

Asia Europe People's Forum

Social Justice Cluster

Our common social future: Commoning and sharing for society, the environment and the economy. A programme for a democratic, participatory and transformative social protection

BARCELONA DECLARATION

Social justice is at the center of all our concerns and of all our efforts to work for a better world. These are shared concerns in Europe and Asia. Levels of development differ widely between these global regions, but also within them. The superrich in Asia have now overtaken their counterparts in Europe. However, at the level of social justice and more particularly social protection, labour law and social services, developments in Europe and Asia are similar and are dictated by the same neoliberal philosophy, strengthened by conservative forces.

Today, social protection is high on the international development agenda, for example through the UN Sustainable Development Goals, the ILO's Social Protection Floors and the European Union's Pillar of Social Rights. While these initiatives are interesting and important, daily political practice continues to widen inequalities, to make employment more precarious, and to roll out the privatisation of public services such as water and health care.

Benefits of market-driven economic growth do not trickle down to the poor. That is why there is now a broad movement, all over the world, to reclaim rights, health care, water, pensions, land and schools: because people are being robbed of their livelihoods, including jobs and wages.

Governments and international institutions often make socially viable solutions impossible. As a result, trust in public authorities is dwindling, sometimes deservedly but often as a result of political manipulation. More and more people are responding by taking initiatives to help themselves, creating small scale farms, providing care for the elderly or the very young, and organizing to produce clean energy, local currencies and cooperatives.

The commons are life's necessities, we need them to meet basic human needs. Social commons are activities and relations co-designed and co-produced by people, with shared ownership and control, forging new relations between people and the public realm. Commons *gobeyond* markets and states, but not *without* markets and states: both will have to adopt a different logic. Commons change the ways in which we understand and practice democracy, participation and governance.

This conference further reflected on progressive definitions of social commons in the context of the self-organisation of people. It has explored the conceptual and practical implications of claiming social resources as commons. It contributed to clarifying the concept and begun to explore links with other sectors, such as the environment and culture, macro-economics and fiscal policies. It examined the potential of the social and solidarity economy.

Climate change broadens the requirements for social protection and social justice. Both will have to be re-defined and scaled up with even more urgency. Climate change is a game changer for how social protection, equitable and sustainable development and the fulfilment of human rights can be realized.

Feminists put the emphasis on social re-production, helpful for thinking about the interdependence of human activities. Many of the commons initiatives are started by women because the expansion of commodification and privatisation in patriarchal and capitalist societies increases the workload for women by integrating them into global commodity chains while at the same time expanding their unpaid social re-production work. It is important that commons do not become women's responsibilities in a new gendered division of labour.

This pursuit of social commons must be seen in the context of our ambition to shape a better world. This calls for a transformation of social, economic and political systems, and for resistance to the dismantling of economic and social rights, which are in effect a new form of enclosure. We are not searching for harmony through adaptation of the status quo. On the contrary, it should be clear that commons and neoliberal capitalism cannot peacefully co-exist. Commons can only endure in the long term through struggle and conflict aimed at building a new political economy to support people's control of essential resources. Therefore, the social protection we envisage will go beyond the currently existing initiatives; it will not be a corrective mechanism but will contribute to the radical changes we need.

By focusing on the collective dimension of our social and economic rights and by directly involving people in shaping public policies, the commons approach can become a strategic tool to resist neoliberalism, privatization and commodification. It can help to build a new narrative to strengthen and broaden people's movements as well as for political and legal action against the exploitative use of our resources. Commons are about power. Claiming and controlling social commons means building power together with others. It is a primary task of all progressive forces, at all political levels, from local communities to global institutions. Facing the challenges of all important recent changes, it is clear the labour movement has to play an important role, countering the fragmentation and precarisation of work, taking into account the role of women and creating alternatives based on their

abilities and skills.

Social protection alone will not be enough to achieve system change. But social justice can become an entry point for policies of social, economic and political transformation. Emphasizing our interdependence and the necessary collective dimension of all our efforts can be a vital step towards strengthening social movements and building citizens' power.

Many important questions remain to be further examined, such as the issues of scale, of class, the role of public institutions, ownership and the transformational potential of commons.

What we are working for is the sustainability of life, for people and the planet. Our social protection, our economic and social rights are ours, so we decide on them. This is a call to join our efforts and fight for social justice in a comprehensive way and to create a message of hope for the future.

This Declaration has been adopted by the conference on social commons, held in Barcelona from 8 to 10 June 2018, co-organised by the social justice cluster of the Asia-Europe People's Forum and Transform! Europe. More information can be found at: www.aepf.info-www.transform-network.net and www.socialcommons.eu