

**Recommendation CM/Rec(2014)1
of the Committee of Ministers to member States
on the Council of Europe Charter on shared social responsibilities¹**

*(Adopted by the Committee of Ministers on 22 January 2014
at the 1189th meeting of the Ministers' Deputies)*

The Committee of Ministers, under the terms of Article 15.b of the Statute of the Council of Europe,

Considering that:

- a. the aim of the Council of Europe is to achieve greater unity between its members for the purpose of promoting the ideals and principles which are their common heritage, and safeguarding human dignity and the freedom and equality of everyone in Europe;
- b. the political and social achievements of Europe are particularly threatened in times of crisis;
- c. the current economic and financial crises affect people unequally, with the greatest effects being felt by the weakest and the least protected;
- d. the preservation of European democratic and social achievements could be supported through reinforcing the ability of public and private institutions, as well as citizens, to understand the changes taking place and address the vulnerabilities and uncertainties experienced by individuals, communities and organisations;
- e. it is essential to put in place solutions which can ensure equitable access to social and economic benefits, as well as an equal sharing of social responsibilities;
- f. stimulating a climate of confidence in the future is indispensable for the strengthening of democracy and the development of the necessary social resources to enable European citizens to work together for the universal protection of human rights, well-being for all, social cohesion, sustainable development and mutually beneficial interaction between cultures;

Convinced that:

- a. renewing confidence in the possibility of inclusive societal progress is necessary to preserve the democratic values championed by the Council of Europe;
- b. the complementarities between representative and participatory democracy can lead to innovation in all fields in which the reciprocal nature of commitments is essential in order to guarantee social cohesion; to this end, it is imperative that all stakeholders become involved to a greater extent in the design, implementation and evaluation of policies and measures having an impact on public life;

Resolved to:

- a. combat the causes of inequalities, poverty, precariousness and discrimination by placing greater emphasis on human rights and dignity, social cohesion and well-being as the basis of democratic citizenship;
- b. bring the practical implementation of rights and principles (such as human dignity, equality, non-discrimination and participation) in line with their formal recognition;
- c. overcome the obstacles which make it difficult to link individual and corporate responsibilities and interests to approaches designed to secure the well-being of all;

¹ When this recommendation was adopted:

- in accordance with Article 10.2.c of the Rules of Procedure of the Ministers' Deputies, the Representative of the Russian Federation reserved the right of his government to comply with it or not.

- d. strengthen governance based on co-operation in order to focus political action on long-term goals, thus avoiding the risks being borne by and the costs being transferred to the weakest social groups or future generations;
- e. improve the ability of public institutions to develop forms of dialogue based on the enhancement of the knowledge of all stakeholders and on the unbiased quest for mutual advantages and common well-being, paying particular attention to those who have less power and whose voices are less often heard;
- f. promote the ability of companies to take into account the interests of all stakeholders, and the possible and real impact of their activities on society at large, inspired by the principles of a socially responsible economy;
- g. value the contribution to innovation in the policies and public services of co-operatives, social enterprises, non-governmental organisations and solidarity-based initiatives of citizens;
- h. strengthen citizens' confidence in their capacity for initiative and in their creativity, and actively support the vital role played by local stakeholders, neighbourhoods, cities, villages, cantons, districts and regions in constructing a Europe of shared social responsibilities;
- i. cherish the assets and values of the European social model based on democracy, fundamental rights, recognition of human dignity and social cohesion;

Recalling that:

- a. the Council of Europe New Strategy for Social Cohesion (2010), which defines social cohesion as the capacity of society to ensure the well-being of all, calls for, *inter alia*, the construction of a Europe based on shared social responsibilities in order to achieve this goal;
- b. the Council of Europe Action Plan for Social Cohesion (2010) seeks to foster the involvement of citizens – by means of participatory democracy – in defining the objectives of societal progress and well-being for all, as well as the political priorities and shared responsibilities that this entails;
- c. the enjoyment of the rights secured by the Convention for the Protection of Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms (ETS No. 5), the European Social Charter (ETS No. 35), opened for signature in 1961 and revised in 1996 (ETS No. 163) and the European Code of Social Security (ETS No. 48) entails responsibilities and duties not only between individuals but towards the community at large and future generations;
- d. many recommendations approved by the Council of Europe Parliamentary Assembly and Congress of Local and Regional Authorities support a change in the economic and social model based on the principles of democratic participation, social justice and sustainable development;
- e. member States should promote and ensure respect for internationally recognised principles and guidelines related to social responsibilities approved or accepted by international or regional organisations and agencies such as the United Nations, the International Labour Organization (ILO), the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) and the European Union;
- f. the ISO 26000:2010 standard “Guidance on social responsibility” provides a set of guidelines to organisations in the public and private sectors on how to operate in a socially responsible manner;
- g. the Code of Good Practice for Civil Participation in the Decision-Making Process, adopted by the Council of Europe Conference of International Non-governmental Organisations (INGOs) on 1 October 2009, promotes a set of general principles, guidelines, tools and mechanisms to enhance citizen empowerment and facilitate interaction at local, regional, national and European levels,

Recommends that the governments of member States, having due regard to their specific national, regional and local structures and respective responsibilities:

- a. promote the Council of Europe Charter on Shared Social Responsibilities set out in the appendix to this recommendation;

b. invite all interested parties to adhere to the principles and implement the measures set out in the charter in their respective legislation, policy and practice at all levels and to evaluate and adapt them in line with changing needs and contexts;

c. ensure that the charter is widely disseminated among public authorities, companies, civil society organisations, social partners, foundations, professional organisations, the media, social networks and citizens in general.

Appendix to Recommendation CM/Rec(2014)1

Council of Europe Charter on shared social responsibilities

1. Definitions

a. “Responsibility” is defined as the accountability of public and private institutions or individuals for the consequences of their actions or omissions in all fields of public and private life, with due regard for the applicable legal and social rules or obligations.

b. “Social responsibility” is defined as the accountability of public and private institutions or individuals for the consequences of their actions or omissions in the fields of social welfare and the protection of human dignity, the fight against social disparities and discrimination, and the quest for justice, social cohesion and sustainability, showing respect for diversity with due regard to the applicable legal and social rules or obligations.

c. “Shared social responsibility” is defined as the accountability of public and private institutions or individuals for the consequences of their actions or omissions in the context of mutual commitments entered into by consensus, agreeing on reciprocal rights and obligations in the fields of social welfare and the protection of human dignity, the fight against social disparities and discrimination, and the quest for justice, social cohesion and sustainability, showing respect for diversity, with due regard for the applicable legal and social rules or obligations.

Shared social responsibility is a means of securing social justice, sustainability and intergenerational solidarity.

d. “Social justice” is intrinsically linked with human rights; it denotes a society based on equality and solidarity, while meeting fundamental human needs, striving through redistribution mechanisms to reduce inequalities and securing collectively the conditions conducive to the development of every individual and his or her skills.

e. “Sustainability” is the fair management of natural resources, the protection of goods essential for a decent life, the preservation of a healthy environment for all and, where appropriate, the reparation of or compensation for ecological damage. Under the principle of social justice, no group or individual should have to bear in a disproportionate way the harmful consequences of any damage to the environment.

f. “Intergenerational solidarity” can be seen as a form of social contract between generations, including a mechanism for supporting mutually beneficial exchanges, both monetary and non-monetary. It places future generations and their possibilities for development at the heart of present-day decisions, without the former having to suffer the irreversible damage caused by the generations preceding them, while at the same time benefiting from what they have achieved. It is to be seen primarily in the preservation, enrichment and transmission of common goods and the frameworks of democracy and social protection for all. It presupposes dialogue among present generations on the reduction of inequalities in order to strengthen and/or restore confidence in political processes resulting in social structures which provide everyone with a level of security and control, and guarantee their autonomy.

2. Scope

Shared social responsibilities complement and enhance specific responsibilities by encouraging all stakeholders and individuals to get involved in maintaining social cohesion, especially in times of crisis, and to be accountable for their actions in a context of knowledge-based decision making, through dialogue and interaction.

Shared social responsibilities involve special care for the weakest members of society and expecting their co-operation with policies and institutions striving to improve their economic and social situation; such responsibilities call for a new approach in a context of interdependence.

3. Implementing conditions

The shared exercise of social responsibilities requires the following conditions:

- a.* no-one should be excluded from decisions that have significant consequences for his or her existence and for the community in which he or she lives. Each individual or group of individuals should have the ability to participate in the making of such decisions or to take other lawful actions for the protection of their interests in a democratic society. Public authorities, corporate bodies and individuals are urged to eliminate any legal, operational or material obstacles to the exercise of these civic functions;
- b.* information required for the sharing of social responsibilities should be available to all stakeholders;
- c.* the principles, norms and priorities in the field of social justice, sustainability and intergenerational relations should be the subject of broad debate and be agreed by democratic consensus;
- d.* these principles, norms and priorities should reflect solidarity and reciprocity among stakeholders, motivating them to take action and to honour their mutual commitments.

4. Standards of action and decision

Policies based on the principle of shared social responsibilities should:

- a.* safeguard the social and political achievements of Europe and ensure their sustainability;
- b.* reduce as much as possible the uncertainties and fears caused by financial and economic crises, and fairly balance the interests of all stakeholders, as well as those of the present and future generations;
- c.* encourage innovation based on multi-stakeholder, multi-level and multi-sectorial, institutional and organisational arrangements;
- d.* ensure, at the stage of their development, that weaker stakeholders have real influence on the choice of priorities and implementing measures adopted;
- e.* enhance everyone's confidence in their ability to contribute to solving matters of society by giving them a fair opportunity to express themselves on the objectives pursued, the means to be deployed and the criteria for assessing the strategies adopted;
- f.* adopt indicators to measure the performance of those policies in terms of well-being for all, the reduction of disparities and the respect for human dignity.

5. Means of implementation

Effective development of policies based on shared social responsibilities requires:

- a.* recognition of the full range of stakeholders, at all levels and in all sectors, their needs and possible contributions in terms of action or suggestions, their rights and obligations, and their role in a social system based on close interdependence;
- b.* participatory processes, making it possible to define the needs of the stakeholders and establish priorities through the exchange of views, and through the unbiased arbitration of different interests;

- c. innovative skills- and knowledge-acquisition processes making it possible for all stakeholders to evaluate the consistency between the decisions taken and the European reference framework in the field of fundamental rights;
- d. institutional arrangements ensuring that each partner will follow the decisions taken and will behave in a co-operative fashion, refraining from any behaviour detrimental to the interests of others;
- e. recognition of material and non-material goods essential for a decent life for all. These goods, which could be seen as “common goods”, are those which contribute to the feeling of belonging to the community. These goods include natural resources, cultural and historical heritage and all goods that individuals and stakeholders have built by means of co-operation and reciprocity.

6. Principle of non-regression

In order to eliminate or reduce poverty, social exclusion and discrimination, all of which impinge on human dignity, and to secure long-term social cohesion, Europe’s social and democratic achievements should be preserved. No one should be prevented from exercising their social, civil and political rights and everyone should be supported in case of distress.

7. Principle of recognition

The sharing of social responsibilities presupposes that everyone receives recognition, is represented and has some degree of influence.

The views of weaker stakeholders should also be heard, heeded and capable of influencing decisions and results. This means avoiding situations where stronger stakeholders, in possession of more information and organisational power, relinquish their specific responsibilities or impose priorities based on their interests alone.

Everyone should be able to contribute, individually or collectively, to the well-being of all, future generations included.

8. Principle of fairness

Sharing social responsibilities in an equitable way requires a reallocation of roles, powers and resources among all stakeholders, private or public.

Such a reassignment should take account of:

- a. the relative urgency of the different expectations expressed by the various stakeholders, acknowledging the priority of those which satisfy fundamental needs and corresponding rights;
- b. the possibility of causing harm to others or the risk of having to suffer such harm;
- c. the recognition of material or non-material contributions of all stakeholders.

9. State and governmental authorities

State and governmental authorities are encouraged to promote the sharing of social responsibilities by adopting appropriate legal frameworks and policies. To this end, they are invited to:

- a. encourage negotiation and discussion involving all stakeholders;
- b. motivate all stakeholders to comply with decisions and to implement them;
- c. make interaction with all stakeholders a key opportunity for learning, so that representative democracy and participative democracy become mutually reinforcing;
- d. explain the thinking behind public policies enabling a sharing of social responsibilities, and to encourage action to that end;

- e. set up institutions specialising in mediation and conflict resolution;
- f. reassess the role of civil servants as mediators between stakeholders who may have different interests, bearing in mind the constitutional principles and democratic procedures in force;
- g. ensure the conditions to guarantee access to social rights;
- h. encourage multilateral and cross-border activities, including the networking of their territories committed to implementing the Council of Europe Action Plan for Social Cohesion (2010);
- i. exchange and disseminate the results of practices of sharing and co-operation in the field of well-being for all, via the instruments and tools created by the Council of Europe.

10. Local and regional authorities

Local and regional authorities, and in particular city, village and neighbourhood authorities, are encouraged to promote the sharing of social responsibilities. To this end, they are invited to:

- a. facilitate participatory processes leading to the implementation of actions seeking social justice, sustainability and intergenerational solidarity;
- b. foster the involvement of residents in projects of general interest, particularly through the preservation and enhancement of necessities for a decent life for all, cultural heritage and all local resources which contribute to the strengthening of social and political capital;
- c. develop local policies in ways which acknowledge and take into account the contribution made by all interested stakeholders to strengthening social protection and social cohesion, and which also empower such stakeholders to participate in decision making.

11. Companies

Companies are encouraged to adapt their forms of governance and management to the principles of shared social responsibility, so as to:

- a. rethink their aims and ways of functioning, bearing in mind their impact on the communities in which they operate;
- b. seek lasting competitive advantages by taking into account societal values and social needs, and adapting production processes accordingly;
- c. take the views of workers, consumers and relevant civil society organisations into account in decision making;
- d. develop ways of managing relationships and conflicts, both in-house and with stakeholders in the communities and areas where they are located, in a spirit of dialogue, confidence and mutual respect;
- e. publish periodic reports on the social impact of their activities.

12. Financial sector

The financial sector is encouraged to participate in the sharing of social responsibilities. To this end, all actors of the financial sector are invited to:

- a. rethink their aims and operating principles in a context of social justice and intergenerational solidarity, ensuring that their actions do not weaken public and private institutions, families or individuals;
- b. be totally transparent about their offer of financial products;
- c. adopt measures to avoid the over-indebtedness of private households.

13. Foundations and stakeholders in the social and solidarity-based economy

Foundations and stakeholders in the social and solidarity-based economy are encouraged to participate in the sharing of social responsibilities in order to:

- a.* ensure that economic construction is based on the primacy of human dignity, the protection of common goods and a fair reconciliation between individual and collective needs;
- b.* propose consumption, saving and investment choices enabling everyone to contribute to social justice, sustainability and intergenerational solidarity;
- c.* improve information on the social impact of their activities;
- d.* support experimentation and research on shared social responsibilities.

14. Media

The media are invited to participate in the sharing of social responsibilities. To this end, they are encouraged to alert public opinion to the advantages of dialogue and the search for consensus among the different actors, levels and sectors and to enhance the value of co-operative forms of action.

15. Education

Teachers and educational staff are encouraged to participate in the sharing of social responsibilities. To this end, they are invited to:

- a.* raise pupils' and students' awareness of the advantages of interaction based on dialogue, in order to achieve social justice, sustainability and inter-generational solidarity;
- b.* develop, in an educational context, experience in the field of sharing social responsibilities.

16. Social partners and civil society organisations

Social partners, associations and non-governmental organisations are encouraged to participate in the sharing of social responsibilities. To this end, they are invited to:

- a.* incorporate the principles of shared social responsibilities in their aims and organisational structure;
- b.* take active part in the democratic process, at all levels and in all its forms, including participatory democracy, which enables these principles to be exercised;
- c.* take part in multi-stakeholder, multi-level and multi-sectorial processes;
- d.* exercise, particularly in the case of trade unions, the right to be informed and consulted and promote the standards established by the International Labour Organisation (ILO);
- e.* subscribe, particularly in the case of non-governmental organisations, to the Code of Good Practice for Civil Participation in the Decision-making Process, adopted by the Council of Europe Conference of International Non-Governmental Organisations (INGOs) on 1 October 2009.

17. Families and individuals

Families and their members are encouraged to participate in the sharing of social responsibilities. To this end, they are invited to:

- a.* take active part in the democratic process, at all levels and in all its forms, including participatory democracy, which enables shared social responsibilities to be exercised;
- b.* bring their consumption, saving and investment choices into line with the pursuit of social justice, sustainability and intergenerational solidarity;

c. develop forms of shared social responsibility in their everyday settings and immediate neighbourhood, focusing on positive parenting, gainful employment, community participation and the enhancement of public areas.

18. Participatory processes and governance

Participatory processes are not a substitute for representative democracy; they can strengthen it and be an essential complement for initiating new policies and bringing citizens, stakeholders and public authorities closer together.

Such processes make it possible for everyone to put forward their own points of view and reformulate their preferences through reasoning and exchanges of views, and contribute to the development of shared knowledge, objectives and projects. These processes should make it possible to:

- a. bring to the fore and examine in a public and transparent setting the different expectations of citizens and stakeholders, and their potential for innovation, experimentation and identification of solutions to current challenges;
- b. define common priorities in the field of well-being for all and reach agreements acceptable to each stakeholder;
- c. construct shared visions and knowledge capable of reconciling the aspirations of present and future generations;
- d. conclude agreements which, due to their fairness, will impel each stakeholder to honour and implement them in practice;
- e. level the playing field for all stakeholders, strong and weak, in setting priorities;
- f. reactivate the stakeholders' social resources and democratic skills;
- g. highlight the key role of social citizenship in countering the fragmentation of responsibilities of individuals as workers, consumers, savers, investors, etc.

19. Participatory process methodology

The methodological principles of participatory processes should provide the opportunity to:

- a. interact on an equal footing with other stakeholders, all present or effectively represented;
- b. have an equal right to information and freedom of expression;
- c. hear the views of others to help reach an equitable consensus;
- d. take part in presenting options and taking decisions;
- e. discuss differences of opinion openly and publicise the agreements reached;
- f. clarify and take into account the long-term effects of decisions, including their possible and real impact on the weaker players and on future generations;
- g. make commitments and obtain guarantees with regard to the implementation of decisions and the respective contributions of other stakeholders;
- h. take part in the design of criteria and procedures to assess decisions and initiatives regarding the well-being of all.

20. Innovation and learning processes

In order to improve policy effectiveness, particular attention should be paid to multi-stakeholder, multi-level and multi-sectorial initiatives encouraging institutional and social innovation, especially at local and regional level. Of particular relevance are initiatives seeking to:

- a.* combat the causes of inequalities and discrimination, making it possible to improve the individual's capacities for equitable participation and to preserve achievements in social rights;
- b.* improve health and social protection systems and other public services by means of joint decision-making with users, the companies concerned, service providers and public authorities;
- c.* set up companies, social enterprises and co-operatives incorporating the interests of all other stakeholders in their forms of socially responsible governance;
- d.* strengthen resilience and devise socially productive lifestyles;
- e.* create social links and networks using new technologies capable of ensuring a pooling of skills;
- f.* promote institutions and professions whose aim is the resolution of conflicts, through the impartial consideration of the interests at stake and by broadening the perspectives of all stakeholders.

Learning processes should be facilitated at all levels in order to promote and disseminate the most relevant innovations and improve methods of evaluation and governance.