Civil Society Prize in 2019 dedicated to the empowerment of women

The EESC dedicates its flagship Civil Society Prize in 2019 to the empowerment of women and fight for gender equality

Applications for 2019 are now open

The European Economic and Social Committee (EESC) has launched its Civil Society Prize for 2019. The theme of the 2019 edition is More women in Europe’s society and economy and the prize will honor innovative initiatives and projects which fight for equal opportunities for women and men and their equal treatment in all spheres of economic and social life.

The EESC Civil Society Prize is open to all civil society organisations officially registered within the European Union and acting at local, national, regional or European level. Individuals can also apply. To be eligible, initiatives or projects must have already be implemented or be still ongoing.

A total of EUR 50,000 will be awarded to a maximum of five winners. The deadline for entries is 6 September at 10 a.m, while the award ceremony will take place on 12 December 2019 in Brussels.

The full description of requirements and the online application form are available on our webpage. (II)
Europeans are asking of the new legislature, of the new president of the European Commission, and of those who exercise the executive and legislative powers of the European Union, that they respond to their expectations and aspirations.

Many decisions still have to be made for the EU to progress further: greater ambition in relation to the climate, fairer digitalisation of the economy which is geared to people, responses to the challenge of immigration and the right to asylum, funding for the EU, steps to reduce social inequalities and boost solidarity between regions, implementation of the European pillar of social rights, a new industrial policy for Europe, etc. All these are priorities with which our institutions will have to deal.

In the new European landscape taking shape before our very eyes, in our capacity as civil society we will have to assume our role, make public debate more dynamic through our initiatives and accompany this new approach and new energy with daring vision. This is the task awaiting us.

Isabel Caño
Vice-president for communication

Diary Dates

28 June 2019, Brussels
Communicating Disability Rights

12 July 2019, Brussels
What kind of economic models do citizens want for Europe?

17 - 18 July 2019, Brussels
EESC Plenary session

In short

**EESC Vice-President Isabel Caño fired one of the six starter pistols for the Brussels 20km race**

More than 40 000 runners representing 137 different nationalities took part in the 20km sporting event in Brussels, which celebrated its 40th anniversary on 19 May 2019. The theme of this year’s race was the European elections and the slogan "This time I'm voting".

With 1373 staff members taking part in the race, the European institutions were well represented in the competition for the 18th year in a row. Their shirts bore the proud slogan "Running for Europe". The starting pistols for the event in the Cinquantenaire Park were fired by King Philippe, along with Isabel Caño, Vice-President of the EESC, Maroš Šefčovič, Vice-President of the European Commission, and Jaume Duch Guillot, Director-General of Communication at the European Parliament. The best times were obtained by Alexandra Tondeur (1:13:04) for the women and Valentin Poncelet (1:00:34) for the men. The EESC Info team would like to offer our congratulations to all our Committees colleagues who ran through the streets of the capital and crossed the finish line. They include: Eleonora di Nicolantonio, Karin Füssli, Jakob Andersen, Johannes Kind, Joaquin Calvo Basarán and many more. Congratulations to all of you!

It was Ms Caño who, on behalf of the EU, thanked all the participants with the following message: "This event has been characterised by an atmosphere of great joy, conviviality, sharing, collective enthusiasm and, above all, a real sense of kinship. " The next Brussels 20km will take place on 31 May 2020. (ehp)

**Dilyana Slavova presents EESC’s views at Eastern Partnership Foreign Ministers meeting**

Dilyana Slavova, president of the EESC’s External Relations section, attended the meeting of foreign ministers of the Eastern Partnership countries hosted by the Council of the EU on 13 May to celebrate the 10th anniversary of the Eastern Partnership.

Dilyana Slavova said that the Eastern Partnership countries (Ukraine, Georgia, Moldova, Armenia, Azerbaijan and Belarus) have always been high on the EESC’s external relations agenda and that "contact with civil society organisations from these countries has developed and matured".
Joint monitoring mechanisms established with these countries "are bearing fruit", even if there are continuing concerns regarding the shrinking space for civil society, respect for the rule of law and freedom of speech. (dgf)

**EESC celebrates EEA Agreement's 25th anniversary**

The 25th anniversary of the European Economic Area (EEA) Agreement, in force since 1994, was the main topic of the EEA Consultative Committee meeting on 23 and 24 May. This committee, which represents employers, workers and other civil society players of EEA member states, insisted on the importance of completing the internal market and addressing its social dimension as the main priorities for the years ahead.

At a special session dedicated to the 25 years celebration, Dilyana Slavova, President of the EESC's External Relations Section, described the EEA Agreement as "a success story. More than a trade agreement it's an example of cooperation between countries that share the same values". EFTA secretary-general Henri Gétaz stressed the resilience of the EEA Agreement: "We went through the financial crisis, up to four reforms of EU Treaties, and the EEA is still in place and working; it takes a lot of work to get this level of cooperation, and also political effort." (dgf)

**EESC/CoR canteen goes plastic-free**

Since 14 May, no disposable plastic material or products packed with plastic are used in the canteen shared by the European Committee of the Regions and the European Economic and Social Committee in the Jacques Delors building, has thus become the first plastic-free canteen of the European Institutions.

Plastic plates, glasses and cutlery are banned, water is only available from water fountains and all other beverages are provided in glass bottles or cans.

Going plastic free is part of a comprehensive approach towards sustainability that started back in 2011, when the CoR/EESC canteen signed up to the sustainable canteen programme of the Brussels Capital Region. Two years later, it won the Good Food Label (with two out of three forks), the Brussels Capital Region certification that recognises eateries that provide healthy and sustainable food. These achievements are the result of the vision and efforts of the EESC/CoR EMAS service in cooperation with the catering contractor. Both agree that there are still challenges ahead, such as applying the same set of rules to the cafeteria and the meeting rooms in the Committees' buildings and discourage the use of disposable products. (dgf/ls)

**Margrethe Vestager at the EESC: "We need a global solution for digital taxation"**

Margrethe Vestager, European Commissioner for Competition, said at the EESC's May plenary session that "the Commission has been pushing for digital taxation because we need a global solution: it's unacceptable that some companies pay taxes and others don't". However, the Commissioner explained that the EU has to find a European solution first.

Luca Jahier, president of the EESC, introduced Margrethe Vestager as the European advocate for competition, a crucial issue for economic democracy: "If we allow the few to control data, they will control the economy and democracy, and then our future will be challenged". Commissioner Vestager agreed, stating that "huge amounts of information can give big businesses an edge that smaller rivals can't match, so they can find it hard to compete, even with a better product, if they don't have a critical mass of data or users". To remedy this market distortion, Vestager said that "one thing [the European Commission] may need to do to open up competition is to require companies to give rivals access to their data in order to give competitors a fair chance".

The Commissioner stressed that competition should also build citizens' trust in a digital world: "Some platforms collect data from millions or even billions of users, and know more about us than our loved ones, so we need to make sure that we tame the dark sides of this digital world". To this end, she said that the European Commission will protect "multi-homing" (which allows consumers to use more than one digital platform), and be "vigilant against online platforms that are so strong that they can act as market referee by fixing the rules for companies that want to be part of it". (dgf)

**The fight against antisemitism is also a fight for a democratic, value-based...**
**Europe**

The EESC invited Raya Kalnova (European Jewish Congress), Michael Bilewicz (Centre for Research on Prejudice, University of Warsaw) and Joel Kotek (Free University of Brussels - ULB) to discuss anti-Semitism in Europe at its plenary session in May.

The EESC president, Luca Jahier started by saying: "Recent events are showing us that we must not let our guard down and think that the sixty years of peace in Europe are to be taken for granted. And although our fundamental rights are enshrined in Article 2 of the Treaty of the European Union, we need to defend them every single day."

Since fear has become a constant part of Jewish people's lives and an alarming 38% are considering emigrating, Ms Kalnova said that the Jewish World Congress felt an increasing sense of emergency. "To combat anti-Semitism, it is important to know what it actually is." The International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance's working definition of anti-Semitism has become a reference for governance and civil society. It has already been endorsed by eleven EU Member States, as well as the European Parliament and the Council of the European Union. Civil society organisations also need to endorse and apply this definition and provide leadership in addressing the problem.

Mr Bilewicz referred to the results of a survey conducted in 2017 revealing that one in four people believe Jews themselves are to blame for the growing anti-Semitism. Many Europeans (50% in Poland, 37% in Austria, 32% in Germany) also believe that Jews exploit the Holocaust.

"Against all expectations, the conspiracy theory that Jews have too much power is again back in our society, in the media and sometimes even in our parliaments," added Mr Kotek. Hatred against Jews is more perceptible than ever.

EESC members expressed their support for the Jewish community and their commitment to fighting discrimination against minorities.

"It is our duty to fight any act of anti-Semitism in Europe," said Employers' Group president Jacek Krawczyk. "It is anti-Semitism that led to the Holocaust. Eighty years after the Second World War started, it would be a serious mistake to forget this. We should all think of this when choosing who to vote for in the European elections."

Arno Metzler, president of the Diversity Europe Group, stressed: "We must all protest and speak up frankly and freely in our personal circles when we hear unpleasant jokes about Jewish people and the past. It is a public and also a personal obligation to defend our European values."

From the Workers' Group, José Antonio Moreno Díaz, president of the EESC Group on Fundamental Rights and the Rule of Law, said: "Tough times are those when the evident needs to be explained. People who do not remember their history are condemned to repeat it. We must leave no room for discrimination. Tolerating intolerance will destroy democracy. Political forces must unite in isolating fascists and expelling them from their ranks." (sma)

Read President Jahier's speech [here](#).

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**EESC puts forward proposal to enhance SMEs' contribution to the bioeconomy**

"The challenge ahead involves both fighting climate change and providing nutrition for a planet that will soon be home to 10 billion people. The bioeconomy, which encompasses the production of renewable biological resources and their conversion into food, feed and bio-based products, can play a major role in achieving both," said Mindaugas Maciulevičius and Udo Hemmerling, rapporteurs of the EESC opinion *Updating of the Bioeconomy Strategy*, adopted on 15 May.

Sustainability principles are essential for a 'new' bioeconomy and natural resources have to be preserved in order to remain productive. SMEs play a major role in the bioeconomy. In order to increase their contribution, they need better advice and access to finance. It is essential to set up individual and flexible advisory services to help agri-food SMEs launch long-term, innovative projects. In addition, public-private cooperation could play a major role in enhancing efficiency and triggering the exchange of knowledge, expertise and best practices.

Linkages between different areas – urban-rural, rural-rural, land-sea – could contribute to sustainable bioeconomy value chains and clusters, and would particularly help central and eastern European countries increase their output and thus boost growth and jobs, especially in rural areas. This region is rich in biomass due to extensive activities in the fields of agriculture, forestry and fishery, with high, but under-utilised, biomass capacity. (sma)

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**Aging with dignity - a human right, but also an opportunity for economic progress**

The EESC believes that aging with dignity should become a fundamental right. Europeans are living longer, and this is good news. But with aging, new social, economic and health-related challenges are emerging that affect both the elderly and their families and societies. For too long this topic has been neglected and the growing needs of older people not anticipated, says the EESC. In an opinion adopted on 15 May, the EESC highlights the enormous potential older people represent for new jobs and technological progress.

Home Helpers, personal carers, care assistants and nurses are among the occupations that will create the most jobs in the future. Their knowledge and education are inextricably linked to the well-being of older people.

"We propose to establish a *European minimum training/education* programme for nurses in gerontology, caregivers and care assistants, not only on a technical level but also on a social and human level, in order to enable and strengthen both the mobility of
workers and services for older people”, says Marian Krzaklewski, rapporteur of this EESC opinion. Training should be facilitated through ICT tools. The EESC also recommends establishing a common EU framework that includes the best of existing training programmes.

Older people want to live as long as possible in their own environment. For the EESC, it is essential that their preferences be respected, in dialogue with their families and relatives. “However, the choice can no longer only be between live-in care and residential care homes”, opinion co-rapporteur Jean-Pierre Haber underlined. “Alternative facilities already exist, and those yet to be built need to be geared towards facilitating independent living. Thus their design should be based on people's profiles and any particular medical conditions they may have.”

The EESC also calls for better use of digital technology innovations: telemedicine, sensors, a digital clinical card and digital medical records, as well as home automation technologies, which would not only enhance older people's independence, but also make care more efficient and secure. (sma)

Europe’s civil society calls for political commitment to achieving equal treatment of men and women

The European Economic and Social Committee (EESC) has urged the European Union and its Member States to put gender equality at the top of their political agenda amid concerns that recent attacks on women’s rights in Europe might seriously compromise progress towards equality between men and women.

“This decade is witnessing a visible and organised backlash in gender equality and human rights. In many areas, including pay, pensions and employment opportunities, progress towards equality has either stalled or gone into reverse”, said Indre Vareikytė, rapporteur for the EESC Opinion on Gender equality issues.

“At the current rate, it will take over 100 years for women to become equal to men in Europe, and daughters of future generations will have fewer rights than the women of today,” she added.

The EESC has called on the EU to step up its efforts and make equality a standalone goal in its future financial frameworks, with an ambitious, binding five-year strategy for effectively tackling all aspects of gender equality.

It has called on all Member States that have not yet ratified the Istanbul Convention to reconsider their position and asked the Commission to add on-line harassment and mobbing of women to the definition of illegal hate speech.

To ensure equal representation within its own ranks, the EESC has called on the Council to review its guidelines for the appointment of EESC members and recommended that the Member States select them on a gender parity basis. At present, 30% of EESC members are women. (II)

The EESC asks governments to encourage and promote philanthropy in Europe

The European Economic and Social Committee has called on the EU Member States to establish an enabling environment for philanthropy in line with EU freedoms and fundamental rights, and recommends that they recognise and promote philanthropy as a recognised and socially responsible form of contributing to the public good or the welfare of others.

In its first opinion entirely dedicated to philanthropy, the EESC also recommends that facilitating cross-border philanthropic activities should be a priority for both the EU and the Member States. However, the Committee has pointed out that philanthropy cannot be a substitute for a welfare state and strong social protection systems based on tax justice and effective employment policies. Instead, these should be strengthened and further developed, which would also improve the capability of philanthropic organisations to “fill in the gaps” and complement funding in niche areas where public support is lacking. “We fully acknowledge the complementarity and innovative added value that philanthropy can bring to social cohesion by boosting common values and making our society more resilient,” the rapporteur of the opinion, Mr Petru Sorin Dandea said. Philanthropic action should remain transparent, he stressed.

figures show that philanthropy has rapidly grown in Europe over the last three decades, with philanthropic contributions in Europe, and daughters of future generations will have fewer rights than the women of today,” she added.

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The single market has brought very tangible benefits to European citizens

The single market has brought many real benefits to European citizens, the European Economic and Social Committee (EESC) argues in its response to the European Commission's assessment of the state of play of the single market. Affordable air travel, the end of roaming charges, enhanced job opportunities in a continent-wide labour market, consumer rights that offer a high level of protection across borders. This success story can be an antidote against populism, nationalism and protectionism, says the EESC.

The EESC’s plenary on 15 May adopted an opinion on the Commission’s communication The Single Market in a changing world: A unique asset in need of renewed political commitment, which reviews 25 years of the single market and outlines the challenges ahead.
The single market has been a tremendous accomplishment, the EESC says in its opinion, and the EU must ensure citizens are aware that many of the very real benefits they have enjoyed in the past 25 years as consumers, business owners or workers are the result of the single market - benefits which are estimated to amount to 8.5% of EU GDP:

For European companies, the single market has meant opportunities to scale up and expand their activities across the EU. Globally, it has given Europe the leverage of a 512-million-strong market, as recently shown by international efforts to comply with the General Data Protection Regulation.

This success story can help rally the support needed to make the single market fit for the digital era, the European Economic and Social Committee (EESC) argues.

The single market must also be perceived as an opportunity to reassert European values and rights: "The values of freedom, economic growth, democracy, peace, science and innovation, political stability, consumer and social rights must always be present in citizens' minds. They are enablers of progress and prosperity for all Member States and citizens," says opinion rapporteur Gonçalo Lobo Xavier.

"The single market affects everyone, and that's what makes it so powerful", says opinion co-rapporteur Juan Mendoza Castro. "We need to combat populist and nationalist threats, which are on the rise in Europe, and the single market is one of the best tools we have to counter these messages".

The EESC also focuses on the EU's competition policy. Its rules limiting state aid and fighting against abuse of dominant positions have been a source of dynamism for the European market and benefits for consumers and businesses. However, in the face of harsh global competition from (sometimes state-owned) oligopolies or monopolies, the EU should demand reciprocity from its trade partners to help European companies vie for markets. (dm)

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**Artificial intelligence in Europe: no one must be left behind**

The development of artificial intelligence in Europe should be as broadly inclusive as possible, the EESC says in its assessment of the European Commission’s Coordinated Plan on Artificial Intelligence. Policy should ensure that civil society reaps the numerous benefits of AI while minimising risks such as the manipulation of democratic processes.

In its opinion on the European Commission’s proposed Coordinated Plan on Artificial Intelligence, the EESC stresses that AI-related policies must engage all social players, including businesses, workers and consumers. This means ensuring the accessibility of data and infrastructure, the availability of user-friendly products and access to knowledge and skills.

Special measures should be taken to increase women's skills in AI and encourage them to take up AI jobs and tasks, she urges, in view of reports that women are lagging behind men in ICT professions in all EU countries (1.5 million women out of a total of 8.9 million in 2018, according to Eurostat figures).

Education systems in Member States must be overhauled to prepare Europe's young people for a world with pervasive AI. Curricula from primary schools to universities need to be reformed to guarantee a strong base in science, technology, engineering and mathematics, as well as in critical thinking. This will help cover the skills demand in Europe, where, according to the Commission, there were 600 000 unfilled vacancies for digital experts in 2018.

At the same time, present-day workers who risk losing their jobs will need lifelong and ongoing learning to upgrade their skills or retrain in new tasks, as AI will likely change the nature of jobs rather than killing them altogether.

The EESC believes that investment in education and training should be a central part of national AI strategies, and also calls for increased EU funds to support reforms.

To make sure society as a whole reaps the numerous benefits of AI, the EESC suggests that the EU adopt the three-pronged framework of sustainable development as a guiding approach: "If AI benefits society – in the spirit of sustainable development – by generating economic prosperity, social well-being and health, as well as environmental gains, it can be acknowledged as 'doing good'”, thus overcoming widespread fears about it, says opinion rapporteur Kylä-Harakka-Ruonala. (dm)

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**News from the Groups**

**The Workers’ voice in the next European Parliament**

by the EESC’s Workers’ Group

“We need the voice of workers to be heard loud and clear not only in the European Parliament, but also in the Commission” said Oliver Röpke, President of the Workers’ Group. For this reason, on 22 May 2019 the EESC Workers’ Group organised a side event at the ETUC Congress to discuss how we can ensure that the rights of workers are at the centre of the political agenda in the new European Parliament over the next five years.

Participants discussed the challenges that trade unions are facing and how they will deal with the expected success of right wing populist parties. “We must regain the trust of workers, because nationalists and extremists will always try to profit from people's despair to gain support,” added Gabriele Bischoff.

The panel, comprised of ETUC General Secretary Luca Visentini, Austrian MEP Evelyn Regner, and two European Parliament candidates, Gaby Bischoff and Nicolas Schmit, agreed that the trust of voters needs to be regained and that politicians should provide an alternative to the rhetoric of anti-European populists. “Voters did not turn racist overnight; people are...
disenchanted and in despair and nationalists offer easy answers, thriving on people's harsh living conditions", said Luca Visentini.

The EU needs to be a social project that improves the working and living conditions of all citizens and tackles inequalities. This requires fair and progressive taxation, the implementation of the Social Pillar, common minimum social standards and the proper enforcement of labour law. (mg)

**Diversity Europe Group releases executive summary of study on young people and the EU**

by the EESC's Diversity Europe Group

The main elements of the executive summary of the study on Youngsters and the EU - Perceptions, Knowledge and Expectations were presented in the press room of the European Commission’s Charlemagne building on May 15.

This research aims to draw comparisons between the attitudes of young people studying at the Brussels-based European Schools and at schools following national education systems in France, Germany, Italy, Sweden and Romania. How much do these young people know about the EU and where have they learnt it? What do they think about the EU and how do they think the EU can or will affect their lives? Are there pronounced differences between Member States and do students in the European schools have distinctively different attitudes?

Commenting on the research, Arno Metzler, president of the EESC's Diversity Europe Group, said: “It is essential to build a new European citizenship as a way to engage with people and enrich them. We should develop new educational tools with regard to the EU, for example by developing a European learning platform or introducing a specific subject in schools to explain what the EU institutions do on a daily basis. We want to make the European community more active. CSOs and citizens should communicate the idea and the aims of Europe. We need to capitalise on our young generations and listen to them, at both national and European level.” (ih)

**Commission vice-president debates with Employers’ Group on future policy priorities**

by the EESC's Employers' Group

Investments in the EU, current challenges the EU is facing and possible priorities for the next term of the European Commission and European Parliament - these were the main topics of the debate between European Commission vice-president Jyrki Katainen and the members of the Employers’ Group, which took place at the group’s meeting on 15 May 2019.

Jacek Krawczyk, president of the Employers’ Group, welcomed Mr Katainen and thanked him for his courage and engagement in defending the rule of law and fundamental rights in the EU. He also thanked him for their earlier meeting in the European Commission, when he had handed to Mr Katainen the declaration issued by the Employers' Group ahead of the European elections.

Tellervo Kylä-Harakka-Ruonala, vice-president of the Group, pointed out that employers are very committed to the mindset of sustainable development - a policy area in which Mr Katainen has been very active. She added that the role of business and economic growth in achieving sustainable development has still not gained the recognition it deserves.

Summarising the term of office of the European Commission, now coming to an end, Mr Katainen underlined significant progress in integration in certain areas such as the capital markets union, the energy union and the digital single market. He admitted that the European Union is now facing a much greater external challenge from global competitors than used to be the case a few years ago. Moreover, certain countries would like to see the EU weakened and fragmented. “That is why we need to defend both the European economic interest and European values,” Mr Katainen said. (lj)

**Soon in the EESC/Cultural events**

"Grand Départ" for clean mobility

On 3 July 2019 the EESC will welcome Alberto Toscano, journalist and author of the book "A bike against Nazi barbarism, the incredible destiny of the champion Gino Bartali", to a debate on clean mobility. Italian cycling champion Gino Bartali was an extraordinary man, a discreet hero who saved hundreds of Italian Jews during the Holocaust. The meeting is being organised by the Transport, Energy, Infrastructure and Information Society (TEN) section of the EESC to mark the “Grand Départ” from Brussels of the 2019 Tour de France (7 July 2019). The aim is to honour not only sport and an environmentally friendly mode of transport, but also human values.

For Pierre Jean Coulon, president of the TEN Section, it is important for people to change their habits - shifting from individual to collective forms of transport (public transport, carpooling, etc.) - and for political authorities to facilitate this shift (for example, by
Artwork exhibition "Post-industrial Societies: Art & Crisis of Values"

The EESC is hosting the art exhibition "Post-industrial Societies: Art & Crisis of Values" featuring the work of the Spanish artist, Jesus Montoia Oribe. The exhibition has been organised to highlight the work done by the EESC in the field of industrial change. It will be displayed at the EESC from 3 June until 30 June.


Council to host EESC exhibition "The EU speaks your language"

The Council of the EU will display in its premises the exhibition 'The EU speaks your language,' originally shown at the EESC in September 2018 to mark the 60th anniversary of the first legal act enshrining multilingualism in the EU.

The EU speaks your language was produced by the EESC and launched in September 2018 on the 60th anniversary of regulation 1/1958 entering into force.

The EU speaks your language is now at its fifth rerun. Conceived as a travelling exhibition, it illustrates the key role of translation in safeguarding the supreme goals of diversity, equal opportunities and democratic legitimisation. Designed as a tribute to a multilingual Europe with expert input from the joint translation services of the EESC and the Committee of the regions, it travels back in time to 1958, highlighting its historical significance of that first legal act whilst featuring a modern approach to what it essentially symbolises.

The EU speaks your language, Council of the EU (Language Library, LEX building), 5 June to 31 October. (cc)
The photo exhibition *Together for Inclusion* is being presented on 18 and 19 June 2019 in the Global Village of the European Development Days (EDDs 2019), organised by the European Commission in Tour & Taxis, Brussels.

The exhibition was organised by the EESC in partnership with the International Disability and Development Consortium (IDDC) and displayed at the EESC last December to commemorate the International Day of People with Disabilities.

The exhibition showcases the 10 award-winning images of the IDDC’s 2017 photo contest—images of people with disabilities shown in a positive light as active agents of their lives.

For more information: https://eudevdays.eu/about-edd (cc)