



EESC info

European Economic and Social Committee

A bridge between Europe and organised civil Society

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**EESC INFO - SPECIAL - CIVIL SOCIETY PRIZE
2019**

Available Languages:

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Editorial



Dear Readers,

As the voice of Europe's civil society, the European Economic and Social Committee (EESC) supports and acknowledges the precious work of the EU's diverse civil society organisations, trade unions and employers' organisations, who, every day and in their own way, strive to make our Union a better place.

Once a year, the EESC awards a special prize to celebrate and pay tribute to particular achievements of Europe's civil society in a given field, after carefully identifying a theme that covers an important area of its work. This year, our Civil Society Prize was awarded for the eleventh time and I am delighted and proud to say that we chose to dedicate it to women's empowerment and actions championing gender equality.

Because time goes by, but inequality of opportunity between men and women remains. In this day and age, it is unacceptable that women, who make up over half of the EU's population, still suffer from discrimination.

It is unacceptable that, at the dawn of the new decade, we are experiencing a backlash against women's rights across Europe. It is equally unacceptable that on average women still earn 16% less than men or have much more chances of experiencing poverty in old age than their male counterparts.

Our prize has shown Europe's civil society to be a fervent champion of gender equality. With its theme "More women in Europe's society and economy", the EESC Civil Society Prize 2019 attracted 177 candidates, which is the second highest number of entries in

its history, just behind the 2016 theme of migration.

As you will see in this special issue of our newsletter, the projects we received promote active and engaged women and empower those who are in vulnerable or disadvantaged situations. They highlight women's innovative work and roles in society and denounce the omnipresent stereotypes and discrimination.

All of them, with our five winners at the forefront, point to the willingness of many among us to take action and make our society truly equal for women and men.

Our first-prize winner, the Women's Toponymy association from Italy, believes that toponymy – the study of place names – is a good indicator of the way a society values its members. By trying to put more notable women on city and town maps, it raises awareness about women's contribution to society and history and gives them public recognition that is long overdue.

The largest women's movement, the Polish Women's Strike, demands more rights for women through protests and marches. Since its Black Monday Strike in 2016, when it rallied women in 150 Polish cities, it has organised over 1500 protests to call for women's rights and a more just society. It now seeks to build an even stronger network by empowering women from small and medium-sized Polish cities, believing them to be a major force for social change.

Stereotyped gender roles are instilled into girls and boys from the earliest age, creating fertile ground for future inequality in adulthood. With its Fairy Tales project, the Bulgarian association NAIA teaches children to look beyond traditional gender roles and to discover that opportunities are out there for everyone – girls and boys alike.

The Finnish Women Code programme or #mimmitkoodaa fights against the prejudice that all software developers should be male by default. Through networking and workshops, it supports women who want to explore opportunities in the software industry and helps them move towards more exciting careers and better paid jobs.

And last but not least, the Brussels Binder is trying to put more women on panels and in the media in Brussels. It wants to show not only that there are active women who deliver in all professional domains, but also that women have the right to take part in and have a say in European policy debates and decision-making.

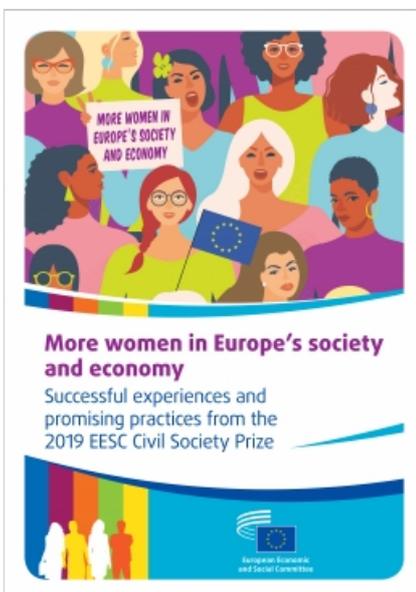
Isabel CAÑO AGUILAR

In short

[Watch the 2019 Civil Society Prize ceremony](#)

Relive the best moments of the award ceremony with our video!

[Civil Society Prize brochure](#)



The EESC has published a brochure showcasing all five winning projects and providing background information about the Civil Society Prize.

You can download it at: <https://www.eesc.europa.eu/en/our-work/publications-other-work/publications/more-women-europes-society-and-economy>

[Civil Society Prize 2019 in the media](#)

Here is a flavour of headlines in the media to date about the Civil Society Prize 2019.

Bulgaria - **BNR**: [Европейска награда за НАЯ](#)

Croatia - **Hina**: [Talijskoj 'Ženskoj toponimiji' glavna nagrada EGSO-a za razvoj civilnog društva](#)

Czechia - **E15**: [Jedna z deseti ulic pojmenovaná po ženách je málo, tvrdí italské hnutí a apeluje na změnu](#)

Finland - **Mikrobitti**: [Mimmit koodaa -ohjelma pokkasi arvostetun kansainvälisen palkinnon – toiminta laajenee ensi vuonna](#)

Greece - **Kathimerini**: [Η δράση για την ενδυνάμωση των γυναικών βραβεύεται από την ΕΟΚΕ](#)



Italy - **La Repubblica**: [Stop a una piazza nei vicoli dedicata a Fernanda Pivano](#)

Latvia - **Neatkarīgā Rīta Avīze**: [Briseles projekts – vairāk varas sievietēm](#)

Poland - **Gazeta Wyborcza**: [Ogólnopolski Strajk Kobiet z nagrodą Europejskiego Komitetu Ekonomiczno-Spolecznego. "Kobiety wiedzą, co robią"](#)

Romania - **Radio Romania International**: [Alo, Bruxelles? "Premiului CESE pentru societatea civilă 2019"](#)

Slovenia - **Večer**: [Ste kdaj pomislili na žensko toponomijo?](#)

EESC News

Italian organisation "Women's Toponymy" is the winner of the 2019 EESC Civil Society Prize



On 12 December, the European Economic and Social Committee (EESC) awarded prizes to five civil society organisations who stand up for equal opportunities for women and men, raise awareness about women's potential and achievements, and contribute to their empowerment in Europe's society and economy. The prize of EUR 50 000 was shared among five winning projects. The Italian organisation "Women's Toponymy" took the first prize of EUR 14 000. The other four runners-up each received EUR 9 000 and ranked in the following order: the Polish Women's Strike, the Bulgarian Association NAIA with its Fairy Tales project, the Finnish Software and eBusiness Association and its Women Code programme, and



The Brussels Binder from Belgium.

"I would like to thank all the candidates – the winners who are here today and everyone who took part – for their impressive and enriching applications. Their projects show that Europe is ready to stand by its commitment to making society truly equal for women and men. Thanks to projects like these, attitudes are slowly changing. The exclusion of women from public life and positions of influence is increasingly viewed as unacceptable and stereotypes about women's roles are considered to be outdated," the EESC President **Luca Jahier** said at the award ceremony.

The EESC Vice-President for Communication, **Isabel Caño Aguilar**, said: "I am delighted that this year, the Civil Society Prize is about the empowerment of women. The projects we received fight for this empowerment. They start with young children and with the perceptions that influence us indirectly on a daily basis when we walk down the street or listen to a conference. They fight against horizontal segregation in the labour market in sectors dominated by men, such as IT. They fight against inequality by appealing to us at a subconscious level through the names of our streets, or they do so loudly, by making themselves heard in their home towns."

This year's winner, **Women's Toponymy (Associazione Toponomastica femminile)** wants to give women public recognition that is often lacking or long overdue, by raising awareness about their contribution to society and history. Believing that toponymy – the study of place names – is a good indicator of the way a society values its members, the organisation is trying to put more notable women on city and town maps.

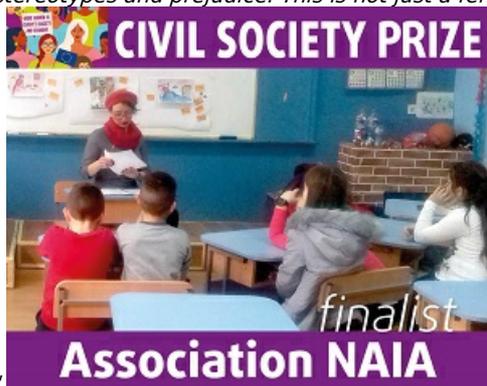


Its recent research into the names of public places in about 90% of Italian municipalities has shown that for every 100 streets named after men, only 7.8 were named after women, of which some 60% referred to religious figures. There are almost no places featuring the names of notable female scientists, entrepreneurs, artists and sportswomen and Women's Toponymy is set to change that.

The project has had a very positive response, with many municipalities joining in, and now the organisation is already teaming up

with associations elsewhere in Europe to spread these good practices.

Accepting the prize, the president of *Toponomastica femminile*, **Maria Pia Ercolini**, said: "You need laws to change a society but they are not enough to change behaviour in a lasting way if they are not supported by a parallel change in people's imagination, you need to combat stereotypes and prejudice. This is not just a feminist battle, but a battle for a society based on solidarity and for



civilisation".

The second prize went to the **Polish Women's Strike**, the largest women's movement in Poland, which hit the world's headlines with its Black Monday Strike in 2016. Through protests and marches, the movement demands more rights for women and condemns the government clampdown on basic values and freedoms. It now seeks to empower ordinary women from small and medium-sized Polish cities.

The prize-winning project from Bulgaria, **Fairy Tales**, came third. This project is run by the **NAIA association** and uses classical fairy tales to fight against stereotyped gender roles instilled into girls and boys from the earliest age, shaping their minds and limiting their future chances and choices.



In fourth place is **Women Code** or **#mimmitkoodaa**, a programme set up by the **Finnish Software and e-business Association** to disprove the myth that all software developers should be male by default. The programme encourages women to look for opportunities in the software industry and move towards better-paid jobs and careers for the future.

The fifth prize winner is Belgium's **The Brussels Binder**, a database of female policy experts. It is run by a group of volunteers who advocate better representation of women in European policy debates, which should ensure that EU laws and policies do not fail to reflect women's needs and views. Its aim is to become a go-to resource for improving gender diversity on panels and in the media, in



Brussels and throughout the EU.

This year's theme, "More Women in Europe's society and economy", attracted 177 candidates, which is the second highest number of entries in the 11-year history of the prize, just behind the 2016 theme of migration. The entries came from no fewer than 27 Member States, demonstrating the widespread interest of citizens and civil society organisations in taking action to tackle gender inequalities, which still loom large in Europe.

The Civil Society Prize is awarded for "excellence in civil society initiatives". Each year, the prize covers a different aspect of the EESC's work. The theme of the Prize in 2018 was European values, identities and cultural heritage as a way of bringing Europeans together.

Further details about the Civil Society Prize 2019 are available [here](#). You can watch the video detailing the winning projects [here](#).

In the winners' words

What's in a name: fighting the gender gap through toponymy



The Italian organisation *Toponomastica femminile*, winner of the first prize, is committed to combating gender disparities by naming places, particularly urban streets, squares and parks, after notable women. Maria Pia Ercolini argues that this symbolic recognition of their contributions to the community can go a long way towards guaranteeing women their rightful place in society.

EESC Info: What does this prize mean for you and your organisation?

Maria Pia Ercolini: The EU's recognition of our work gives the organisation the authority to form international networks and export good practices.

What advice would you give to other organisations in terms of achieving results with such activities and programmes?

I would recommend taking part in local, national and international groups and projects of all kinds, always highlighting the work of women. This increases the visibility and effectiveness of existing organisations while at the same time developing civic feeling and encouraging every single person to step up to the plate when it comes to constructing society and forming networks.

How will you use this specific funding to provide further help in the community?

We intend to build a database accessible to all, to make regional toponymy policies transparent and visible, to take our activities international by building a multilingual site with maps and geolocation of women's roads, to publish female itineraries across the EU and to provide advice to and cooperate with interested administrations and associations.

In your view, what is the best way to combat gender stereotypes and reduce prejudice? Why do you think that addressing stereotypes on a more symbolic or subconscious level could help change misconceptions and prejudice about women's role in society?

In order to combat stereotypes and prejudice, we must operate on various levels, involve all age and social groups and professional categories, regardless of gender, and avoid excluding people who may balk. Prejudice comes from the symbolic and is rooted in images and models that fail to reflect the complexity of individuals and genders; in order to change instinctive reactions and behaviour, we must leverage clear-eyed observation of what people do on a day to day basis.

The Polish Women's Strike: getting small-town women into the fight for women's rights



The Polish Women's Strike (PWS), winner of the second prize, is a grassroots movement that arose in Poland in 2016 as a reaction to the government's attempt to scrap women's abortion rights. Since then the movement has grown across the country and led a number of actions that have seen the mass participation of women from small and medium-sized Polish cities. PWS's Marta Lempart shares her thoughts on the vital importance of this movement in today's Poland.

EESC info: What does this prize mean for you and your organisation?

Marta Lempart: We feel visible. Women who are doing the hardest activist work, where there are no TV cameras, no big media, no artistic photographs, no recognition apart from the horrible cyber and non-cyber hate, the ordinary women - teachers, saleswomen,

mothers, nurses, chefs and drivers, who are the change they want to see - in small and middle sized cities of Poland, are finally visible and appreciated - their sacrifice, their courage, their ideas, efforts and successes. The point of recognition in international history and history is for those who do not demand fame - but deserve to be seen, heard, and supported in spite of coming from a non-capital city, a non-big city post code.

It also means that the time of big-city feminism driven by establishment, privileged and academic women is ending; that now the ordinary women who have been silenced, ignored and looked down as "not good/educated/eloquent/prepared/accepted enough" to be feminists, women who put themselves on the line on a daily basis, are taking the lead, because they know best that this is a life or death fight.

What advice would you give to other organisations in terms of achieving results with such activities and programmes?

1. Get rid of the management board - create a helpdesk to coordinate and serve projects. Never, ever create and force projects from the top down - get rid of the up-and-down, create a powerful network of support. Understand that where there is 100% responsibility for the outcome, there has to be 100% decision-making power. Finance and support in any way you can anything that even only partially fits in your organisational vision - don't look for and don't force 100% matches in ideas, views and actions. Believe in what people say, how they feel and what they do.
2. Respect and encourage local activism as the focus point in whatever you do, actively fight media ignorance and arrogance towards local activism, which is usually invisible and ignored by national media outlets. Stop organising your meetings, workshops and conference in the capital city of your country.
3. Speak ordinary language.
4. Acknowledge your personal privilege and think of it for 5 minutes in the morning every day. Then use it to support people in what they do. Every day support at least one person you disagree with in terms of strategies, methods, or actions. Make sure the voice of the minority in your organisation, the voices of people forever abstaining, are heard. People can't be forced to walk even the most reasonable and effective path - they need freedom to choose and walk their own way. That's how we all get there.
5. Be kind. Let it go.

How will you use this specific funding to provide further help in the community?

The funding will be used to actively prevent and fight activist burnout (anti-burnout fund). Most of the women in PWS are under state and social pressure (police investigations, prosecutions), many are harassed and cyberbullied, have work problems or problems with keeping their businesses afloat, and their children and families are also impacted. The pressure and the amount of engagement takes its toll on their mental health and general state of health.

Part of the fund will also be used to go back to PWS's roots. We are planning to contact all the initial organisers of the first strike who are no longer engaged in the PWS for various reasons - either because of their personal situation, or because they have joined other

organisations, or have had personal conflicts - and organise a national get-together on the strike's 4th anniversary (3 October 2020).

Poland has a long history of feminist activism, and was one of the first nations in Europe to enact women's suffrage. However, Poland is also influenced by conservative views. Against this background, what does this prize mean to you?

It's great support for the first line of the fight and resistance against rightwing populism and religious fanatics - because it's women who are actively fighting the heavily sponsored, internationally organised wave of anti-woman, anti-human "New World Order" agenda that governments and international institutions seem to have no idea how to deal with. Poland was a training field for religious extremists in 2016, with the idea of a total ban on abortion. They lost that fight, and that is a fact. They expected very little or no resistance, but women have been fighting back with a struggle that is real, day in day out.

NAIA: "Domestic violence is a social problem, not a private one"



The Bulgarian association NAIA, winner of the third prize, has been fighting domestic violence in small, underprivileged communities for 20 years, carrying on its programme of social assistance to victims in dire circumstances. In parallel, as Svetla Sivcheva explains in this interview, it focuses on prevention by working with young children to explore ways of breaking and overcoming social stereotypes in order to open up their horizons and fulfil their potential.

EESC Info: What does this prize mean for you and your organisation?

Svetla Sivcheva: This award is very important for our organisation, which has been working for 20 years to combat violence against women and children, uniting more and more people around the idea that this is a socially significant problem rather than a private one, and that fighting violence against women is a responsibility of the state, the institutions and every individual. We are an organisation that works with vulnerable groups from small towns and villages with many social problems - poverty, unemployment, dropping out of school and lack of health care. It is very difficult in this situation to protect women's rights, to empower them, to inspire them to believe in their potential and to fulfill themselves both socially and economically. Despite these difficulties, we have carried on, and this award recognises our perseverance and persistence and salutes our efforts to show just how important and valuable it is for society to give women and men equal opportunities.

What advice would you give to other organisations in terms of achieving results with such activities and programmes?

There is hardly any advice to give, because a lot of work has already been done by civil society on the subject, although it is not always in the spotlight and on politicians' radar. Non-governmental organisations and individual citizens are constantly trying out new ideas and creating good practices at EU level, exchanging experience and expertise. We are hoping that civil society's work will prompt reflection on real and effective state policies which will show clearly that this is a priority, and that there is the will at the highest level to promote and guarantee equal opportunities for women and men in all spheres of social and economic life. In some Member States, there has been some backsliding on the prevention of gender-based violence and the achievement of gender equality, and this is very worrying. We are hoping to see clear political will at EU level and at the level of individual governments to uphold common European values, including equal opportunities for women and men.

How will you use this specific funding to provide further help in the community?

We will use it to secure our Gender Equality Programme. Our organisation does not have great financial resources and services provided to victims of domestic violence are always a priority and cannot be interrupted. We are experiencing difficulties in funding activities designed to achieve gender equality. We will use the funding to work on preventing violence against children, but also to work with female entrepreneurs and to advocate for more women in politics and decision-making. With these financial resources, we will be able to inform and support more women from small and closed communities and this is very valuable.

Your project engages parents and pre-school children. Why is it important to talk to young children about gender equality? How are fairy tales helping them to understand the message about the importance of equality between women and men?

The problem we are focusing on is the imposition of gender stereotypes from an early age under the influence of parents, teachers and peers. Many of the cultural stereotypes and social symbols that children learn in their early childhood stay with them as adults and become the norm. This restricts boys and girls from expressing themselves freely and encourages them to behave in a way that is considered socially appropriate. In order to break this cycle, it is important for children to be encouraged from an early age to see women and men in roles other than traditional ones, to evaluate their potential and capabilities and to believe that their knowledge and skills are equally valued and relevant to society.

Classic children's fairy tales are a great tool to approach different issues with young children, including equality between women and men, in words that are accessible and comprehensible to them. We work with fairy tales and their characters to open up new possibilities for girls and boys - qualities, interests and potential which enable them to fulfill themselves in non-stereotypical roles and to be recognised as equally valuable and meaningful.

#mimmitkoodaa: infiltrating a stronghold of gender segregation - the IT industry



software is the core mission of the Finnish Software and eBusiness Association (Ohjelmisto- ja eBusiness ry), winner of the fourth prize. They offer hands-on, free of charge workshops to women with no previous coding experience to help them flourish in the IT industry. Rasmus Roiha and Milja Köpsi spoke to us about #mimmitkoodaa's philosophy and how the organisation is planning to use the prize money.

EESC info: What does this prize mean for you and your organisation?

Rasmus Roiha & Milja Köpsi: We feel extremely grateful and privileged and even more driven to continue our work with #mimmitkoodaa. Our programme will have an even deeper impact as it grows in numbers and broadens in scope. We now have 5000+ women and dozens of companies in the programme. Our target is to have ten thousand women and a hundred companies involved in the next two years. Winning the EESC prize gave the programme positive media exposure and helped bring in more committed partners.

What advice would you give to other organisations in terms of achieving results with such activities and programmes?

Be specific. Offer something tangible, not just a seminar or increased information flow. In most cases it is easy to get participants for different programmes, especially if you are offering something for free. In our case, the success factor was to get the first companies involved as they are doing the heavy lifting: paying a fee for the launch events (community building) AND committing themselves to organise beginner-level workshops (practical, hands-on work). The first eight companies we handpicked and invited, and so we got top companies committing to the programme. From there on, it was easier to scale up. So starting with something practical is a great way to validate the idea of the programme, or any startup idea :)

How will you use this specific funding to provide further help in the community?

In 2020 we'll be expanding the #mimmitkoodaa programme across Finland. We will be launching inspiring events where we share career stories and tips for learning, show what positions and business/work opportunities the software industry has and how women can use their individual life and work experience in the field of technology.

Also coming up are more of the highly popular hands-on workshops, where women can try different kinds of content management systems, programming languages, AI testing, white hat hacking, etc.

The Finnish Software and eBusiness Association publishes encouraging women's career stories so that women can inspire and support each other and begin to see ICT as a career choice. To what extent do you think this helps women to find their place in the software industry?

The power of examples and role models is an incredibly valuable asset in our network. When you present different kinds of people with different kinds of career stories, everyone can find examples and encouragement for their own journey. This way we can lower and bring down biases (conscious or unconscious) that people in the software industry still have today.

On top of this, we are building a network for the women who are either already in the software industry, or interested in a career in it. We have already seen more than satisfactory participation in the live Q&A session on Instagram. This is something that has never been tried before in our industry.

Is your network also planning to help young female students to choose STEM subjects at school or have you already managed to reach out to them with the current project?

#mimmitkoodaa's target group is adult women, but we can already see how these women are an active example for younger women and girls. Adult women with even a basic understanding of software development and the possibilities software can provide via digitalisation, among other things, have better career opportunities and this will also have an impact on their network, family and friends.

The Brussels Binder: changing the face of Brussels panels



Brussels hosts a huge number of debates every year. Two thirds of the speakers featured in such panels are male. However, there are plenty of women who could be relied on to bring both expertise and diversity to EU debates. Building a platform that can act as a hub for both women experts and panel organisers looking for speakers has been the core of the Brussels Binder strategy to fight this imbalance. EESC Info talked to Juliane Schmidt about their overall strategy to change the male face of Brussels panels.

EESC Info: What does this prize mean for you and your organisation?

Juliane Schmidt: The Brussels Binder strives for a change of culture in which equal gender representation becomes the norm. The EESC prize is an acknowledgment of the importance of our fight. Winning this prize for us means putting the issue of women's representation at the top of the agenda, while also honouring our work to add to the vibrant civil society across Europe.

What advice would you give to other organisations in terms of achieving results with such activities and programmes?

The Brussels Binder is based on a very inclusive approach, aiming at building synergies with different partners and, in the long term, growing a network of like-minded organisations and groups across the EU. As an organisation, we follow feminist principles of leadership including sharing "power with" others and fostering the "power within" oneself. We work with volunteers, women driven by the idea of changing society, and we value inclusiveness and transparency, with all members being able to make their ideas and opinions heard.

How will you use this specific funding to provide further help in the community?

In addition to improving the technical quality of our database and website (brusselsbinder.org), this funding will help us engage in delivering training and workshops (for women professionals, as well as to raise awareness in organisations and companies), toolkits for conference organisers and participants, meet-ups and other events to build a community of women professionals and experts.

Gender quotas are part of a global trend to improve women's representation in decision-making bodies. What is your opinion on this? Do you think introducing quotas is decisive in achieving gender balance on panels and in bodies? What else is needed?

Quotas are a chance to shift mentalities, raise awareness and contribute to avoiding unconscious biases and practices. At the same time, they are quite controversial and divisive. It is important to recognise that quotas should be a means to an end, and not an end in themselves. And they must be accompanied by other measures, such as awareness raising campaigns and training (for managers and women professionals).

Editors:

Ewa Haczyk-Plumley (editor-in-chief)
Daniela Marangoni (dm)

Coordination:

Agata Berdys (ab)
Katerina Serifi (ks)

Contributors to this issue:

Agata Berdys (ab)
Anna Comi (ac)
Daniela Marangoni (dm)
Laura Lui (ll)

Address:

European Economic and Social
Committee
Jacques Delors Building,
99 Rue Belliard,
B-1040 Brussels, Belgium
Tel. (+32 2) 546.94.76
Email: eescinfo@eesc.europa.eu

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