



Doc. 58

02 September 1949

Role of the Council of Europe in the field of social security

Report

Social, Health and Family Affairs Committee

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1. REPORT

The Committee on Social Questions proposes that the following Recommendations, which have been unanimously approved by the members attending the Committee, should be adopted by the Assembly:

1.1. SOCIAL SECURITY

In the battle for social justice, social security plays an important part. It is, in a civilized nation, a bulwark of the people against adversity. It is also the most efficient means of waging war against poverty and misery.

The Assembly considers that one of the principal duties of the Member States is to pursue this war with loyalty, perseverance and energy.

It is convinced that one of the best means of preserving peace in Europe is for all the nations to strive tirelessly to satisfy the vital needs of the workers.

It realises that to-day, as yesterday, social security is one of the best safeguards - of democratic institutions against the constant danger of totalitarian dictatorships.

It adopts the principles laid down in Article 25 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights:

"Everyone has the right to a standard of living adequate for the health and well-being of himself and of his family, including food, clothing, housing and medical care and necessary social services, and the right to security in the event of unemployment, sickness, disability, widowhood, old age or other lack of livelihood in circumstances beyond his control."

It recognises the great value of the conventions and recommendations of the International Labour Organisation, regarding compensation for accidents at work in both industry and agriculture, occupational diseases, sickness insurance in industry, agriculture and among seamen, old age pensions, permanent incapacity pensions, and death benefits, both in industry and agriculture.

It notes with regret, however, that the absence of a sufficient number of ratifications does not yet permit the generalisation and co-ordination of social security legislation in European countries. Such a generalisation and co-ordination would enable a greater equalisation of the social charges which burden costs of production in each country.

It notes that the efficient application of social legislation would depend largely on the spirit in which all those who participate — employers, workers, and the medical profession — respect the provisions of these laws and avoid any abuses which might endanger their normal functioning.



Finally, until such time as a European code of social security is drawn up, the Assembly recommends to Member States:

1. That they should continue their efforts to perfect their social security legislation so as to achieve, not necessarily a uniformity of laws in all countries, but, by different methods, an equally high level of social security;
2. That they should examine, within the framework of the Council of Europe, the possibility of a general ratification of international conventions on social security;
3. That they should be guided by action already taken through bilateral or regional agreements in order to prepare a multilateral agreement which would make their own social legislation completely applicable to the nationals of other countries.

The Assembly resolves that, after the first Session of the Consultative Assembly, the Committee on Social Questions shall be instructed to continue its work and the study of questions submitted to it by such practical means as it shall think fit. For this purpose it shall enter into contact with the International Labour Organisation and other specialised agencies of the United Nations, as well as with other international organisations with which consultation appears to be desirable.

1.2. EUROPEAN HOUSING PROBLEM

No social security problem possesses the same extent and urgency as the tragedy of Europe's housing conditions. The Consultative Assembly considers that the present situation is a real collective human tragedy involving the lives and happiness of millions of families. Even before the war, the existence of slums, the crowding of whole masses of people into inadequate dwellings, the failure to provide adequate accommodation for so great a number of workers in both town and country was a disgrace to our civilisation. The extent of the task is greater than ever to-day. The destruction and damage of millions of homes in the war and the fact that in many Member States it has been impossible during the war years to undertake any construction plans, have combined to produce the most serious housing crisis in the history of Europe. The task to be undertaken will certainly be difficult and of long duration. But the Assembly requests the Member States to do all that is within their power to build a better Europe, and to provide all Europeans with the elementary right of decent housing—a right properly stressed in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights.

From the economic point of view, it is essential to ensure that each of the Member States shall benefit from the experiences gained by the others in the field of technique and new methods of construction and reconstruction.

There should be a continuous exchange of information concerning the proportion of personal income devoted to housing, as much in the case of workers dwellings as in rural housing.

From the social point of view, a study of the following problems is required:

The conditions of hygiene, personal dignity and family comfort prevailing in low-cost housing; The methods of control of housing and building societies and, in particular, the participation of workers in such control;

The part played by social security organisations in the policy of improved housing.

The Assembly instructs its Committee on Social Questions to organise as quickly as possible the exchange of information on housing policy between the various Member States of the Council of Europe.

1.3. EMIGRATION OF WORKERS

The Assembly draws the attention of Member States to the importance of the problem of the emigration of workers, as it exists since the war, due to the demographic and economic conditions in European countries.

As far as Member States are concerned, it believes that countries which accept workers from other countries should grant them the same social rights as those of the workers who are nationals of the country itself.

The Assembly instructs its Committee on Social Questions to undertake a complete study of the problem in its present form, including the pooling of surplus manpower with a view to maintaining full employment.

It recommends, as a first step, that the international convention adopted by the International Labour Conference in June 1949, should be ratified at the earliest possible date by the countries of Europe.

1st September 1949.