Parliamentary Assembly
Assemblée parlementaire
https://pace.coe.int

COUNCIL OF EUROPE
CONSEIL DE L'EUROPE

Doc. 16517
27 November 2026

The 65th anniversary of the European Social Charter: social rights as the foundation of resilient democracies and social justice

Reply to Recommendation[1]: Recommendation 2304 (2026)
Committee of Ministers

1. The Committee of Ministers has carefully considered Parliamentary Assembly Recommendation 2304 (2026) "The 65th anniversary of the European Social Charter: social rights as the foundation of resilient democracies and social justice", together with the comments submitted by the European Committee on Social Rights (ECSR) and the Governmental Committee of the European Social Charter and the European Code of Social Security (GC) and in the light of the Chișinău Declaration adopted at the High-Level Conference on Social Rights – the European Social Charter (Chișinău, 18-19 March 2026).

2. The Committee of Ministers welcomes the Parliamentary Assembly's ongoing commitment to strengthening the European Social Charter (hereafter "the Charter") system. It fully concurs with the view that the effective protection and promotion of social and economic rights are central to sustaining democratic stability, social cohesion and the rule of law, particularly at a time of unprecedented challenges for democracies in Europe. As reaffirmed by the Chișinău Declaration on Social Rights and the European Social Charter, investing in social rights is both a moral imperative and a strategic choice, essential for building sustainable, resilient, just and inclusive societies and reinforcing trust in democratic institutions at all levels.

3. The Committee of Ministers shares the Assembly's emphasis on social rights, as enshrined notably in the Charter, as a fundamental pillar of democratic stability and as a key dimension in the framework of the New Democratic Pact for Europe. This approach is in line with the conclusions of the Chișinău Declaration, which recognised social justice as a core objective of the Pact and highlighted the need for renewed commitments and integrated solutions across sectors to ensure social justice in Europe.

4. The Committee of Ministers has taken good note of the proposals to both raise the profile and support the effective implementation of the Charter and its system, including the organisation of activities involving civil society and social partners, and the emphasis on promoting and expediting the ratification of the Revised Charter and the 1995 Collective Complaints Protocol. It encourages member States to consider ratifying the revised European Social Charter (1996), while keeping under review the possibilities for accepting additional commitments. It supports the recommendation to promote Charter-focused activities – including debates, conferences, and campaigns – involving civil society and social partners, to raise the Charter's visibility and support its effective implementation. The recent high-level conferences, such as those held in Vilnius (2024) and Chișinău (2026), have played an important role in this regard and further events are encouraged.

5. The Committee of Ministers would underline that the dissemination and national-level follow-up of ECSR conclusions and decisions, enhanced dialogue and peer exchange among States Parties, structured engagement with social partners, and closer co-operation with intergovernmental committees, are particularly valuable measures to reinforce implementation of State obligations under the Charter. In this connection,

1. Adopted at the 1576th meeting of the Ministers' Deputies (25 November 2026).

it welcomes the ongoing exchanges between the ECSR, the GC and the Steering Committee for Human Rights (CDDH), intended to explore possible avenues for future collaboration where there is clear added value.

6. The Committee notes the Assembly's call for wider ratification of both the Revised Charter and the 1995 Collective Complaints Protocol. In this respect, it notes with satisfaction that the Governmental Committee will continue to encourage exchange of experiences among States Parties to facilitate informed consideration of additional commitments. The Committee of Ministers has also taken note of the Assembly's concern that the 1991 Amending Protocol has yet to enter into force.

7. Regarding the request to review the limits of the Charter's territorial and personal scope, the Committee of Ministers recognises the significance of this subject for the universality and equality of human rights for all persons within the jurisdictions of States Parties. It has taken due note of the proposal to instruct the CDDH to carry out a feasibility study on the revision of the material, territorial and personal scope of the Charter and invites also the ESCR and the GC to actively contribute to this matter, in co-operation with the CDDH as recently envisaged. Further, the Committee of Ministers will bear it in mind when considering the future priorities of the Council of Europe Programme and Budget.

8. The Committee notes the importance the Assembly attaches to the recognition of the right to a healthy environment in a legally binding instrument, potentially through an additional protocol to the Charter. It recalls the commitment in the Reykjavík Declaration to reflect on the nature, content and implications of the right to a clean, healthy and sustainable environment, as well as the conclusions of the CDDH study on the need for and feasibility of a further instrument or instruments in the field of human rights and the environment; and the further analysis on that matter conducted at the request of the Committee at its 1520th meeting. It notes that these matters remain under consideration within the competent bodies of the Council of Europe. It acknowledges that this work is consistent with the pledges of the Reykjavík and Chișinău Declarations and aligns with the Council of Europe's commitment to advancing social equality and democratic stability in the face of new challenges. In this respect, the Committee of Ministers recalls that the Council of Europe Convention on the Protection of the Environment through Criminal Law was adopted at its 134th Ministerial Session last year and opened for signature in Strasbourg on 3 December 2025. The Committee also adopted the Council of Europe Strategy on the Environment and a related action plan, marking an important step towards fulfilling the Reykjavík Declaration commitment to strengthening our work at the Council of Europe on the human rights aspects of the environment based on the political recognition of the right to a clean, healthy and sustainable environment as a human right, in line with United Nations General Assembly Resolution 76/300 "The human right to a clean, healthy and sustainable environment", and by pursuing the implementation of the Committee of Ministers' Recommendation CM/Rec(2022)20 on human rights and the protection of the environment. Finally, in November 2025, a new Steering Committee on the Environment (CDENV) was set up to co-ordinate the intergovernmental work in the field of the environment and advise on appropriate action to be taken on the implementation of the Strategy, ensuring a multidisciplinary and cross-sectoral approach.

9. The Committee of Ministers also recalls the relevance in this field of Council of Europe Development Bank, which serves as an important instrument for advancing social rights and the objectives of the European Social Charter by supporting targeted social investments that strengthen social rights, social inclusion and social cohesion across member States.

10. Finally, the Committee of Ministers reiterates its commitment to the protection, promotion, and progressive development of social rights in Europe, notably through the Charter system. It will continue to support and engage in activities that give effect to the Vilnius and Chișinău Declarations and where possible to the Assembly's recommendations.