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Civil Society Organisations' Bulletin



THE FUTURE OF ENERGY IN EUROPE

FOREWORD

Séamus BOLAND (IE)

President, Civil Society Organisations' Group



A Europe in peril

“Europe as a task: to strengthen common freedom, responsibility, security and prosperity. This is the main motto of the Czech presidency of the Council of the EU”, as outlined by the Prime Minister of the Czech Republic Petr Fiala, whose country took over the presidency¹ on 1 July. The term “common freedom” is now being well and truly tested. Whether it’s Russia’s declaration of war on the sovereign nation Ukraine and its consequences, the return of severe financial insecurity affecting millions of people, or having to manage the challenges of climate change – an existential threat to our planet and future generations – the freedoms that we cherish are now in peril. In stating the presidency’s priorities, the prime minister underlined some basic values which include the *freedom of individuals, but also of nations, as well as responsibility for ourselves, for our families, for other citizens, but also for the environment that surrounds us.*

The presidency will be dominated by the war. Issues on how we manage the large population movement, providing basic assistance to millions of dislocated families and families damaged directly by the continued targeting of civilians, and of course the management of the rebuilding of a country, whose candidacy for EU membership has been accepted.

The presidency will also need to manage the huge disruption to energy supply. The need to develop a system of sustainable energy supply coupled with the absolute requirement to protect our planet represents a challenge that will require supreme leadership of the Union. Old talk

of achieving targets by 2050 is almost redundant. This war has shown that unless the EU has the courage to bring forward all plans to secure renewable energy on a vast scale, it will fail the hopes and dreams of its citizens. It is welcome then that the Czech presidency will focus on the “implementation of the RePowerEU² package, which includes a faster transition to low-emission and renewable energy sources, energy savings or the provision of more resilient, diversified sources».

Success with this will depend on a number of main requirements of leadership such as:

- the level of investment available both in the private and public sector;
- the commitment by the leadership in every EU Member State to make it happen; and
- the willingness to include the millions of citizens, who are actively participating in the formation of policy and its implementation in thousands of civil society organisations.

Any separation between the political leadership and citizens’ organisations will seriously delay progress and cause a huge decline of confidence in the ability of the EU. As outlined during our bureau’s visit to Tullamore³ in Ireland: the just transition relies on the inclusion of civil society organisations in its design.

In the July plenary session⁴, we will have an important debate on the increasing level of gender-based violence, in particular attacks, often fatal, on women. Some cases across the EU, including the tragic murder of Ashling Murphy while running in a public space in Ireland, have demonstrated the unacceptable difference in the safety of women and men.

And finally thanks for the huge support from within and outside the EESC for the adoption of our new name⁵ “**Civil Society Organisations’ Group**”. As many have said, we now have a name that actually describes the fact that all of our 106 Members are nominated by civil society organisations. Sometimes civil society organisations have to stand alone in fighting for rights and better services for marginalised people and their communities. It’s an honour to know that quite a lot of them are represented in our Group.

Séamus Boland

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5. EESC, Group III name change, <https://europa.eu/!HTxJ4N>

THE FUTURE OF ENERGY IN EUROPE

How to guarantee a just transition, providing secure, affordable and clean energy for EU citizens and businesses



Baiba Miltoviča © EESC

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Séamus Boland © EESC

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Ensuring a fair and just transition that leaves no one behind is a matter of focusing on **three core dimensions**: investing in clean energy sources, improving energy efficiency and energy savings, and empowering

citizens and businesses.

Dependence on fossil fuels endangers both the climate and the stability of energy prices, at a time when **clean energy sources** are becoming cheaper and more efficient. Promoting research and the implementation of clean energy sources can therefore boost the share of renewables in the energy mix (especially hydrogen, biofuels, wind and solar). To achieve this, streamlining and accelerating permit-granting procedures is crucial.

Energy efficiency and energy savings are other key factors. The **renovation of our building stock** to ensure optimal energy use is vital in order to reduce consumption, but also to protect the most vulnerable consumers from rising energy prices. Supporting citizens and business is also central in order to boost energy savings. Through **informed choices** and simple everyday changes in our energy use, we can support the reduction of our reliance on fossil fuels in practice.

Finally, the energy transition is about people. The creation of **energy communities and cooperatives** should be encouraged to **give citizens and businesses an active role** in producing clean energy for themselves. Community energy ownership plays a crucial role in shifting power from fossil-fuel companies to consumers, who thereby become **prosumers** who are best placed to engage with energy-poor households and understand their needs. More fundamentally, citizens and stakeholders must be given a voice when it comes to how the energy transition should be implemented, an action that can be fostered with the help of civil society organisations.

Delivering a **just, affordable and secure energy transition is imperative** for our future, and the EESC, together with EU decision-makers, is committed to designing the right course, ensuring that no one is left behind.

Energy poverty: a multifaceted challenge for the Union



Ioannis Vardakastanis © EESC

Ioannis VARDAKASTANIS (EL)
Vice-President,
Civil Society
Organisations' Group

President, Greek
National Confederation of Disabled
People (NCDP)

President, European Disability Forum
and International Disability Alliance

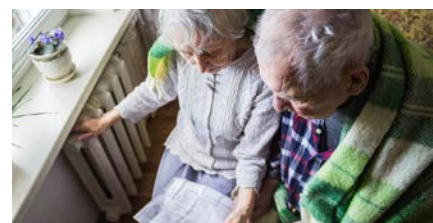
Member, Economic and Social Council
of Greece (OKE)

Member, Greek National Commission of
Human Rights (EEDA)

Energy poverty is an increasing

issue and concern for citizens and businesses in Europe.

In 2020, 8% of the EU population reported not being able to keep their homes adequately warm. Today that number is likely to have risen, as energy prices have sharply increased since mid-2021. In March 2022, energy annual inflation in the EU hit 40.2%, with the highest annual rate of change in energy prices reaching 99.6% and the lowest 0%. The geopolitical tensions, including the war in Ukraine and the EU's dependency on energy imports, have also contributed to the rise in energy prices.



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However, **tackling energy poverty** demands that we look beyond energy prices alone and **consider all root causes and factors** contributing to this form of poverty, including low incomes, inefficient buildings and appliances, and lack of information on and access to incentives for reducing energy consumption.

The EU and its Member States **need to adopt a variety of measures** to combat energy poverty and ensure equal access to clean and affordable energy for all. This includes direct measures to alleviate the rise of energy prices, such as direct financial support, as well as incentives to decrease energy consumption, for

example by providing information and support to consumers to renovate and move to cleaner and cheaper sources of energy. The [Renovation Wave](#)¹ will be key in tackling energy poverty in the long term, as long as it includes the deep renovation of buildings, guaranteeing a reduction of energy consumption. It is also essential to

work on reducing poverty overall, with the need to improve access to employment, social inclusion and decent standards of living, and with particular attention to those with low incomes, disadvantaged groups and people living in rural and remote areas.²

Spain and Portugal — The new central role of a peripheral region



João Nabais © EESC

João NABAIS (PT)
Member, Management Board,
Portuguese Association for Consumer Protection (DECO)

The Iberian peninsula, that tip of Europe that connects the Mediterranean with the Atlantic, far from the centre of Europe, will take centre stage in the current energy crisis.

Today's **energy-related turmoil** is not only the result of the **war in Ukraine**. It is also a consequence of the **lack of investment** in oil and natural gas. This investment shortfall is the result of a number of factors, including pressure on investors and governments to commit to clean energy, the uncertain future of fossil fuels and years of weak

and volatile oil prices.

The desire to reduce carbon emissions means that today, there is much **less appetite for investing in hydrocarbons**. This exacerbates price volatility and makes it harder to improve the supply side.

Europe was already facing an energy crisis last year and natural gas, coal and oil prices were high long before the first Russian tanks started the invasion of Ukraine. We were heading towards a crisis, but Putin managed to get us there more quickly.

Heavily reliant on the supply of gas from Russia and drifting dangerously towards nuclear and coal, with all the consequent environmental costs, the European Union may today have in its south-westernmost point, in **Spain and Portugal, a source of growing**

energy supply.

Powered by Algerian natural gas (ten billion cubic metres per year, with opportunities for further growth) and located in a region with exceptional conditions for the production of photovoltaic, wind and wave energy, served by seaports that today are major gateways to Europe for liquefied gas, the two Iberian countries could play a decisive role in redrawing the energy map of the Old Continent.



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Nuclear power? No, thanks.



Jan Dirx © EESC

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Vice-President,
Civil Society Organisations' Group
Liaison Officer,
Groene11
(Green11), Dutch

nature and environmental organisations

The nuclear lobby is taking advantage of the current energy crisis to regain its long-waning influence with false claims and half-truths. However, if you put all the facts on the table, it is clear that **nuclear power** is not **technology**

for the future, but rather **of the past**.

What we need now is an **energy system** that can be put in place as soon as possible and that is based on renewable energy combined with complementary, flexible, carbon-free (i.e. hydrogen) gas-fired power plants.

Nuclear power requires the biggest investment costs, amounting to around EUR 6 800 per KW, compared to approximately EUR 1 300 for onshore wind and EUR 3 300 for offshore wind. Moreover, nuclear power plants take at least 12 to 15 years to build.

An energy system **based on**

renewable solar and wind energy needs additional sources at times when there is not enough sun and wind, **requiring a very flexible complementary system**. That is not possible with nuclear power plants, but it is with hydrogen power plants, which use hydrogen produced from renewable energy. And then you still have the unsolved problem of radioactive waste from nuclear power,

1. European Commission, Renovation wave, <https://europa.eu/!Crktwr>

2. Mr Vardakastanis is rapporteur for the exploratory opinion "Tackling energy poverty and the EU's resilience: challenges from an economic and social perspective" that will be put to the vote of the EESC plenary in September 2022. More information: europa.eu/!CjdvFQ

with the European Commission also pointing out that almost no nuclear power-producing country is meeting its obligation to build up sufficient resources for the decommissioning of plants and the treatment and disposal of waste.

But let's be optimistic and trust that the politicians who have to decide whether or not to give nuclear power the green light base their decisions more on the facts than on the sales pitches of nuclear industry lobbyists. And if they don't, I firmly believe that

the EU's civil society organisations are strong enough to ensure that our energy supply will be truly sustainable in the future and not "polluted" by nuclear power.

REPowerEU for Energy Citizens Manifesto

Dirk VANSINTJAN

President, REScoop.eu, the European federation of citizen energy cooperatives

The current energy crisis



Dirk Vansintjan
© Fredography

If the war in Ukraine has taught us anything, it is that all of us – citizens, public authorities, NGOs and businesses – are addicted to imported fossil and nuclear fuels.

The effects of the crisis have hit the cooperative energy sector, just as any other. Yet, it is those who drive energy cooperativism – the citizens – that are feeling the most pressure. Volatile energy markets mean EU citizens are faced with soaring gas and oil prices for transport, heating their homes, and for electricity. For

many households, their energy bill has doubled or tripled, putting them under financial strain. Before this crisis, many citizens were already affected by energy poverty. Now, this number is bound to rise even further.

History shows what Europe's energy citizens do in times of crises

This is not the first time Europe has been confronted with an energy crisis. In times of crisis, institutional authorities are needed to react. However, in times of crisis the DNA of cooperativism also comes alive

and citizens can work together to tackle problems in solidarity.

We only need to look back to the 1970s when, in response to the oil supply shocks, Danish citizens resoundingly

rejected their government's plan to invest in nuclear. Instead, they started investing in solar and wind technologies, as well as district heating as a way to move away from oil.

Local community ownership of renewables: a way forward

Today, citizens are still capable of leading by example. In 1991, Ecopower¹ was founded, starting with a micro-hydropower plant in a medieval watermill. Now it is a large cooperative with 65 000 members, and produces around 90 GWh/y of green electricity. Ecopower supplies green electricity to about 2% of Flemish households and assists its members to consume less and to produce energy themselves by installing PV panels. And its tariff is the lowest of all

suppliers because it supplies at cost.

Many citizens and local communities are eager to repeat Ecopower's success, and the potential is there. **By 2050, around 45% of renewable energy production could be in the hands of citizens**², about a quarter of which could come through participation in a cooperative. There is also an estimation that **citizens have the capacity to invest up to EUR 240 billion towards the**

energy transition by 2030³.

If we want to meet this potential, and if we want more initiatives like Ecopower across Europe, priority must be given to allowing local communities to build up enough self-owned (e.g. by citizens, cooperatives, local authorities, SMEs, etc.) renewable energy production – in particular through renewable energy communities (RECs) and citizen energy communities (CECs).

The European Commission's REPowerEU Plan

With its **REPowerEU Communication**⁴, the European Commission has laid out a plan to diversify away from Russian gas,

which currently makes up more than 40% of Europe's entire gas consumption. However, we need to make sure Russian fossil energy

1. Ecopower, <https://www.ecopower.be/>
2. CE Delft, Report, <https://cedelft.eu/publications/the-potential-of-energy-citizens-in-the-european-union/>
3. ScienceDirect, <https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/abs/pii/S1364032120305888>
4. European Commission, RePowerEU, <https://europa.eu/EvttMN>

doesn't simply get replaced with someone else's fossil energy. Much

more ambition and political vision for rolling out renewables and

energy savings is needed. That is where citizens come in.

Our REPowerEU for Energy Citizens Manifesto

We would like to propose a **REPowerEU for Energy Citizens Manifesto**. This manifesto calls for an inclusive and local community-centred approach to the EU's REPowerEU plan. Our manifesto consists of a number of actions the EU and Member States should take to empower local public authorities, citizens and community initiatives to take ownership and responsibility for replacing imported fossil gas with renewable energy.

At the centre of this plan, the EU should frame local ownership of renewable energy production as a matter of security of energy supply.

1. Acknowledge and support local ownership of renewable energy production as a matter of securing energy supply.
2. Support energy sobriety and lasting behavioural change to save energy.
3. Access to renewable energy for

energy poor, vulnerable and lower-income households should be a priority – not just a side measure.

4. Ensure full implementation of EU rules for renewable energy communities.
5. Putting gas – even renewable gas – in its place.

[Read our full REPowerEU for Energy Citizens Manifesto¹](#)

REPowerEU package: what's in it for European consumers?

*Tiina Vyyryläinen (FI), Mordechaj Martin Salamon (DK), Baiba Miltoviča (LA) and Kęstutis Kupšys (LT)**

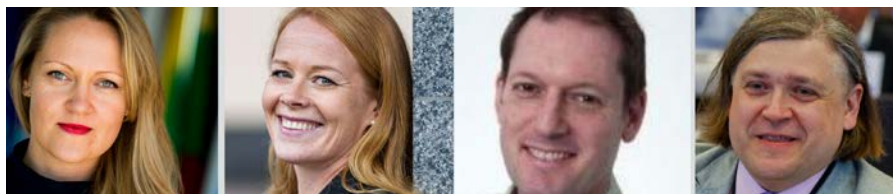
The Commission's new [REPowerEU²](#) package may bring welcomed support helping consumers invest in renewable energy and energy efficiency measures. However, it is still **not enough to overcome all the barriers consumers** face in their daily lives when trying to do their part for the green transition.

With energy prices surging, it is time to do everything possible to help

Same barriers, same need for action

The package seeks to achieve this by supporting the consumer take-up of solar panels, heat pumps and home renovation with increased energy efficiency and renewable energy targets. The Recovery and Resilience Facility ([RRF³](#)) will provide funds for that.

This all sounds good, but it is not enough that the EU is taking this position. What consumers need is for the Member States and local authorities to play their part as well and help tackle the practical barriers consumers face all around Europe.



Baiba Miltoviča, Tiina Vyyryläinen, Mordechaj Martin Salamon and Kęstutis Kupšys © EESC

consumers cut their energy bills and move to more sustainable energy consumption.

REPowerEU aims to massively

For example, **long permitting periods** for the installation of solar panels or heat pumps or for more energy-efficient home renovations are holding consumers back. There is also a **lack of trusted advisory services and professional installers** to help consumers choose wisely and do the installations.

If getting a permit to renovate your home takes months and months or you can't find a suitable installer, that may discourage you from investing. Many people need advice and reliable guidance since not all solutions work for everyone.

accelerate the much-needed energy transition given that we need to move away from Russian gas. How can this be done?

The shift to renewables and more energy-efficient housing and consumption will not happen overnight, try as we might. Consumers are facing unprecedented increases in energy bills, putting household budgets under immense pressure. That is why the Commission and the Member States need to ensure that energy supply to consumers is

1. REScoop.eu, Manifesto, <https://www.rescoop.eu/uploads/rescoop/downloads/REPowerEU-for-Energy-Citizens-Manifesto-FULL.pdf>

2. European Commission, REPowerEU, <https://europa.eu/jc3fnp>

3. European Commission, RRF, <https://europa.eu/jt78jr>

prioritised and no one is left in the cold next winter.

RRF funding is crucial for REPowerEU to materialise, with support for coordinated planning and financing for national infrastructure as well as energy projects and reforms. This measure should target household

consumers at Member State level.

Heating isn't the only problem though. Cooling is also an issue during the summer, with Europe suffocating increasingly frequently through heatwaves of 45°C and more. We should examine how solar energy can help with that.



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From bulk purchases to independent advice

There are many ways - immediate, short-term and long-term - in which national governments could help consumers through the crisis. These solutions all seek to help consumers play their part in the green transition and survive price increases.

There can be no doubt that promoting **one-stop-shops for building renovation** is crucial; it has already yielded good results.

Public authorities could **organise collective purchase campaigns** to get good deals from energy suppliers or buy energy-efficient products like

LED lightbulbs in bulk and make them available to less affluent consumers at a low price. Consumers should also be allowed to pay their **bills by instalments** to make it easier for them to keep up with payments, and **disconnections should be banned**. Some countries have already started to provide **vouchers**, but additional support for consumers - particularly vulnerable ones - is needed. While energy vouchers are welcome, they're often insufficient or come far too late to make a difference.

Public authorities should also **train frontline workers to advise**

consumers on how to cut their heating bills. Reducing the room temperature by just 1 degree, for example, can cut heating consumption by 5 to 7% with little compromise on comfort. Consumers often don't know what they can do in their daily lives relatively quickly. That is why Member States should also ensure **funding** for projects by **organisations advising consumers** on energy efficiency measures: for instance, consumer organisations that provide independent advice on issues such as consumer rights and energy consumption behaviour or efficiency measures.

A moment of solidarity

While met with understandable scepticism in some countries, ideas for the transport sector must be considered very seriously. Europeans want to be seen as conscientious citizens of the world, with proper consideration for values and peace at the core of policy making - but when it comes to individual freedoms, there is a lack of shared willingness to accept swift action to cope with looming challenges. Is society ready to adopt a **lower speed limit** for fuel economy reasons? All commuters would feel

the benefits of this move because of decreased imbalance in terms of fuel demand and supply resulting in lower pressure on prices at the pump. Even owners of powerful, gas-guzzling vehicles will see the double effect because their individual fuel consumption will decrease.

Nevertheless, as is the case in so many policy dossiers, REPowerEU will divide society along the lines of wealth and income. We should work to **diminish the regressive effects of REPowerEU measures**: we need to

help those with the fewest resources to adapt and to soften the impact on the most vulnerable households. The EESC, and especially its Civil Society Organisations' Group (Group III), has a crucial role to play here: as a body designed to represent civil society, we should help build a consensus in society by adopting an approach geared to the common good.

**The authors of this article come from consumer organisations in their respective countries: Finland, Denmark, Latvia and Lithuania.*

The future of energy in the European Union and the role of consumers



Ileana IZVERNICEANU DE LA IGLESIA (ES)
Director for Communication and Institutional Relations and

Spokesperson, Organisation of Consumers and Users (OCU)

There is strong consensus on what the future energy model should be throughout the European Union. The [European Green Deal](#)¹ sets out the path

for achieving climate neutrality by 2050. A transition that is fundamental to the continuity of our society as we envisage it today.

1. European Commission, A European Green Deal, <https://europa.eu/!Tr74bn>

Ileana Izverniceanu de la Iglesia © EESC

The Commission has repeatedly recognised the **key role of consumers** in designing an efficient, sustainable future energy market. Ensuring that consumers have enough **information** to make more **sustainable choices** will make them the lever for change needed for achievement of this green goal, which is still far off in terms of both time and the reality of emissions figures.

In addition, progressive decarbonisation should provide an

active role for **new players**, prosumers and energy communities, which will play a disruptive and decisive role in the future structure of the markets.

However, this process of **change is not without risk to consumers**. A transition that is not balanced, does not guarantee supply or leads to disproportionate price increases, which may jeopardise the whole process and the achievement of the desired green goal. The war in Ukraine has revealed some of these **risks**: Lack

of competition in current markets and asymmetry in regulation result in unjustified price increases, causing disenchantment among consumers and punishing the most vulnerable.

We consumers should not have to bear the brunt of the effort to achieve the green goal. **Fair, efficient, democratic regulation** is the only way to counter the risk of an energy transition that benefits just a few to the detriment of many.

WHAT IS EESC OPINION TEN/761 ALL ABOUT?

An interview with the rapporteur for the EESC opinion TEN/761¹ on “Energy prices”

Lutz RIBBE (DE)

Director, Department for Nature Conservation Policy, EuroNatur
President, EESC Sustainable Development Observatory



Lutz Ribbe © EESC

What are the three main findings of this opinion?

Firstly: contrary to what many people claim, climate policy is not the primary reason behind the rapid increase in prices. The current price shock is driven by fossil

fuels, particularly gas. Global gas consumption has risen considerably as economic activity has recovered following the COVID-19 pandemic, and Putin’s policy of energy scarcity is a further issue.

Secondly: unlike in the case of fossil

fuels, the costs associated with producing renewables are falling, making them now the cheapest forms of energy. Finally, there is another, very bitter finding: so far, it has been very difficult for citizens to benefit from the falling costs of renewable energy.

How could these issues be addressed? What are your three main proposals?

A greater distinction should be made between energy prices (markets) and energy costs (consumers). For years, we have been calling for energy savings, which can help moderate the increase in energy costs when energy prices go up. Now we do have higher prices, but the costs for many are being driven up to unsustainable levels. Nevertheless, in our opinion we state that we should not lower energy prices artificially. Rather, our energy consumption must be drastically reduced. However, this requires investment, e.g. buying energy-saving appliances or

insulating houses. Many people do not have the necessary funds, and policymakers are therefore asked to finally put in place appropriate support programmes.

A second point: citizens, too, must finally have the possibility to benefit from falling renewable energy prices. The European Commission promised years ago to put citizens at the heart of energy policy and to make them into producers, but to a large extent nothing has happened! In this connection, there are many great examples of how to help lower-

income households in particular. The Commission and the Member States must at long last take action here, and community energy cooperatives provide an opportunity.



© Sergey Neanderthalec, Shutterstock

1. EESC opinion TEN/761, <https://europa.eu/!RYjJQ>

After the adoption of the opinion, what have you done to promote the opinion and to make civil society's voice heard?

We have spoken to the European Commission and to MEPs. However, particularly in the case of the Commission, we still feel that the

concerns of the industry are receiving more attention than the interests of "small" citizens. Therefore it will remain an important task for us, as

Civil Society Organisations' Group of the EESC (Group III), to present these particular interests of citizens at every opportunity.

MEMBERS IN THE SPOTLIGHT

Krzysztof Pater elected President of the Polish Scouting and Guiding Association



Krzysztof Pater © Michal Wiraszka

Krzysztof PATER (PL)
Vice-President,
EESC Labour Market Observatory
President,
Polish Scouting and Guiding Association (ZHP)

outgoing authorities and debated on a large number of resolutions, including resolutions on the implementation of the SDGs, organisational culture, implementation of [Safe from Harm](#)² and safety policy for children, young people and adults, intergenerational dialogue and youth engagement.

On 21 May, Civil Society Organisations Group Member, Krzysztof Pater was elected president of the Polish Scouting and Guiding Association ([ZHP](#)¹) for the next four years.

The **42nd ZHP General Assembly**, which took place on 19-22 May 2022 in Warsaw, discussed reports from

ZHP provides dynamic, values-based, non-formal educational and leadership training programmes for about 90 000 young people in Poland between the ages of 6 and 25 years. It aims to provide a safe environment in which young people can achieve their potential as responsible and active

European citizens, who participate in their local communities and all areas of society. The scout motto is "Czuwaj": this means "be aware" or "stay awake", symbolising readiness. ZHP is a founding member of the World Organization of the Scout Movement and the World Association of Girl Guides and Girl Scouts.

ZHP was appointed host of the 26th [World Scout Jamboree](#)³ which will take place in 2027 in Gdańsk, Poland. The World Scout Jamboree takes place every four years in a different country. Jamborees can bring together about 40 000 people from all over the world.

NEWS FROM THE GROUP

European Just Transition Conference in Ireland

The Civil Society Organisations' Group (Group III) in partnership with Irish Rural Link ([IRL](#)⁴), the national network representing the interest of rural communities in Ireland, held a [joint conference](#)⁵ on 9 June in Tullamore, Ireland.

The conference explored the topic of **'Just Transition'** from multiple angles and speakers debated the necessity for, as well as the opportunities emanating from 'Just transitions' in the following three panels:

- Strengthening communities

and building capacities through recreation and heritage;

- Creating jobs and delivering renewable energy;
- Investing in education and training.

The conference was opened by Minister Pippa Hackett, Minister of State for Land Use and Biodiversity, with guest speakers; Kieran Mulvey, Just Transition Commissioner, Ireland; Cllr. Declan Harvey, Cathaoirleach of Offaly County Council and Séamus Boland, president of the Group III and CEO of IRL.



Séamus Boland and Pippa Hackett © EESC

1. Polish Scouting and Guiding Association, <https://zhp.pl/en>
2. Scouts, Safe from Harm, <https://www.scout.org/safefromharm>
3. Scouts, World Scout Jamboree, <https://www.scout.org/jamboree>
4. Irish Rural Link, <https://www.irishrurallink.ie/>
5. EESC, Just Transition conference in Tullamore, <https://europa.eu/IKGBC9G>

Speaking about the conference, **Séamus Boland**, said: "I am delighted to be able to bring my EESC Group to Tullamore to see first-hand how Just Transition is being implemented in an area which has been impacted most by the measures needed to address climate change. It is also important to highlight the vital role communities play in a Just Transition and ensuring that they are involved and engaged with every step of the way."

Minister Pippa Hackett said: "We stand in the doorway to transition – we can see the landscape ahead, some of us have dipped our toes in, but many of us are, understandably, reluctant to fully commit as to do so is to wave goodbye to what we know, what we understand. Civil society organisations have a tremendously important role to play as communicators, mediators and animators of both the people most impacted and those legislating, at national and EU level, for transition."

I welcome this conference as one more important step along the road for the most impacted regions of the EU, including our own Midlands region of Ireland."

Kieran Mulvey, Just Transition Commissioner said: "Over the last number of months I have engaged with community groups across the Midlands region and sought their feedback in relation to the just transition process to date including the national JTF. The overwhelming response was that they feel that most communities require assistance in the development of proposals and would favour a stronger emphasis on partnership in call for proposals which would see communities



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partner with local authorities, or other experienced bodies to access funding. I have signposted this in the Just Transition Fourth Progress report and recommend that these issues be addressed so that communities can engage meaningfully in the Just Transition process."

The conclusions and recommendations, a video recording and photos of the conference as well as the presentations of all guest speakers are available on the website of the EESC at: <https://europa.eu/!KGBc9G>

For a sustainable future, it is crucial to involve young people in the reconstruction process of Ukraine



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On 29 June, the Civil Society Organisations' Group (Group III) held a webinar entitled [Youth in the post-war reconstruction process](#)¹. The webinar was organised in the context of the [European Year of Youth 2022](#)² and moderated by Group III Member **Katrina Leitāne**, who is chairing the EESC coordination group for the European Year.

The webinar brought together civil society representatives from the Ukrainian, EU-27 and European level, institutional representatives and citizens, so that three different dimensions of the topic could be

discussed: the youth dimension, the institutional dimension and the European dimension. Participants also discussed

new youth realities and looked at the role of youth organisations in the reconstruction process. In this context, speakers made concrete proposals on youth empowerment. The proposals will feed into the legislative work of the Committee.

President **Séamus Boland** opened the webinar by calling for youth and youth organisations to be given greater recognition and capacity in order to be effectively involved in managing current challenges. Mr Boland said: "Be it the war in Ukraine, climate change or the food and energy crisis, we need to listen to young people. This is why

we recommended in our recent [EESC resolution](#)³ to encourage partnerships between EU and Ukrainian National Youth Councils and exchanges between young people and youth organisations from Ukraine and the EU." It was now time for young people to be given more responsibility and more trust to accomplish their aspirations.

Natalia Shevchuk from the Ukrainian Youth Council stressed the role of mental health support and the EU candidate status for the reconstruction process. The intervention of the 15-year-old refugee **Anzhelika Saldetskaya** demonstrated how dramatically the lives of many young people have changed since the beginning of the war.

Jaroslav Kurfürst, Ambassador,

1. EESC, webinar, <https://europa.eu/!8gdRjN>
 2. European Commission, European Year of Youth, https://europa.eu/youth/year-of-youth_en
 3. EESC resolution, <https://europa.eu/!hjKHf6>

Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Czech Republic, said: “Ukraine will be a priority of the Czech Presidency. Ukrainians should be able to rebuild and choose their future themselves. Young people should have a say and role here. This is their future.”

Group III Member **Louise Grabo**, who

represents the National Council of Swedish Youth Organisations (LSU), stressed the need for secure and sustainable economic support for the resilience and capacity of youth organisations. This was supported by other speakers, one of whom was **Catriona Graham** from the World

Scout Bureau. Ms Graham said: “Young people are out there, making changes in their communities. We need resourcing, recognition, trust and empowerment to ensure inclusion in the post-war reconstruction process.” A recording of the webinar is available at: <https://youtu.be/kK04p98txyE>

Conference to discuss “One Health” concept

The EESC’s [Consumers and Environment Category](#)¹ held a [hybrid conference](#)² on “Health (One Health)” on 20 June. Speakers and participants discussed the “One Health” concept, which emerged in the early 2000s with the realisation that human and animal health issues were closely linked to the health of ecosystems. The concept has recently gained traction with regard to climate change and the development of pandemics. Deforestation and biodiversity loss play a major role in this process.

Opening the conference, Category co-spokesperson **Thierry Libaert** said: “At all levels, it will only be possible to move forward and go beyond merely discussing one health by decoupling the climate, biodiversity and health services.”

Keynote speaker Éloi Laurent, author of *Et si la santé guidait le monde ?*, called for a shift from an economy focused on GDP and growth to one that follows a social-ecological approach. In this context, he proposed updating the current WHO definition of health. “We may wish to define ‘**full health**’ as a continuous state of well-being: physical and psychological, individual and social, human and ecological. The important insight provided by this definition is the holistic nature of health, which links mental health to physiological health, individual health to collective health and human health to planetary health.”

Pietro Stella from the European Food Safety Authority (EFSA) spoke about



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the authority’s work in the areas of **animal health and food safety**, including a two-year pilot project aimed at identifying emerging risks to food, feed and environmental safety in the transition to a circular economy, and its cooperation with stakeholder organisations. Mr Stella explained that the One Health approach was an integral part of the EU’s [Farm to Fork strategy](#)³. Fully implementing it would require legislative changes fostering cooperation, initiatives to enhance knowledge and expertise sharing, enhanced data policies, resources to implement a partnership model between regulatory actors, and research on the science of integration.

Bruno David from the French National Museum of Natural History addressed the impact of biodiversity erosion on consumers. He stressed the **importance of biodiversity and ecosystem services** for human well-being. “We are nothing without biodiversity,” he said. Biodiversity was key to human health and an important economic factor. “Our insects are important for pollination, for recycling, for biological control, for feeding insectivores, for controlling livestock parasites and more.” Mr David called for a green GDP and stressed the need

to overcome environmental injustices and to change consumption habits.

Agnès Popelin-Desplanches from the French Economic, Social and Environmental Council (CESE) spoke about the opinion on [“A national public policy on environmental health at the heart of the regions”](#)⁴, for which she was rapporteur. “We need to go beyond an approach to health based on diseases and treatments and move towards a global and coherent health and environmental policy. Risk prevention and health protection (full health) are intrinsically linked to respect for biodiversity and the preservation of life,” she said. The CESE would **recommend** tackling current challenges with **various measures** based on three key points:

- consolidate and reorganise the link between knowledge and decision-making;
- make environmental health a central and cross-cutting objective of public policies;
- empower local authorities and citizens.

The Members of the Category recommended that the Committee draw up an **own-initiative opinion** on the theme of the conference.

1. EESC, Consumers and Environment Category, <https://europa.eu/!Nf36rW>

2. EESC, Health (One Health) conference, <https://europa.eu/!RWtHxk>

3. European Commission, Farm to Fork strategy, <https://europa.eu/!7DnHBT>

4. CESE opinion, https://www.lecese.fr/sites/default/files/pdf/Fiches/2022/FI08_sante_environnement.pdf

The work of associations in calling for fundamental rights and principles

On 17 February, the [Associational Life Category](#)¹ held its second meeting of the year.

In a first panel discussion, chaired by Civil Society Organisations' Group (Group III) Member **Christian Moos**, Members looked at how civil society can strengthen the rule of law and democracy in the 'Year of Action' announced by the US president, Joe Biden, following the 2021 Summit



Colin Scicluna © EESC

for Democracy, and beyond. **Colin Scicluna**, head of cabinet of European Commission vice-president

Dubravka Šuica, stressed the crucial role of civil society networks for our democracies. With regard to democracy and the rule of law, the EESC's and the Commission's messages should reinforce one another, Mr Scicluna said. The discussion also included contributions by **Márton Gerő**, professor at the ELTE Faculty of Social Sciences (Hungary), on the situation of civil society in Hungary and by **Vasyl Kushmuns**, representing Promote Ukraine, on the work of his organisation to support Ukrainian refugees arriving in Belgium.

In a second panel discussion, moderated by Group III vice-president **Pietro Barbieri**, Members exchanged

views on how to strengthen the voice of persons with disabilities and people at risk of marginalisation in the European institutional setting. **Andrea Volterrani**, professor of sociology at the Tor Vergata University of Rome, introduced the key words of participation, community and communication. Other panellists, including EESC Members **Dovilė Juodkaitė**, **Elena Sinkevičiūtė** and **Maria Nikolopoulou**, added to this with the viewpoints of their organisations from the youth and disability sectors.

The final meeting of the year will take place on 18 October 2022.

Conference on the Future of Europe: What's next?



The Conference on the Future of Europe (CoFoE²) marked a huge step forward for participatory democracy. [Amongst other things, the CoFoE proposals](#)³ call for an enhanced institutional role for the EESC, which should be empowered as a facilitator and guarantor of participatory democracy activities like structured dialogue with civil society organisations (CSOs) and Citizens' Panels.

On 15 June, the Civil Society Organisations' Group (Group III) held a thematic debate on *Following up on the CoFoE from an EESC and organised civil society perspective: from words to action*. The debate was joined by **Colin Scicluna** (head of cabinet of Dubravka Šuica), **Annamie De Clerck** (European Citizens' Panel representative and working group on European Democracy), **Gabriella Civico** (Centre

for European Volunteering, joining as a representative of the EESC's Liaison Group) and **Alexandrina Najmowicz** (European Civic Forum and Civil Society Convention for the Future of Europe).

The debate was an opportunity for a first exchange and discussion of ideas and proposals on how to use the Group's current tools and processes to gather and convey messages and concerns from CSOs and Citizens' Panels to the European institutions and keep the wide and open dialogue initiated with the other components of CoFoE alive.

Group III president **Séamus Boland** opened the debate by pointing out the challenges civil society faced in order to be involved in the debates and work of the CoFoE. "When there is a crisis, CSOs are suddenly noticed, but they are there all the time", he stated, calling for a major inclusion of the citizens' and civil society's voice in the EU decision-making process.

Ariane Rodert, vice-president of Group III, highlighted the role of the Group, in particular, and the EESC as

a whole for participatory democracy, saying that "we can act as a bridge and we can support each other as CSOs that gather and engage citizens".

Ms De Clerck stated: "these are our questions and proposals; we are now waiting for answers", referring to EU policy-makers. **Ms Civico** wished for a "proper structured dialogue between EU institutions and organised civil society". **Ms Najmowicz** stated that in spite of the challenges, the voice of civil society had eventually been brought into the Conference. She recalled the presence of Art. 11 TEU on 'maintaining an open, transparent and regular dialogue with representative associations and civil society' and called for an inter-institutional agreement on civil dialogue.

Several Members of the Group took part in the debate. **Christian Moos** supported structured civil society dialogue as an effective way to include CSOs.

1. EESC, Associational Life Category, <https://europa.eu/IVD38XB>

2. Conference on the Future of Europe, <https://futureu.europa.eu/>

3. CoFoE, final report, <https://futureu.europa.eu/pages/follow-up>

Lidija Pavić-Rogošić reminded participants of the EESC's central role: "we should work on strengthening democracy, through innovative and modern ways for citizens' participation in cooperation with

national and European institutions and organisations". **Katrina Leitane** urged that proposals from young people be seriously considered and said "it is important for the European Commission to respond to our

opinions and to brainstorm together on their implementation".

The Group will continue its work on the follow up to the [CoFoE proposals](#)¹ in the coming month.

HIGHLIGHTS FROM THE LAST PLENARY SESSION

Debate on the Conference on the Future of Europe



Dubravka Šuica © EESC

At the plenary session on 15 June 2022, the EESC and European Commission vice-president Dubravka Šuica

agreed that, after a year of debate on the future of the EU, it was now vital to provide Europe's people with specific follow-up measures.

With 49 proposals and 326 measures adopted, based on citizens' recommendations and after contributions from all stakeholders, **vice-president Dubravka Šuica** said that the challenge was now twofold. Firstly, to live up to this call and find the best possible way to support structured dialogue with civil society organisations. Secondly, to follow up on the [Conference](#)² and ensure that this exercise does not backfire and feed resentment towards the EU

and its institutions. On this point, the **EESC** has put forward **specific ideas**: the follow-up should be thorough, simple, transparent and in the form of an online dashboard coupled with a public screening exercise.

President of the Civil Society Organisations' Group (Group III) **Séamus Boland** said that the [final recommendations](#)³ of the Conference needed a genuine follow-up producing tangible policy results, and that the Commission should integrate the outcomes into its 2023 work programme.

Group III Member **Christian Moos** said that the Council must not ignore the citizens' recommendations, which have been supported by the European Parliament. Taking them seriously means that "we need a Convention. Taking ourselves seriously means that we need to call for more formal civil society inclusion and a civil society



Kinga Joó © EESC

dialogue at European level."

Group III vice-president **Kinga Joó** mentioned the crucial role the EESC has had

in supporting the European Citizens' Initiative (ECI⁴), to give citizens a voice in EU policy-making, assuming its role as a facilitator to promote participatory democracy in Europe.

Group III Member **Lidija Pavić-Rogošić** stressed that if "we want democracy to survive, we need to strengthen citizens' ownership of future policies at all levels by deepening the commitment and establishing structured participatory processes".

A video recording of the plenary debate is available at: <https://fb.watch/dZz3vBkuMi/>

EESC plenary debate on digital rights and principles



Andrea Renda © EESC

On 15 June, at its plenary session, the EESC hosted a debate on **digital rights and principles** with **A n d r e a**

Renda, senior research fellow at the Centre for European Policy Studies (CEPS). The debate was linked to the adoption of the EESC opinions on the draft [European Declaration on Digital Rights and Principles](#)⁵ and the [Data](#)

[Act](#)⁶.

Andrea Renda expressed support for the Declaration on Digital Rights and Principles and for the Data Act, as two pieces in the jigsaw puzzle that is the EU regulatory system (including, among others, the AI act, the Digital Services Act, the Digital Markets Act and the Data Governance Act) being put together. The European model is based on ideas such as user-centric digital services, an inclusive digital environment which requires

skills, empowerment and access to connectivity, freedom of choice, pluralism, participation and the prevention of individual manipulation.

1. CoFoE, final report, <https://future.europa.eu/pages/follow-up>
2. Conference on the Future of Europe, <https://future.europa.eu/>
3. CoFoE, final report, <https://future.europa.eu/pages/follow-up>
4. European Commission, ECI, <https://europa.eu/citizens-initiative/en>
5. European Commission, Declaration on European Digital Rights and Principles, <https://europa.eu/IDqHGMc>
6. European Commission, Data Act, <https://digital-strategy.ec.europa.eu/en/library/data-act-proposal-regulation-harmonised-rules-fair-access-and-use-data>

The Declaration on Digital rights and Principles

Ileana Izverniceanu de la Iglesia, Member of the Civil Society Organisations' Group (Group III), stressed that the digital transformation

is essential for economic growth and recovery, improving competitiveness and promoting opportunities, prosperity and jobs. However, this

transition has to be undertaken with a lot of caution, so that no one is left behind and making sure that all European citizens are involved.

The Data Act

Maurizio Mensi, Group III Member and co-rapporteur to this [EESC opinion](#)¹, outlined the importance of this legislation, as its goal is to create fairer access and usage. It sets out a series of principles related to social inclusion and solidarity, putting people at the centre. "The EESC supports data governance for full control over generated data, in line with digital humanism, guaranteeing EU strategic autonomy and

technological independence while respecting dignity and fundamental rights," Mr Mensi said.

Group III Member **Alessandro Mostaccio** emphasised that the EESC strongly supports the European Data Strategy on the digital economy because it tries to ensure that this market is people-oriented as a prerequisite for creating a fair and secure digital environment for citizens and businesses. It is of great symbolic



Maurizio Mensi © EESC

and political importance, as it re-establishes the supremacy of the rule of law over the economy.

A video recording of the plenary debate is available at: <https://fb.watch/dZz55kauqL/>

Ukraine's reconstruction discussed at the EESC plenary



Vsevolod Chentsov © EESC

On 16 June, the EESC held a plenary debate on the situation in Ukraine and the adoption of the [EESC Resolution](#)² on

Ukraine – from relief to reconstruction – proposals by European civil society. Three Ukrainian speakers contributed to the debate: H. E. Ambassador **Vsevolod Chentsov**, Head of the Mission of Ukraine to the European Union, **Marta Barandiy**, representing Promote Ukraine, and **Mariya Korolchuk**, representing the Community Organized Relief Effort (CORE) and Funky Citizens.

EESC president **Christa Schweng** stressed that the EESC would continue to focus on Ukraine, stating that "as the house of European civil society, it is our duty to advocate enhanced support for Ukrainian civil society organisations."

Mr Chentsov underlined the crucial importance of the reconstruction process in Ukraine, which would affect

the state, the economy and society. "While we are fighting the war, we are also fighting for our European future," he stated, referring to Ukraine's EU candidate status.

Ms Barandiy praised the help received from civil society organisations with regard to temporarily protected people, humanitarian assistance, sanctions on Russia and the European perspective on Ukraine and its candidate status.

Ms Korolchuk stated that "Ukrainians are united by two purposes: to win the war and to rebuild their country", stressing that not only do they share European democratic values, but they are actually willing to fight for them.

Séamus Boland, president of the Civil Society Organisations' Group (Group III) and one of the rapporteurs for the EESC resolution, said: "Civil society actors must be at the centre of the programming, implementation and monitoring of EU and national humanitarian assistance to Ukraine – both during the war and when rebuilding the country. Young



Séamus Boland © EESC

Ukrainians and youth organisations should be directly involved in rebuilding the country." The EESC resolution

strongly supports the country's unconditional EU candidate status and states that European civil society will be working hand in hand with Ukraine for Ukraine on the reconstruction of the country and on delivering a stronger, greener, more resilient and sustainable European partner.

Several Members of the Group III took the floor in the plenary debate. **Krzysztof Stanisław Balon** asked for support from all EU Member States: "Ukraine has to be granted EU candidate status immediately. Cohesion policy should be adapted accordingly so that it can meet the challenges of reconstruction and accession." **Svjetlana Marijon** said it was important "to make sure that Ukrainian refugees receive

1. EESC opinion INT/978, <https://europa.eu/!CHk7kG>
2. EESC Resolution, <https://europa.eu/!hjkHf6>

psychological support”, which should be the top priority. **Tymoteusz Adam Zych** underlined: “We

admire Ukrainian resistance and unequivocally condemn the Russian aggression.”

A video recording of the plenary debate is available at: <https://fb.watch/dZz1J7TDNL/>

OVERVIEW OF RECENT WORK

The last EESC plenary session took place on 15 and 16 June. The EESC plenary adopted 14 opinions and 1 resolution, 7 of which were drafted by Members of the Civil Society Organisations’ Group. A list of the recent work can be found below.

Anastasis YIAPANIS (CY), rapporteur, [CCMI/187](#)¹ The European Furniture Industry

Francisco Javier GARAT PÉREZ (ES), rapporteur, [NAT/850](#)² Management, conservation and control measures applicable in the Convention of the International Commission for the Conservation of Atlantic Tunas (ICCAT)

Kęstutis KUPŠYS (LT), rapporteur, [NAT/847](#)³ Revision of the F-gas regulation

Maurizio MENSI (IT), co-rapporteur, [INT/978](#)⁴ Data act

Pietro Vittorio BARBIERI (IT), co-rapporteur, [REX/554](#)⁵ Instrumentalisation of migrants

Séamus BOLAND (IE), rapporteur, [EESC resolution](#)⁶ *Ukraine – from relief to reconstruction – proposals by the European civil society*

Stoyan TCHOUKANOV (BG), rapporteur, [INT/986](#)⁷ Chips Joint Undertaking

The **complete texts** of all EESC opinions are available in various language versions on the Committee’s [website](#)⁸.

The **next EESC plenary session** will take place on **21 and 22 September 2022**. For more information on the upcoming plenary session please visit our [website](#)⁹.

A list including all **new work appointments** of Civil Society Organisations’ Group Members is available on the Committee’s [website](#)¹⁰.

UPCOMING EVENTS

18/07/2022 – Meeting of the EESC’s Farmers Category



More information on the Civil Society Prize 2022 is available at: <https://www.eesc.europa.eu/en/agenda/our-events/events/eesc-civil-society-prize-2022>

1. EESC opinion CCMI/187, <https://europa.eu/!krHFq8>
2. EESC opinion NAT/850, <https://europa.eu/!T9c3qX>
3. EESC opinion NAT/847, <https://europa.eu/!kCkM3W>
4. EESC opinion INT/978, <https://europa.eu/!CHk7kG>
5. EESC opinion REX/554, <https://europa.eu/!x8MfBG>
6. EESC resolution, <https://europa.eu/!hjKHf6>
7. EESC opinion INT/986, <https://europa.eu/!rKKnYd>
8. EESC opinions, <https://europa.eu/!wF86wY>
9. EESC plenary sessions, <https://europa.eu/!Dg84qG>
10. EESC, New work appointments, <https://europa.eu/!B8mnf8>

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