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SOCIAL JUSTICE AND CHALLENGES OF MODERN SOCIETIES: THE IMPACT OF INTERNATIONAL ORGANIZATIONS

ABSTRACT

The challenges that modern society faces create or change the direction of its development with direct implications for the entire population. Social justice, as a synonym for equality of resources and opportunities for all people, is often the topic of various discussions and the starting point for the development of strategic documents. Each country, individually, is characterized by a specific and inherent level of development and (in)stability, conditioned by social, economic and political factors. The degree of success in this sense is difficult to measure, but it must be monitored. The idea of social justice is the basis of national development programs, as well as dialogue and cooperation between countries at the regional and international levels. The role of international organizations in advocating for social justice is crucial. Their approach, resources and influence around the world can significantly influence policies, raising awareness and promoting social justice in general. Examples of the work of international organizations can be viewed from different perspectives. From the aspect of promoting social justice, United Nations organizations, as well as many others, play an important role in establishing international frameworks and providing concrete support to the governmental and non-governmental sectors. The concept of social justice pervades Agenda 2030 and the goals of sustainable development, respecting the principle of universality, inclusion and improvement of social, economic and environmental aspects on a global level. The protection of human rights is the basis and prerequisite for reducing inequality, poverty and health protection. The following period brings new challenges in the field of achieving and striving for social justice, as well as the values that are summarized in it.

Keywords: *social justice, challenges, international organizations, sustainable development, human rights.*

1. INTRODUCTION

The flow of time, as well as numerous internal and external factors, influence society and direct its development. Despite changes, the needs of every human being are constant and specific, and depend on how they live, in what circumstances and in what place. The idea of social justice is present in the concepts according to which states plan their activities and is closely linked to the values that are respected and promoted in society. The achievement of social justice is closely linked to the resources at the disposal of the state, as well as to its level of development. In practical terms, the degree of aspiration towards social justice is most tangible at the local and state levels, while in theoretical terms it is best reflected at the international level. The international community, through its specifically focused institutions, strives to influence the reduction of poverty in the world, equality of opportunity, improvement of the overall health of the population, promotion of peace, protection of human rights and numerous other aspects of social life and action. When it comes to human rights, they belong to everyone equally regardless of gender, age, ability, race, ethnicity, nationality or any other affiliation. They are basic and inalienable rights that every human being possesses and constitute a set of moral principles that are questioned and confirmed in the field of moral philosophy. Human rights are also the legal protection of human dignity, they legally confirm and protect the human dignity of each individual. It is about the rights that belong to every individual in relation to the state and government. Referring to them, the individual makes requests to institutions and authorities at the local and national level that they act in a certain way or to prevent actions that call into question his human dignity.¹

The purpose of this Paper is to examine the impact of international organizations in the context of the challenges faced by modern societies. In accordance with the topic and the use of content and document analysis methods, as well as comparative analysis of practices, the focus is placed on United Nations organizations, taking into account their universal character, global operations, but also the resources they have at their disposal for the purpose of protecting human rights, striving for social justice and the role they play in the international community. The 2030 Agenda and the Sustainable Development Goals are a call

¹ Spajić-Vrkaš, V., Stričević, I., Maleš, D., Matijević, M., *Teaching rights and freedoms - A manual for primary school teachers with exercises for classroom teaching*, Faculty of Philosophy, Zagreb 2004, p.15.

to action for positive social change in countries around the world. Also, as an international organization, the Council of Europe is also extremely important when it comes to protecting human rights and promoting democracy.

2. SOCIAL JUSTICE AND SHAPING OF A JUST SOCIETY

Social justice as a term appears in literature, but also in practice through the aspiration of societies to provide the population with equal access to resources and opportunities, through respect for diversity. Social justice is a moral imperative that originated in ancient literature. Today, there are differences of opinion about the precise definition of the phrase social justice. But the general concept is that individuals and groups should receive fair treatment and an impartial share of the benefits of society.² Social justice requires the notion of a society made up of interdependent parts, with an institutional structure that affects the prospects of each individual member, and that is capable of deliberate reform by an agency such as the state in the name of fairness.³ The concept of social justice can be defined from different perspectives. Some authors emphasize that social justice may represent a state of affairs (whether actual or ideal) in which (a) benefits and burdens in society are dispersed in accordance with some justifiable allocation principle (or set of principles).⁴ Social justice is both a goal and a process. The goal of social justice is full and equitable participation of people from all social identity groups in a society that is mutually shaped to meet their needs. The process for attaining the goal of social justice should also be democratic and participatory, respectful of human diversity and group differences, and inclusive and affirming of human agency and capacity for working collaboratively with others to create change.⁵ The above definitions indicate the importance of diversity, respect, sharing and inclusion of all in the process of positive change.

Numerous authors believe that social justice encompasses economic justice. Social justice is the virtue which guides us in creating those organized human interactions we call institutions. In turn, social institutions, when justly organized, provide with access to what is good for the person, both individually and in our associations with others. Social justice also imposes a personal responsibility to collaborate with others, to design and continually perfect our institutions as tools for personal

² Hemphill, B., *Social Justice as a Moral Imperative*, The Open Journal of Occupational Therapy: Vol. 3: Iss. 2, Article 9, 2015, p. 1 Available at: <http://dx.doi.org/10.15453/2168-6408.1150>.

³ Miller, D., *Principles of Social Justice*, Harvard University press, London 1999, p. 4.

⁴ Jost, J. T., *A Theory of System Justification*, Harvard University Press, 2020, p. 13.

⁵ Adams, M., Bell, L. A., Griffin, P. (Eds.). *Teaching for diversity and social justice* (3rd ed.), Routledge, 2016, p. 26.

and social development.⁶ Social justice is also closely related to, or rather, implies and strives for, truth. Some authors point out that, being the first virtues of human activities, truth and justice are uncompromising. A well-ordered society is not designed only to advance the good of its members but to be also effectively regulated by a public conception of justice. That is, it is a society in which everyone accepts and knows that the others accept the same principles of justice, and the basic social institutions generally satisfy and are generally known to satisfy these principles.⁷

From the above-mentioned notions of social justice, it is clear that despite the different definitions, the essence of the concept is the same. The term social justice permeates numerous strategic documents and is based on the aspiration of society that all its members be equal, but it also implies the responsibility of every citizen. In the context of human rights and social justice, it is important to emphasize that the exercise of rights is not justified if it violates the rights of others, and in this sense additional caution is needed. Social justice implies:⁸

- a belief in human equality is a belief that all men are equal in intrinsic worth and are entitled to have access to the rights and privileges of their society, implying that suppression of distinction between individuals and groups are as inherently unjust;
- a social philosophy advocating levelling of social, political and economic inequalities;
- fellow-feeling and compassion;
- intelligent cooperation of people in producing an organically uniform united community so that every member has an equal and real opportunity to grow and learn to live the best of his native abilities;
- the balance of adjustments of the various interests concerned in the social and economic structure of the state in order to promote harmony upon an ethical and economic basis.

Social justice is also defined as a fundamental social value and norm concerning the way in which resources should be distributed among individuals and social groups. The main criteria for achieving social justice are right, merit and need. Perceptions of social justice can vary significantly between societies or within a

⁶ See: <https://www.cesj.org/learn/definitions/defining-economic-justice-and-social-justice/>, 15 January, 2025.

⁷ Rawls, J., *Revised edition of A Theory of Justice*, published in 1971 by Harvard University Press, 1999, p. 4.

⁸ Dikshit, C. J., *Social justice*, Institute of Judicial Training & Research Uttar Pradesh, 2019, p. 16.

society.⁹ The scope and meaning of social justice underwent a dramatic change in the context of globalization. Globalization is a process where national boundaries have become permeable in such a way that people's lives are affected increasingly by the working of global market changes, on which nation states have little control. Therefore, contemporary theorists of social justice argue that in the context of globalization, the scope of social justice can no longer be limited to the state as a politically bounded community but needs to be extended beyond to the level of global justice across humanity.¹⁰

Fair access to goods and services is a fundamental principle of social justice. Based on the belief that all human beings are equal before God and the law, the notion of fairness as related to access is often linked with the notion of equality to imply that all people, regardless of their gender, race, age, class, language, religion and occupation, are entitled to benefit from public goods and resources. The principle of equity derives from the recognition that the concept of fairness as equal or uniform distribution is not always possible or implementable, particularly in view of existing injustices that have prevented or reduced the ability of certain individuals or groups to gain equal access to public goods, resources and opportunities in the first place. Rights as a key principle of social justice can be divided into the following two sub-groups: (a) legal rights, which include inherited rights, and other lawful rights such as the right to receive payment for one's jobs according to agreed terms and (b) moral rights, which include people's basic human rights, liberties. Participation in the context of social justice means involving people in decisions that govern their lives. This includes not only engaging them in deciding on the kind of public services needed in their areas but also ensuring their full participation in political and cultural life.¹¹

Social justice makes societies and economies function more cohesively and productively, by reducing poverty and hunger, inequalities and social tensions. Given its central importance to inclusive and sustainable socio-economic development, social justice should be seen as one of the cornerstones of the renewed multilateralism that is required to overcome current challenges – a rallying point as well as an organizing principle for a more efficient and coherent

⁹ Glossary of social security, see: <https://www.coe.int/t/dg3/sscssr/source/glosscro.pdf>, 15 February, 2025.

¹⁰ Prasad, B. D., *The SAGE Encyclopedia of Action Research*, SAGE Publications, London 2014, p. 6.

¹¹ Khechen, M., *Social Justice: Concepts, Principles, Tools and Challenges, Economic and social commission for Western Asia (ESCWA)*, United Nations, New York 2013, p. 5.

multilateral system that supports national efforts across a range of policy areas and interventions.¹²

In order to maintain the essential idea of social justice, it is necessary, from a systemic and individual perspective, to ensure that equality and fairness are respected at all times and in all situations.

3. INTERNATIONAL ORGANIZATIONS AS SOCIAL JUSTICE INSTRUMENTS

Britannica defines international organization, institution drawing membership from at least three states, having activities in several states, and whose members are held together by a formal agreement. The Union of International Associations, a coordinating body, differentiates between the more than 250 international governmental organizations, which have been established by intergovernmental agreements and whose members are states, and the approximately 6,000 nongovernmental organizations (NGOs), whose members are associations or individuals.¹³

The emergence and development of international organizations is an excellent indicator of how international law is transformed and changed, even its essence, in accordance with the needs and changing circumstances in international relations.¹⁴ The number of international organizations is growing day by day, and their powers and the number of members are constantly increasing. The world would not be what it is today without international organizations. They represent a continuous process of regional and international action (association), constantly limited by new fields of interest. Although their decisions do not have an absolutely binding character, their opinion is of great importance, because they can certainly contribute to the development of a better, more orderly, more advanced and more modern world.¹⁵

¹² International Labour Organization 347th Session, Geneva, 13-23 March 2023, Governing Body, Update on the Global Coalition for Social Justice, p.3.

¹³ See <https://www.britannica.com/topic/international-organization>, 9 February, 2025.

¹⁴ Novaković, M., *The role of international organizations in international relations – the example of the United Nations. Non-state actors in international law*, Faculty of Philology, University of Belgrade, 2020, p. 176.

¹⁵ Danilović, N., *International organizations and their role as subjects of international public law*, Megatrend review, Faculty of Law Megatrend University, Vol. 16, № 2, 2019, p. 111.

States have tended to establish trade / economic unity in order to keep the national-international economy alive in the growing and globalizing world especially after World War II. The main purpose of international organizations should be to provide fair solutions to problems that exceed the power and ability of states and to serve common interests.¹⁶ International organizations are created and function to solve problems that go beyond the borders of one state. They play a crucial role in ensuring world order and global security. Today, issues of international and national security are among the priorities and are essential for the actions of every state. They are also the subject of study, scientific research, and the attention of civil society and interior political struggle.¹⁷

Policy makers and regulators worldwide coordinate their efforts and share experiences as part of their engagement in different global and regional organizations. Each of these organizations, and the spaces they convene and their outputs, provide an opportunity for bringing the voice of community networks and introduce in their recommendations favorable wording that can then be used by champions at the national level to change local policy and regulations.¹⁸ It is widely believed that International Organizations execute an important role in peace-making, economic stability, health and in various other pivotal matters with a mandate to act in the interest of the international community. There is a large number of intergovernmental organizations around the world today dealing with a significant amount of international and inter-state challenges.¹⁹

International organizations have become an essential arena for shaping public policy, and choices made in the design and reform of these organizations are critical to constructing a just international order. In order to contribute to such an order, international organizations should be efficient, legitimate, democratic, and conducive to distributive justice.²⁰

¹⁶See <https://businessdiplomacy.net/why-do-international-organizations-exist/>, 12 February, 2025.

¹⁷ Pasternak, I., Krap, A., Yastrubetska, L., Grytsyshen, D., Sergiienko, L., *The role and influence of international organizations in shaping and maintaining international legal order and global general and financial security*, Journal of law and sustainable development, Miami, v. 11, n. 12, 2023, p. 3.

¹⁸ See <https://policy.communitynetworks.group/international-organisations/start>, 12 February, 2025.

¹⁹ Fayyaz, S., *An analysis of international organizations' independent role in contemporary world politics*, ISSRA Papers Volume-XII, Institute for strategic studies research and analyses, 2020, p.89.

²⁰ Barnett, M., Duvall, R., *Justice, Power and International Organizations*. University of Rochester, 2005, p. 11.

3.1. United Nations

The United Nations is an organization of sovereign states, which voluntarily join together to create a forum. The UN was founded after World War II with the aspiration to avoid future wars through diplomacy and dialogue among nations. Member States join the United Nations because it provides them the mechanism to solve problems and disputes and to act on matters of concern to humanity. The UN is the forum where countries meet to discuss important issues such as human rights, social and economic development, and the fight against terrorism, among others. It plays a central role in reducing international tensions, preventing conflicts and putting an end to fighting already under way. The United Nations provides the means to help maintain international peace and security, to help those most in need to lead better lives, and to formulate policies on matters affecting all of humanity.²¹

The United Nations represents the pinnacle of the development of international organizations, and their rapid development was influenced by their predecessor - the League of Nations, which represents the first organization of a global character aimed at maintaining peace, or preventing war. In organizational, structural, historical and political terms, the United Nations represents the most significant organization and the pinnacle of the development of international organizations. In some elements, they have reached the level of states - in their importance, in their influence on relations, and in relation to other international organizations, they are an exception.²²

The United Nations coordinates its work with the funds, programmes, specialized agencies and other organizations of the UN System. The United Nations itself is one part of the UN System. Cooperation between the UN and the other entities of the UN system is essential in order to achieve the purposes of the Organization laid out in the UN Charter. The Charter of the United Nations is the founding document of the United Nations. It was signed on 26 June 1945, in San Francisco, at the conclusion of the United Nations Conference on International Organization, and came into force on 24 October 1945. The work of the United Nations covers five main areas: maintain International Peace and Security, protect Human Rights, deliver Humanitarian Aid, support Sustainable Development and Climate Action, uphold International Law.²³ Due to its unique international character, and the powers vested in its founding Charter, the UN can take action on a wide range of issues. It also provides a forum for its member states to express their views through

²¹ See https://www.un.org/sites/un2.un.org/files/22-00087a_visitorcentre_booklet_e_web.pdf, 12 February, 2025.

²² Novaković, M., *op. cit.* note 14, p. 182, 188.

²³ See <https://www.un.org/en/our-work>, 12 February, 2025.

the General Assembly, the Security Council, the Economic and Social Council, and other bodies and committees.²⁴

The Universal Periodic Review (UPR) is a unique procedure that involves reviewing the human rights situation in all UN member states, regardless of whether they have ratified a particular convention or not. The UPR is a process under the auspices of the Human Rights Council and provides an opportunity for each UN member state to demonstrate what it has done to improve the protection and promotion of human rights and to fulfil its obligations. It is designed to ensure equal treatment of each UN member state in the context of assessing the state of protection and promotion of human rights. The ultimate goal of the mechanism is to improve the human rights situation in all member states and to address violations of rights wherever they occur. There is currently no other universal mechanism of its kind.²⁵

3.1.1. Global goals of sustainable development

On 25 September 2015, the 193 member states of the UN approved the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, an ambitious plan that sets out to achieve prosperity that is respectful of the planet and its inhabitants. This Agenda is made up of 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), further broken down into 169 targets, to be met by 2030 with the intention of "leaving no-one behind". The 2030 Agenda is a continuation of the UN Millennium Development Goals (2000-2015) which were in their day the first international consensus on facing global problems such as the eradication of extreme poverty and hunger, and to promote improvements in access to education. Although the targets were not fully achieved, they nevertheless provided the basis for significant progress which, in 2015, was extended through the 2030 Agenda and its respective SDGs.²⁶ All 17 Sustainable Development Goals, are an urgent call for action by all countries - developed and developing - in a global partnership. They recognize that ending poverty and other deprivations must go hand-in-hand with strategies that improve health and education, reduce inequality, and spur economic growth – all while tackling climate change and working to preserve our oceans and forests.²⁷ The 17

²⁴ Steffek, J., Hahn, K., *The Impact of NGOs on International Organizations: Contested Influence in Global Governance*. Brooklyn Law School, 2010, p. 823.

²⁵ Kesonja, D., Vlašić, T., *Integration and Human Rights, Handbook for Educators*, Office for Human Rights and Rights of National Minorities of the Government of the Republic of Croatia, 2021, p.10.

²⁶ See <https://www.iberdrola.com/sustainability/committed-sustainable-development-goals/what-is-agenda-2030>, 13 February, 2025.

²⁷ See <https://www.un.org/en/desa>, 13 February, 2025.

Sustainable Development Goals, to be implemented by 2030, cover all the major challenges facing the planet: climate, biodiversity, energy, water, poverty, gender equality, economic prosperity, peace, agriculture, education and so on. Interdependent, they only make sense if they are jointly respected, and must be pursued both locally and internationally. Each country is responsible for implementing them, while ensuring that the proposed indicators and targets are met on time.²⁸

Every year, the UN Secretary General presents an annual SDG Progress report, which is developed in cooperation with the UN System, and based on the global indicator framework and data produced by national statistical systems and information collected at the regional level. According to the latest report on Progress towards the Sustainable Development Goals:²⁹

- Global efforts to eradicate extreme poverty have faced significant setbacks by the COVID-19 pandemic and a series of major shocks during 2020-22. The pandemic caused extreme poverty to increase in 2020 for the first time in decades, reversing global progress by three years;
- Achieving global health goals faces significant challenges, with progress slowing since 2015 in areas like maternal mortality, premature deaths from major noncommunicable diseases, and access to essential healthcare;
- Unfortunately, global progress in education has not been fast enough. Only 58% of students worldwide achieved at least the minimum proficiency level in reading at the end of primary schooling in 2019;
- Many women still lack control over their sexual and reproductive health, and violence against women persists. Urgent action is needed to challenge biased social norms, eliminate harmful practices, and change discriminatory laws. Increasing women's leadership roles and investments in gender equality are crucial at national, regional, and global levels;
- As of 2022, 2.2 billion people were without access to safely managed drinking water and 3.5 billion lacked access to safely managed sanitation;
- While labour markets have shown resilience, uneven pandemic recovery, the declining protection of labour rights and emerging vulnerabilities erode social justice prospects. The report foresees a worsening labour market outlook, with higher unemployment and sluggish growth in 2024,

²⁸ See <https://focus2030.org/Focus-on-the-SDGs>, 14 February, 2025.

²⁹ United Nations, Economic and Social Council Seventy-ninth session 2024, May, see <https://unstats.un.org/sdgs/files/report/2024/SG-SDG-Progress-Report-2024-advanced-unedited-version.pdf>.

exacerbating income inequality and jeopardizing equitable pay for women and decent work for young people;

- Over the past five years, the gap in per capita income growth between the poorest and richest countries has widened. In addition, discrimination based on age, gender, religion, race, or belief affects one in six people globally;
- Persistent threats to human security across the globe underscore the breakdown of peaceful and inclusive societies, crucial for sustainable development and the need to restore trust and strengthen and renew global peace and security frameworks.

The progress assessment carried out in 2024 reveals that the world is severely off track to realize the 2030 Agenda. Of the 169 targets, 135 can be assessed using available global trend data from the 2015 baseline to the most recent year, along with custodian agency analyses; 34 targets lack sufficient trend data or additional analysis. Among the assessable targets, only 17 per cent display progress sufficient for achievement by 2030. Nearly half (48 per cent) exhibit moderate to severe deviations from the desired trajectory, with 30 per cent showing marginal progress and 18 per cent moderate progress. Alarming, 18 per cent indicate stagnation and 17 per cent regression below the 2015 baseline levels. This comprehensive assessment underscores the urgent need for intensified efforts to put the SDGs on course.³⁰

From the above data, the following can be concluded:

- societies are increasingly facing crisis situations (pandemics, floods, etc.) and it is necessary to invest in strengthening national frameworks in order to adequately respond to crisis situations and their consequences;
- protecting the overall health (physical and mental) of the population is imperative for preserving the well-being of society and a prerequisite for its social development;
- it is necessary to more intensively implement programs for protection against violence and discrimination, as well as improving the education system, the labour market and strengthening competencies in order to reduce various forms of vulnerability;
- ecological sustainability directly affects the sustainability of social justice;
- preserving peace, stability and guaranteeing security as a priority for the coming period.

³⁰ United Nations, The Sustainable Development Goals Report 2024, See <https://unstats.un.org/sdgs/report/2024/The-Sustainable-Development-Goals-Report-2024.pdf>, 16 February, 2025.

The 2030 Agenda also puts the principles of equality and non-discrimination at its heart, with a commitment to leave no one behind and reach those furthest behind first, special attention to marginalized groups, and two dedicated goals on combating discrimination and inequalities (SDG 5 on gender equality and SDG 10 on inequalities within and between countries), as well as a cross-cutting commitment to data disaggregation, inclusive participatory approaches (all of society and all of Government approaches), and accountability for the 2030 Agenda follow-up and review indicate that the entire Agenda was developed using a human rights-based approach, which is also crucial for its effective implementation.³¹

SDG 17 explicitly focuses on 'strengthening the means of implementation and revitalizing the global partnership for sustainable development. It highlights effective public, public-private and civil society partnerships. The 2030 Agenda and the SDGs serve as a global reference point for the transition to sustainable development. They call for the transformation of existing institutional structures in every country and require a concerted effort of governments at multiple levels, civil society, business, and academia.³²

To deliver on the 2030 Agenda, the UN system needs to be innovative, agile, inclusive, and results-oriented. The UN system's ability to redefine how it engages with partners and works with other stakeholders towards shared sustainable development outcomes is crucial for the SDGs.³³

3.2. Council of Europe

The Council of Europe is the continent's leading human rights organisation. Since its foundation in 1949, the organisation has created a common legal space, centred on the European Convention on Human Rights (ECHR), across its 46 member states. The Council of Europe's Committee of Ministers has overseen the implementation of 25,000 judgments and decisions from the Court, benefitting millions of people across the continent in many different ways. Alongside the

³¹ See <https://www.ohchr.org/en/sdgs/about-2030-agenda-sustainable-development>, 16 February, 2025.

³² Weiland, S., Hickmann, T., Lederer, M., Marquardt, J., Schwindenhammer, S., The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development: Transformative Change through Sustainable Development Goals? Politics and Governance, Vol 9, No 1, 2021, p. 91.

³³ The United Nations Environment Programme and the 2030 Agenda Global Action for People and the Planet, see <https://www.icsspe.org/system/files/UN%20-%20Environment%20Programme%20and%20the%202030%20Agenda%20Global%20Action%20for%20People%20and%20the%20Planet.pdf>, 15 February, 2025.

ECHR, the Council of Europe has developed more than 200 legally binding international treaties to help protect people from various threats including torture, violence and sexual abuse. The European Union and the Council of Europe have developed a strong political and strategic partnership including joint cooperation programmes in a large number of countries, inside and outside the European Union, worth more than €230 million.³⁴ The Council of Europe protects and promotes three core values: human rights, democracy and the rule of law. It is, therefore, often called Europe's human rights watchdog.³⁵

The Council of Europe has adopted a large number of documents aimed at protecting human rights, some of the most significant being, among others, the European Convention on Human Rights and the European Social Charter.

The European Convention on Human Rights (ECHR) is an international treaty for the protection of human rights and fundamental freedoms in Europe, and was signed by the Council of Europe in 1950. All 46 states from the Council of Europe are parties to the Convention, and 27 of them are members of the EU. The Convention established the European Court of Human Rights, whose purpose is to protect people from human rights violations. Any person whose rights have been violated by the state, based on the Convention, can submit a case to this court. This was a new feature that gave individuals rights in the international arena. Judgments establishing a violation are binding on states. The Committee of Ministers of the Council of Europe supervises the execution of judgments.³⁶

The European Social Charter is a Council of Europe treaty that guarantees fundamental social and economic rights as a counterpart to the European Convention on Human Rights, which refers to civil and political rights. It guarantees a broad range of everyday human rights related to employment, housing, health, education, social protection and welfare. The Charter lays specific emphasis on the protection of vulnerable persons such as elderly people, children, people with disabilities and migrants. It requires that enjoyment of the abovementioned rights be guaranteed without discrimination.³⁷ It was open for signature on 18 October 1961 in Turin, Italy. In these years, the Charter has been revised and new rights have been included to take into account the challenges facing modern societies, but the Charter has remained at the heart of the Council

³⁴See <https://www.coe.int/en/web/portal/the-council-of-europe-key-facts>, 15 February, 2025.

³⁵ See <https://www.europewatchdog.info/en/council-of-europe/>, 15 February, 2025.

³⁶ See <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/HR/legal-content/glossary/european-convention-on-human-rights-echr.html>, 15 February, 2025.

³⁷ See <https://www.coe.int/en/web/european-social-charter>, 20 February, 2025.

of Europe's statutory goals: human rights, rule of law and democracy, which cannot be realised without the respect for social rights.³⁸

4. CHALLENGES OF THE MODERN AGE

Nowadays, economic inequality is strengthened by numerous social problems such as the demographic aging of the population, low fertility rates, high youth unemployment, high pension and health costs and environmental pollution. Therefore, one of the important challenges of political and economic stability of today's society and social capital is the improvement of human development and the strengthening of social rights.³⁹ The key element of the fight for justice, i.e. fairness, is the adoption of good laws and the establishment of fair institutions. In order to achieve justice, as the first and most important value of a democratic society, citizens should be united, responsible and tolerant. Those values are a necessary condition for the existence and maintenance of democracy, especially social democracy.⁴⁰

Starting from the principles of solidarity and the common good, it is possible to speak of justice in society and the state. Both concepts arise from the understanding of man and his social nature, have their own history and their own current issues.⁴¹ Solidarity or the principle of solidarity is a fundamental and distinguishing determinant of all social security systems. Social solidarity, an intrinsic value and principle of the social security system, is first and foremost a national matter. It is based on a mutual feeling of interdependence and reliance on fellow citizens.⁴² If individuals are prevented from exercising their rights, human rights, social security and social justice inevitably collapse. This leads to the social exclusion of individuals and families, which has incalculable consequences, especially for vulnerable categories of society.

³⁸See <https://www.coe.int/en/web/european-social-charter/60-anniversary>, 20 February, 2025.

³⁹ Pavlišić, P., *Society on the road to conflict: a historical overview and the need for the development of a fairer new economy*. Economic thought and practice, Vol. 25 No. 1, 2016, p. 230.

⁴⁰ Čupić, Č., *Universal values and democracy, The importance and role of universal values for the establishment of social democracy*, Collection of papers Social democracy in Europe and the concept of a "good society", Belgrade, 2016, p.10.

⁴¹ Valković, M, *Solidarity and justice as the foundation of the social state*, Social Policy Review, Vol. 111, no. 3-4, Zagreb 1996, p. 218.

⁴² Martinović, A., *Solidarity as Key Determinant of Social Security Systems in EU*, Review for Social Policy, year 22, no. 3, Zagreb, 2015. p. 347.

Social exclusion is the process by which certain individuals are pushed to the margins of society and prevented from participating fully simply because of their poverty, lack of basic skills and opportunities for lifelong learning or as a result of discrimination. In this way, they are excluded from work opportunities, income-generating opportunities and education, as well as from networks of social and community activities. The socially excluded do not have access to power and decision-making processes, and therefore often feel helpless and unable to take control of their decisions that affect their daily lives. The European approach to the definition of poverty and social exclusion is based on the understanding that poverty and social exclusion are not primarily the result of human weaknesses or failures of individuals, but are the result of structural problems in society.⁴³

The work of international organizations contributes not only to the strengthening of social justice and societies, but also to their promotion, with the ultimate goal of achieving the best interests of people and communities. Examples of programs of international organizations that have contributed to the strengthening of social justice:

1. The Global Fund to Fight AIDS, Tuberculosis and Malaria (The Global Fund): This organization invests more than 5 billion US dollars annually in the fight against HIV, tuberculosis and malaria, ensuring a healthier, safer and more equitable future for all;⁴⁴
2. UNESCO's Education for All Program: This global movement, led by UNESCO, is dedicated to ensuring quality primary education for all children, youth, and adults. The program provides free, quality education for all children, especially in underdeveloped countries. The program has led to significant increases in literacy rates, reduced gender gaps in education, and improved life chances for millions of children around the world;⁴⁵
3. The World Bank provides low-interest loans, zero to low-interest credits, and grants to developing countries. These support a wide array of investments in such areas as education, health, public administration, infrastructure, financial and private sector development, agriculture, and environmental and natural resource management;⁴⁶
4. UNICEF funds cash transfer programs to poor families around the world to provide children with basic needs, including education, nutrition and

⁴³ Barbarić, Đ., *Poverty - a stain on the conscience of humanity, a presentation of the framework and possibilities of poverty reduction in the Republic of Croatia*. MoSt Association, Split, 2021, p.7.

⁴⁴ See <https://www.theglobalfund.org/en/>, 22 February, 2025.

⁴⁵ See <https://uis.unesco.org/en/glossary>, 22 February, 2025.

⁴⁶ See <https://projects.worldbank.org/en/projects-operations/projects-home>, 22 February, 2025.

healthcare. This program has helped millions of children in Africa, Asia, and Latin America escape poverty;⁴⁷

5. Through the Decent Work Programme, the International Labour Organization (ILO) funds projects that improve working conditions, reduce worker exploitation and provide social security for vulnerable groups. The programme has successfully improved working conditions in developing countries and reduced child labour;⁴⁸
6. The World Health Organization (WHO) through its Universal Health Coverage program funds projects aimed at universal health care, ensuring access to health services for poor and vulnerable populations. The programs have improved the availability of vaccines, medicines and medical services in underdeveloped countries;⁴⁹
7. The United Nations Fund for Women (UN Women), through its Women's Economic Empowerment Programme, funds projects that help women gain economic opportunities, such as training, entrepreneurship grants and employment support. These programmes have reduced gender gaps in the economic sector and advanced women's rights.⁵⁰

The above examples are proof that despite the uncertainty that is present on the global scene, there are initiatives that are changing people's lives for the better all over the world.

5. CONCLUSION

It can be concluded that the role of international organizations in advocating for social justice is certainly crucial and is reflected primarily in the efforts that are invested financially, materially and in terms of policy changes, in improving people's lives and protecting their rights. Numerous documents, programs and practices are indicators of society's intention to follow the direction of development, togetherness and equality. The limitations of this paper are reflected in the inability to delve deeper into the individual roles of international organizations and their specific programs, which provides opportunities for further research and focus on some of the aspects of the complex relationships within societies, the perception of social justice, as well as the correlation of the activities

⁴⁷ See <https://www.unicef.org/topics/cash-transfers>, 22 February, 2025.

⁴⁸ See <https://www.ilo.org/topics/decent-work>, 22 February, 2025.

⁴⁹ See https://www.who.int/health-topics/universal-health-coverage#tab=tab_1, 22 February, 2025.

⁵⁰ See <https://www.unwomen.org/en/what-we-do/economic-empowerment>, 22 February, 2025

of international organizations and government programs in the context of strengthening social justice.

Modern society is characterized by various everyday challenges, both at the national and international levels. States, individually, regardless of their level of development and economic power, often do not have the capacity to respond to growing needs in all areas of social activity. Therefore, international cooperation in jointly solving the same and similar problems plays a very important role, which is most clearly seen through the activities of international organizations. A large number of financial resources are allocated annually to support projects and programs of international organizations, with the aim of improving and protecting human rights and preserving social security. An additional value of this type of support is the fact that in many cases the percentage of funds received from the international community is higher than the national budgets of countries for certain areas. In order for funds to reach those in need, it is necessary to monitor and evaluate, especially in the context of identifying new needs, better informing and advocating for the continuation of current programs, as well as creating new ones. In this sense, it is important to mention the importance of conducting analyses, projections and using social innovations, which can certainly be the topic of some future papers and discussions.

Social justice is a concept that is inseparable from human rights. National and international policies are based on the principles of equality, inclusion and universality. Numerous international bodies have been established and various strategic documents have been adopted, all with the aim of protecting the human rights of citizens, regardless of where they live and what their specificities are. The period ahead brings uncertainty, and requires readiness, resources and strengthening of protective mechanisms of the system of protection of human rights and social justice, at the national, regional and international levels.

Various data available to the public indicate that social problems are becoming more complex and that more investments (financial and material) will be needed in the field of human rights protection. At the same time, certain changes are occurring on the international scene and the budget and scope of operations of certain international organizations are being reduced, which brings new challenges in the future and obstacles that must be overcome.

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