion have already been explored. Much substantial work has also been accomplished by the intergovernmental sector of the Council of Europe, in the preparation of the new Strategy and Action Plan for Social Cohesion of 2010 and related methodological tools. However, some of these tools have proved to be of (too) great complexity, and the development of more manageable tools, following a political agenda addressing the most urgent issues, could be useful.

57. We should all recognise that the protection against social exclusion and the creation of true social cohesion to the greatest extent possible is a fundamental basis for democracy. Poverty and social exclusion are not only threats to individual human rights – social and economic or civil and political rights – but to democracy as such. Furthermore, a democracy which is not inclusive and does not take into account the concerns and needs of the whole population will tend to further discriminate certain societal groups because they will always be less well represented than others in democratic processes, including those allocating resources.

Appendix – List of different categories of minimum income and security schemes

- *Minimum wages*: representing, according to ILO definitions, the minimum sum payable to a worker for work performed or services rendered, within a given period, whether calculated on the basis of time or output, which may not be reduced either by individual or collective agreement, which is guaranteed by law and which may be fixed in such a way as to cover the minimum needs of the worker and his or her family, in the light of national economic and social conditions.^{38 39} Out of 28 European Union member States in 2013, 21 had national legislation setting a statutory minimum wage whilst others set minimum wages by sectors or stipulated that minimum wages are to be determined by social partners through collective bargaining. Levels of minimum wages vary greatly in the European Union: from 158 €/month in Bulgaria to 1,874 €/month in Luxembourg.⁴⁰
- *Guaranteed minimum income schemes*:⁴¹ systems of social welfare provision aimed at preventing poverty of low-wage workers whilst encouraging professional activity by providing complementary incomes. Such schemes are often means-tested and linked to certain conditions (such as limited hours of work, substantial reasons for not working more (on grounds of illness, disability, caring for children or someone who is ill), a limited amount of savings, proven willingness to participate in the labour market or to perform community services). They have, for example, been established in France (*Revenu minimum d'insertion (RMI)* in 1988, followed by the *Revenu de solidarité active (RSA)* in 2009)⁴² and the United Kingdom (“income support system”).^{43 44}
- *Fair wage concepts*: In a study in 2010, an ILO senior economist identified 12 dimensions of fair wages.^{45 46} In the same spirit, the Parliamentary Assembly itself has asked for the guarantee of “fair remuneration and social coverage” in its [Resolution 1993 \(2014\)](#) on decent work for all.
- *Living wages*: a concept already promoted by the ILO Constitution of 1919 which underlined the urgency of improving working conditions.⁴⁷ Workers and their families were meant to be able to lead a simple but decent existence, considered acceptable by the society (taking into account its level of economic development) and allowing them to live above the poverty line and participate in social and cultural life. A more recent initiative was launched in the United Kingdom thanks to TELCO (East London Community Organisation), supported by unions, associations and communities.⁴⁸ Today, the Living Wage Foundation encourages companies to voluntarily pay the living wage to their employees. In London, 200 companies were associated with this project during the 2012 Olympic Games in London, where 81.2% of workers received at least the living wage.⁴⁹
- *Basic income*:⁵⁰ A basic income (also called citizenship income or negative income tax) is a system of social security that periodically provides each citizen (the richest and the poorest) with a sum of money that is sufficient to live on (transfer payment from the government). A basic income is typically intended to be provided at subsistence level, so as to encourage people to engage in economic activity. In Europe, many of its advocates united in the Basic Income Earth Network (BIEN), which recognises numerous national advocacy groups.⁵¹

38. General Survey of the reports on the minimum wage, ILO, 1992: [www.ilo.org/public/libdoc/ilo/P/09661/09661\(1992-79-4B\).pdf](http://www.ilo.org/public/libdoc/ilo/P/09661/09661(1992-79-4B).pdf).

39. General Survey of the reports on the Minimum Wage Fixing Convention, 1970 (No. 131), and the Minimum Wage Fixing Recommendation, 1970 (No. 135), ILO, 2014: www.ilo.org/wcmsp5/groups/public/---ed_norm/---relconf/documents/meetingdocument/wcms_235287.pdf.

40. Eurostat, Tables, Graphs and Maps Interface: minimum wages in Europe: <http://epp.eurostat.ec.europa.eu/tgm/table.do?tab=table&init=1&plugin=1&language=fr&pcode=tps00155>.

41. Basic Income Earth Network (BIEN): www.basicincome.org/bien/aboutbasicincome.html#history.

42. Pôle emploi, *Le revenu de solidarité active (RSA)*: www.pole-emploi.fr/candidat/le-revenu-de-solidarite-active-rsa--@suarticle.jspz?id=43242.

43. United Kingdom Government, *Income Support*: <https://www.gov.uk/income-support/overview>.

44. Similar systems have been implemented in other European countries: Austria, Denmark, Finland, Germany, Iceland, Ireland, Liechtenstein, Luxembourg, the Netherlands, Norway, Portugal, Spain, Sweden and Switzerland.

45. See Fair Wage Network: www.fair-wage.com/en/fair-wage-approach-menu.html.

46. D. Vaughan-Whitehead, *Fair wages – Strengthening corporate social responsibility*, E. Edgar Publishing, Cheltenham, United Kingdom, Northampton, MA, United States, 2010, pp. 66-67.

47. General Survey of the reports on the Minimum Wage Fixing Convention, 1970 (No. 131), and the Minimum Wage Fixing Recommendation, 1970 (No. 135), Minimum wage, living wage and fair wage, p. 29 – 32, ILO, 2014: www.ilo.org/wcmsp5/groups/public/---ed_norm/---relconf/documents/meetingdocument/wcms_235287.pdf.

48. Kate Lawton and Matthew Pennycook, *Beyond the bottom line: the challenges and opportunities of living wage*, 2013: www.ippr.org/assets/media/images/media/files/publication/2013/01/beyond-bottom-line_living-wage_Jan2013_10162.pdf.

49. Greater London Authority, *A fairer London: the 2012 living wage in London*, London, November 2012, pp. 31-37.

50. In particular, the issue of basic income schemes had been presented in detail to the former Social, Health and Family Affairs Committee at a hearing with Mr Bálint Misetics, Hungarian Researcher, at the committee meeting in Florence in November 2011. At the time, this report was still being prepared by the former Hungarian rapporteur and former member of the Parliamentary Assembly, Ms Virag Kaufer, (who has since left the Hungarian Parliament and the Assembly). More information on the early stages of preparing this report is available from the Secretariat.

51. Basic Income Earth Network (BIEN): www.basicincome.org/bien/aboutbasicincome.html#history.