

2021

European Economic
and Social Committee

A Year in Review



European Economic
and Social Committee

This brochure is based largely on the *Annual Activity Report 2021*, issued in June 2022, which is the European Economic and Social Committee's main tool for reporting annually to the budgetary authority. Additional source materials include the EESC's Statistics 2021 publication by the Directorate for Communication and Interinstitutional Relations, the EESC's website and social media content and general activities at the Committee throughout 2021.

The full *Annual Activity Report* can be viewed here: www.eesc.europa.eu/en/about

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FOREWORD

Dear readers,

It is with great satisfaction that I present to you the main highlights of the EESC's work in 2021.



This exercise allows us not only to take stock of what we achieved but also how it echoed across Europe, on civil society organisations, and on European policymakers.

Over the past two years, the COVID-19 pandemic has disrupted our work at an unprecedented scale and pace, bringing along a new set of vocabulary such as hybrid, remote and teleflex.

At the same time, this year was also a reminder that our world is more connected than ever. Indeed, 2021 was full of monumental events with global repercussions, such as the Conference on the Future of Europe. With over 20 local events and citizens' consultation, the EESC has once again proved its added value in engaging with citizens, thanks to its members and their extensive network of civil society organisations.

Besides engaging in dialogue, the EESC also has a record of providing concrete support to European civil society: indeed, this year the Civil Society Prize gave 23 awards to European NGOs who made outstanding contributions to tackling the consequences of the COVID pandemic and its consequences.

In 2021, we also continued building on our relationship with other European Institutions, and signed a new administrative cooperation agreement with the European Committee of the Regions. In doing so, the EESC continues to strive for better administrative practices, establishing a firm legal framework for long-term, efficient and effective cooperation.

Indeed, it has never been clearer that tackling big problems requires people working together across borders and institutions.

Given that in 2021 the pandemic dominated our lives from day one, the EESC relentlessly continued to develop a virtual workplace, making a breakthrough in the way we organise our meetings and our work.

Indeed, throughout the health crisis, the EESC remained extremely active and focused its efforts on enabling the reinforcement of the measures then in place:

- new communication tools were improved;
- numerous remote and hybrid meetings and events were organised, including with large audiences and offering simultaneous interpretation where needed;
- distance-voting and use of electronic workflows became standard practice.

All those efforts contributed to the EESC being able to fulfil its institutional role without disruption.

As I look back at 2021, I am convinced that the EESC will continue to occupy a key position as the bridge between policymakers and Europe's citizens.

Or, as recently stated by Christa Schweng, President of the EESC "Implementing the highest ethical and professional standards together with ensuring that our voice is heard remain our EESC key priority."



Gianluca Brunetti
Secretary-General of the European
Economic and Social Committee



We believe that the European Union is about building bridges and breaking down barriers. As we strive every day to be a bridge between European civil society and the EU institutions, we would like to share with you some success stories from 2021. **We hope you enjoy reading about them.**





BEFORE WE BEGIN

WHAT IS THE EESC?

The European Economic and Social Committee (EESC) is an EU consultative body that was set up some 60 years ago to advise European decision-makers, by delivering **opinions** to the European Parliament, the Council, and the European Commission. The EESC ensures that citizens' organisations have a say in Europe's development. A unique body, the Committee provides a forum for consultation, dialogue and consensus-building among representatives from the various sections of organised civil society.

WHAT ARE THE EESC'S OBJECTIVES?

The EESC is committed to European integration. It helps strengthen the EU's democratic legitimacy and effectiveness by enabling civil society organisations from the Member States to express their views at the European level.

In other words

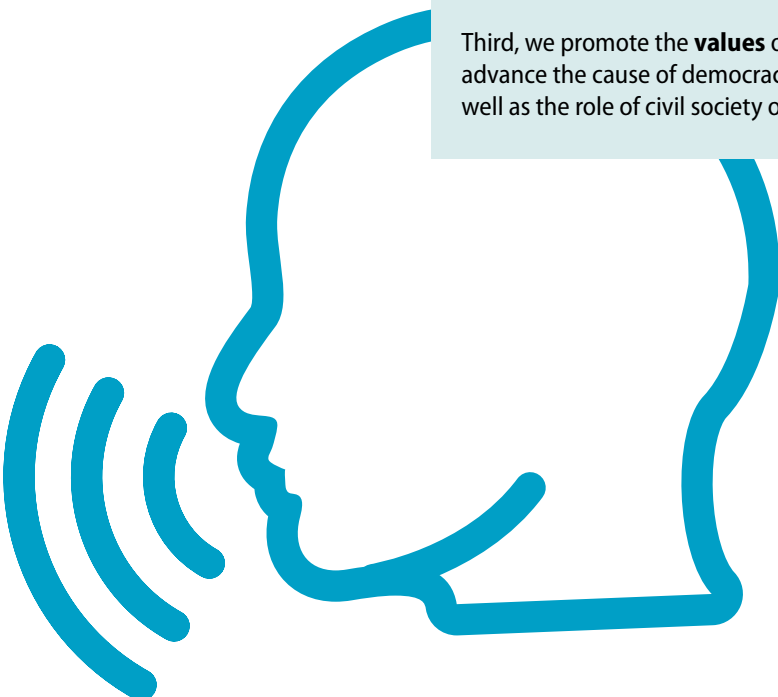
The EESC's purpose is to give organised civil society a voice in Europe

But how do we do that?

First, we help to ensure that **European policies and legislation** better reflect economic, social and civic realities by advising the European Parliament, the Council and the European Commission. We do this by tapping into EESC members' experience and stimulating dialogue and efforts to secure consensus, which serves the general interests of the EU.

Second, we promote the development of a **more participatory EU** that is more in touch with public opinion, by acting as an institutional forum representing, informing, expressing the views of and securing dialogue with organised civil society.

Third, we promote the **values** on which European integration is founded and advance the cause of democracy – in particular participatory democracy – as well as the role of civil society organisations, in Europe and around the world.



WHAT IS ORGANISED CIVIL SOCIETY?

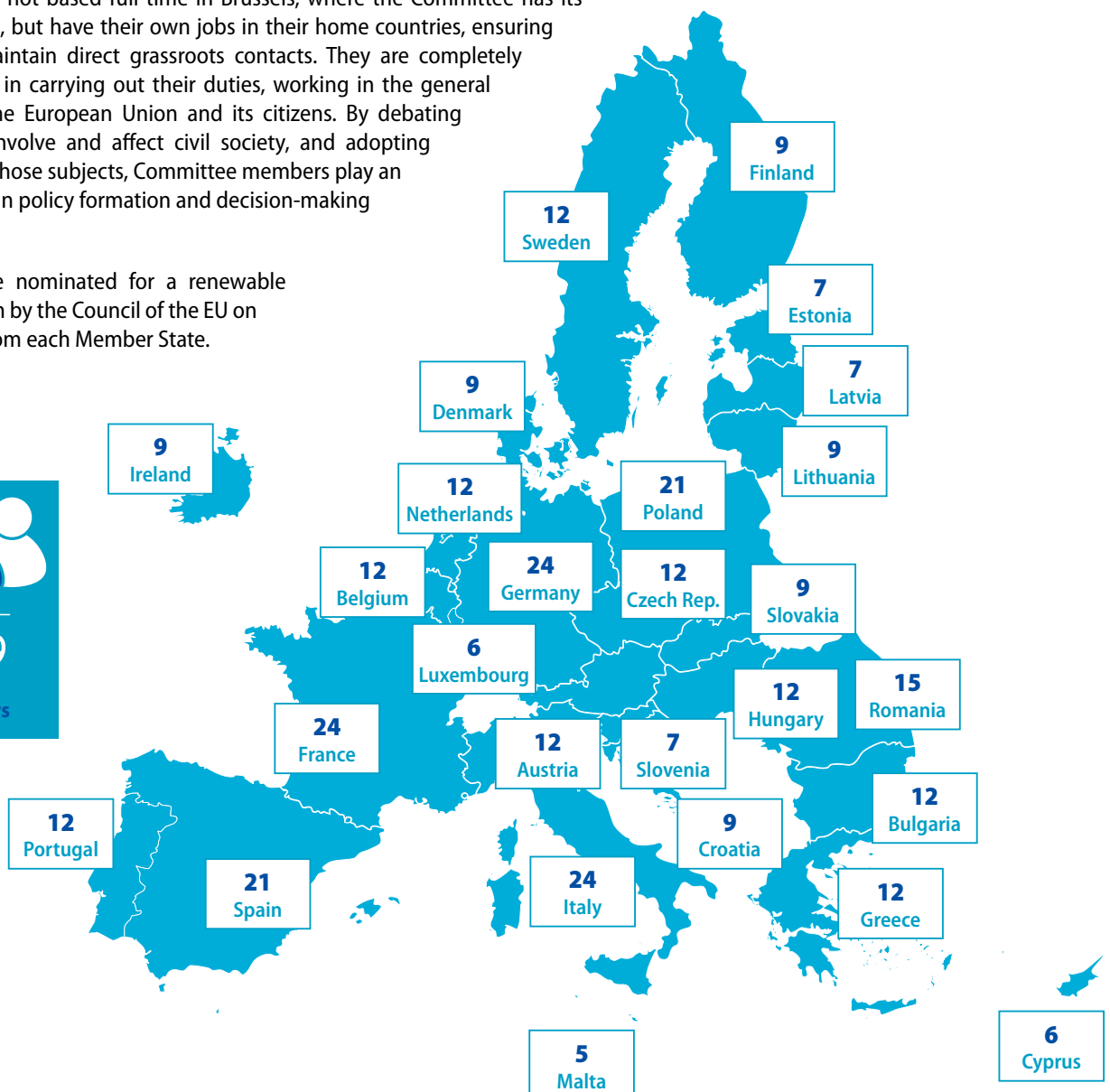
The term civil society embraces a wide range of organisations and their activities to improve the well-being of their members or communities. Employers organisations, trade unions, networks, associations, non-governmental organisations (NGOs), interest groups and movements are formed to advance their common interests through collective action. These groups often act as intermediaries between decision-makers and the public, offering an avenue for people to play an active role in bringing about change or to support good causes.

HOW IS CIVIL SOCIETY REPRESENTED?

The EESC is made up of **329 members** from the **27 Member States**. They are not politicians, but employers, trade unionists, farmers, and representatives of professional and community associations, youth organisations, women's groups, consumer associations, environmental campaigns, and many more. They come from all social and professional backgrounds and have a vast range of knowledge and experience.

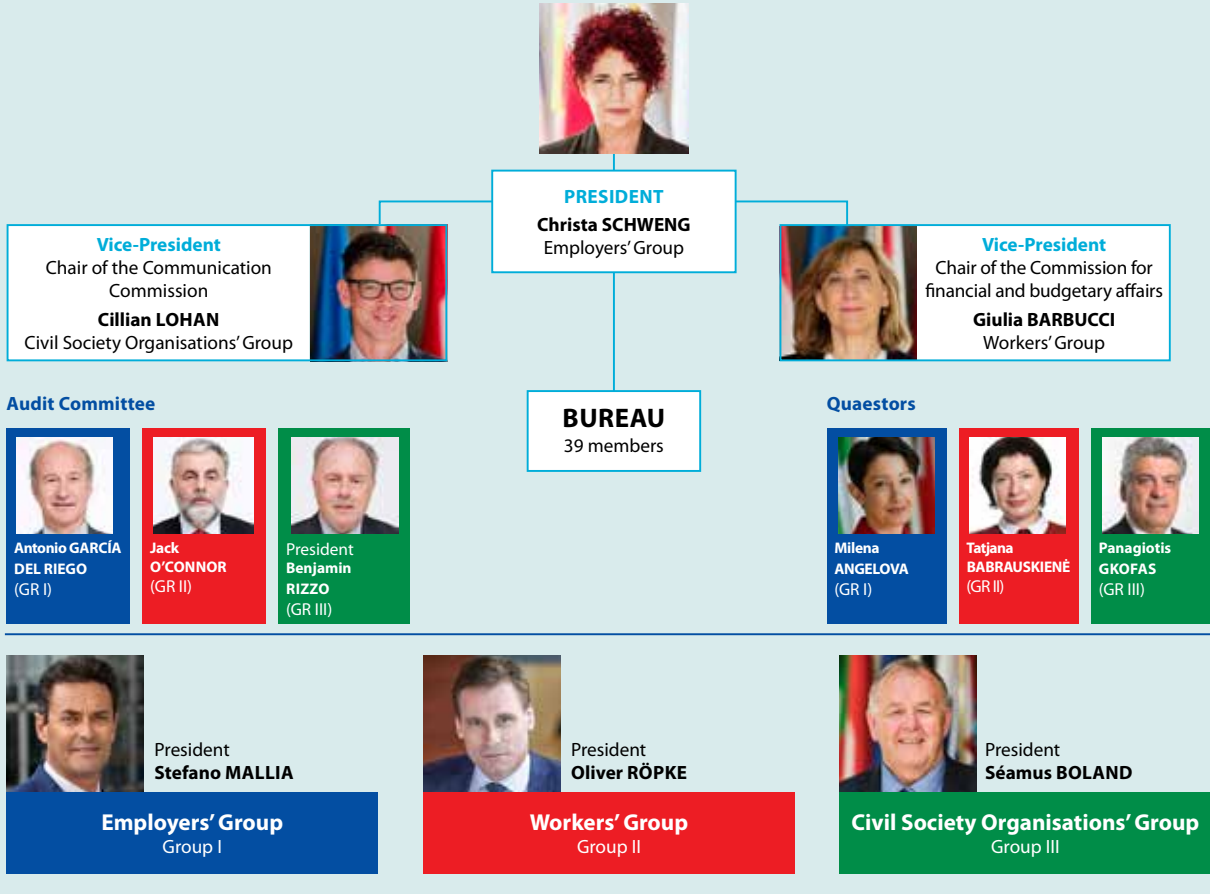
Members are not based full-time in Brussels, where the Committee has its headquarters, but have their own jobs in their home countries, ensuring that they maintain direct grassroots contacts. They are completely independent in carrying out their duties, working in the general interest of the European Union and its citizens. By debating issues that involve and affect civil society, and adopting opinions on those subjects, Committee members play an integral part in policy formation and decision-making at EU level.

Members are nominated for a renewable five-year term by the Council of the EU on a proposal from each Member State.



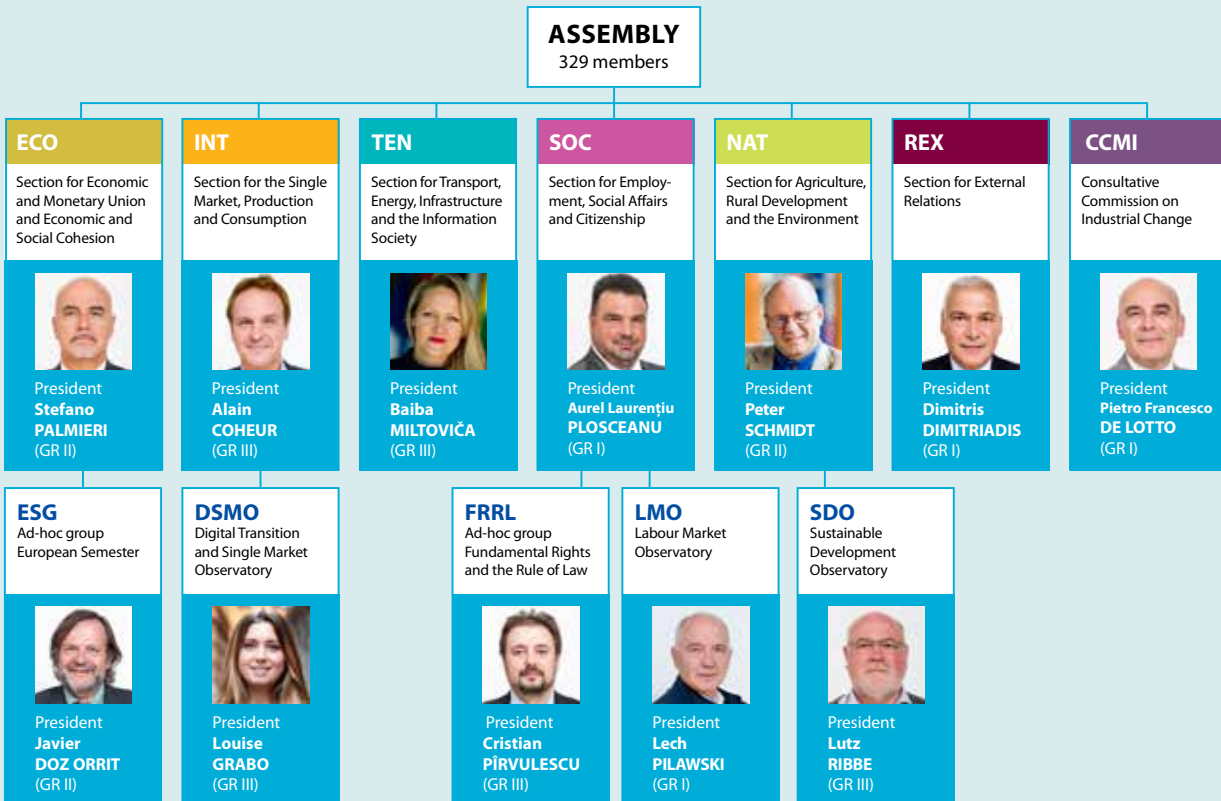
HOW IS THE EESC ORGANISED?

Presidency and political bodies 2020-2023



PRESIDENCY

GROUPS



SECTIONS & OTHER BODIES

The Presidency and the Bureau

Every two-and-a-half years, the EESC elects a **Bureau** that includes the EESC president and two vice-presidents, the presidents of the three groups and a varying number of members. The Bureau's main task is to organise and coordinate the work of the EESC's various bodies and to lay down policy guidelines. The **president** directs all the work of the Committee and represents the EESC in its relations with other institutions and bodies. The two **vice-presidents** are responsible for budget and communication, respectively.



Christa Schweng (since October 2020)

Christa Schweng took office as the EESC president in October 2020 at a challenging time, when Europe was gripped by the second wave of the COVID-19 pandemic. Her presidency motto, ***United for the future of Europe***, reflects the belief that unity is what the EU and its citizens need the most to overcome the pandemic and the economic crisis it has provoked. Ms Schweng set her goals on a swift recovery and on shaping a vision for a post-COVID-19 Europe. She has also strongly engaged with the Conference of the Future of Europe.

Ms Schweng's priorities focus on **three pillars: a Europe that prospers economically, a Europe that is socially inclusive and a Europe that is environmentally sustainable**. The Europe of the future should provide the right conditions for all of civil society to thrive and live in open, values-based democracies. She is steering the EESC's work to focus on major global trends such as the digital and green transitions. The aim is to guarantee that the EU fully reaps the benefits of this change and to ensure that no one is left behind.

President Schweng has also managed to strengthen the EESC's ethical standards and transparency through an enhanced Code of Conduct. She was engaged in campaigns such as binding EU recovery funds to respect for the rule of law and raising awareness about vaccination.



Our Union was created on the basis of the power of law not the law of power. What makes us strong is our unity. We share common European values, which are non-negotiable under any circumstances: respect for human dignity and human rights, freedom, democracy, equality and the rule of law. We must remain united for the future of Europe!

Christa Schweng, President of the EESC

EESC members work in three groups:

Employers' Group

Group I

Stefano Mallia



Workers' Group

Group II

Oliver Röpke



Civil Society Organisations' Group

Group III

Séamus Boland



The key is to build consensus between the three groups so that the EESC's opinions reflect the economic and social interests of all of them.

Employers' Group

The Employers' Group brings together entrepreneurs and representatives of business associations active in a wide array of sectors, from industry to retail and from agriculture to services. It represents more than 20 million European companies – big and small – that provide citizens with jobs, deliver goods and services for consumers and form the backbone of our European economies and societal welfare.

Our members bring the day-to-day reality of business in all EU Member States to the European level. They are genuinely committed to putting their own experience to good use to further the European venture.

The work of the Employers' Group is framed by priorities reflecting the key needs of European businesses. In order to match the dynamics in which European businesses operate, these priorities are reviewed regularly. Our current priorities are: fostering EU values, strengthening the EU's economic foundations, bringing the EU to the digital forefront and seizing opportunities provided by proactive climate action. Together, the Employers' Group is striving to create **a European business environment that provides opportunities for employers to grow and be successful.**

The Employers' Group works closely with its six partner organisations: BusinessEurope, Copacogeca, EUROCHAMBRES, EuroCommerce, SGI Europe and SMEunited.

Workers' Group

This group is comprised of representatives from more than 80 national trade unions, confederations and sectoral federations.

It is firmly committed to enlarging and strengthening the EU as an area of prosperity, freedom and democracy, mutual support and social cohesion and aims to ensure that **workers play a real part in European policy-making**. In view of the significant challenges posed by the pandemic, climate change and digitalisation on both European economies and the world of work, a strong workers' voice will be key to ensure a sustainable recovery and socially balanced and just transitions. Although the European social model is an example for much of the world, there are still too many people suffering hardship or exclusion from society because of poverty, discrimination, lack of education or other disadvantages, and the pandemic has exacerbated these precarious conditions. Priorities for the Workers' Group are and will remain full employment, better living and working conditions and the well-being of all EU citizens, as well as that of workers and their families on other continents.

Civil Society Organisations' Group

This group ensures that the EESC voices the concerns of the various economic, social, occupational and civic organisations that make up civil society in the Member States. Its overall aim is to truly strengthen participatory democracy across the EU and to make sure that EESC opinions on EU legislative proposals reflect the interests of all Europeans. Its activities therefore build on three pillars: **diversity in democracy, consensus-building and civic engagement**.

Its members are drawn from organisations representing the following fields: academia, citizens' participation and empowerment, civil society development, consumers, environment, heritage and sustainable development, farming, fisheries and coastal communities, forestry, protection of human rights (issues concerning children, elderly people, families, gender equality, marginalised and underprivileged groups, migrants and refugees, minorities, persons with disabilities, women and youth), liberal professions, craft, small and medium-sized enterprises, as well as the social economy.



The Committee is the only voice of employers, workers and NGOs within the institutional framework. Especially on sectoral policies, our opinions provide insight, knowledge and a fresh, non-political view founded on real-life experience. Our consensus-based opinions provide safe ground on which politicians can come to decisions that take into account the first-hand experience and concerns of civil society.

Christa Schweng, President of the EESC

THE EESC'S CONSTITUENT BODIES

Working bodies

The EESC has **six sections**, which specialise in different policies: agriculture and environment; the single market; social issues; economic issues; energy, transport and IT infrastructure; and the external policies of the EU. Members belong to one or more of these sections depending on their areas of expertise, and it is here that the groundwork is laid for Committee opinions. The Committee also has a Consultative Commission on Industrial Change (CCMI), which monitors industry's ability to anticipate and adapt to the impact of globalisation. The EESC has set up three specialist observatories – on the digital transition and the single market (DSMO), the labour market (LMO) and sustainable development (SDO). It also has a group focused on the European semester which considers European civil society proposals on growth and employment, a group on fundamental rights and the rule of law and a liaison group promoting civil dialogue and participatory democracy.

Working bodies



6 Sections

- ECO** Economic and Monetary Union and Economic and Social Cohesion
- INT** Single Market, Production and Consumption
- TEN** Transport, Energy, Infrastructure and the Information Society
- SOC** Employment, Social Affairs and Citizenship
- NAT** Agriculture, Rural Development and the Environment
- REX** External Relations

1 Commission

- CCMI** Consultative Commission on Industrial Change

3 Observatories

- DSMO** Digital Transition and Single Market Observatory
- LMO** Labour Market Observatory
- SDO** Sustainable Development Observatory

3 Other bodies

- ESG** European Semester Group
- LG** Liaison Group
- FRRL** Group on Fundamental Rights and the Rule of Law

Secretary-General

Gianluca Brunetti is the EESC's secretary-general. The chief role of the secretary-general is to implement decisions made by the Committee's plenary assembly, the Bureau and the president. He is also responsible for managing the administration and the budget of the Institution, and assisting members in carrying out their duties.



HOW DOES THE EESC TAKE ACTION?

Under the EU treaties, the European Parliament, Council and the Commission are required to consult the EESC on a wide range of policy issues when passing new legislation. As well as being required to refer to the EESC on certain matters, these three institutions may consult the Committee on other matters whenever they consider it appropriate. The EESC draws up and adopts, at any of its **nine annual plenary sessions** held in Brussels, **opinions** based on a consensus reached between its members. Once adopted, its opinions are forwarded to the European Parliament, the Council and the Commission and published in the *Official Journal of the European Union*.

The EESC may also decide to draft **own-initiative opinions** on any question pertaining to the EU, its policies, and potential policy development. It also issues **exploratory opinions** in response to requests from the presidencies of the Council, the Commission and the European Parliament in spheres where it is regarded as having the appropriate skills and expertise. Such requests are not necessarily related to a piece of draft legislation. The EESC may express itself through other types of text, such as **information reports, resolutions, and position papers.**



An opinion is born



OR



REFERRAL

by the European Parliament, Council or Commission

OR

OWN INITIATIVE

by the EESC



AUTHORISED

by the Bureau



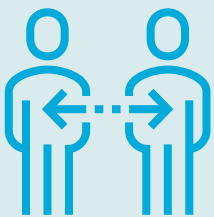
SECTIONS

confirm rapporteur and study group



DRAFTING

by rapporteur with study group input



DISCUSSION, VOTE AND ADOPTION
by sections/CCMI



DISCUSSION, VOTE AND ADOPTION
by the assembly in plenary session



SENT
to the EU institutions
AND

PUBLISHED
in the EU's *Official Journal* (24 languages)



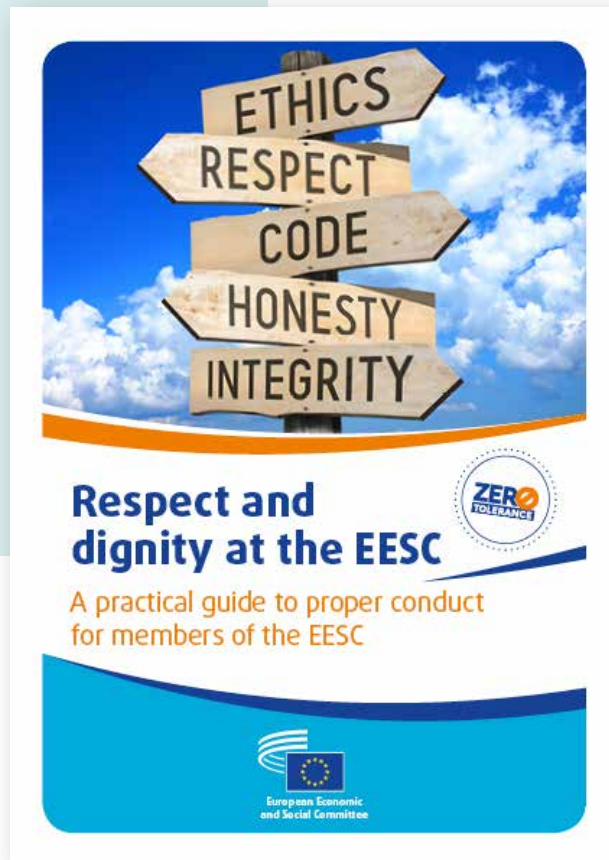
Rapporteur **PRESENTS** key findings and **PROMOTES** the opinion at EU, Member State and local levels

A reinforced ethical framework

Since 2019, the EESC disposes of a **Code of conduct**, clarifying the organization's mission, values and principles, linking them with standards of professional conduct.

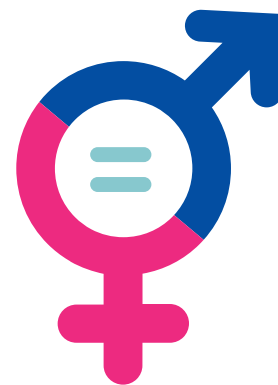
In 2021, this Code of Conduct of the Members of the EESC was revised and adopted with the twofold aim of strengthening its provisions and establishing new rules in areas which were previously not included. It applies to EESC members, alternates, experts and delegates.

This revised Code of Conduct establishes an Ethical Committee, in order to ensure strict adherence to ethical standards, non-discrimination, equal opportunities and dignity in the workplace.



Fostering Equality

The EESC continuously aims to fostering a culture of equality. Therefore, the Ad Hoc Group on Equality was established. The group's mission is to promote a cross-cutting culture of equality and non-discrimination across the EESC. The first step in this process was to identify the areas in which members might potentially receive unequal treatment due to their origin, gender, sexual orientation or beliefs. The group's ultimate goal is to increase women's participation in the EESC and to reach a gender-balanced workforce in the near future.



The EESC is strongly committed to high ethical standards and to modern, transparent working methods. The new Code of Conduct for members comes as a first solid milestone in our efforts to reform and strengthen the way we work. I want to ensure that every staff and every member is proud to work for our Committee.

Christa Schweng, President of the EESC





EESC AT A GLANCE 2021

EESC OPINIONS

We try to keep up with civil society's concerns – the things that inspire, drive and sometimes frustrate European citizens. In 2021, there was no shortage of these: some already on the radar, others only just starting to gain momentum. As one of the smaller EU institutions in the heart of Brussels, but with its members active across the continent, the EESC is able to track and respond to the issues that concern people the most.

Very opinionated ... in a good way

200 opinions, position papers and reports adopted by the EESC in 2021...

The EESC engages in areas that affect citizens most.



Where can you find the EESC's opinions?

- On the Committee's website at eesc.europa.eu
- in the Official Journal of the EU at eur-lex.europa.eu

Total opinions and reports, five-year trend

2021	▶	200
2020	▶	131*
2019	▶	127
2018	▶	215
2017	▶	155
2016	▶	151

*The number of opinions is dependent on the legislative cycle. 2020 was a year of EESC renewal in a very unusual context.

Top five hot topics in 2021

Reviewing the most popular opinions tells us what motivates you. This knowledge helps us develop and calibrate the way we represent organised civil society.

1. Regulation on artificial intelligence

The regulation on artificial intelligence, or AI Act, is the first ever legal framework which sets out horizontal rules for any AI system affecting the single market, using a risk-based approach. The EESC welcomed the fact that the Commission proposal not only addresses the risks associated with AI, but also puts health, safety and fundamental rights at its centre and is global in scope.

However, the EESC thinks that some elements are missing in the proposal. Namely, there should be a complaints and redress mechanism for citizens who have suffered harm from any AI system. The EESC also supports a ban on the use of AI for automated biometric recognition in publicly and privately accessible spaces.



Regulation on artificial intelligence
rapporteur: Catelijne Muller



The AI Act lacks notions such as the human prerogative of decision-making, the need for human agency and autonomy, the strength of human-machine collaboration and the full involvement of stakeholders.

Cateljine Muller, rapporteur



Telework offers win-win solutions, as it makes it possible for employers to organise work in a way that best meets the objectives of their business and for employees to better combine work and private life. To grasp the opportunities of teleworking in a gender-equal way, work and family roles need to be lived beyond gender stereotypes.

Milena Angelova, rapporteur

2. Teleworking and gender equality

In this opinion, the EESC draws attention to the risk that teleworking may lead to taking up the double burden of paid and unpaid work. It considers that social partners can play a significant role in advancing teleworking in a way that contributes to gender equality, promoting well-being at work and productivity, e.g., through collective bargaining. The Committee reiterates its call for investing in digital infrastructure and connections for all, including local shared spaces that facilitate teleworking outside the home, as well as enhancing digital skills, with special attention to women, in order to enable them to fully participate in labour markets and address any form of digital divide.

Teleworking and gender equality

exploratory opinion,
rapporteur: Milena Angelova,
co-rapporteur: Erika Koller



Action on critical raw materials is essential if we want to be able to fulfil the objectives of the EU Green Deal while avoiding further dependencies and at the same time ensuring new permanent and decent jobs and a fair transition in communities affected by industrial change.

Dumitru Fornea, rapporteur

3. Critical Raw Materials Resilience: Charting a Path towards greater Security and Sustainability

In this opinion, the EESC expressed its conviction that the measures proposed by the EC can contribute towards the security of supply of critical raw materials, thus maintaining and developing an industrial and technological base in the EU. The EESC fully supports the green transition of the energy sector and considers the extraction of raw materials necessary for the deployment of green technologies a fundamental step. The EESC considers the existence of adequate financing instruments that facilitate the green transition for the ore extraction and processing sectors to be of paramount importance.

Critical Raw Materials Resilience: Charting a Path towards greater Security and Sustainability

rapporteur: Dumitru Fornea,
co-rapporteur: Michal Pintér



4. Next Generation Trade and Sustainable Development – Reviewing the 15-point action plan

The EESC opinion on the EU's approach to Trade and Sustainable Development (TSD) and reviewing its 15-point action plan sets out both pragmatic and innovative proposals for an ambitious review, featuring a revamped sanctionable enforcement approach with stronger civil society monitoring, using innovative instruments and enhancing the leverage for TSD. The opinion considers that TSD chapters in their current form are not fully living up to their legally binding commitments.



Next Generation Trade and Sustainable Development

own-initiative opinion,
rapporteur: Tanja Buzek



Successful TSD implementation and enforcement require structured and collaborative interaction between EU institutions, international bodies and, most importantly, with and among the Domestic Advisory Groups (DAGs).

Tanja Buzek, rapporteur

5. A New Pact on Migration and Asylum

In this opinion, the EESC welcomes the New Pact on Migration and Asylum but criticises its lack of ambition and boldness. Too focused on borders and returns, the pact proposes too few feasible solutions for a solidarity-based approach to migration management. The EESC's main criticism is that the pact focuses primarily on returns and the management of borders at the expense of dealing with other burning issues, such as regular immigration channels, safe pathways for asylum and the integration of migrants. In addition, according to the EESC, some of the proposed solutions may not be feasible in practice.



A New Pact on Migration and Asylum

rapporteur: José Antonio
Moreno Díaz,
co-rapporteur: Cristian Pîrvulescu



We had great hopes for this pact but I have to say we are a bit disappointed. The Commission's analysis is good, we agree with the conclusions, but we are frustrated with the devil in the detail, with the proposals.

José Antonio Moreno Díaz

EESC PLENARY SESSIONS

The EESC promotes the development of a participatory EU, one that is more in touch with the public's concerns and expectations. It acts as an institutional forum which represents, informs and expresses the views of civil society organisations and is in dialogue with those organisations. All 329 EESC members meet in plenary session nine times a year in order to accomplish their most important duty: **voting on opinions**. This is a solemn moment in which compromise, **consensus-building** and internal democracy find their highest expression.

It is also an occasion when special guests from all over Europe and beyond are invited to debate. In the pages that follow, we give you a flavour of plenary activities in 2021 and some of the special guests that we welcomed, what they talked about and what this means for the EESC and citizens around Europe.

A year in the life of the EESC plenaries – 2021

27-28

JANUARY



Presentation of the priorities of the Portuguese Presidency by **António Costa**, Prime Minister of Portugal

Presentation of the 2021 Commission Work Programme and the Strategic Foresight Report by **Maroš Šefčovič**, Vice-President of the European Commission – Interinstitutional Relations and Foresight

Debate on *A New Pact on Migration and Asylum* with **Ylva Johansson**, Commissioner for Home Affairs

Debate on *The new EU-UK Trade and Cooperation Agreement* with **Michel Barnier**, Head of the European Commission's Task Force for Relations with the United Kingdom

Presentation of the UN's official mission to the EU institutions by **Olivier De Schutter**, UN Special Rapporteur on extreme poverty and human rights



24-25

FEBRUARY

Debate on the Conference on the Future of Europe with **Dubravka Šuica**, Vice-President of the European Commission for Democracy and Demography

Resolution on the *Involvement of Organised Civil Society in the National Recovery and Resilience Plans – What works and what does not?* – Debate with **Johannes Hahn**, Commissioner for Budget and Administration

EESC Civil Solidarity Prize: Civil society against COVID-19



24-25

MARCH

Debate on the *European Disability Rights Strategy* with **Helena Dalli**, European Commissioner for Equality

Debate with **Olivér Várhelyi**, European Commissioner for Neighbourhood and Enlargement, on *Enhancing the accession process – A credible EU perspective for the Western Balkans*

Debate with **Valdis Dombrovskis**, Executive Vice-President of the European Commission for An Economy that Works for People



27-28

APRIL

Debate on the *Sustainable and Smart Mobility Strategy* with **Adina Vălean**, European Commissioner for Transport

Debate on the *European Pillar of Social Rights Action Plan*, the Porto Social Summit and the upcoming *EU Action Plan for the Social Economy* with **Nicolas Schmit**, European Commissioner for Jobs and Social Rights



9-10

JUNE

Debate on the European *Green Deal* with **Frans Timmermans**, Executive Vice President of the European Commission for the European Green Deal

Debate on the Rule of Law, the New Strategy for the Implementation of the Charter of Fundamental Rights and the *European Democracy Action Plan* with **Didier Reynders**, European Commissioner for Justice



7-8

JULY

Presentation of the Priorities of the Slovenian Presidency by **Anže Logar**, Minister of Foreign Affairs of Slovenia

Debate on *A post-COVID economy that works for all – Towards a well-being economy?* with **Tim Jackson**, economist; Fabrice Murtin, economist; **Sandrine Dixon-Declève**, co-President of the Club of Rome; and **James Watson**, ECON Director at Business Europe

Debate on *Artificial Intelligence and Real Values: Our Digital Future* with **Jayant Narayan**, Lead, Artificial Intelligence and Machine Learning, World Economic Forum, co-lead Global AI Action Alliance



22-23
SEPTEMBER

Debate on *Securing Media Freedom and Diversity in Europe* with **Ricardo Gutiérrez**, Secretary-General of the European Federation of Journalists, and **Julie Majerczak**, Head of the Brussels Office of Reporters without Borders

Debate on Cohesion Policy with **Elisa Ferreira**, Commissioner for Cohesion and Reforms



Today's opinion is coming at a decisive juncture in time. Freedom of the media is not an optional add-on, it's the backbone of our democracy.

Julie Majerczak, Head of the Brussels Office of Reporters without Borders

20-21
OCTOBER

Debate on *The Future of EU Trade Policy in a Changing Global Reality*, with **Jean-Marie Paugam**, Deputy Director-General of the World Trade Organization

Debate on *The Long-Term Strategy for Rural Areas*, with **Janusz Wojciechowski**, Commissioner for Agriculture

Debate on the *New Industrial Strategy* with **Padmashree Gehl Sampath**, Berkman Klein Fellow, Harvard University



8-9
DECEMBER

Debate on the EU priorities for recovery and the implementation of the 2022 European Commission work programme, with **Ursula von der Leyen**, President of the European Commission, and **Maroš Šefčovič**, Vice-President of the European Commission for Interinstitutional Relations and Foresight

Debate on the topics of sustainable finance and anti-money laundering, with **Mairead McGuinness**, Commissioner for Financial Services, Financial Stability and Capital Markets Union

Debate on the *Fit for 55 package: building a resilient and sustainable framework for the EU's future*, with **Kadri Simson**, Commissioner for Energy



WORKING HAND IN HAND TOGETHER WE CAN MAKE A DIFFERENCE!

Cooperation with other institutions

The Committee maintains and develops effective cooperation with the other EU institutions and bodies.



European Parliament

In 2021, digital tools made it easier for the European Parliament and the EESC to take part in each other's events, which increased the number of meetings. EESC members held numerous meetings with members of the European Parliament (MEPs) and took the floor in 25 events in Parliament. MEPs actively participated in 101 EESC meetings. 48 bilateral meetings between MEPs and EESC members were also held.

2021 was marked by the continuation of the coronavirus pandemic. After the spring lockdowns, both the Parliament and the Committee resumed most of their activities and were able to organise more in-person meetings.

On 19 April, the President met with MEP Eva Maydell to discuss the future of Europe, especially how to generate greater prospects for the younger generation and build a stronger, more empowering European democracy.



European Commission

High-level meetings were held throughout 2021, with participants including the Commission president, sixteen commissioners and the Head of the Task Force for Relations with the UK attending eight EESC plenary sessions.

The EESC adopted its contribution to the 2022 Commission Work Programme on 9 June 2021. The Commission adopted the programme on 19 October 2021, setting out the next steps in its agenda towards a post-COVID-19 Europe.

The President of the European Commission participated in the EESC's December plenary session, where she stressed the importance of social partners in EU recovery.

Work began on the revision of the Protocol on Cooperation between the EESC and the Commission. The aim of the revision is to introduce targeted improvements and necessary updates 10 years on from when it was first adopted.





European Council and the Council of the European Union

Portugal held the EC presidency in the first half of 2021, followed by Slovenia in the second half, both demonstrating great willingness to cooperate, despite the pandemic. António Costa, Prime Minister of Portugal, and Anže Logar, Minister of Foreign Affairs of Slovenia, presented the priorities of their countries' Council presidencies at EESC plenary sessions.

The Portuguese and Slovenian EC presidencies formally requested a total of 12 exploratory opinions. Ministers and representatives of the EC presidencies attended a variety of EESC-organised events on subjects ranging from adult learning to artificial intelligence, and the Committee's representatives were invited to numerous presidency events. References to the Committee's opinions and initiatives can be found in Council conclusions.



European Committee of the Regions

European Committee of the Regions

Cooperation between the European Economic and Social Committee and the European Committee of the Regions (CoR) is enshrined in the Administrative Cooperation Agreement, which was first concluded in 1999 and revised in 2015, establishing a firm legal framework for longterm, efficient and effective cooperation. In October 2021, the two Committees signed a new cooperation agreement, which will be valid until 31 December 2026.



Several events saw the active involvement of EESC members in the CoR's activities, including EuroPCoM and the European Week of Regions and Cities. Similarly, CoR members were invited to EESC events.

Economic and Social Councils of the EU

In 2021, the EESC continued its close cooperation with national economic and social councils (ESCs) and similar institutions on a bilateral basis and within the network of national ESCs of the EU. The EESC president held meetings with the national ESC presidents of Bulgaria, Romania and France and took part in the plenary session of the Spanish ESC. The president also took part in major conferences organised by national ESCs and/or national civil society organisations (Greece and Poland). The cooperation also included the ongoing work in the framework of the European Semester Group and co-organising – with the French Economic, Social and Environmental Council – the annual meeting of the presidents and secretaries-general of the national ESCs and the EESC on 22-23 November 2021 in Paris.



Structured dialogue with European citizens

The EESC regularly organises events to promote participatory democracy and citizen engagement. The key events in 2021 are listed below.



ECI Day 2021: Empower citizens to impact the future of Europe, 3-4 June 2021

In 2021 the European Citizens' Initiative Day (ECI Day) took place for the first time online over 2 days. While 2021 saw the first two pieces of legislation inspired by European Citizens' Initiatives take effect, the EESC event, entitled *Empower citizens to impact the future of Europe*, focused on how to ensure that the ECI achieves the greatest impact.

The ECI Day 2021 was a remarkable event, both in terms of participation and content. Discussions highlighted the need to improve responsiveness by the EU institutions and generate a true dialogue around European Citizens' Initiatives. The debate however also pointed out that even initiatives that do not reach the final formal steps of the process can lead to multiple impacts, by bringing issues into the public space and generating awareness.



Civil society Days: A Sustainable Recovery for the Future of Europe's Citizens, 1-5 March 2021

The fully virtual Civil Society Days 2021 took place for the first time over a period of 5 days with more than 500 participants from Europe and beyond. In 2 panel discussions (opening and closing sessions) and eight thematic workshops they discussed the challenges of ensuring a sustainable recovery and the key role of civil society in this endeavour. Each workshop produced 3 key recommendations to the address of EU-institutions and other key stakeholders, while the 2 co-chairs of the Liaison Group (including the EESC president) published a joint statement after the event to support and further promote these recommendations. Institutional visibility was ensured by Commission Vice-President Dubravka Šuica, a Portuguese State Secretary on behalf of the EU Council presidency, the First Vice-President of the CoR, a member of Executive Vice-President Frans Timmermans' Cabinet, and six MEPs.



Meeting of the presidents and secretaries-general of the Economic and Social Councils (ESCs) of the EU and the EESC – Paris, 22-23 November 2021

Presidents and secretaries-general of the European Economic and Social Committee and national Economic and Social Councils (ESCs) across the EU met on 22-23 November to discuss the topic of *Participatory democracy and its role in making the EU resilient and future-proof*.

After in-depth and rich discussions, participants endorsed conclusions to be shared with the European institutions and key European actors – representing a powerful message and a timely contribution to the Conference on the Future of Europe.

The event also saw the approval of a mobility project between ESCs, which would improve sharing of knowledge, experience and best practices and create a genuine network of organised civil societies in the EU.

Focus on the Conference on the Future of Europe (CoFoE)

The decision of the Communication Commission to focus outreach activities on the CoFoE and the kick-off event organised on 10 June 2021 under the title *Bringing Europe back to citizens* paved the way for the organisation of over 20 local events in physical or hybrid form, plus some 20 thematic events organised by sections and 10 at group level – with many more still in the pipeline. The aim was “to reach out to real-life actors, with their real-life hopes, worries and opinions, in order to strengthen the connection between the EU and its citizens in the Member States”, as indicated by the CoFoE ad-hoc group in the document *Planned activities for the Conference on the Future of Europe*. Guideline documents were drafted and two information and training sessions were held to help EESC members organise the local events.

The EESC contributed to the EU corporate communication efforts by participating in the interinstitutional communication coordination groups at operational and senior management level, by using the joint visual message and by focusing on the themes listed in the multilingual online platform, while at the same time communicating the Committee’s specific contributions and fine-tuning the content to better reach its target audiences.



Two major events from the point of view of media impact, namely **two seminars for journalists from all over Europe** which were organised respectively in February and December 2021 to give more visibility to the Committee, to allow journalists to get to know the work of the members and to establish closer links with them, were also devoted to the CoFoE



Competitiveness must remain at the heart of the Future of Europe. Only through a robust economic base, will we be able to deliver on the EU citizens’ requests, put forward in the Conference on the Future of Europe-- a better environment, better working conditions, increased income, better education systems, family rights, gender equality. A “competitiveness check”, an “innovation principle” and strengthening the role of SME, as the backbone of our economy, must be a pre-requisite for implementing people’s wellbeing.

Stefano Mallia, President of the EESC Employers’ Group







10 PRIORITIES AND MAJOR THEMES IN 2021

The EESC has been in action for over six decades, driven by one powerful overarching remit: to help strengthen the European Union's democratic legitimacy and effectiveness by enabling civil society organisations from the Member States to express their views at European level.

1

SAFE AND SUSTAINABLE NEIGHBOURHOOD FOR A SAFE AND SUSTAINABLE EUROPE

The EESC's action with civil society from neighbouring countries reaffirmed that our relationship should be one of equal partnership, in which all sides would benefit.

The **EESC's Western Balkans Civil Society Forum**, which took place in Skopje on 30 September and 1 October, put the spotlight on the need for a clear EU accession perspective for the region as a geostrategic investment in peace, stability, security and economic growth across the entire continent.



The place of the Western Balkans is in the EU. Any discussion about EU enlargement is implicitly a discussion on the future of Europe. Civil society should be fully involved in the process.

Christa Schweng, President of the EESC



If Europe wants the Western Balkans in, we must leave Brussels and go there. Meet the region and its people; EU accession is achievable by human contact, not paperwork.

Dimitris Dimitriadis, President of the EESC's Section for External Relations

The security perspective also dominated the **EESC Eastern Partnership file**. The developments in Belarus following the fraudulent presidential elections in August 2020 had attracted the attention of EESC members. Consequently, a subgroup on Belarus was created and its members participated in an exploratory mission to Lithuania to meet with Belarusian civil society players in exile. The outcome of the meetings would serve as a basis for a conference dedicated to Belarus to take place in 2022.



In 2021, the EESC advocated green transitions and sustainable development throughout its neighbourhood, focusing particularly on the social impact on workers and communities and the role that civil society can play in supporting and facilitating this transition. Cooperation in managing natural disasters and the impact of the EU Green Deal were also on the agenda of the **EU-Turkey Joint Consultative Committee (JCC)**, while the **EU-European Economic Area (EEA) JCC** focused on the action needed to make the Arctic a peaceful, sustainable and prosperous region. 2021 also saw the establishment of the EU Domestic Advisory Group (DAG) under the **EU-UK Trade and Cooperation Agreement (TCA)**. The DAG will be the watchdog ensuring that the signatories to the agreement keep their promises to maintain high social and environmental standards on both sides of the Channel.

The high-level **civil society conference on the Geopolitics of the Green Deal** organised by the EESC in December 2021 confirmed once more that leaving our partners behind would undermine the EU's ability to implement ambitious climate commitments and make progress with the energy transition.



While the EU must prove leadership in climate action, we will only succeed if we engage the rest of the world to join our path towards green transition.

Christa Schweng, President of the EESC

2

PROMOTING A FAIR AND INCLUSIVE ENERGY TRANSITION (ENERGY POVERTY)

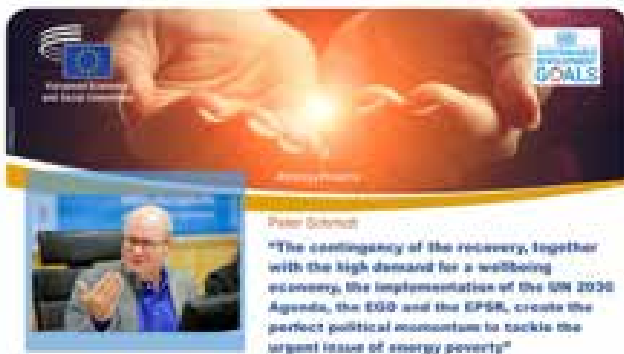


This is a unique moment to take coordinated action simultaneously on climate neutrality, recovery from the COVID-19 crisis and social cohesion. Energy poverty reduction cannot be achieved without the active involvement of organised civil society.

Christa Schweng, President of the EESC

The need for a fair transition is an integral part of the Green Deal. The Fit for 55 legislative package aims to deliver on the EU's increased emission reductions target to the benefit of all European citizens. In the face of the climate emergency, a just and fair transition to carbon neutrality could provide a unique opportunity to reduce systemic inequality. However, the ambitious climate targets that the EU has set itself will require the transition to speed up in a way that may increase inequalities in Europe with regard to access to essential energy services. "Energy poverty", where people spend a large part of their disposable income on basic supply of energy and fuel, has become a distressing problem in the EU.

In 2021, the EESC called for a broad political coalition across all three EU institutions and European organised civil society to deploy a comprehensive and consistent overarching European political strategy to tackle energy poverty. A **high-level public conference on Energy poverty at the crossroads of the European Pillar of Social Rights and the European Green Deal** dedicated to this topic was held by the EESC on 20 April 2021.



Energy efficiency is a key area of action in combating energy poverty, without which full decarbonisation of the EU economy and society cannot be achieved. Therefore, the EESC supports **the Renovation Wave for Europe**, as it is a "win-win-win" strategy for the EU: a threefold win for the climate, for recovery – thanks to the local jobs created – and finally for the fight against energy poverty. In 2021, an opinion dedicated to the subject was drawn up and a debate was held on the Renovation Wave on 11 February 2021.



3

FUNDAMENTAL RIGHTS AND THE RULE OF LAW

In 2021, as in the previous year, the EESC – notably its Group on Fundamental Rights and the Rule of Law (FRRL Group) and its Section on Employment, Social Affairs and Citizenship – continued their work on the long-term impact of COVID-19. Two opinions were drawn up, taking account of the results of hearings.

Beyond the pandemic, the EESC again took stances in defence of the rule of law in the face of new attacks, such as attempts to question the primacy of EU law. It also continued to express its views on important current policy developments through further opinions and events.

The EESC assiduously played its role as the voice of civil society defending EU values, based on the strong belief that civil society plays a central part in the matter. The Fundamental Rights and Rule of Law Group organised an input session on values in the Conference on the Future of Europe – giving the floor to citizens’ movements, and led six country visits to Germany, Ireland, the Czech Republic, Spain, Cyprus and Lithuania. It also opened a new web section with a sharing function, thus allowing civil society representatives to upload their contributions.

The Fundamental Rights and Rule of Law Group also held its second conference, on Fundamental rights and the rule of law – Civil society perspectives on the European Rule of Law Mechanism, which brought together EU and civil society representatives to discuss the themes of the second European Commission report on the rule of law.

EESC initiatives

On 24 June 2021, the **EESC launched a new web section entitled Fundamental Rights and the Rule of Law: trends in EU Member States.** This section allows readers to consult the information that the EESC Fundamental Rights and Rule of Law (FRRL) Group had received from stakeholders as part of its country visits in a more targeted way. It also has a sharing function, whereby civil society representatives upload their contributions.

The **conference on Civil society perspectives on the European Rule of Law Mechanism**, which took place on 4 November 2021, covered developments in the EU in the area of fundamental rights and the rule of law in 2020-2021 and the debates focused on the European Rule of Law Mechanism themes: justice, media, corruption and checks and balances.

Christa Schweng, President of the EESC, in reaction to the entry into force of the Polish Constitutional Tribunal ruling which found that parts of EU law were “incompatible” with the Polish Constitution in October 2021.



EU legal and political responses cannot stand alone. We must also better engage civil society actors, as they are the bridge between the expectations of the general population and institutions.

Giulia Barbucci, EESC Vice-President, at the opening of the 4 November conference on Civil society perspectives on the European Rule of Law Mechanism



The attack on the rule of law and fundamental rights was initially an attack on human rights and then became an attack on NGOs. Finally, it became an attack on institutions of the rule of law and on democracy itself.

Cristian Pîrvulescu, President of the Group on Fundamental Rights and Rule of Law



*The post-COVID recovery offers the perfect opportunity to prepare strategies that ensure that **no areas or their citizens are “left behind”** in the just transition to a climate-neutral, sustainable and prosperous European Union, in line with the objectives of the European Green and Social Deal, the NextGenerationEU recovery package, the Territorial Agenda 2030 and the 17 Sustainable Development Goals. Civil society’s contribution is crucial. Local civil society actors, workers and businesses as well as citizens need to be engaged to unlock the immense potential of rural/urban communities, and to co-design and foster their sustainable development.*

Peter Schmidt, President of the EESC’s Section for Agriculture, Rural Development and the Environment

4

TOWARDS A HOLISTIC STRATEGY ON SUSTAINABLE RURAL/URBAN DEVELOPMENT

In 2021, the EESC helped to put rural areas back on the EU agenda and called on policymakers to implement a **comprehensive and holistic strategy for balanced, cohesive, equitable and sustainable rural and urban development**, in particular with an own-initiative opinion on the subject adopted in October.

The role of the communities in rural/urban sustainable development

In September 2021, the opinion was presented at the event Communities for Future: Transformation through localisation of policy and decision-making, co-organised by ECOLISE (European network for community-led initiatives on climate change and sustainability), the EESC and RURENER (European Network of rural communities engaged in the energy transition) in the context of the European Day of Sustainable Communities 2021. The event explored the potential of communities to revive local economies as we emerge from the pandemic, but in a way that also takes account of the deepening climate and ecological emergency and the urgent need for deeper societal transformation.

The way forward

The opinion prompted strong interest from the other EU institutions and has already had a high policy impact. It will further contribute to the implementation of the Commission’s long-term vision for the EU’s rural areas issued in June 2021, while being closely related to the Conference on the Future of Europe. Cooperation between the EESC and the European Commission on this issue is clearly underway, and the EESC will play a crucial role in the launch and implementation of the Rural Pact in 2022.



eesc.europa.eu
Youth Climate and Sustainability Round Table #1
Following the recommendations of the EESC own-initiative opinion on



TOWARDS A HOLISTIC STRATEGY ON SUSTAINABLE AND EQUITABLE RURAL & URBAN DEVELOPMENT

18 June 2021 | 9:30-13:00 CEST
Online public hearing





The pandemic has deepened the gaps between the EU territories. Now that the EU has approved a courageous recovery package, with the new Multiannual Financial Framework, NextGenerationEU and – within this plan – the national recovery and resilience plans, these gaps have to be taken into account when allocating the funds. The Territorial Agenda must continue to focus on certain fundamental points: a Union of balance, where regions function properly, connecting urban and rural areas and providing a dignified life to all its citizens.

Stefano Palmieri, President of the EESC's Section for Economic and Monetary Union and Economic and Social Cohesion

Josep PUXEU ROCAMORA
Rapporteur of the opinion "Towards a holistic strategy on sustainable rural/urban development"

European Economic and Social Committee

”
“The quality of life in the rural world is measured by the increase in the number of young people and especially by initiatives that provide quality, well-paid jobs. The new business and employment initiatives offered by remote working can make the rural world more dynamic.”

@EESC_NAT #EESCplenary #RuralAreas



Talking and dialogues are essential, but the real measure of success for youth engagement is in acknowledging if young generations have been heard and consequential actions have been taken. Europe and the world need ambition, leadership and action. Our systems are based on borrowing from the future, it's time now to start investing in it.

Cillian Lohan, Vice-President for Communication

5

YOUTH ENGAGEMENT IN CLIMATE AND SUSTAINABILITY

For some years now, the EESC has been working on how to better integrate the voice of the younger generation into its work and into the EU decision-making process in a structured and meaningful way.

In particular, in September 2020, the EESC adopted the opinion Towards structured youth engagement on climate and sustainability in the EU decision-making process, which was drafted in close collaboration with two youth organisations, the European Youth Forum and Generation Climate Europe.

Two concrete initiatives have been launched: the Youth Climate and Sustainability Round Tables and the inclusion of a youth delegate in the EESC delegation to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) Conference of the Parties (COP).

Youth Climate and Sustainability Round Tables

The Youth Climate and Sustainability Round Tables are a space for regular, structured and meaningful dialogue between young people and EU decisionmakers, launched after the adoption of the EESC's opinion.

Executive Vice-President Frans Timmermans participated in the kick-off event in July 2021 and he committed to attending two Youth Round Tables per year. The second Youth Climate and Sustainability Round Table took place in November 2021 and Virginijus Sinkevičius, Commissioner for the Environment, Oceans and Fisheries, participated in the event and engaged with the young representatives on protecting ecosystems and restoring biodiversity.



EESC youth delegate in the EESC delegation to UNFCCC COP meetings

For the first time, the EESC included a youth delegate (Sophia Katharina Wiegand) in its official delegation to UNFCCC COP meetings during the COP26 in 2021.

Following the EESC's decision to participate in the COP26 remotely, the Committee decided to invite the youth delegate to Brussels. This allowed her to meet the other members of the delegation in person and to acquire a better understanding of the work and structure of the EESC.



The European Year of Youth 2022 is a great opportunity to intensify and amplify the work we are doing with and for youth. However, achieving structured and meaningful youth engagement is a long-term project, key to delivering the European Green Deal and implementing a just transition.

Peter Schmidt, President of the EESC's Section for Agriculture, Rural Development and the Environment





With the Covid-19 pandemic our continent has been facing unprecedented challenges which clearly demonstrate the importance of the decisions we are asked to take about the future of the European Union.

*We have the responsibility to show to European citizens, workers and businesses that a fairer and more inclusive Europe is possible. It means that the time has come to show that we can combine economic performance, with social justice and decisive environmental measures. The citizens of Europe and especially its workforce expect this time a transition that leaves no one behind and we have to make sure to deliver on it. It is our task to make sure that the transition and the upcoming challenges for Europe's workers go hand in hand with **strong labour and trade union rights**, by **improving working conditions** and **collective bargaining!***

*This is the momentum to **strengthen social rights**, and ensure that social policies will bring a fair, just and better future for the EU citizens. The **guarantee of decent living and working conditions for all, redistribution and upward convergence, quality job creation and enhanced investments in social protection** should be at the forefront of discussions to pave the way for a sustainable future, ensuring a socially fair green and digital transition that leaves nobody behind.*

Olivier Röpke, President of the EESC Workers' Group

6

MORE THAN RECOVERY – BUILDING A RESILIENT EU ECONOMY AND FOSTERING SUSTAINABLE GROWTH

2021 was marked by the start of the implementation of the EU's ambitious recovery instrument, the NextGenerationEU, and its centrepiece, the Recovery and Resilience Facility (RRF). The EESC stressed from the beginning that simply getting back to the pre-crisis status quo is not enough. The EU needs to foster the necessary reforms to help Europe achieve a true digital and green transition and to make the European economy more sustainable, inclusive and resilient after this crisis.

Through the opinions and events of its dedicated European Semester Group, the EESC worked to ensure that the voice of European civil society is heard throughout the implementation process of the RRF and that the financial means made available truly reach those in need.

The COVID-19 crisis and the much-needed recovery further emphasised the need for revision of the EU's economic governance rules. As this revision was put on hold following the activation of the general escape clause of the Stability and Growth Pact in 2020, the EESC welcomed the relaunch of the public consultation on this issue in 2021 and advocated moving to a revised and rebalanced, prosperity-oriented economic governance framework.

Monitoring how European funds are spent is crucial to ensure that all Europeans share the benefits of both the recovery and the green and digital transitions. The Committee thus followed and continues to follow closely the implementation of funds for the programming period 2021-2027 so that all discrepancies and inequalities can be tackled.

ESG Annual Conference 2021: Building a resilient Europe – civil society and the National Recovery and Resilience Plans

This high-level conference discussed whether the National Recovery and Resilience Plans will deliver as regards the aim of achieving fair, inclusive, competitive and sustainable growth and cohesion through the new growth strategy – the European Green Deal.

Conference on improving the framework for sustainable finance

The conference took stock of what has been achieved so far in the EU in the field of sustainable finance, discussed upcoming initiatives and made policy recommendations.



7

ACCOMPANYING, SUPPORTING AND EMPOWERING SMES IN EUROPE FOR THE TRANSITION TO A GREEN ECONOMY

Delivering the green transition of our economy will depend heavily on the success of small and medium-sized enterprises, which are the backbone of our economy and the drivers for growth and innovation. If the EU wants to lead as a global role model in climate protection, we have to manage the green transition of the European economy while maintaining competitive value chains, jobs and companies.

In this regard, the EESC adopted two relevant opinions on *Sustainable finance taxonomy – climate change* and on the *Next Generation SME Strategy – Enhancing Effective and Swift Delivery* and organised a **public hearing on the EU SME Strategy** in November 2021.

The EESC also sent a **delegation of six members to the SME Assembly in November 2021 in Portorož**, Slovenia to present and defend the Committee's position on current key issues relating to the SME Strategy in Europe. Thanks to these initiatives, the EESC identified the actions necessary to accompany, support and empower SMEs in Europe for the transition to a green economy.



A delegation of six members to the SME Assembly in November 2021 in Portorož, who presented and defended the Committee's position on current key issues relating to the SME strategy in Europe



The green transition can only be successful if it is SME-focused. This is especially valid in the case of support measures necessary to help SMEs obtain knowledge and understanding on what is the nature of the green transition, what it involves in the short, medium and long run and what they should do to be adequately prepared for it and to be able to turn the challenges into opportunities. Many SMEs face uncertainty and lack of knowledge and understanding of the specific climate and environmental policies, including regarding the requirements of all the new financial tools.

Milena Angelova, rapporteur of the EESC opinion on Next Generation SME Strategy – Enhancing Effective and Swift Delivery, at the 2021 SME Assembly



Competitiveness and ethics are not contradictory terms – quite the contrary! There is a challenge here and we need to look at it through the prism of European values. That will enable us to become world leaders in this field, all the while remaining true to our values.

Marie-Françoise Gondard-Argenti, rapporteur for the opinion on the Coordinated plan on artificial intelligence



We at the EESC have always advocated a “human in command” approach to AI, because not all decisions can be reduced to ones and zeros.

Cateljne Muller, rapporteur for the opinion on the Regulation on artificial intelligence

8

ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE: FROM GUIDELINES TO REGULATION – CIVIL SOCIETY PERSPECTIVE

The year 2021 marked an important milestone in the governance of Artificial Intelligence (AI). In April, the European Commission presented the first ever legal framework on AI to address the specific risks posed by AI systems and set the highest standard worldwide. The role of civil society was particularly important in this respect and the EESC contribution to this major regulation was very timely.

The EESC positions were outlined in **three opinions on AI** adopted in 2021. A debate on *Artificial Intelligence and our digital future* was organised during the July plenary session and the president of the EESC defended the civil society perspective at a high-level event on AI organised by the Slovenian Presidency.


Nevertheless, the major civil society contribution to the legislative process was the **second Stakeholder Summit on AI**, organised in November together with the European Parliament’s Special Committee on Artificial Intelligence in a Digital Age. The summit brought together around 400 participants from business, civil society, workers, researchers and the European institutions to discuss how legislation could protect fundamental rights while enabling society to benefit from AI.



Boosting the use of Artificial Intelligence in Europe’s micro, small and medium-sized Enterprises

STUDY




 EESC President Christa Schweng
@EESC_President

#ArtificialIntelligence continues to change how we
live
work
learn
interact.

▶ Now is the time to go beyond a policy framework and put in practice real #EUValues for our digital future.

📺 #EESCplenary debate with @jayantnarayan



World Economic Forum and 9 others

9

BOOSTING EU INDUSTRY'S RESILIENCE AND STRATEGIC AUTONOMY BY SECURING CRITICAL RAW MATERIALS SUPPLY

While the pandemic is not over yet, the green and digital transitions present widespread opportunities for EU industry, but also some challenges that need to be managed to ensure that these transitions do not hamper industrial competitiveness. One of these challenges is that of ensuring that the twin transition does not come at the price of creating new dependencies but rather make Europe more competitive and more autonomous, while remaining open to the world.

Smart waste management, circular economy, investment in key strategic industry and securing supply can contribute to this goal. Resilience in the supply of critical raw materials is a key prerequisite for the success of the dual transition.



Action on critical raw materials is essential if we want to be able to fulfil the objectives of the EU Green Deal while avoiding further dependencies and ensuring new permanent and decent jobs and a fair transition in communities affected by industrial change.

Dumitru Fornea, rapporteur for the opinion on Critical Raw Materials Resilience

EESC opinion on Critical raw materials resilience: Charting a path towards greater security and sustainability (March 2021)

In September 2020, the European Commission published its action plan on critical raw materials, an instrument that the EESC welcomed in its opinion adopted at the plenary session in March 2021.

A position paper was produced to better convey the key messages and several followup meetings were held. Furthermore, the EESC was invited to join the European Raw Materials Alliance as an observer, where it is currently represented by Andres Barceló Delgado (GRI).





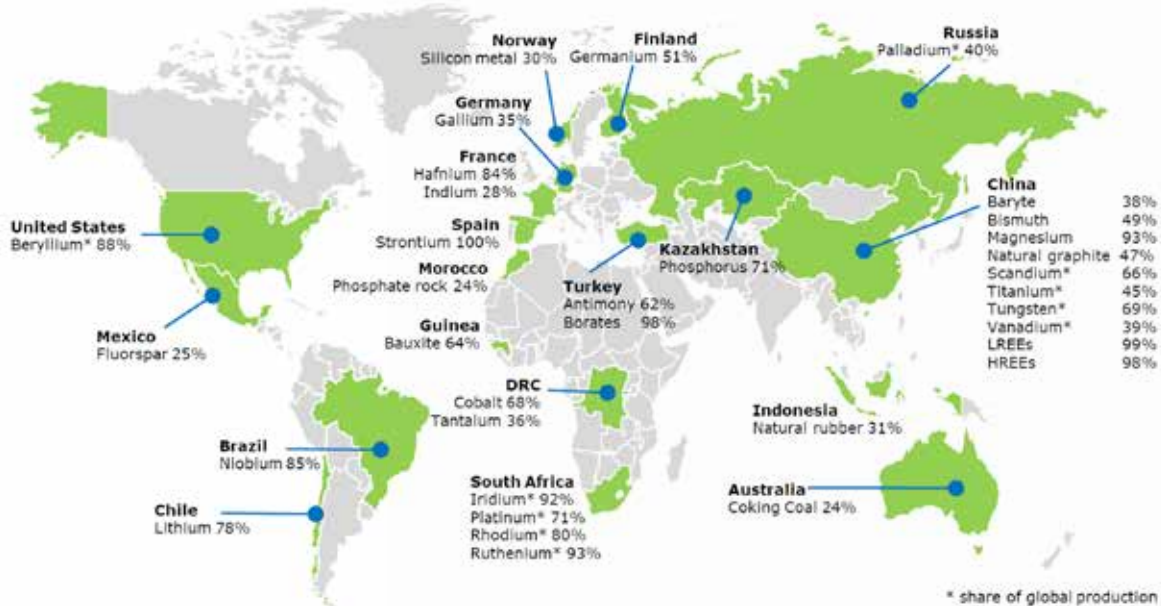
We need to assist investment through loan guarantees, depreciation regimes and State aid, but also by developing a streamlined authorisation process for mining activities.

Michal Pintér, co-rapporteur for the opinion on Critical Raw Materials Resilience

Webinar on The role of critical raw materials to form a strong industrial base (July 2021)

Between June 2021 and March 2022, the EESC organised a series of events on the updated new industrial strategy, announced by the Commission on 5 May 2021.

The first webinar in this series took place on 13 July and explored The role of critical raw materials in forming a strong industrial base. The objective of the meeting was to understand the international and European scenario for critical raw materials, the actions ongoing from an institutional point of view and how civil society sees the interaction between the industrial strategy and the critical raw materials action plan.



Source: European Commission report on the 2020 criticality assessment



10

FORESIGHT: ANTICIPATING AND SHAPING THE EU'S FUTURE

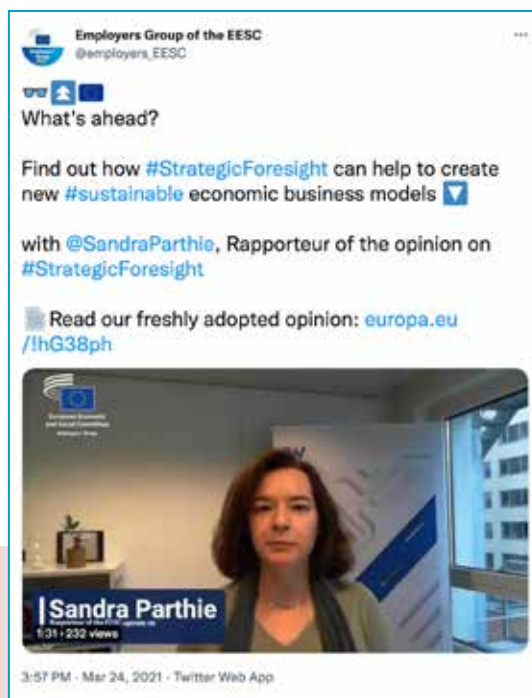
The EU has decided to further integrate strategic foresight into the EU policy cycle, thus increasing the EU's capability to prepare for the challenges of the future.

The EESC participated in this process by actively engaging with foresight activities on its own and in cooperation with other institutions.

The EESC contributed to the EC annual Strategic Foresight Cycle, offering its competence, knowledge and the representativeness of civil society organisations by adopting an opinion on the first Strategic Foresight Report (SFR) and, towards the end of the year, by starting the draft of the opinion on the second SFR.

Several opinions with a forward-looking dimension have been adopted and are ongoing and several events underlined this dimension, such as an ECO seminar on Strategic Foresight and EU Decision-making – Economic Aspects (22 June 2021).

The EESC also played a key role at EU interinstitutional level in this field, thanks to its active involvement in the ESPAS, the EU interinstitutional network on foresight, and particularly by participating in the ESPAS annual conference on Shaping Europe's future: Global trends and strategic choices (18-19 November), with a 16-member delegation, including the section/Consultative Commission on Industrial Change (CCMI) presidents, the presidents of the groups and the EESC president. The EESC president and the president of the EESC's Section for Agriculture, Rural Development and the Environment were keynote speakers and presented the EESC's forwardlooking work such as the own-initiative opinion on Strategic autonomy and food security and sustainability.



I cannot emphasise enough, both the extent of the challenges facing our European societies today and the necessity for civil society cooperation, in order to overcome these difficulties. The engagement of civil society organisations during the economic and financial crisis, the COVID-19 pandemic and the war in Ukraine are just some examples. The time has now come to better structure the role and access of civil society actors. They must become real partners for EU and national authorities. The establishment of a European Statute for Associations and the creation of an EU Civil Society Strategy could help unlock their full potential. We need a holistic and integrated approach to policy-making and civil society involvement if we want to re-think our growth and governance models and balance economic prosperity with social inclusion, human capital, sustainability and well-being.

Séamus Boland, President of the EESC Civil Society Organisations' Group



The EESC is ready to involve all stakeholders in foresight discussion because it has the employers, the trade unions and the environmentalists in its composition.

Peter Schmidt, President of the EESC's Section for Agriculture, Rural Development and the Environment section, in his speech at the ESPAS conference (workshop: How to use future scenarios for policy-making in an era of profound transitions)

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Momentum for Social Europe

DISCLAIMER: All opinions in this column reflect the views of the author and not necessarily those of EURACTIV.

By Oliver Nijssen | 12 FEB




... momentum for social policy reform, which...
... drive much-needed momentum for...
... Workers' Group of the European Economic...

Irish Examiner

Home News Sport Lifestyle Business Property Opinion Podcasts Sports World

New rural plan 'needs investment and faster broadband rollout'



A new plan positioning workers or businesses to relocate to rural regions must be supported by adequate investment and speedier rollout of high-quality broadband.

While welcoming the new **Co-Rural Plan**, with Rural Link (RL) and the policy mix a welcome one, but cautioned it depended on levels of...

Diário do Winifó BRAGA NOTÍCIAS DESPORTO BELGIÃO



Fotografia: António de Almeida Costa

Frankfurter Allgemeine ESTABLISHED 1845

Home News Politik Deutschland und die Welt Wirtschaft Unternehmens Finanzen

China „kooperativ ein"

PREMIER FEDERAN

Die Europäische Union hat vorerst keine Chance, die Wirtschaft zu retten. Das ist die Botschaft der jüngsten Umfrage unter den Politikern der Europäischen Union. Die Union hat die Aufgabe, die Wirtschaft zu retten. Das ist die Botschaft der jüngsten Umfrage unter den Politikern der Europäischen Union.

Radio România Internațional Contacte | Prezentare | Programare

Radio România Internațional / Rumänia, în limba / La Asociación de Bebés Prematuros de Rumanía y el premio del CESE

La Asociación de Bebés Prematuros de Rumanía y el premio del CESE

2021-02-23 18:03:00

A mediului de Rumanía se atributează premiul CESE (Comité Economico y Social Europeo) a la solididad civil en una ceremonia virtual.



PREMIUL CESE PENTRU SOLIDARITATE CIVILĂ

Presidência da UE e CESE em sintonia sobre importância da Cimeira Social

Declaração conjunta de António Costa e Christa Schweng

EUROPA

Osoby z niepełnosprawnościami: „Znowu musimy walczyć o swoje prawa"

Pandemia obnażyła skalę wykluczenia społecznego osób z niepełnosprawnościami, biedę, dyskryminację i nierówne traktowanie – alarm niepełnosprawnych. Czy UE to zmieni?

agence europe

European Daily Bulletin No. 11247


300 days of the EESC Presidency - the first delivered promise by Christa Schweng

ASIA ANALYSIS READ MORE

GOVERNMENT

Budget and recovery policy in Europe

Stefano Palmieri, President, Section for Economic and Monetary Union and Economic and Social Committee, describes budget and recovery policy in Europe



TIMES MALTA

Businesses need Stefano Mallia

The EU and US need to continue to work together to support Malta's recovery.

RMF 24 NOWE RADIO RMF24 informacyjno-muzyk

RMF24 • Fakty • Polska

Licealistka z Polski z prestiżową nagrodą: inicjatywa wspiera ofiary przemocy domowej

Katarzyna Szymańska-Borginon
Poniedziałek, 15 lutego 2021 (11:13)

Licealistka Krystyna Paszko zdobyła nagrodę Europejskiego Komitetu Ekonomiczno-Społecznego (EKES) za Solidarność Obywatelską 2020 - dowiedziała się dziennikarka RMF FM Katarzyna Szymańska-Borginon, stworzony przez 17-latkę internetowy sklep 'Rumianki i bratki' będący ratunkiem dla ofiar przemocy domowej, która nasiliła się w okresie pan...

THE PARLIAMENT POLITICS, POLICY AND PEOPLE MAGAZINE

Conference on the Future of Europe: How not to waste the opportunity

By Christa Schweng
Considering how long it took to launch the conference, it is necessary to do everything fast and requires an ambitious agenda. EESC president Christa Schweng.



VITA Vita Newsletter

«Transizione energetica: l'Ue deve cambiare marcia»

Il Comitato economico e sociale europeo (Cese) esamina lo stato di avanzamento dell'Unione dell'energia e i piani nazionali per l'energia e il clima, e avverte che gli obiettivi dell'Ue in materia di energia e clima per il 2050 potranno essere raggiunti solo con un cambio di passo nella transizione e se i cittadini saranno realmente al centro di questo processo.

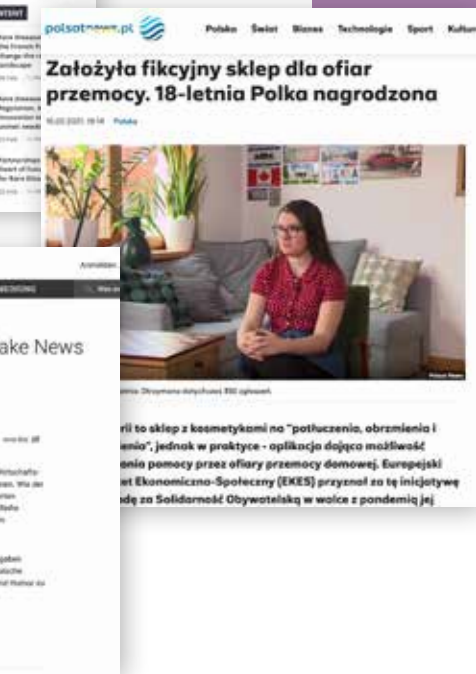


WIENER-ZEITUNG

Österreichische Initiative gegen F... ausgezeichnet

Die österreichische Initiative #EUROAggerCovid19 hat den Europäischen und Österreichischen Arbeitgeberverband für ihre hervorragende Solidarität gegen die Auswirkungen der COVID-19-Pandemie ausgezeichnet.





OUTREACH ACTIVITIES

The health crisis drastically affected communication activities in 2021, as for the second year in a row visits to the EESC's headquarters could not take place and a large number of events had to be cancelled, while others – such as Europe Day – were conducted online. Particularly noteworthy for 2021 are the promotion of a culture of communication across the Committee, the improvement of the Committee's outreach and image, including through widespread use of digital communication tools including webinars and podcasts, and the activities related to the Conference on the Future of Europe (CoFoE).

LISTENING TO AND VOICING CIVIL SOCIETY'S WISHES FOR THE FUTURE OF EUROPE

The kick-off event organised on 10 June 2021 under the title *Bringing the European Project back to citizens* paved the way for the organisation of local events linked to the Conference on the Future of Europe (CoFoE) and aimed to reach out to real-life actors, with their real-life hopes, worries and opinions in order to strengthen the connection between the EU and its citizens in the Member States. Over 20 local events were organised in physical or hybrid form, plus some 20 thematic events organised by sections and 10 at group level – with many more still in the pipeline.

THE EESC ON SOCIAL MEDIA



Facebook:

www.eesc.europa.eu/facebook



Twitter:

www.eesc.europa.eu/twitter



Instagram:

www.instagram.com/eu_civilsociety



You Tube:

www.eesc.europa.eu/youtube







LinkedIn:

www.linkedin.com/company/european-economic-and-social-committee

Follow us!

To make the most of all possible opportunities for dialogue with the European public, the EESC also has a social media presence, concentrating on Twitter, Instagram, Facebook, LinkedIn and YouTube. Plenary debates can be followed on social media via @EU_EESC or by using the hashtag #EESCplenary.

By the end of 2021, the EESC had over 50 000 followers on Twitter, over 37 000 on LinkedIn and 38 600 on Facebook, while the two-year-old Instagram account almost doubled its number of followers, reaching 6 400 by the end of the year.

	 Facebook followers	 Twitter followers	 LinkedIn followers	 Instagram followers*
2021	38 669	54 318	37 442	6 483
2020	36 664	50 351	31 345	3 712
2019	32 600	43 300	14 500	1 105
2018	24 486	36 634	9 407	–
2017	20 674	31 053	7 829	–
2016	16 352	25 303	6 728	–

* NEW since October 2019

Top 5 events on EESC social media in 2021

- Civil Society Prize
- Civil Society Days
- European Citizens' Initiative Days
- Your Europe, Your Say!
- CoFoE launching event Bringing Europe back to citizens

Due to health situation, the events on this list were held online or in hybrid format.

WIDER PUBLIC ENGAGEMENT, FROM CULTURE TO ONLINE EVENTS

As well as members meeting citizens in their own countries, the EESC actively encourages people from all over Europe to come to Brussels and see for themselves how it represents their interests. Although the pandemic prevented the EESC from welcoming visitors onsite, the implementation of a system for virtual visits allowed visitors and groups to be welcomed online. A remarkable increase in the EESC's outreach through the web and social media was achieved. In 2021, the EESC organised 62 online talks and virtual visits, reaching 1 605 participants.



Visitors



Groups

2021	1 605 (online)	62
2020	2 371	88
2019	11 144	441
2018	9 419	424
2017	7 847	342
2016	7 371	312



Europe Day

Each year, the EESC, together with the other European institutions, opens its doors to the public. On average since 2010, the Open Day has welcomed 2 800 visitors per year. Due to the pandemic crisis, Europe Day 2021 was held fully online: a 360° virtual tour of the EESC premises and a series of introductory videos welcomed the visitor to a digital experience. Online talks were available and a webinar with EESC members took place on the same day. This generated 3 660 visitors online, and resulted in a potential outreach of 1.4 million people on the EESC's social media channels.

Your Europe, Your Say! 2021 goes virtual!

Your Europe, Your Say! (YEYS) is the annual youth event of the EESC. It started in 2010 with the goal of connecting young people with the European Union. The aim of YEYS is to host 16-18-year-old pupils from all EU Member States and from the candidate countries so they can work together in order to draw up resolutions which will then be passed to the EU institutions.

The 2021 YEYS event, entitled Our Climate, Our Future! took the form of a COP climate negotiation, empowering students to engage with climate solutions, and brought together online 234 teenage students and 56 teachers from 27 EU Member States and the UK. The conclusions the students came to were presented to Frans Timmermans, European Commission Executive Vice-President, at the closing session, making this a valuable contribution to the EU Climate Pact.

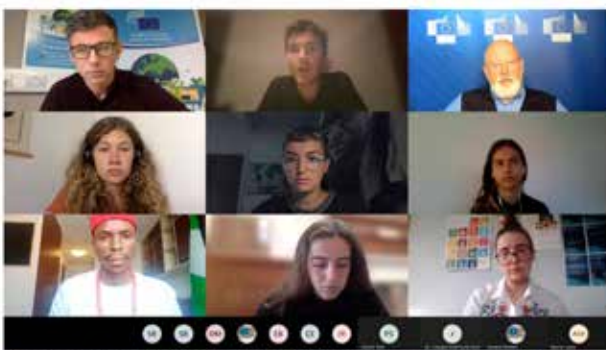
Youth Climate and Sustainability Roundtables

Following the recommendations of the EESC own-initiative opinion on Youth Engagement on Climate and Sustainability, the EESC hosted a first round table bringing youth climate activists and representatives of youth organisations together with high-level EU decisionmakers to discuss EU policies on climate and sustainability.

The online event engaged the European Commissioner for Climate and Executive Vice-President, Frans Timmermans, and 10 young climate activists in direct open dialogue.

The event also served to launch a permanent structure for Youth Round Tables, which will be organised twice a year.

As a result, on 26 November 2021, the Second Youth Round Table on #Biodiversity took place, organised by the EESC's Section Agriculture, Rural Development and the Environment, with the European Commissioner for Environment, Oceans and Fisheries, Virginijus Sinkevičius.



10 young climate activists meet with Commissioner Timmermans LIVE



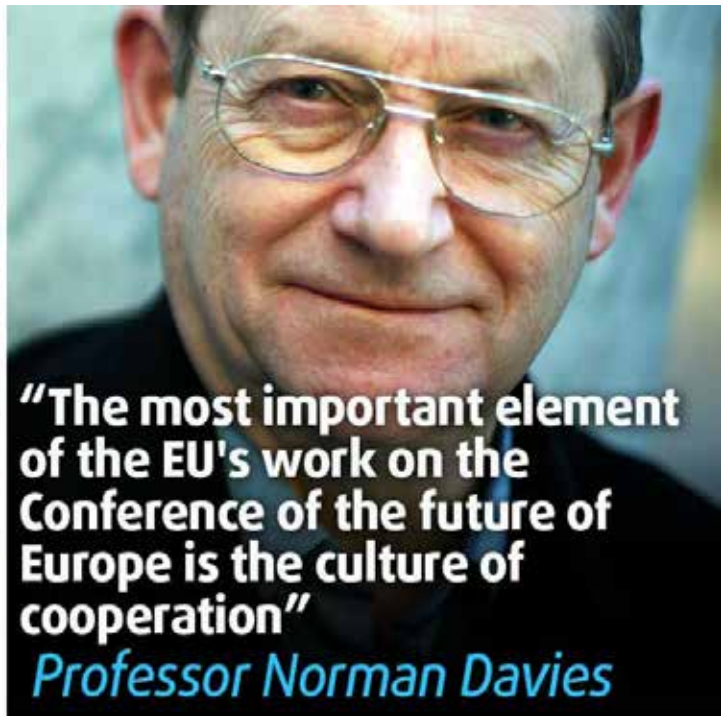
13 July 2021 | 10:00 – 11:00 | Webstreamed

THE “NEW NORMAL” OF PRESS ACTIVITIES

Despite the pandemic-related restrictions, the EESC managed to organise two major CoFoE-related press events with physical presence: (i) the Connecting EU seminar 2021 in Lisbon on 18-19 November, with more than 100 participants, mostly communication officers from civil society organisations and journalists and (ii) the fifth edition of the seminar for journalists, which followed the fully virtual fourth edition of February 2021 and took place on 8-9 December 2021 under the title Safe, sustainable and secure Europe at the heart of the debate on the Conference of the Future of Europe, with physical participation of a reduced number of journalists due to COVID restrictions.

On the web and on social media you can watch the new series of podcasts on The Grassroots View, which explores topical themes presenting the civil society perspective, bringing testimonies from actors on the ground and from EESC members, and EESC in a flash – a series of two-minute online interviews with an EESC member who comments on a topic which was high on the Committee’s agenda and had implications for Europe. The digital newsletter EESC Info regularly presented the point of view of personalities from the world of science, politics, media and culture on events and topical themes.

EESC Info



2021 CULTURAL HIGHLIGHTS

In the EESC, we strongly believe that culture has a transformative power that is crucial for building a sustainable future and for that reason, we invest in culture as the path to achieve it.

The EESC's cultural activities are considered a communication tool and as such they are meant to highlight and promote the work done in the EESC by its members, sections and groups.

In a time of restrictions to social contacts, the EESC was the only EU institution that kept staging cultural events at a normal pace, albeit in virtual format. Going virtual provided an opportunity to develop a modern approach.

Activities ranged from photo exhibitions to the screening of short films and online musical performances. Major events were jointly organised with the EESC's sections.

The EESC organised ten cultural events in 2021, almost one per month.

The Art Talks series was inaugurated as an effective and innovative tool to blend art with politics.



The Art Talks were all hosted and webstreamed on the Facebook page Arts&Culture and resulted in a different approach to promoting the EESC's work, using culture as the vehicle rather than just a complementary tool, while generating a higher engagement rate by the audience.

Cultural highlights of the year



Hand in Hand by Maria Reis Rocha

A virtual exhibition featuring illustrations and short videos focused on the social dimension of life (mental health, social participation and quality education, the fight against poverty and racism and children's rights), which was closely connected to the Portuguese Presidency's priorities. The launch of the online exhibition was held fully remotely, inaugurating the Art Talks series.



Virtual opening of the "Hand in Hand" exhibition
1st Art Talk



Artivism for Gender Equality

A virtual exhibition made up of 25 posters by Women Engage for a Common Future (WECF), a non-profit network of over 150 women’s and civil society organisations implementing projects in 50 countries. The launch of the event was held on 8 March to commemorate International Women’s Day. The Art Talk hosted a live musical performance by the young and talented Tamara Mozes, who played and sang live from her studio in Warsaw.



Virtual opening of the "Artivism for Gender Equality" exhibition
2nd Art Talk to mark the International Women's day



Live music performance by Tamara Mozes
during the International Women's day Art Talk

Designing systemic change – Your Europe, Your Say! 2021 side event

In order to give the YEYS audience the opportunity to engage and interact during the side event, three artists – Sophie Ong, Tibor Miklos and Esther Blodau – created inspiring art works.



Online film screening by Europalia Arts Festival

To mark the 2021 European Year of Rail, the EESC organised the screening of a short film, which was an excerpt from the dance performance *La Ronde* by the well-known French choreographer Boris Charmatz. This cultural activity was held in collaboration with the EESC’s Section for Transport, Energy, Infrastructure and the Information Society.



Cultural partnership with Europalia Arts Festival
Screening of "La Ronde" Aftermovie by Boris Charmatz

EUROPALIA
ARTS FESTIVAL
TRAINS & TRACKS



EVENTS TO REMEMBER

Civil Solidarity Prize

In a ceremony held online on 15 February 2021, the EESC awarded its one-off Civil Solidarity Prize *Civil society against COVID-19* to 23 winners chosen from among 250 applications from across the EU and the UK. Through this prize – worth EUR 10 000 per winner – the EESC aimed to reward not-for-profit initiatives carried out by individuals, civil society organisations or private companies that aim to tackle the COVID-19 crisis and its manifold consequences, to boost the visibility of these initiatives and to celebrate all those battling coronavirus in society at large, displaying courage, engagement, solidarity and civic responsibility.



Seminars for Journalists

On 24-25 February 2021, the EESC held its fourth seminar for journalists under the title *The Conference on the Future of Europe as a turning point for the EU*, organised online due to the pandemic. The 45 participants had the opportunity to follow the EESC's plenary session via webstreaming, including the debate on the CoFoE with EC Vice-President Dubravka Šuica.



The fifth seminar for journalists took place on 8-9 December 2021 under the title *Safe, sustainable and secure European Union at the heart of the debate on the Conference of the Future of Europe*, with participation in person by a reduced number of 16 journalists due to COVID-19 restrictions. There were three panel discussions, respectively on secure democracy and fundamental rights, sustainable recovery and energy transition and safe migration.

Connecting EU seminar

The Connecting EU seminar *What kind of Europe do you dream of?* took place in Lisbon on 18-19 November 2021. It was organised in cooperation with the Portuguese economic and social council and consisted of 3 panels: The health crisis and its impact on the future of Europe, A stronger economy, social justice and jobs and European democracy. More than 100 people participated in the event, among them the EESC president, the three group presidents, EESC members, academics, journalists, experts, press officers from civil society organisations, representatives of EU institutions, economic and social councils and Europe Direct Centres.



Civil Society Prize

Under the title *Climate Action*, the 12th edition of the Civil Society Prize rewarded five initiatives by civil society organisations that aimed to promote a just transition towards a lowcarbon and climate-resilient economy. In the words of EESC VicePresident, Cillian Lohan: "To tackle climate change, we need the active participation of all parts of society. And we need to shift from consultation and top-down engagement towards a model of co-design, co-creation and empowerment. Positive stories such as the projects of our winners show this co-design and co-creation. They also engage people and organisations. This wealth of ideas gives us faith that the battle against climate change is far from lost."



Your Europe, Your Say!






Your Europe, Your Say! is the annual youth plenary session of the EESC. This flagship event was launched in 2010 with the goal of connecting teenagers with the European Union.

Under the title *Our Climate, Our Future!* the 11th edition of Your Europe, Your Say! took the form of an online COP climate negotiation, empowering students to engage with climate solutions. It took place online on 18 and 19 March 2021 and brought together 234 teenage students and 56 teachers from 28 European countries. The students presented their recommendations live to European Commission Executive Vice-President Frans Timmermans.



SOME KEY FIGURES AND DATES FOR 2021

2021 was a very special year for the European Economic and Social Committee, and for the world in general. Some of the figures below will show how the pandemic impacted EESC activities as a whole.

<p>700</p> 	<p>The EESC had 700 active staff (officials, temporary agents, contract agents, SNEs and special advisers)</p>
<p>329</p> 	<p>The EESC has 329 Members from all EU Member States, who are appointed for a renewable five-year term of office. The current mandate runs from October 2020 to September 2025</p>
<p>52</p> 	<p>Number of trainees who completed a paid traineeship: 52 trainees (24 in spring 2021 and 28 in autumn 2021). Twice a year the EESC offers paid traineeships for a period of five months to give university graduates valuable work experience</p>
<p>200</p> 	<p>Number of opinions, position papers and information reports approved by the EESC plenaries in 2021: 200</p>
<p>10</p>	<p>In 2021, the EESC has organised 10 virtual cultural events</p>
<p>7.4K</p> 	<p>Hand in Hand virtual exhibition by Maria Reis Rocha (15.01.2021-5.02.2021) had the biggest reach with total engagement (likes, comments, shares) = 1.2 K and total reach = 7.4 K</p>

<p>€150 524 938</p> 	<p>The total budget of the EESC was exactly EUR 150 524 938. Accuracy, efficiency and accountability are key to a balanced budget, validated by the Commission and adopted by the European Council and Parliament</p>
<p>0.092%</p>	<p>The EESC's budget corresponds to 0.092% of the 2021 EU budget in commitment appropriations (or 0.091% of the 2021 EU budget in payment appropriations)</p>
<p>€50 000</p> 	<p>The total value of the 12th edition of the Civil Society Prize, which rewards initiatives promoting a just transition to a low-carbon, climate-resilient economy, was €50,000</p>
<p>Zero</p> 	<p>The Committee's canteen has been plastic free since May 2019; since June 2020, all catering-related activities are plastic free</p>

... and much more

USEFUL LINKS

EESC website:

www.eesc.europa.eu



Facebook:

www.eesc.europa.eu/facebook



Twitter:

www.eesc.europa.eu/twitter



Instagram:

www.instagram.com/eu_civilsociety



You Tube:

www.eesc.europa.eu/youtube



LinkedIn:

www.linkedin.com/company/european-economic-and-social-committee

EESC president's website:

www.eesc.europa.eu/president

EESC president on Twitter:

[@EESC_President](https://twitter.com/EESC_President)

Civil Solidarity Prize:

[www.eesc.europa.eu/en/agenda/our-events/events/
civil-solidarity-prize](http://www.eesc.europa.eu/en/agenda/our-events/events/civil-solidarity-prize)

Civil Society Prize:

www.eesc.europa.eu/en/initiatives/civil-society-prize

European Circular Economy Stakeholder Platform:

circulareconomy.europa.eu/platform/



European Economic and Social Committee

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