18 March 2026

SGIs Network Joint Declaration for the Tripartite Social Summit of 18 March 2026

The SGIs Network gathers associations representing providers and employers of services of general interest (SGIs) and public services.

Europe did not build the Single Market alone. From the outset, market integration was paired with cohesion policy to ensure prosperity extended beyond capitals and core regions. That balance created trust, legitimacy, and shared progress in the European Union.

Today, that balance is under strain. Too many citizens experience the Single Market as working primarily for those who can move easily, while others feel compelled to leave their communities to access jobs, housing, or essential services. More than thirty years after its creation, the Single Market faces a simple but decisive test of credibility: can people rely on it to build a life where they feel at home, regardless of their location?

When territories lose access to essential services, people, jobs, companies, SMEs, investments, and confidence soon follow. If opportunity continues to concentrate in a limited number of places, Europe risks drifting into a two-speed reality, regardless of its shared values and Treaty commitments.

Freedom to Stay: strengthening the Single Market from the ground up

The freedom to stay is not about limiting mobility. It is about making mobility a choice, not a necessity: freedom to stay and freedom to move are two sides of the same coin. It strengthens the Single Market by reconnecting competitiveness, territorial and social cohesion. It enables Europe to produce, innovate, and invest everywhere, because every place offers the foundations that citizens and businesses need, including reliable, accessible, affordable and high-quality services of general interest, skilled workers and strong local cohesion.

Services of General Interest (SGIs) sit at the heart of this vision. Access to affordable and high-quality SGIs is a fundamental right under the European Pillar of Social Rights and a shared EU value under Article 14 TFEU and Protocol No. 26. High-quality, affordable, and universal SGIs are not only pillars of social and territorial cohesion: They are structural assets for Europe's competitiveness, resilience, and democratic trust.

A call for action to turn the Freedom to Stay into a reality

With this pledge, the signatories want to address shared and systemic challenges: persistent investment gaps, skills shortages, digital transitions that risk widening territorial and social divides, demographic ageing, infrastructure deficits, regulatory fragmentation, and funding models that remain short-term or misaligned with the missions of SGIs.

Together, we speak with one voice: the Single Market requires a strong social and territorial foundation to deliver industrial ambition, demographic resilience, and public trust.

This pledge calls for:

1. Integrating the Freedom to Stay into the next Cohesion Policy cycle and the next Multiannual Financial Framework as a guiding objective.
2. Creating a “Freedom to Stay” indicator, designed to complement the European Semester and translate cohesion and SGI objectives into measurable outcomes.
3. Co-designing a European Action Plan on Services of General Interest, to deliver concrete follow-up to the Letta Report by developing a holistic Action Plan on SGIs.

This pledge is a starting point for a broader alliance, the signatories of which launched on 23 February 2026, called the **Coalition for the Freedom to Stay** (more information on www.freedomtostay.eu). This initiative embraces all those parts of the economy and society that believe that this freedom should be an essential feature of a modern and inclusive Internal Market.

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The signatories:

SGI Europe

CEMR - Council of European Municipalities and Regions

CER - Community of European Railway and Infrastructure Companies

EFEE - European Federation of Education Employers

HOSPEEM - European Hospital and Healthcare Employers' Association

PostEurop – Association of European public postal operators

UITP – International Asssociation of Public Transport