

DRAFT Council of Europe Charter on Shared Social Responsibilities

1. Scope

Shared social responsibility does not replace specific responsibilities. Rather it complements and enhances them by encouraging social stakeholders and individuals to engage in transparency and to be accountable for their actions in a context of knowledge and decision making constructed through dialogue and interaction. Nor does shared social responsibility entail assigning indiscriminately to the weakest players individual responsibility for their economic and social situation, but rather calls for a new approach to responsibility in a context of interdependence.

2. Definition of shared social responsibility¹¹

a. "Responsibility" is defined as the state in which individuals and public and private institutions are accountable for the consequences of their actions or omissions in all fields of public and private life, with due regard for the applicable moral, social and legal rules or obligations;

b. "Social responsibility" is defined as the state in which individuals and public and private institutions are accountable 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, justice, social cohesion and sustainability, showing respect for diversity with due regard for the applicable moral, social and legal rules or obligations;

c. "Shared social responsibility" is defined as the state in which individuals and public and private institutions are accountable 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, justice, social cohesion and sustainability, showing respect for diversity with due regard for the applicable moral, social of judicial norms and obligations.

3. Definition of social, sustainability and intergenerational solidarity

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

a. "Social justice" is the guarantee of human rights, while meeting fundamental human needs, striving, through redistribution mechanisms, to reduce inequalities and securing collectively the conditions conducive to the development of the individual and his or her skills, regardless of gender, origins, race, beliefs or convictions.

b. "Sustainability" is the fair management of natural resources, the protection of goods ensuring a life in dignity for all, 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 damage to the environment.

c. "Intergenerational solidarity" places future generations and their possibilities for development at the heart of present-day decisions, without their 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 the commons and the frameworks of democracy and social protection for all. It presupposes dialogue among the present generations on the reduction of current inequalities in order to restore confidence in political processes which will result in social structures providing everyone with a level of security and control guaranteeing their autonomy.

4. Implementing conditions

The shared exercise of social responsibilities requires the following conditions:

a. no-one should be excluded from the decisions which have or may have significant and irreversible consequences for his or her existence and on the community in which he or she lives. Each individual or group of individuals should have the ability to take a decision or take part in an action having significant

effects in the public arena. The public authorities, corporate bodies and individuals are urged to eliminate the legal, operational and material obstacles to the exercise of this right;

b. there should be the broadest possible level of transparency in order to ensure that the information required for the sharing of social responsibilities is available to all the various 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 having a significant influence on their substance and application;

d. these principles, norms and priorities should be able to nurture a feeling of solidarity and reciprocity between stakeholders, motivating them to action and to honouring their mutual commitments;

5. Standards of action and decision

Policies based on the principle of shared social responsibility seek to:

a. safeguard the social and political achievements of Europe and ensure their sustainability;

b. take account of the consequences of decisions and actions in order to learn lessons from the mistakes of the past, to reduce as far as possible uncertainty and fear, injustice and unjustified discrimination, and to protect the rights of present and future generations;

c. encourage innovation based on new multi-stakeholder, multi-level and multi-sectoral institutional and organisational arrangements;

d. provide the weaker stakeholders with opportunities to influence decisions and priorities;

e. manage conflicts through the impartial mediation of interests and an understanding of the complexity of the issues at stake;

f. build up everyone's confidence and ability to take action by giving them an opportunity to express their views on the objectives pursued, the means to be deployed and the criteria for assessing the strategies adopted;

g. adopt indicators making it possible to measure societal progress in terms of well-being for all, the reduction of disparities and the respect for diversity.

6. Means of implementation

An effective strategy in the field of shared social responsibilities presupposes:

a. recognition of the full range of stakeholders, their demands and possible contributions in terms of action or suggestions, their rights and obligations, and their role in a social system based on close interdependencies;

b. participatory/deliberative processes, making it possible to refine the needs of the stakeholders and establish priorities through exchanges of different arguments and viewpoints, and through the impartial arbitration of differing interests;

c. innovative and skills and knowledge-acquisition processes making it possible for all involved to evaluate the consistency between the decisions taken and the European frames of reference in the field of fundamental rights, and paving the way for the democratic management of the well-being for all;

d. forms of partnerships involving, in a sustainable cooperative way, different stakeholders, levels and sectors;

e. institutional mechanisms offering confidence in the fact that each partner will act in accordance with the decisions taken and will refrain from any harmful behaviour or acting solely in his or her own interest to the detriment of the interests of others;

f. recognition of material and non-material goods ensuring a life in dignity for all. Those goods, that could be named as “commons” are those which express a functional utility for the exercise of fundamental rights and the development of the individual, and which contribute to the feeling of belonging to the human community. These goods include natural resources, the cultural and historic heritage and all those goods that individuals and stakeholders have built by means of cooperation and reciprocity, including by the use of IT (crowdsourcing).

7. Principle of non-regression

In order to eliminate poverty, social exclusion and discrimination, 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 or jeopardise their own life and human dignity and everyone should be supported in case of distress.

8. Principle of recognition

The sharing of social responsibilities presupposes that everyone receives recognition and has a representation and some degree of influence.

The views of the weaker stakeholders should be able to be heard, heeded and capable of influencing decisions and results. This means avoiding situations where the stronger stakeholders, in possession of more information and organisational power relinquish their specific responsibilities, impose priorities based on their interests alone and fail to acknowledge and compensate for the harm to which they may give rise.

Everyone should be able to contribute, individually and collectively, to the well-being of all, future generations included. If some people are incapable of accepting social responsibilities because of circumstances beyond their control, it falls to all parties to rectify the situation.

9. Principle of fairness

Sharing social responsibilities in an equitable way requires a reassessment of the allocation of roles and powers among all stakeholders, private and public.

A reassignment of roles, specifying the arrangements for the participation of the various stakeholders in well-being for all and the enjoyment of the commons should take account of the following:

- 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.

10. States and governmental authorities

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

- a. encourage and legitimise forums for negotiation and discussion between the many stakeholders;
- b. motivate stakeholders to comply with decisions and to implement them;
- c. make interaction with stakeholders a key opportunity for learning, so that representative democracy and deliberative democracy become mutually reinforcing;
- d. communicate information so as to 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 public servants as mediators between different stakeholders who may have different interests, bearing in mind the constitutional principles and democratic procedures in force;

g. ensure the conditions to guarantee the access to social rights;

h. encourage multilateral and cross-border activities, including the networking of territories committed to implementing the Council of Europe Action Plan for Social Cohesion;

i. exchange and spread results of practices of sharing and cooperation in the field of the well-being for all, by utilising the on-line tools created by the Council of Europe such as Spiral and Edgeriders.

11. Local and regional authorities

Local and regional authorities, and especially, city, neighbourhood and village 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 involvement of residents in projects of general interest, through the preservation and enhancement of the goods ensuring a life in dignity for all, the landscape, the cultural heritage and all local resources contributing to the strengthening of social and political capital, while including the diversity resulting from immigration;

e. frame local policies which acknowledge and take into account the contribution made by everyone to strengthening social protection and social cohesion and which also ensure that all stakeholders have negotiation and decision making powers.

12. Companies

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

a. rethink their aims and operational models bearing in mind all the costs and impacts of their activity;

b. seek lasting competitive advantages by taking into account societal values and social and ecological needs and adapting production processes, rather than focusing exclusively on reducing labour force costs and the socialisation of environmental harm;

c. take the viewpoints of workers, consumers, those who experience the harmful consequences of production, institutions and the relevant civil society organisations into greater account in decision making;

d. develop ways of managing relationships and conflicts, both in-house and with the 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 and environmental impact of the activities of companies, including those of a financial nature.

13. Financial sector

Banks, credit societies and the financial sector are encouraged to participate in the sharing of social responsibilities. To this end, they are invited to:

a. rethink their aims and operating principles in a context of social, environmental and intergenerational justice, ensuring their actions do not weaken public and private institutions, families and individuals as a result of short-term speculative choices;

b. be totally transparent about their offer of financial products, particularly when such products jeopardise the security and dignity of the weakest;

c. adopt measures to avoid the over-indebtedness of families and individuals.

14. 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 the commons and a fair reconciliation between individual and collective needs;
- b. develop consumption, saving and investment choices enabling everyone to contribute to social justice, sustainability and intergenerational solidarity;
- c. improve information on the social and environmental impact of their activities;
- d. support experimentation and research on shared social responsibility.

15. Media and education

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 of consensus among the different actors, levels and sectors and to enhance the value of cooperative forms of action.

Education

Teachers and training 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. Trade unions and organised civil society

Trade unions, 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 responsibility in their aims and organisational structure;
- b. take part in forums for participatory/deliberative democracy which enable these principles to be exercised;
- c. take part in multi-stakeholder, multi-level and multi-sectoral processes;
- d. exercise, particularly in the case of trade unions, the right to be informed and consulted and defend 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 [CONF/PLE(2009)Code1].

17. Families and individuals

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

- a.* take part in forums for participatory/deliberative democracy which enable shared social responsibility 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 harmonious co-existence, bringing up children and young people, sociability, job creation through community links, the enhancement of public areas.

18. Participatory/deliberative processes and governance

Participatory/deliberative processes are not a substitute for representative democracy; rather they could 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 visions 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, transparent setting the different interests put forward by citizens and stakeholders, and their potential for innovation, experimentation and identification of solutions to current challenges;
- b.* define common priorities in the field of the 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 acknowledged as being fair and which will encourage each stakeholder to honour and implement them in practice;
- e.* reduce imbalances of power between strong and weak stakeholders in setting priorities;
- f.* reactivate the stakeholders' moral and social resources and democratic skills;
- h.* highlight the key role of social citizenship in countering the fragmentation of responsibilities of individuals as workers, consumers, savers, investors, etc.

19. Participatory/deliberative processes methods

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

- a.* interact on an equal footing with other stakeholders, all present or duly represented;
- b.* have an equal right to information and freedom of expression;
- c.* hear the viewpoint of others in the context of impartial discussions, seeking a consensus that is as equitable as possible;
- d.* take part in choosing alternatives 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 impact on the weaker players and on future generations;
- g.* make commitments and receive guarantees about the implementation of decisions and the respective contributions of the 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 renew the policies, particular attention should be paid to multi-stakeholder, multi-level and multi-sectoral initiatives encouraging institutional and social innovation, especially at local level. Of particular relevance are initiatives seeking to:

a. combat the causes of inequalities and discrimination, making it possible to improve individuals' 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 in their forms of socially responsible governance the interests of the other stakeholders;

d. strengthen resilience and devise sustainable lifestyles;

e. create social links and networks using the 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 the different stakeholders;

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