

ICSW EUROPE NEWSLETTER

1/2022

(Issued on 4 March 2022)

ISSN 2411-9709

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"Разом нас багато" –

"Together we are many, we can't be defeated"

Quote from the Ukraine 2005 Eurovision contest song, that became the unofficial anthem of the Ukrainian "Orange Revolution".

**"Разом нас багато" –
"Together we are many, we can't be defeated"**



The attack by the Russian Federation on Ukraine on the last week of February 2022 was directly from the playbook of the igniting of the Second World War, in 1939: 10 years of disinformation and agitation to create prejudice and hate against other populations, occupation of neighboring areas on the pretext of "rescuing our ethnic nationals" (Donbass), false flag operations (Crimea), and claiming that invasion of another nation is "peacekeeping" and a mystical historical "right".

This war has been planned and prepared. We have long witnessed the "Newspeak", similar to that described in Georg Orwell's dystopian novel "1984", published in 1949: Untruth is named "truth", war is called "peace", dictatorship is "democracy", oppression is "liberty". Spreading vulgarly fake information by the Russian state-monopolized media to brainwash people has kept ordinary people in the dark. Truth is the first victim of wars.

The attack of Russia on Ukraine, the indiscriminate shelling and killing of people is pushing hundreds of thousands of European girls and boys, women and men to asylum and steals them their future.

In the moment of this deepest humanitarian and social crisis of the European Region since the Second World War, ICSW Europe strongly condemns the barbaric attack on Ukraine and expresses its solidarity to the peoples of Ukraine.

The Russian Federation's illegal attack is not only an attack on Ukraine but also directed against all democratic and human rights-based societies, thus it is an attack on Europe as a whole, on the EU, on the UN and all peoples of the World.

Most recently Russia ratcheted its threat against all of humanity by lunatic threatening with nuclear arms. Already the attack on Ukraine where there are 15 nuclear plants is a huge risk in times of crises: if the plants are not monitored and serviced because of disorder and casualties of key personnel, many Chernobyl disasters might result.

The ICSW Europe Board insist that all ICSW members must withdraw from any eventual collaboration with the Russian Federation State-related agencies that are an integral part of the immoral war machine. Such cooperation is considered as a violation of ICSW Constitution's values and principles and would lead to cancelling of membership.

But we must support all civil society organizations, that share our basic values, including those in Ukraine and also such civil society organizations in Russian Federation that are defending human rights and democracy. This is not a war between people, it is a Russian Federation State-led ruthless and immoral action of organized violence against Ukraine and its peoples. While social workers and social sector organizations are against all militarism, now there is no room for neutrality about the aggressor and the victim.

ICSW commends all civic and public organizations that are involved in preventing and alleviating the suffering of people induced by this war.

P.S.

The editorial and other texts of this Newsletters were written at the time when there still was optimism and trust on collective reason on how to solve our common global problems by recognition of facts, honest dialogue, and cooperation between nations. We trust that human reason and peace will win. By joining our hands to work for peace,
"We shall overcome!"

ICSW Europe Board

A Message from the President



Quite a while ago, mid-June 2019 we last met face-to-face at the General Assembly in Chisinau, Moldova at the generous invitation of our member, Casa Mare Project led by Social Work Professor Vadim Moldovan. There we also had a capacity building session about ICSW strategic approaches.

We anchored ourselves into a Human Rights-Based Approach (HBRA) and Social Policy Systems (SPS) – approach, in contrast to charity-based do-good social projects.

We saw our mission as the promotion of the **Comprehensive Social Policy-approach** in the European Region. We also placed our work in the context of *ethically right, socially inclusive and fair, ecologically sustainable, and economically feasible sustainable development agenda*.

Reading the idea of Comprehensive Social Policies (CSP) in catchwords we can say it means policies that promote the following goals:

An inclusive society for all: equal rights to access to social security, essential services, and full inclusion.

Social Values in All Policies: equal opportunity, equity, social and gender equality in all sectors of society.

Leave No One Behind: Equal opportunity and equity imply additional focus on the needs of vulnerable people and investments in additional services to vulnerable groups in order “not to leave anyone behind”.

Consequently, ICSW Europe tries to ensure that all its work has a clear overall long-term objective and a link towards **universal social policy systems** even in cases when a specific activity focuses on the needs and rights of specific population groups.

Now it is time to look at our mission again. Two and half years have passed since the last face-to-face dialogue as the social and physical distancing hit us in early 2020. Many attempts for having face-to-face meetings had to be cancelled. For all international organizations this situation has been a great challenge.

ICSW Europe finally was able to have the twice/trice postponed 2021 General Assembly meeting virtually in January 2022.

We cannot continue living as hostage of the pandemic. We must learn to live with it. Vaccinations have diminished the risks and the burden of disease remarkably. Now we believe that we can meet properly again during the second part of this year.

Here comes the good news: ICSW Executive Director, Professor of Social Work and Social Services, *Dr. Antonio López Peláez* of the National University of Distance Education (UNED) has invited ICSW Europe to have its next capacity building event and General Assembly of 2022 in Spain. The date and venue will be determined later. We thank him warmly for this invitation!

It will provide us also an opportunity to re-examine our above-described mission in the post-COVID World. The World has changed – more than we ever believed possible. While the first response to COVID-19 was medical and health-oriented, now it has become increasingly clear that the pandemic has been a broad and deep hit at the whole society and at all the dimensions of people's well-being. Even the reasonably well-to-do middle class feels that they are not only ‘left behind’ but rather, fully left outside of society. The rise of general riots are an indication of such alienation. Recovery requires broad, comprehensive social policy measures that do not address only the traditional ‘target groups’ of social welfare.

What is needed now is exactly what ICSW's broad mission highlights: fight insecurity, alienation and existential experiences of being ‘outsiders’ *by including all* people meaningfully; making socially conscious inequality reducing decisions in all sectors; and creating empowering ‘trampolines’ back to society for people who have lost command over their

lives and have fallen on passivating, minimal cash transfers, 'safety-nets'. And, overall, putting the well-being of people, their existential, mental, social and physical needs at the center of societal goals and policies. Of course, we also need serious ecological realism in the fair transition towards more ethically, socially, ecologically, and economically sustainable development.

At our GA in January there was some exchange about eventual topics for the next Capacity Building Seminar. One of those was to examine the emerging 'new' forms of poverty, exclusion and alienation, and the multidimensional responses it requires. This is a broad framework that can accommodate many specific topics.

The ICSW Europe Board invites all members to think about the topics to be covered in a two-day capacity building event next Fall. Create ideas and make proposals on topics and identify eventual speakers / workshop leaders. You are also welcomed to organize sessions / workshops. **Send your ideas to Gabriela Siantová** gabriela.siantova@icsw.org and cc to me ronwiman@icsw.org. The ICSW Europe Board and our host in Spain will sort the ideas out and start drafting the program.



President

To the attention of the members of the Conference of INGOs and Permanent Representations to the Council of Europe

Aschaffenburg, 28 February 2022

Europe has entered a new era with the unprovoked attack of the Russian Federation on Ukraine ordered by President Putin. The Committee of Ministers of the Council of Europe has drawn the necessary conclusions and suspended the rights of representation of the Russian Federation in the Committee of Ministers and in the Parliamentary Assembly. However, the Russian Federation is still bound by the European Convention of Human Rights and all the other conventions of the Council of Europe it has ratified. The judgments of the European Court of Human Rights have still to be respected by the Russian Federation. The Council of Europe has not withdrawn its protection from the citizens of the Russian Federation.

We fully support this step and believe that it was overdue – for far too long the government under President Putin has violated fundamental human rights, basic civil rights and acted aggressively against its neighbours. The many laws against free NGO's, the poisoning and subsequent imprisonment of Alexei Navalny, the prosecution of the Human Rights Centre Memorial, the harassment of free media and the many peaceful demonstrators arrested and mistreated for doing nothing but exercising the rights guaranteed to them by the European Convention of Human Rights and the values of the Council of Europe, the discriminatory laws against so called foreign agents or the campaigns against LGBTQIA+ people in Russia are just some examples. The aggression against neighbouring countries add to this devastating picture – such as against Moldova, Georgia and, for such a long time, parts of the Ukraine, including the occupation of Crimea which is against international law.

Now, millions of Ukrainian people suffer the horrors of a war fought with the greatest brutality even against civilians, as testified by NGOs on the ground including Amnesty International.

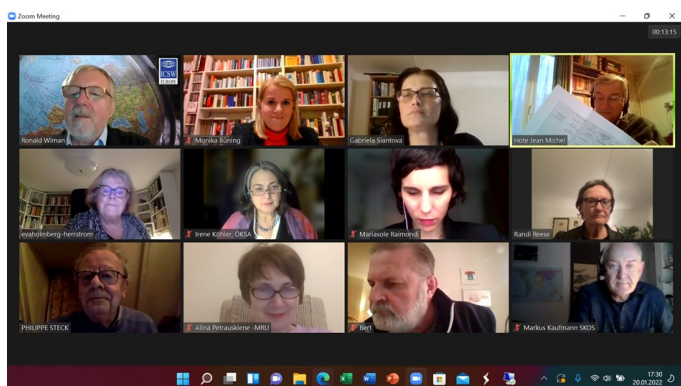


Photo: Screenshot of the virtual ICSW Europe General Assembly on 20 January 2022

Ronald Wiman, ICSW Europe President

As the Conference of INGOs we condemn this act of violence and are in solidarity with the people of Ukraine, as well as the people in Russia and Belarus who stand up against their criminal and un-lawful governments and protest against an unjust war, risking their freedom, health and lives in defending the values of the Council of Europe.

I want to thank all NGOs who are actively supporting the people of Ukraine, be it on the ground, be it as refugees coming to their countries, be it by organising donations or simply by visibly showing support for the victims of this aggression. I also want to thank all governments and countries which have opened their borders, are organising shelter and provision for refugees and who support the Ukrainian people in their fight for freedom and the survival of their nation. We urge them to stand steadfast, to close all loopholes which could be exploited to support this regime and its corrupt system of oligarchs.

We thank all the Member States which have clarified that the Council of Europe shall not suffer again from Russia not paying its membership fees and to compensate it so that this important Organisation can continue to function and will not once again be subdued by blackmail from its erring member.

We all understand that this is an attack not only on Ukraine but on Europe, on democracy and all the values the Council of Europe stands for. This is indeed a decisive moment in our history, and we have to stand together for what we treasure: our freedoms, Human Rights, Democracy and Rule of Law.

We must also think about the future to help the Ukrainian society and institutions to rebuild the country devastated materially but determined courageously to defend all of us against a new world order of violence and oppression.

We ask all NGOs in the Ukraine and abroad which suffer from this act of aggression, are helping or want to help the people of the Ukraine or to express their solidarity to contact us for any support and aid we can offer as the Conference of INGOs in the Council of Europe.

The solidarity that is expressed throughout the world is the sign that peace will win.

Gerhard ERMISCHER



Ukraine Crisis: Social Platform calls on EU to support the most vulnerable



Statement by Social Platform on the war in Ukraine 2 March 2022

Social Platform stands in full solidarity with the people of Ukraine, their democratically elected leaders, and all those individuals and organisations providing urgent humanitarian support to the over half a million people who have already fled, as well as the millions still inside Ukraine of all nationalities, genders, ethnicities, races and religions whose right to refuge and asylum must be respected and facilitated.

Europe's history taught us the value of peace to social justice and human rights. It has also taught us that those in the most vulnerable situations, like children, young and older people, women, LGBTI people, people with disabilities, undocumented migrants, Roma and others from persecuted ethnic or religious backgrounds, are always the first to suffer and the last to benefit. The Russian regime's invasion of Ukraine must be stopped. It is not only causing a fracturing of our territorial peace in Europe, it will also fracture the daily lives of people in Ukraine, Russia and beyond, and perpetuate Russophobia.

As members of Social Platform many of us represent civil society organisations who are fighting disinformation, reporting on human rights abuses, helping migrants and refugees and others in

vulnerable situations and providing vital services in Ukraine and neighbouring countries. Our work shows just how crucial independent civil society is to democracy, peace and solidarity, and how important not-for-profit service providers are to fill gaps to ensure people can flee, obtain information, and access the services we offer.

Regular avenues to safety and access to basic services like food, shelter and medical care must be guaranteed at all costs. While ensuring that basic safeguards against abuse are properly guaranteed, all possible support must be given to individuals and organisations helping the most vulnerable and those at risk of being left behind in the panic of war, including people housed in institutions. Regular avenues must be complemented by practical measures to facilitate those fleeing, such as accessible transport services.

The activation of the Temporary Protection Directive is vital in this dire situation. It will not only allow Ukrainians to reside in the EU regularly after the usual 90-day visa-free period but will also protect those providing humanitarian assistance, including members of Social Platform. The EU must make sure that all people trying to flee Ukraine are welcomed, not just those holding Ukrainian nationality. For this, the complete and non-discriminatory application of the Geneva Convention and other forms of protection must be a priority.

The EU's response must be centred on ensuring that peace prevails. We urge EU and national leaders to rapidly mobilise all EU funds and resources possible to make sure that those in Ukraine and those fleeing are protected, and that service providers and civil society organisations are able to defend human rights and provide the care and support needed.

[Here](#) is a link to our tweet, please support by retweeting.

(source: Social Platform. [online]. [cit. 2022-3-3]. Available at: <<https://www.socialplatform.org/news/ukraine-crisis-social-platform-calls-on-eu-to-support-the-most-vulnerable/>>)

A workshop on [The Future of Social Protection and the European Welfare State: minimum income schemes and access to quality social services](#) is taking place on **17 March** from 10-12am during the Civil Society Days. The workshop is co-organised with Social Services Europe.

Anna Diamantopoulou, Chair of the High-Level Expert Group on the Future of the Welfare State and Social Protection, is welcomed as a panellist. *Anna Diamantopoulou* is chairing the independent group of experts working on a report on how to reinforce European social protection and welfare systems (to be published at the end of 2022). The work of the group is to look at demographic change, labour market transitions and globalisation and considers the interaction between social protection systems and other welfare policies, such as education, social inclusion, disability, healthcare and long-term care.

More on the group [here](#).

(source: Social Platform.
silvana.roebstorf@socialplatform.org. [E-mail]. [cit. 2022-2-8])

2021 ICSW Europe General Assembly was held on **January 20, 2022** online on platform ZOOM due to the current Covid-19 epidemic situation.

The Agenda of the GA was as follows:

- 1) Opening and Checking of Voting Rights (*paid-up members*)
- 2) Video message by the ICSW Global President, Dr Sang-Mok Suh
- 3) Minutes of the GA held virtually on 14th December 2020 (for approval)
- 4) ICSW Europe President's Statement, presentation of the ICSW Annual Activity Report 2020 including a preliminary report 2021 (*for approval*)
- 5) Report of 2020 from the Treasurer (*for adoption and discharging of responsibility, after the auditor has made her comments*)
- 6) Proposal for an auditor for 2021. Updating of the Budget for 2021 and Budget for 2022.
- 7) Any Other Matters Arising (4/2021 ICSW Europe Newsletter)
- 8) Closing the General Assembly

At the General Assembly participated four A-category members with two voting rights (Austria, Finland, Germany and Spain) and five C-category members with one voting right (France, Lithuania, Norway, Sweden and Switzerland) and two observers with no voting rights (France and Sweden). One proxy was sent by the Netherlands.

The next General Assembly is planned to be organised face to face (Spain) if the Covid-19 situation allows in the second half of the year 2022 (preferably in September, but this will depend on the term of ICSW Global GA taking place).

ICSW Europe President, Ronald Wiman, closed the GA with the slogan "Let's keep connected...". He said that organising online meetings is a real challenge and expressed his hope of surviving this social distancing and coming back to normal this year.

ICSW Europe Editor



"In Spain, the fight against Covid-19 promises to be long-term, not only in the health field, but also regarding equal rights."

Graciela Malgesini, Senior Policy Coordinator
graciela.malgesini@eapn.es

The Covid-19 related challenges are especially hard to people in poverty. Despite the set of measures adopted, some with great impact and others with deficiencies, there is a risk of further undermining social cohesion if the welfare state is not strengthened and the fight against inequality in terms of rights is deepened. The fight against Covid-19 promises to be long-term, not only in the fight against the Coronavirus, but also regarding the battle for equality and justice¹.

In 2021, a total of 12,495,000 people, which represents 26.4% of the Spanish population, are living at Risk of Poverty and/or Social Exclusion (AROPE). The figure represents an increase of 1.1 percentage point and breaks the downward trend of the previous five years. The Living Conditions Survey for the year 2020, published in 2021, is the main source of data on Poverty and Social Exclusion. **It only very partially reflects the enormous economic consequences suffered because of the pandemic.** In this sense, the income data and, therefore, poverty, inequality and some others refer to the year 2019, that is, they do not expose the current situation and require the use of some indirect indicators.

¹ For more information, see Poverty Watch Spain 2021, available at: <<https://www.eapn.eu/wp-content/uploads/2021/10/eapn-Poverty-Watch-Spain-2021-Final-5225.pdf>>

Other long-term impact of Covid-19 is related to the increase in 'financial exclusion'. The term refers to the inability or difficulty of access and/or use of financial services and products in the general market, which are appropriate to their needs and allow them to lead a normal social life in the society to which they belong. Due to the difficulty of accessing a job with a living wage and the loss of their jobs, many lost their main source of income and, without having savings, were unable to meet the costs of rent, electricity, water, basic needs and food. The Living Conditions Survey provide three variables that indicate a situation of financial exclusion: "not being able to face unforeseen expenses", "reaching the end of the month with great difficulty" and "having delays in the payments for the main housing". These variables worsened between 2019 and 2020, due to the economic and labour crisis. The profiles that register the highest incidence of financial exclusion are the following: people with a non-EU nationality, who live in a single-parent household or made up of adults (not parents) with children, whose income places them in the first decile income per unit of consumption, who have a low educational level (with primary studies or the first stage of secondary education), who are between 16 and 29 years of age, and reside in the Canary Islands and Ceuta. Around 5.9% of households had delays in the payment of unrelated bills with the house; 27.2% of the population is in debt, predominantly with low or medium levels, although 2.2% have a high level. At the end of a normal month, 7.3% needed to borrow money and 44% could keep their current living conditions with their savings only for three months or less.

The set of policy measures known as the "Social Shield" mainly protects certain types of "vulnerable households", but people living in poverty, with high debts, living in insecure housing or homeless are not on the list. Immigrants and locals working in the black economy cannot prove their income has fallen or their jobs have been lost, so they survive on food aid and casual precarious work. The pandemic is taking its toll on women, with widening gender gaps: the female unemployment rate increased from 15.5% in 2019 to 18.3% in 2020, while the male rate rose from 13.78% to 16.13% in the same period. The economic crisis related to health security measures is having a great impact in sectors with high rates of female

employment, such as the service sector, education, or the artistic and cultural field. In addition, the closure of educational and healthcare centres continues to have a negative impact on the reconciliation of work and family life, with more women leaving the market to assume care. Therefore, once again, when a new crisis comes, it is even worse for women and gender equality is facing a setback.

Graciela Malgesini, Senior Policy Coordinator, EAPN Spain

Why the UNECE Regional Forum for Sustainable Development needs Civil Society



Sylvia Beales

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February 2022

The UNECE region, with 17% of the world's population, comprising 56 countries in very distinct sub regions, is holding its sixth Regional Forum on Sustainable Development in hybrid form in Geneva on 6 and 7 April 2022. Its theme is 'Building back better from the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) while advancing the full implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development in the UNECE Region.'

See <https://regionalforum.unece.org/> and <https://indico.un.org/event/36313/> for more details.

In line with the focus of the 2022 High Level Political Forum the goals to be examined in depth through peer learning sessions, side events and exchange of experiences are Goals 4 (life long education), Goal 5 (gender equality), goal 14 (life below water), goal 15 (life on land) and goal 17 (partnerships and data). Four Eastern Europe countries, Belarus, Latvia, Kazakhstan, Montenegro are in the process of preparing their Voluntary National Reports, along with Andorra, Greece, Italy, Luxembourg, Netherlands and Switzerland.

The meeting is happening in the context of continuing fall out of the COVID-19 pandemic, affecting all sub regions and Member State actions to implement their 2030 and SDG commitments. Covid-19 has brought to light the ugly extent of unequal access to economic, social, political and cultural rights within and between countries and the sub regions. Progress is going backwards on key indicators for poverty, inequality, gender equity and political freedoms. It is no wonder that UNECE has declared its intention that the Forum be a space for discussion as to how *'forward-looking policies adopted now could provide an opportunity to build back better from the pandemic towards more sustainable and resilient societies... and that the Forum ...will offer a unique learning space to exchange effective policy actions for a sustainable recovery geared towards accelerating SDG progress.'* Civil society participation and the sharing of experience within the Forum is being encouraged by the UNECE Secretariat, and there is a declared intention to bring the regions challenges and proposals more fully into the global discussions of the SDGS held at the High Level Political Forum in July.

For civil society and their organisations and representatives SDG related meetings are both an opportunity and a challenge. Civil society is able to participate fully in 2030 Agenda follow up and SDG implementation through the HLPF and its associated meetings because of agreements made at the 1992 Earth Summit and its Agenda 21 (article 23.1) that *'Critical to the effective implementation of the objectives, policies and mechanisms agreed to by Governments in all programme areas of Agenda 21 will be the commitment and genuine involvement of all social groups.'*¹ The 2013 GA resolution 67/290 on organisation aspects of the high level forum on sustainable development in its paragraph 15² affirmed that Major Groups and other stakeholders are 'allowed' to attend all official meetings of the forum; have access to all official information and documents; to intervene in official meetings; to submit documents and present written and oral

¹ <https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/content/documents/Agenda21.pdf>

² <https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/index.php?page=view&type=111&nr=1888&menu=35>

contributions; to make recommendations; and to organize side events and round tables, in cooperation with Member States and the Secretariat. The original 9 Major Groups established at the Earth Summit have now expanded to 21, and are known as Major Groups and Other Stakeholders (MGOS).

The ECE RCEM, (Regional Civil Society Coordination Mechanism) of which I am a member, representing the constituency of older persons for Gray Panthers, was confirmed as a MGOS in 2020. There is opportunity for us in the ECE RCEM to both take full advantage of the space offered to us for a dedicated Civil Society Forum preceding the official meeting, where we can debate and agree our positions and input into the formal sessions, and participate as experts in peer learning sessions and side events. The RCEM is also now being encouraged to support the shaping of the event itself and input expertise into the peer learning tables. This is a concrete change to previous years and is the result of good collaboration with the UNECE Secretariat over time and recognition of the importance of partnership with, and giving voice to, civil society for SDG progress. It is the visible and concrete result of civil society self organising' into a coherent mechanism (the RCEM), which now brings together 14 thematic constituencies and 10 regional ones, and convenes (virtually) regularly for decision making and mutual learning. More details of working methods are on the [ECE RCEM website](https://ece-rcem.eu/about-rcem/rcem-concept-note/) and through these links: <https://ece-rcem.eu/about-rcem/rcem-concept-note/> and https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/content/documents/27114MGoS_TOR18_Dec_2020.pdf.

In 2021 we were able to input to the Forum our collective voice for nine of the roundtables and for the opening and closing plenaries. These positions can be accessed through the RCEM website. The RCEM is also actively inputting to the global negotiations through the Major Group and Other Stakeholder (MGOS) coordination mechanism, and developing joint advocacy and support for national groupings in country for VNR input and follow up.

Our challenges are integral to the nature of our diverse region and our determination to facilitate and encourage the engagement of our very different thematic constituencies. We have differences in

language, culture and outlook; and are subject to the impacts of the increasing social and economic inequalities between countries and population groups, and ongoing conflict within and between countries. Some constituencies are more used to organising than others. At the national level civil society in specific countries may find it hard and risky to organise, with participation under pressure and censorship to overcome. We face challenges in organising regionally as we lack resources for coordination, meetings and improving our digital competencies.

Nevertheless we can, and do, arrive at common positions, to underpin our work going forward. Two priority concerns articulated in 2021 were that the social dimension is not being adequately addressed in regional forum arrangements, and there must be full disability inclusion – interpretation, captioning and signing; to enable full participation of persons with disability in line with the CRPD³ and the UN Disability Inclusion Strategy.⁴ We also took forward a range of recommendations into the HLPF debates. These included vaccines for all without distinction; that Covid-19 must not be an excuse for inaction, but the reverse; that SDG progress must be underpinned by just institutions, human rights compliance and robust, reliable and disaggregated data by gender, age, disability, ethnicity and other indicators; that economies must be people centred with flexible, inclusive employment according to ILO standards and deliver universal social services available for all in urban and rural areas; that all countries must show progress to deliver strengthened and financed social policies, including mental health services, social protection and accessible and appropriate health care services for all, including refugees, migrants and ethnic minorities.

In 2022 we are already raising the importance of financial support for civil society to organise and be included at global and regional forums. We are seeking ongoing connections after the Forum – including Sub-Regional Forums – to enable wide engagement of civil society and deeper analysis of national governments input to the HLPF. We are

calling for the ECE RCEM to be a meaningful partner of all national and regional SDG processes, including training, more time, more voices – and to be given possibilities to speak up in all sub-regions. We are calling for ECE RCEM reps to be included in national delegations and for constituencies of UNECE to be heard in intergovernmental processes at regional and global levels. We are supporting constituencies to collaborate to produce ‘shadow reports’, as well as to input to the official VNRs, and to have such reports made visible on the UNECE website.

This work rests and falls on the interest of civil society to take advantage of the spaces being offered, within the RCEM and within the Forum. ICSW Europe deep and insightful experience and proposals on the SDGs under review can be inputted into the Forum, with side events organised and representatives designated for peer learning roundtables. Members can be active at national level and within the RCEM, this year being a contact for and linking to civil society groupings in the countries conducting Voluntary National Reviews – Belarus, Latvia, Montenegro, Andorra, Greece, Italy, Luxembourg, the Netherlands and Switzerland.

Nothing about us without us.

Sylvia Beales

³ <https://www.un.org/development/desa/disabilities/convention-on-the-rights-of-persons-with-disabilities.html>

⁴ <https://www.un.org/en/content/disabilitystrategy/>

Council of Europe



Programme for the French Presidency of the Council of the European Union

On 1 January 2022, France has taken over the Presidency of the Council of the European Union. The Presidency rotates every 6 months and will be held by France in the first half of 2022 – until 30 June 2022.

Programme for the French Presidency of the Council of the European Union in:

Employment, social policy, health and consumer affairs

Health

The French Presidency will prioritise strengthening European public health through promoting **responsiveness, coordination and solidarity**. The COVID-19 pandemic has highlighted the need for more effective measures for health emergency preparedness, anticipation and response. It has also accentuated the need to reinforce supply chains for health products. Lastly, our interdependence in terms of public health, both within the EU and with the rest of the world, has revealed the importance of the principle of solidarity in the management of the epidemic, to ensure that everyone has timely access to medical countermeasures. The French Presidency will continue the discussion undertaken by the previous presidencies on the development of European public health with a view toward the emergence of a true European Health Union.

Building on efforts already undertaken to extend the mandate and resources of the principal European agencies in the field of health, the Presidency will support the establishment of the **European Health Emergency preparedness and Response Authority (HERA)**.

The Presidency will initiate negotiations on the revision of the **directives on the safety and quality of human blood and on the safety and quality of human tissues and cells**, in order to allow a more flexible adaptation to scientific and technological developments and to take into account lessons learned from the pandemic.

Developing **digital health** will be a central focus of the French Presidency's work.

Lastly, the French Presidency will work to reinforce the European Union's actions in the field of health, including its contributions to **global health**, in cooperation with other international bodies.

Employment, Social Affairs and Equality

The French Presidency will continue strengthening **the Social Europe** following on from the European Pillar of Social Rights declared on 17 November 2017 at the Social Summit in Gothenburg, and from the commitments made at the Porto Social Summit on 7 and 8 May 2021. The measures set out in the Action Plan to implement the Pillar, presented by the Commission on 4 March 2021, will contribute to achieving the target figures by 2030.

The French Presidency will commence negotiations with the European Parliament concerning the proposed directive on **adequate minimum wages in the EU**. It will also initiate discussions on the proposed directive on improving **the working conditions of people working through digital labour platforms**.

The French Presidency will also:

- work towards the Council's adoption of recommendations on **individual learning accounts** and on the **social impact and impact of the climate transition on the labour market**;
- focus on women's **economic empowerment**, as well as concretely achieving gender equality;
- move forward negotiations through trilogues on the proposed directive on strengthening the **application of the principle of equal pay for equal work, or work of equal value, between**

men and women through pay transparency and enforcement mechanisms in order to improve access to employee information;

- in light of the EU Strategy for the Rights of Persons with Disabilities 2021-2030, the Presidency will hold a ministerial conference in early March to discuss how action can be taken to improve **the social and economic participation of persons with disabilities as well as their access to rights**;
- encourage discussion on children's access to essential services, a principle included in the Council recommendation establishing the **European Child Guarantee**, as well as on the mental health of vulnerable young people and on preventing the loss of autonomy, which will be addressed through ministerial conferences;
- with a view towards eradicating homelessness by 2030, the Presidency will seek to give new impetus to this policy goal via the European platform to combat homelessness and the Housing First policy.

The whole document – [Programme for the French Presidency of the Council of the European Union](#).

The official website of the French Presidency is available [here](#).

(source: *Programme for the French Presidency of the Council of the European Union*. [online]. [cit. 2022-2-27]. Available at: <https://presidence-francaise.consilium.europa.eu/media/qh4cg0qq/en_programme-pfue-v1-2.pdf>)

European Commission



Action Plan for the Social Economy of the European Commission

On December 9, 2021, the [Action Plan for Social Economy](#) was published by the European Commission.

But what do we mean by social economy? A very interesting question, especially regarding the EU member states, as the term is definitely interpreted differently. Basically, social economy organizations are institutions that pursue social and ecological purposes and reinvest most of their profits in the organization. According to the European Commission, there are 2.8 million social economy organizations in Europe, employing 13.6 million people. But national traditions and a different understanding of the social economy make it very diverse. For example, there are cooperatives, social enterprises, non-profit associations and foundations, or mutual societies. The common thread is that these organizations focus on people and the environment and reinvest most of their profits in the organization or a specific social cause.

The Social Economy Action Plan aims to create the right conditions for a thriving social economy by issuing guidelines to member states on the fiscal framework for social economy organizations, improving access to state aid guidance, and improving best practices for socially responsible public procurement.

Furthermore, opportunities for business creation and development are to be created for social economy organizations. For this, the Commission wants to increase its support beyond the estimated EUR 2.5 billion previously allocated to the social economy (2014-2020). And a new EU gateway for the social economy will be set up; this will bring together all the

information that is important for the social economy. In 2022, the Commission will establish a European Competence Center for Social Innovation.

Recognition of the social economy and its potential is another goal of the EU Commission. To this end, the EU Commission will carry out communication activities highlighting the role and specificities of the social economy. The Commission will also commission a study to collect qualitative and quantitative data to better understand the social economy across the EU. It will also organize training for public officials on various topics relevant to the social economy, promote the social economy at regional and local level by boosting cross-border exchanges, and more.

Monika Büning, ICSW Europe; Deutscher Verein für Öffentliche und private Fürsorge e.V.

With this as background, the first chapters of this year's Bilan social analyse the pandemic's impact on various socio-economic groups and economic sectors: as was the case in last year's review, all chapters again consider, to a greater or lesser extent, the consequences of the unfolding public health crisis. We asked our contributors not only to analyse key developments in the EU social agenda during 2020, but also to describe EU and domestic policies between January and July 2021.

The European Social Observatory has again worked closely with the European Trade Union Institute (ETUI) and renowned external scholars to draw up this year's edition of the book. Through this collaborative publication, we aim to contribute to the debate between policymakers, social stakeholders and the research community, while providing accessible information and analysis for practitioners and students of European integration.

A publication can be downloaded [here](https://www.etui.org/publications/social-policy-european-union-state-play-2021#table-contents).

(source: European Trade Union Institute. [online]. [cit. 2022-2-27]. Available at: <<https://www.etui.org/publications/social-policy-european-union-state-play-2021#table-contents>>)

European Trade Union Institute



Social policy in the European Union: state of play 2021

Re-emerging social ambitions as the EU recovers from the pandemic



The European Union is currently fighting on two main fronts, Covid-19 and climate change, though with skirmishes elsewhere – including migration and the rule of law. While science seems to be slowly gaining the upper hand in the fight against the pandemic, despite setbacks like the latest Omicron attack, Covid-19 continues to hold global society in its grip. But the second nut is even harder to crack. Climate change is rolling out its forces, in the form of floods, droughts, tornados and hurricanes, and striking indiscriminately.

European Commission



Platform Work Directive finally places the workers at the centre of concern



The European Commission launched its [Platform Work Initiative](#)'s centre piece, a draft for an EU Directive on December 8th [2021]. The set of measures proposed promises to improve the working conditions of platform workers and to put an end to abusive and false classification of their employment status. The Directive promotes transparency in algorithmic management of platform work and recognizes unfair competition cooperative platforms were facing until now.

The European Commission proposes a directive that will be the centrepiece of its efforts to improve the working conditions of workers in the platform economy. This directive will provide a legally binding tool that sets standards that the EU Member States will need to implement with their national legislation. Given the speed growth of the platform economy over the last years and the deterioration of workers rights, such a proposal was long overdue.

CECOP welcomes that the Directive proposes a rebuttable presumption of an employment relationship for people working through digital labour platforms. **This promises to put an end to the unfair practice to classify workers as self-**

employed when in fact they are subordinated to the platforms. Platforms will need to prove that workers can rightfully be classified as self-employed. For many workers, this will also mean greatly improved access to social protection mechanisms and workers' rights.

The Directive also increases **transparency in the use of algorithms by platforms**, the establishment of review mechanisms for managerial decisions. CECOP welcomes this step, as it can favour cooperative platforms whose model provides workers with ownership and control over algorithms and data.

In addition, CECOP welcomes the fact that the Directive will allow a **more level playing field** with platforms committed to providing higher work standards such as cooperative platforms. The Impact Assessment Report, accompanying the Directive, recognised that "companies based on alternative business models, such as cooperatives, might have opportunities to grow once the playing field were levelled".

Nevertheless, we warn that cooperatives **should not be institutionalised** as a way for platforms to circumvent their employers' responsibilities and duties. Joining a cooperative can be a solution for self-employed working through platforms, provided that the cooperative principles are respected meaning voluntary membership and members' governance and control over the cooperative¹.

Finally, we call the EU's legislators to improve this proposed directive in line with the European Parliament's Own-Initiative Report "*Improving working conditions of platform workers*"², the European Economic and Social Committee's opinion "*Non-standard employment and platform cooperatives in the digital transformation of*

1 In reaction to the French "*portage salarial*" example from the Jean-Yves Frouin's report mentioned in the Impact Assessment Report accompanying the Directive, please refer to the position paper of the French Federation of Business Employment Cooperatives (Fédération des Coopératives d'Activité et d'Emploi – CAE): <<https://documents.scop.coop/share/s/siVgbcp9RfSK1z1QqbLeQ>> (February 2021)

2 <https://www.europarl.europa.eu/doceo/document/TA-9-2021-0385_EN.html>

Industry”³ and the European Commission's Social Economy Action Plan⁴, which recognizes the potential of platform cooperatives to provide tangible advantages to all stakeholders concerned by the platform: workers with quality working conditions and adequate protection, consumers but also regions or states where the platform operates since they help retain revenues and taxes locally. The EU has the power to strengthen the potential of platform cooperatives, which can in turn, contribute to achieving the EU objectives of a fair digital transition.

In March 2021, CECOP published a paper addressing the needs of platform workers, and how developing cooperative solutions can challenge the platform economy and to improve working conditions for platform workers. Read it [here](#).

[CECOP website](#)

(source: CECOP; available at: <<https://cecop.coop/works/platform-work-directive-finally-places-the-workers-at-the-centre-of-concern>>)

3 <<https://www.eesc.europa.eu/en/our-work/opinions-information-reports/opinions/non-standard-employment-and-platform-cooperatives-digital-transformation-industry-own-initiative-opinion>>

4 <<https://ec.europa.eu/social/main.jsp?catId=1537&langId=en>>

Social Economy Action Plan to boost Europe's Social Economy, including worker and social cooperatives

The European Commission has launched its [Social Economy Action Plan](#), laying out Europe's strategy to boost the social economy across the EU. CECOP welcomes this strong political initiative, much needed when Europe faces major challenges, such as COVID-19 resilience and recovery, fair and inclusive digital and green transition, rise of inequalities and work

transformations, global challenges for sustainable economic and industrial development.



We particularly welcome the very inclusive and open process DG GROW and DG EMPL put in place over the last years to consult and involve stakeholders in the design of the Action Plan. In addition, the Action Plan has the merit of identifying the major barriers to the development and growth of the social economy and the merit of mainstreaming the social economy into different EU policies and initiatives. However, while the Action Plan announces measures for the 2021–2030 period, most of the key Commission presented initiatives are planned for 2022 and 2023. We regret that despite the goodwill, a long-term vision with clearly established targets is missing.

One of the important elements of the Action Plan we are welcoming is the inclusive definition of the social economy. The recognition of all sectors, including the industrial sector, and all types of cooperatives was fundamental to create a broad and impactful Action Plan.

Action Plan

(source: CECOP. Social Economy Action Plan to boost Europe's Social Economy, including worker and social cooperatives. [online]. [Cit.: 2022–02–07]; available at: <<https://www.cecop.coop/works/social-economy-action-plan-delivers-but-lacks-long-term-objectives>>)

Publications

Lights on!

Worker and social cooperatives tackling undeclared work

Francesca Martinelli



Undeclared work involves, on average, 25% of all European workers. It has various negative impacts and consequences not only on them, but on governments, welfare solidarity, and businesses too. Thus, tackling undeclared work is a major challenge at both national, and European level.

Since the 2000s, the European Commission has put in place specific programmes to tackle it, that require a holistic approach, which is a combination of punitive and preventive measures, that involve not only all social partners and key stakeholders, but also needs the national authorities to be fully committed to implementing the measures.

In this context, cooperatives have shown that they can contribute in various ways to transforming undeclared activities into legally protected work, and to address related problems. Focusing on the qualitative analysis of 11 European cooperatives, this report commissioned to *Dr. Francesca Martinelli*, explores how the cooperative model can offer concrete practices to support the transition of undeclared workers into the formal economy within the European context.

The report aims to become a tool available to the cooperative movement, European, and national policy makers, to promote a better understanding of the potential of cooperatives in tackling undeclared work.

It's time to turn the lights on!

[ACCESS THE REPORT](#)

Useful Links

EAPN Spain – Poverty Watch Spain 2021:

<https://www.eapn.eu/wp-content/uploads/2021/10/eapn-Poverty-Watch-Spain-2021-Final-5225.pdf>

ECE RCEM:

<https://ece-rcem.eu/>

CECOP Europe:

<https://cecop.coop/works/platform-work-directive-finally-places-the-workers-at-the-centre-of-concern>

Programme for the French Presidency of the Council of the European Union:

https://presidence-francaise.consilium.europa.eu/media/gh4cg0qq/en_programme-pfue-v1-2.pdf

European Commission – Action Plan for the Social Economy:

<https://ec.europa.eu/social/main.jsp?an-gId=en&catId=89&newsId=10117&furtherNews=yes#navItem-1>

European Trade Union Institute: Social policy in the European Union: state of play 2021:

<https://www.etui.org/publications/social-policy-european-union-state-play-2021#table-contents>

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.

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