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Civil Society Organisations'
Bulletin



GRUPPO ORGANIZZAZIONI DELLA SOCIETÀ CIVILE

BULLETIN SEPTEMBER 2025

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EDITORIAL: End of EESC's 2020-2025 term

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By Séamus BOLAND, President, EESC Civil Society Organisations' Group

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There are many emotions as we come to the end of the European Economic and Social Committee's ([EESC](#)) 2020-2025 term and look forward to the next one. Some of the members of the EESC's Civil Society Organisations' Group will be saying goodbye and will face old or new responsibilities in just a few days. Others will be returning to voice civil society's concerns at EU level and officially welcome new members at the inaugural plenary session of the new term from 21 to 23 October 2025. Personally, I will hand over the presidency of the Civil Society Organisations' Group to my fellow Irishman [Cillian Lohan](#), to whom I wish the best of success.

This is a moment to reflect on the group's achievements over the last five years in an extraordinary period of shifting history. The term started with the epoch-changing COVID-19 pandemic. A pandemic that shook the world and demonstrated not only the fragility of our health system, but also of humanity itself. We are all still coming to terms with the effect that this pandemic has had and yet despite the success of bringing an effective vaccine to all EU citizens, we still have to translate the lessons learnt, for instance on health research, preparing for future crisis situations and using this knowledge for current challenges, including the treatment of cancer and rare diseases. A new Global Health Resilience Initiative, as announced by European Commission President Ursula von der Leyen in her [State of the Union speech](#) in front of the European Parliament on 10 September, is very welcome in this regard.

But the pandemic was just one factor that marked the past term. In February 2022, Russia declared war on Ukraine. This unjustified full-scale invasion marked a serious attack on the sovereignty of a nation on European grounds. It also marked the end of the peace that we took for granted for many years and threatens to destabilise peace not just

in Europe, but in the rest of the world as well.

The election of Donald Trump as President of the United States of America and the consequences of his declared vision of ‘making America great again’ are already redefining global trade and political and military alliances, including with the EU. In upscaling defence systems and spending, EU Member States will have to make, both individually and collectively, significant budgetary choices. It is almost certain, despite the slogan ‘no one should be left behind’, that people who are living in poverty will have little chance to improve their situation. Indeed the 93.3 million people in the EU currently declared at risk of poverty or social exclusion^[1] could be joined by almost the same number of people within five years.

In [renaming our group](#) the Civil Society Organisations’ Group, and making the eradication of poverty our overarching priority during the past term, we as a group have declared who we are and why so many of us work on a daily basis across all Member States against the forces that continue to create inequalities in our society. COVID-19 saw organisations reaching out to young and old for support, and organisations have helped Ukrainian refugees from the first day of war, and are providing relief to people living in poverty on a daily basis. We also highlighted how civil society organisations are first at the scene of the various climate disasters in the EU that are now sadly becoming part of our realities.

From the conviction that these organisations need to have a say in policy-making, we have been advocating a structured civil dialogue over this term, not at least through our [open letter](#) to the Presidents of the European Commission and the European Parliament, and the Presidency of the Council of the European Union. With the aim to strengthen civil dialogue in a sustainable and inclusive manner, our group also requested a study entitled [Mapping civil dialogue practises in the EU institutions](#). This study was launched on 16 July and presented by some of its co-authors from the Centre for European Policy Studies at our web-streamed group meeting. It takes stock of current practises and gives concrete recommendations for next steps. I hope it will help to further advance the implementation of [Article 11 of the Treaty on European Union](#).

In the coming term, I sincerely hope that the commitment to establish a meaningful civil society platform, even if not reiterated by President von der Leyen in her State of the Union speech, will be delivered. In her speech, she

mentioned initiatives such as the European Anti-Poverty Strategy, the Child Guarantee, measures to bring relief to farmers and the first EU Housing Summit. These initiatives are essential for eradicating poverty by 2050. To say it in the President's own words 'Eight years ago, the European Pillar of Social Rights^[2] made housing a social right in Europe. It's time to turn this promise into reality'. A strong cohesion policy and support for the social economy will be other important elements.

Last but not least, I would like to wholeheartedly thank members and stakeholders for their cooperation and support during my presidency.

[Séamus Boland](#)

President, EESC Civil Society Organisations' Group

^[1] Eurostat, [People at risk of poverty or social exclusion in 2024](#)

^[2] European Commission, [European Pillar of Social Rights - Building a fairer and more inclusive European Union - European Commission](#)



CURRENT AFFAIRS: Schengen is Europe – and Europe needs Schengen!

17 September 2025

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Border controls in the EU

By Rudolf KOLBE, Vice-President of the Civil Society Organisations' Group, representing the Austrian Federal Conference of the Liberal Professions

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It's Schengen's birthday! In 1985, when five countries – including Germany and France – laid the foundations of the [Schengen Agreement](#) in the small Luxembourgish village of the same name, they were betting on the future. Today – 40 years later – we are able to travel around freely: we don't have to stop at border controls, nor do we need stamps in our passports. What an achievement! And yet I have the feeling that we have forgotten what it means for us.

For me, Schengen stands for freedom: the freedom to visit people, do business, experience different cultures – without having to worry about border controls. For commuters, Erasmus students, families with relatives on different sides of borders – Schengen is part of daily life. It is the most tangible symbol of European integration. So it is all the more painful for me to see how it is now being hollowed out, step by step.

An increasing number of Member States are relying on internal border controls, within the European Union. Migration, terrorist threats, the COVID-19 pandemic – the list of reasons they give is long. We do of course have to take these matters seriously. But I firmly believe that erecting barriers at borders again is not the answer. Anyone who believes that countries have to go it alone in order to ensure their security is in the long run jeopardising precisely what protects us: trust and European solidarity.

And something that is particularly worrying me is that increasingly, domestic policy motives are being used to justify border controls. A few headlines, a few pictures of stern-looking officials – and there you go: a country has demonstrated it has a tough national approach! But this doesn't solve the real problems. We need a European migration policy that works – not permanent emergency management at internal borders. Otherwise, there is a risk of triggering a domino effect that erodes Schengen slowly but surely.

It is precisely for this reason that the resistance displayed to Romania and Bulgaria joining Schengen has always been of great concern to me. I am glad that earlier this year my home country, Austria, finally paved the way for those countries to join. Better late than never. This act not only demonstrated European fairness, it also sent out a long-overdue signal to the effect that we stand by our pledges.

In doing so, we should not overlook the fact that Schengen is more than open borders. Police and judicial cooperation works – and shows that, if we want them, European solutions are indeed possible.

I am firmly convinced that Schengen is the centrepiece of Europe. Without Schengen, Europe loses not only its pace of progress, but also its soul.

And Europe without a soul – we just can't allow that to happen.

[Rudolf KOLBE](#) (Austria)

Vice-President, Civil Society Organisations' Group

Executive Board member, Austrian Federal Conference of the Liberal Professions([BUKO](#))



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CURRENT AFFAIRS: World Food Forum



By Kerli ATS, Member of the Civil Society Organisations' Group,
representing the Estonian Chamber of Agriculture and
Commerce

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BETTER PRODUCTION, BETTER NUTRITION, A BETTER ENVIRONMENT AND A BETTER LIFE

The [World Food Forum](#) will be taking place in Rome this autumn. It is a flagship event that is organised under the umbrella of the United Nations Food and Agriculture Organization ([FAO](#)) and brings together food system stakeholders from around the world.

This year's forum is of particular significance, as it marks the 80th anniversary of the FAO, commemorated in a week of global dialogue, knowledge exchange and solution-driven collaboration. The theme – "[Hand in Hand for Better Foods and a Better Future](#)" – is guided by the FAO's four "betters": better production, better nutrition, a better environment and a better life. These principles provide a framework for the way that different stakeholders can jointly contribute to shaping a more sustainable and fair food system – a goal that is shared globally.

Our food system is currently facing numerous major challenges, which farmers, policymakers, consumers and other players in the food supply chain have to deal with every day. Climate change, geopolitical instability, input price volatility and socio-economic pressures are putting the entire system to the test. In the EU, the [European Commission's proposal for the 2028-2034 EU budget](#) has recently caused concern, but there are hopes for the final budget to be improved in the course of the negotiation process. At the same time, consumers are becoming increasingly conscious of the quality, origin and environmental impact of the food they buy. It is clear that the food system is undergoing a transformation before our very eyes.

In this changing landscape, the focus must be on solutions that provide food producers with all the opportunities and conditions they need for the production of healthy, nutrient-rich and affordable food. This is essential to ensure the continuity of rural entrepreneurship and the vitality of rural life, as well as motivation and stable working conditions for those who produce our food.

Undoubtedly, finding solutions depends on cooperation at many levels. Equally important is innovation: new technologies, science-based approaches and data-driven decision-making help make production more efficient and environmentally friendly. It is crucial to invest in generational renewal, giving young people confidence in the fact that agriculture is not a sector of the past, but a field of the future, with space for entrepreneurship, development and a strong sense of purpose.

The main theme of the upcoming World Food Forum – better production, better nutrition, a better environment, and a better life – aptly summarises these goals.

[Kerli ATS](#) (Estonia)

Member, Civil Society Organisations' Group

Chairwoman of the Board, Estonian Chamber of Agriculture and Commerce ([EPKK](#))



Take a Stand for Equality campaign

17 September 2025

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By Juliane Marie NEIIENDAM, Member of the Civil Society Organisations' Group, representing the Danish Women's Council

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Democracy should never be taken for granted. That is why we, at The Women's Council in Denmark, are launching the campaign '[Take a Stand for Equality](#)' ahead of the 2025 municipal and regional elections in November. Thanks to the support from the Tuborg Foundation, we can shine a light on the importance of equal access, fair representation and the crucial role of women and minorities in local politics.

In Denmark, we like to think of ourselves as an open and equal society. Yet the reality shows that women and candidates from minority backgrounds still face significant barriers when they want to participate in local democracy. Hate speech, online harassment and threats remain serious obstacles. [Studies show that 73% of hateful attacks on Facebook are directed at women](#), and local politicians are among the most exposed to harassment.

This is not just an individual problem — it is a democratic challenge. When women and minorities are silenced or discouraged from taking part, we all lose important perspectives and ideas that can move our communities forward.

With '[Take a Stand for Equality](#)', we want to create a safe and inspiring space for more women and minorities to run for local office, and to encourage young people in particular to vote and engage in their local communities. Our campaign will include physical and online debates, workshops, and a special feminist election celebration at the

[Talk Town Festival](#). We want to offer a platform where candidates and voters can meet, share experiences and strengthen the sense of belonging and community.

We know that change does not happen overnight, and we do not claim to have all the answers. But we believe that by standing together, listening to each other and supporting one another, we can make a difference — one conversation, one vote and one brave new candidate at a time.

We warmly invite everyone who believes in a more inclusive and representative local democracy to join us. If you want to collaborate, participate, or learn more, please reach out to helene@kvinderaad.dk or project leader astrid@kvinderaad.dk.

Together, we can take a stand for equality.

[Juliane Marie NEIIENDAM](#) (Denmark)

Member, Civil Society Organisations' Group

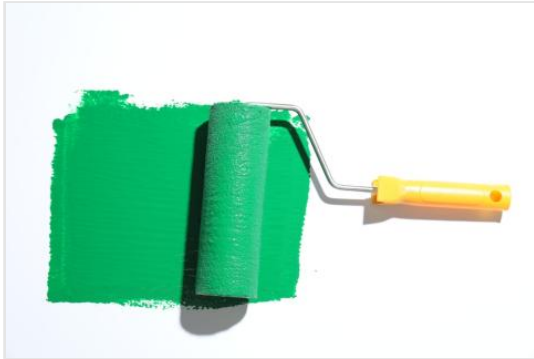
Member of the Board, [The Women's Council in Denmark](#)



CURRENT AFFAIRS: Withdrawal of Green Claims Directive

17 September 2025

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Greenwashing

By Thierry LIBAERT, Member of the Civil Society Organisations' Group, representing the Fondation pour la Nature et Homme (France)

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WITHDRAWAL OF THE GREEN CLAIMS DIRECTIVE: MORE ENVIRONMENTAL BACKSLIDING?

The [Green Claims Directive](#), withdrawn by the European Commission on 20 June 2025, had been proposed by the Commission on 22 March 2023. The European Economic and Social Committee had adopted its opinion on the proposal on 14 June of the same year ([INT/969](#)), and then on 12 March 2024 the Commission proposal had been adopted by an overwhelming majority in the European Parliament.

There were many reasons behind the Commission's decision to withdraw the Directive: its requirements had been deemed too burdensome; methods for calculating environmental footprint were disputed; and 90% of European companies found its scope too broad. All these concerns are understandable.

Nevertheless, greenwashing remains a problem, and an ambitious campaign against it must be pursued. Greenwashing is a practice that breaches consumer trust by misrepresenting the environmental credentials of products, and disincentivises businesses engaged in valid decarbonisation measures, who then face competition from companies making false environmental claims. It also creates confusion among the public as to what really needs to be done to implement the green transition in order to bring about a cleaner, healthier, climate-neutral Europe.

All is not lost, however. A Directive on Empowering Consumers for the Green Transition, on which I wrote as EESC rapporteur ([INT/968](#)), has now come into force ([Official Journal of 6 March 2024](#)). This new Directive paves the way for a better framework to govern environmental claims. All Member States must adopt the measures necessary for implementing this Directive by 27 March 2026.

The fight against climate change is too important for misleading claims to go unchallenged. The subject needs to be re-examined in greater depth.

[Thierry LIBAERT](#) (France)

Member, Civil Society Organisations' Group

Vice-president, Scientific Council, French civil society organisation "Fondation pour la Nature et l'Homme" (FNH)



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The proposal for the 2028-2034 EU budget on the negotiation table

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Insider Briefing

Briefing prepared by the Civil Society Organisations' Group secretariat, with the input of Luca JAHIER, EESC rapporteur on the MMF 2028-2034, President of the [EESC's European Semester Group](#), and Member of the Civil Society Organisations' Group

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WHAT IS THE MFF AND HOW DOES IT WORK?

The [Multiannual Financial Framework \(MFF\)](#) is the European Union's long-term budget plan, usually set for seven years. It is not a single fund, but a structure that sets maximum annual amounts ('ceilings') for EU spending in different policy areas, such as agriculture, research, cohesion and security. It does not only include how much money will be available for the different policy areas, but also how the funds are distributed among Member States and regions. The MFF should ensure that the EU's priorities are matched with stable, predictable funding, and that spending is planned responsibly over several years. Each year, the EU adopts an annual budget within the limits set by the MFF.

WHY IS THE MFF SO IMPORTANT?

The MFF is the EU's main tool for investing in its future. The new MFF comes at a time of unprecedented challenges: geopolitical instability, Russia's war against Ukraine, climate change, digital transformation and social inequalities, to name a few. Overall, the EU budget has played an important role during recent crises, supporting citizens during the pandemic, helping manage energy and supply chain shocks and enabling EU support for Ukraine. The question is whether EU decision-makers can agree on an ambitious budget for 2028-2034 that will allow the EU to address the most pressing challenges and give it the necessary flexibility to respond to future crisis situations.

WHY DOES THE MFF MATTER TO CIVIL SOCIETY ORGANISATIONS?

The MFF will impact every European, determining support for farmers, businesses, regions and vulnerable groups. It will shape investments in education, research, health and crisis preparedness, as well as funding for civil society organisations and their activities.

ACCORDING TO THE COMMISSION PROPOSALS, WHAT'S NEW IN THE 2028-2034 MFF COMPARED TO ITS PREDECESSOR?

- Size and design: The proposed budget is €1.98 trillion (1.26% of EU GNI including the repayment of the debt created by "[NextGenerationEU](#)" grants, compared to the initially 1.13% of the EU GNI for the previous MFF^[1]), reflecting higher ambition and new challenges.
- Simpler, more flexible structure: Fewer, more coherent programmes make it easier to access funds and adapt to crises.
- National and regional partnership plans: For the first time, 14 funds are combined into tailored plans for each country and region, aimed at maximising impact and simplifying rules.
- New European Competitiveness Fund: €409 billion to boost research, innovation and strategic technologies.
- Stronger focus on defence and security: More funding for joint defence projects, military mobility and critical infrastructure.
- Enhanced climate and social goals: At least 14% of partnership plans for social inclusion; continued support for farmers and rural areas.
- Extraordinary Crisis Mechanism: New tools for rapid response to shocks and disasters.
- Modernised EU revenues: New 'own resources' and adjustments to national contributions for stable funding.

HOW HAVE EU CIVIL SOCIETY NETWORKS REACTED TO THE COMMISSION PROPOSALS?

WHAT POSITIONS DID THEY ANNOUNCE BEFORE THE PUBLICATION OF THE PROPOSALS?

- Joint statement by over 40 civil society organisations: [Keep what works: 8 success factors for a future ESF+](#)
- European Youth Forum: [Young people take a blow in the European Commission's proposal for the post-2027 Erasmus budget](#)
- SMEunited: [Proposed MFF has potential to respond to current challenges](#)
- European Environmental Bureau: [A LIFE-threatening budget: Commission's MFF proposal risks quiet rollback of EU environmental funding – through budget lines, not headlines](#)
- Copa Cogeca: [Presentation of the post 2027 MFF/CAP – The Black Wednesday of European Agriculture](#)
- European Disability Forum: [EU Budget post-2027: social spending must be reinforced](#)
- European Anti-Poverty Network: [EU budget 2028-2034: Defence, security and competitiveness at the expense of the most vulnerable](#)
- Civil Society Europe: [Civil Society Europe's Reaction to the Multiannual Financial Framework 2028-2034: Progress for Some, Setbacks for Others](#)
- COFACE Families Europe: [The future EU budget: Why families must remain at the heart](#)
- Joint letter by +330 NGOs: [Joint letter: Strengthening and shielding European democracy with the upcoming MFF - European Civic Forum](#)
- European Partnership for Democracy and partner organisations: [Support for Democracy in the Next MFF is Key for the EU to Achieve its Ambitions](#)
- European Policy Centre (EPC) policy brief by Liza Saris: [Securing Europe's civic space: Investing in democracy in the next MFF](#)

ARE THERE ANY VOICES FROM THE EESC?



Luca Jahier, rapporteur for the [EESC opinion](#) on the Commission proposals from the Civil Society Organisations' Group, stated: 'We have a real problem with this new budget. First, on one hand, we have an increase of only + 0.1%

compared to the previous MFF, and on the other hand, we have strong new priorities: defence, competitiveness, etc., that we all welcome, but ""*de facto*"" there is no ambition to have a higher and stronger budget to cope with everything. Second, there are no new debt instruments to finance large-scale strategic investments, like NextGenerationEU. Another serious problem is the reduction of the common agricultural policy (CAP) and the cohesion funds. Finally, new own resources are a positive step, but again it is not enough..."

WHAT'S NEXT?

The decision on the future long-term EU budget and revenue system will be discussed by Member States in the Council, acting by unanimity, with the consent of the European Parliament for the MFF, and, where relevant, ratification by national parliaments for the revenue.

The EESC is currently working on its position on the proposals. The opinion [ECO/682 \(Multiannual financial framework 2028-2034\)](#) will be presented in January 2026 at the EESC plenary session.

KEY SOURCES AND FURTHER READING:

- European Commission: [Multiannual Financial Framework](#)
 - European Parliament: [Understanding the EU Budget](#)
 - Council of the EU: [EU long-term budget](#)
 - Previous EESC opinions in preparation for the MFF 2028-2034:
 - [The road to the next Multiannual Financial Framework](#)
 - [Enhancing Fiscal Transparency through Participatory Budgeting in the EU](#)
 - [Next generation of own resources](#)
 - [Defence-related investments in the EU budget](#)
-

REFLECTIONS BY CIVIL SOCIETY PARTNERS: EU budget

17 September 2025

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By Peter MEEDENDORP, President of the European Council of Young Farmers (CEJA)

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EU BUDGET PROPOSALS: HISTORICAL SETBACK FOR YOUNG FARMERS

Over the summer, the European Commission's proposals on the EU's future long-term budget ([2028-2034 Multiannual Financial Framework - MFF](#)) were much talked about in our fields, stables and orchards. With contradicting declarations, significant delays in accessing the proposals and complex governance models, young farmers were not impressed with the overall picture presented by the EU's executive.

Most importantly, amid all the talk, a silent renouncement took place: against all expectations, the MFF does not provide for an earmarked budget for young farmers in the common agricultural policy ([CAP](#)). A few weeks away from the publication of the [Strategy for Generational Renewal](#), the Commission's budgetary proposal feels like a false start. With the numbers of young farmers continually decreasing, it also stands in total contrast to the urgency of the situation and to EU agriculture's demographic challenges. While the European Council of Young Farmers (CEJA) welcomes the importance given to young farmers, the absence of earmarked funding takes us back in time 25 years,

when we had to fight to get a miserable percentage of the policy's budget. Because we know what happens without the ambition for a dedicated budget, [we reject the notion of aspirational targets](#).

As demonstrated multiple times, CEJA is not opposed to change, as long as it is justified, transparent and within a clear governance framework. But these MFF proposals reflect something different: the belief, at the highest political level, that the EU must simplify its budgetary framework by trimming down a well-established, ever-improving CAP governance model. Ahead of the upcoming negotiations, CEJA is worried that this new framework, with its shaky governance, leaves too much room for interpretation by Member States and creates much more complexity for farming and rural areas.

Faced with this, our message to legislators is simple: as young farmers, the decisions that are made regarding this budget and the CAP will impact the rest of our careers. These decisions are not only about spending budgets, they are also about giving the right signals to upcoming generations and telling them that there is a future in and for the agricultural sector in the EU.

Peter MEEDENDORP

President, European Council of Young Farmers ([CEJA](#))



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REFLECTIONS BY CIVIL SOCIETY PARTNERS: EU budget

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By Augusto GONZALEZ, President, Young European Leadership (YEL)

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A CONFIDENT EUROPE MUST INVEST IN YOUTH, SOVEREIGNTY AND SOLIDARITY

As the European Union prepares its [2028-2034 Multiannual Financial Framework](#) (MFF), Young European Leadership (YEL) calls for a forward-looking budget that empowers youth, supports vulnerable Member States and asserts the EU's leadership on the global stage.

The EU must take decisive ownership of Europe's security agenda, beginning with the war in Ukraine. While transatlantic cooperation remains vital, it is essential that Europeans – not Washington – set Europe's policy priorities. The MFF must include robust funding for sustained support for Ukraine and for developing the EU's own strategic capabilities. A confident, sovereign Europe begins with budgetary autonomy. Furthermore, the EU must continue to provide long-term assistance to the Member States most affected by the war, including those hosting large numbers of Ukrainian refugees or facing inflationary and energy-supply pressure. Solidarity must be more than just a slogan – it must be a line item.

Lastly, young people must be treated as co-architects of the EU's future, not passive recipients. The next MFF should:

- substantially increase Erasmus+ and European Solidarity Corps funding, with a special focus on inclusion and access;
- create dedicated, long-term funding streams for youth civil society organisations, particularly those working across borders;
- include a youth component in EU external action, supporting young leaders, peacebuilders and social innovators beyond EU borders;
- apply youth impact assessments to all MFF programmes, ensuring that the next generation is a cross-cutting priority.

YEL also encourages the EU to explore innovative instruments, such as participatory budgeting and youth-led funding mechanisms, to make EU spending more transparent, inclusive and democratic.

The 2028-2034 MFF is more than just a financial blueprint. It is a test of the EU's political maturity. At YEL, we believe a confident Europe must invest in youth, sovereignty and solidarity to meet the challenges ahead and shape the world to come.

Augusto GONZALEZ

President, Young European Leadership ([YEL](#))



NEWS ON OUR ACTIVITIES: End of the EESC's 2020-2025 term of office

17 September 2025

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As the EESC Civil Society Organisations' Group prepares for the 2025-2030 term of office, it bids farewell to 42 esteemed Members whose dedication and expertise have profoundly shaped its work – in many cases, over several terms.

Read a few testimonies of some of our Members who have stood out for their exceptional length of their service: Bernardo

HERNÁNDEZ BATALLER, who has been an EESC member for 31 years, and Lutz RIBBE and Miguel Ángel CABRA DE LUNA, who have both been members for 27 years.

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A MOMENT OF GRATITUDE AND RENEWAL

As the EESC Civil Society Organisations' Group prepares for the 2025-2030 term of office, it bids farewell to 41 esteemed Members whose dedication and expertise have profoundly shaped its work – in many cases, over several terms. Their voices have been integral to strengthening civil dialogue and ensuring that Europe's policies remain rooted in the values Europeans hold dear and the realities of their daily lives.

Among them, a few Members stand out for the exceptional length of their service: Bernardo Hernández Bataller, who has been with us for 31 years, and Lutz Ribbe and Miguel Ángel Cabra de Luna, who have both been Members for 27 years. Their long-standing commitment reflects not only personal dedication, but also the enduring strength of the group as a platform for civil society's contribution to strengthening participatory democracy and the European project. While this is a moment of heartfelt appreciation, it is also a moment to look to the future. The legacy of those who now leave the EESC will continue to inspire the Group's work in the years ahead.

[Bernardo Hernández Bataller](#) – Advocating consumer rights and protection

Bernardo Hernández Bataller has been a Member of the EESC since 1994, dedicating 31 years to strengthening consumer protection policy. Over his terms of office, he has served as rapporteur for 106 opinions, including landmark work on services of general interest ([TEN/334](#) in 2008), the collaborative consumption ([INT/686](#) in 2014) and consumer information ([INT/1057](#) in 2024) among others. He has also held several leadership roles at the EESC, including President of the Commission for Financial and Budgetary Affairs (CAF), President of the Section for Single Market, Production and Consumption ([INT](#)); Quaestor; and Co-spokesperson for the [Consumers and Environment Category](#). His legacy is one of tireless commitment to consumer interests and the EESC's mission, always grounded in collaboration and consensus building.

[Lutz Ribbe](#) – Advancing sustainable development and prosumerism

Over his 27 years at the EESC, Lutz Ribbe has played a pivotal role in shaping debates on sustainable development and renewable energy at the Committee. Twice serving as chair of the Sustainable Development Observatory ([SDO](#)), he has enabled dialogues with representatives of the United Nations Environment Programme, the EU Agriculture Commissioner and numerous other policy-makers. He has been rapporteur for key opinions, including on sustainable development ([NAT/229](#) in 2004), the common agricultural policy ([NAT/449](#) in 2010) and renewable energies and regional economies ([TEN/660](#) in 2018). Mr Ribbe has also championed the concept of 'citizen energy', known as prosumerism, placing it firmly on the Committee's agenda. His terms reflect both his pride in our achievements and a clear-eyed realism about the challenges that remain in advancing sustainability within Europe, particularly in the current political climate.

Miguel Ángel Cabra de Luna – A legacy of social commitment

Since joining the EESC nearly three decades ago in 1998, Miguel Ángel Cabra de Luna has been a tireless advocate for the social economy, the rights of people with disabilities and older persons, and the European Social Fund as a tool for inclusion and employment. His work has left a lasting imprint, particularly through his role as rapporteur of an opinion on different types of enterprises ([INT/447](#) in 2009), which established official recognition and differentiated treatment for social economy enterprises. Through numerous opinions, constructive institutional dialogue and a strong commitment to EU values, he has contributed to building a more inclusive Europe, embodying his deep commitment to social justice and the most vulnerable in society.

We warmly thank all departing Members for their invaluable contributions and for the lasting impact they leave on the work of the Civil Society Organisations' Group and on the EESC as a whole. Their names are listed here in recognition of their service.



ANDERSSON Jan Torsten



BÁLEŠ Vladimír



BLANC Patricia



BOGUSZ Małgorzata Anna



BRZOBOHATÁ Zuzana



CABRA DE LUNA Miguel Ángel



CSER Ágnes



DESTOM Joël



DIOGO Edgar



DIRX Jan



DUBRAVSKÁ Jarmila



DULEVSKI Lalko



GILLOT Dominique



GKOFAS Panagiotis



GRABO Louise



HAUKANÖMM Monika



HERNÁNDEZ BATALLER Bernardo



INDJOVA Diana



KILIM Irma



KIUKAS Vertti



KOLYVAS Ioannis



KRUSE Andreas



KÜKEDI Zsolt



KUPŠYS Kęstutis



MARIJON Svjetlana

NEWS ON OUR ACTIVITIES: The EESC TEN section's achievements and upcoming challenges

17 September 2025

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By Baiba MILTOVIČA, President of the EESC section for Transport, Energy, Infrastructure and the Information Society (TEN), representing the Latvian National Association for Consumer Protection

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Over the past five years the EU has experienced the COVID-19 crisis, the war in Ukraine, mounting energy prices and inflation rates, and an increase in energy poverty. The transport sector has been one of the hardest hit by the crisis (supply chain disruptions, steep falls in travel and tourism, reduced connectivity). During the COVID-19 crisis it was popular to criticise electricity markets, with ‘radical’ reforms proposed either to preserve short-term markets or to complement them with long-term instruments to guide investment. The EESC's section for Transport, Energy, Infrastructure and the Information Society ([TEN](#)) has been an ally to the European Parliament, European Commission and Council in achieving a balance and ensuring that the views of civil society organisations, workers and businesses are borne in mind. My efforts as section president have been supported by the hard work of our dedicated members as well as by the section's very effective bureau and secretariat, to whom I am grateful.

Consensus is the essence of our Committee's activities, and an approach we have consistently applied in the section. Our work has always demonstrated the goodwill of our members and their groups. Building consensus also means

working with other sections and sharing work and events, as we have done for example in our cross-cutting work on energy transition during the energy crisis, the [Blue Deal](#) and the cost-of-living crisis. Universal access to high-quality drinking water and sanitation at affordable prices should be regarded as a service of general interest, and in view of that the TEN section contributed to the EESC's EU Blue Deal project with an opinion focusing on water infrastructure (EESC opinion [TEN/804](#)).

Persistently high consumer prices are dangerous as they erode purchasing power, lead to a deterioration in the social situation of households and negatively affect living standards. The cost-of-living crisis continues to weigh heavily on people's lives across the European Union, and the TEN section has therefore produced an opinion looking at the question of how a comprehensive housing policy can reduce the cost-of-living crisis in the EU (EESC opinion [TEN/841](#)).

Reconciling all of these different tasks has not been easy and we have certainly done our best to ensure that the TEN section has operated smoothly over the last five years. I want to stress how important it is, in view of our role as representatives of the EESC, to work while bearing in mind that we have to provide an example for EU citizens, for taxpayers, for men and women whose trust and faith in EU institutions is challenged every day by difficult times. I will never be tired of renewing the message that we need to treat each other with mutual respect and empathy, since, despite the different views we may have, we are all working for the same cause – Europe!

[Baiba MILTOVIČA](#) (Latvia)

President, [TEN section](#), EESC

Board Member, Latvian National Association for Consumer Protection ([LPIAA](#))



NEWS ON OUR ACTIVITIES: The EESC ECO section's achievements and upcoming challenges

17 September 2025

→ [READ ONLINE](#)



By Ioannis VARDAKASTANIS, President of the EESC Section for Economic and Monetary Union and Economic and Social Cohesion (ECO), representing the Greek National Confederation of Disabled People

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The world has been going through fundamental changes and major geopolitical shifts and has experienced an unprecedented level of uncertainty that has challenged Europe's identity and its role in the world, exposing vulnerabilities and exacerbating economic and social disparities across regions and income groups.

In the face of these challenges, the European Economic and Social Committee's (EESC) Section for Economic and Monetary Union and Economic and Social Cohesion ([ECO](#)) has continued to advocate a resilient and sustainable EU economy as a key base for the EU's responses and many shared ambitions, such as the green and digital transitions. We have argued that resilient and inclusive growth is the key to reducing inequalities in opportunities and outcomes and ensuring shared prosperity across the EU, stressing the need for fundamental changes – not just incremental steps.

This term of office (2022-2025) saw the mid-term review of the [Recovery and Resilience Facility](#) and the [2021-2027](#)

[Multiannual Financial Framework](#), while making crucial recommendations for the future. The ECO section also adopted important opinions and a resolution placing cohesion policy at the heart of EU priorities as a vital tool for reducing regional disparities and promoting economic, social and territorial cohesion. We continued our work on critical issues in taxation and the integration of Europe's financial markets and presented key recommendations for macroeconomic stability. We also explored ways to boost public and private investment in strategic European interests and held difficult but important discussions on defence financing in the EU.

Crucially, we led the [EESC's cross-cutting package of own-initiative opinions on the cost-of-living crisis](#). This package calls for structural reforms and offers EU institutions, national governments, social partners and civil society clear, actionable guidance on how to build resilience against future crises and move toward a more inclusive, sustainable Union.

Despite the unprecedented challenges, I am proud that the ECO section has remained true to its core mission: ensuring EU economic policies reflect the real needs of citizens, leaving no one behind.

The above-mentioned objectives must be pursued further in the coming term of office, as global challenges persist and have in some cases even intensified, for example, with the increase in US tariffs on EU imports.

[Ioannis VARDAKASTANIS](#) (Greece)

President, [ECO section](#), EESC

President, Greek National Confederation of Disabled People (ESAMEA)

President, European Disability Forum (EDF)

President, International Disability Alliance (IDA)



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NEWS ON OUR ACTIVITIES: Launch of new EESC study on civil dialogue

17 September 2025

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[Mapping civil dialogue practices in the EU institutions](#) (Publication)

[Civil dialogue: new EESC study published](#)

(Press release)

● Statement by President Séamus Boland on the publication of the new EESC study (see below)

EESC PLENARY: Interview with rapporteur Pietro Barbieri



We spoke with the rapporteur for the EESC opinion [SOC/840](#) 'EU strategy to support, protect and empower civil society', representative of the Italian Center for Autonomy.

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WE SPOKE WITH THE RAPPORTEUR FOR THE EESC OPINION [SOC/840](#) 'EU STRATEGY TO SUPPORT, PROTECT AND EMPOWER CIVIL SOCIETY'

THE EESC WELCOMES THE INITIATIVE ON AN EU CIVIL SOCIETY STRATEGY. WHAT SHOULD THIS FUTURE STRATEGY INCLUDE?

An EU strategy for civil society should introduce measures based on: 1) a safe and enabling environment for civil society; 2) sustainability and independence; and 3) stronger civic participation and civil dialogue. When it comes to dialogue between the European institutions and civil society organisations (CSO), in our view, certain key elements arise that the strategy cannot ignore. First and foremost, for the EESC it is fundamental that the dialogue be cross-cutting and involve the whole European Commission – not just the Commissioner responsible for creating the strategy and the proposed Civil Society Platform. While Commissioner McGrath has important responsibilities, as always, these are not sufficient to cover the entire area of interest for CSOs. We are also proposing that other institutions – such as the Council and the European Parliament – be involved, through an interinstitutional agreement. There is moreover a need to clarify certain points about how this civil dialogue would work. We believe: i) it must be meaningful; ii) the agenda – and therefore also the priorities – must be agreed on; and iii) the right conditions must be put in place, starting with support aimed at ensuring that CSOs are able to participate actively and on an informed basis. This could take the form of direct funding for empowerment. Finally, there needs to be assessment of the results, based on effective, ongoing monitoring of progress, with reporting at least every two

years.

WHAT ARE THE MAIN RECOMMENDATIONS OR PROPOSALS OF THE OPINION?

As part of the opinion, we propose the launch of a pilot project with the European Commission and the EESC's Liaison Group to establish a broad dialogue process on key topics for civil society. This is part of our response to the Civil Society Platform that the Commission proposed. This pilot project is, without a doubt, our most important proposal. It could be considered a trial for a permanent civil dialogue process. In other words, it gives the Commission a 'laboratory' where it can build the platform, brick by brick, without being exhaustive, as this should be a joint process. However, we do suggest a governance system, which has already been tested in a number of EESC activities in agreement with the Commission. An example is the [European Migration Forum](#), which the EESC is organising with the Commission since 2015. We propose a tripartite governance structure, with the Commission on one side, the EESC and its national representatives on another, and the [EESC Liaison Group](#), which includes 47 European organisations and networks of civil society already operating in the EESC, on another. We believe that this set-up will help make it possible for all these stakeholders to participate in direct discussions on a range of topics. Obviously, we are also contemplating how this new structure might guide the policy direction of the Commission, the Parliament and the Council in the future. We are thinking, primarily, of an experimental project that would guide dialogues on democracy, fundamental rights and the rule of law. Later it could also address cross-cutting issues – such as the Commission's work programme and the multiannual financial framework. We believe that all of this can contribute to the EESC's normal activities, substantially enriching them.

AFTER THE ADOPTION OF THIS OPINION, WHAT HAVE YOU DONE/WILL YOU DO TO PROMOTE IT?

The EESC produces a large number of opinions not only on legislative initiatives and on requests from the rotating presidency of the Council of the European Union, but also on topics that are not on the European agenda, and that civil society would like to see included. This is already a form of civil dialogue, built up since the founding Treaties of the European Union. In terms of the kind of dialogue being contemplated now, the EESC has experience in facilitating dialogue and channelling the voice of civil society into EU decision-making. If we draw on this experience,

the interplay between the EESC and the Civil Society Platform could have extremely positive effects if based on convergence, mediation and wider consensus. It is a matter of working towards compromise, and our proposals go in that direction.

Promoting our proposals will require a conscious effort from the whole Committee, starting from the top. This is a political task of interweaving, involving the Commission, civil society organisations at EU level, and the EESC. The key challenge for us is not to lose sight of the unfolding developments and to stay firmly on the path taken of working across the board, with the other parties. Naturally there are different levels of engagement. The Committee leadership will be involved in certain levels, while myself and the other two rapporteurs will be involved in others. All three rapporteurs are in contact with the Commission concerning the follow-up of our opinion on the proposed civil society strategy.

The opinion on 'EU strategy to support, protect and empower civil society' was presented and adopted at the EESC plenary session in July 2025. Read it at: <https://www.eesc.europa.eu/en/our-work/opinions-information-reports/opinions/eu-strategy-support-protect-and-empower-civil-society>



Rapporteur for the EESC opinion [SOC/840](#) 'EU strategy to support, protect and empower civil society'

Vice-President, Civil Society Organisations' Group

Former Spokesperson, Third Sector Forum

President, Center for Autonomy

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EESC PLENARY: Danish Council Presidency will work for ‘a strong Europe in a changing world’

17 September 2025

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Marie Bjerre, Danish Minister for European Affairs

At its plenary session on 16 July, the European Economic and Social Committee (EESC) held a debate on the priorities of the Danish Presidency of the Council of the European Union, with Marie Bjerre, Danish Minister for European Affairs. Read the key messages of the members of the EESC Civil Society Organisations' Group.

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The July plenary session of the European Economic and Social Committee (EESC) hosted a debate on the political priorities of the [Danish Presidency of the Council of the European Union](#). Under the motto ‘A strong Europe in a changing world’, the presidency’s two main priorities will be security and competitiveness. The presidency started on 1 July and will come to an end on 31 December 2025.

‘We need a strong, competitive and green Europe. A Europe that is able to take responsibility for its own security. And a Europe that is able to innovate and compete at global level. Supporting Ukraine and moving forward on enlargement will be key,’ said Marie Bjerre, Denmark’s Minister of European Affairs, speaking at the EESC plenary session on 16 July.

Several members of the EESC’s Civil Society Organisations’ Group took the floor during the debate:

[Séamus Boland](#), group president, said that ‘A strong, competitive Europe is about how we manage to leave no one behind in our society. We can learn a lot from Denmark’s best practises.’

[Juliane Niemand](#) said that ‘Women’s participation in the economy, innovation and defence is vital. When we let women in 100%, we strengthen our resilience and our common values. I would like to encourage the Danish Presidency to invite women into all aspects of its programme.’

[Jan Dirx](#), group vice-president, said that ‘The European Parliament’s rapporteur for the proposals to amend the [European climate law](#) will come from the radical right-wing group Patriots for Europe. What will this mean for this important and necessary legislative process?’

[Christian Moos](#) thanked the Danish Presidency for focusing on empowering the EU to defend itself, including in terms of ‘a whole of society approach, meaning the defence of democracy’. Mr Moos asked the presidency to work against the counter-narrative which holds that efforts to ramp up defences will take money away from social or environmental policies.

[Rudolf Kolbe](#), group vice-president, highlighted the timeliness of the presidency’s focus on cutting red tape and strengthening the single market. However, he pointed out that ‘Simplified rules and digital tools free us to innovate, but must be backed by robust security. SMEs and professions need support. Targeted investments and public-private partnerships can deliver reliable, user-friendly digital infrastructure.’

[Elena Calistru](#) spoke about the expected proposal for the next Multiannual Financial Framework ([MFF](#)): ‘We welcome the goal of simplification, but this should not come at the expense of democratic participation.’ Ms Calistru also asked the presidency to help ensure that civil society’s voice is heard along the entire MFF cycle.

Read the EESC’s press release: <https://www.eesc.europa.eu/en/news-media/press-releases/danish-council-presidency-will-work-strong-europe-changing-world>

Watch the debate at: <https://webcast.ec.europa.eu/eesc-plenary-session-2025-07-16>



EESC PLENARY: Youth Test showcases EESC's commitment to young people, says Commissioner Micallef

17 September 2025

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At its plenary session on 16 July, the European Economic and Social Committee (EESC) held a debate on youth with Glenn Micallef, European commissioner for Intergenerational Fairness, Youth, Culture and Sport. Read the key messages of the members of the EESC Civil Society Organisations' Group.

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The European Economic and Social Committee (EESC) reaffirmed its commitment to youth inclusion in policy making during a high-level debate with European Commissioner Glenn Micallef at the EESC plenary session on 16 July. The debate brought together EU stakeholders, youth representatives and institutional leaders to discuss the future of youth participation, intergenerational fairness and the practical tools that make youth mainstreaming a reality, chief among them the EESC Youth Test.

Glenn Micallef, Commissioner for Intergenerational Fairness, Youth, Culture and Sport, praised the EESC for working with young people as equal partners in shaping policy, in addition to advocating for them. The Commissioner said that 'The trust young people place in Europe is not automatic; it must be earned. That means giving them real responsibility, real power and real space to lead. From affordable housing to mental health action plans, the Commission is determined to turn participation into policy and ensure youth engagement from day one. And with the 50% budget increase for Erasmus+ proposed today, we will further strengthen our support for young people in Europe.'

Several members of the EESC's Civil Society Organisations' Group took the floor during the plenary debate:

[Katrīna Leitāne](#), president of the [EESC's Youth Group](#), stressed that the EESC was the very first EU institution to implement the [EU Youth Test](#) at EU level. On behalf of the Committee, she thanked the European Youth Forum for helping develop this unique methodology for strengthening youth participation in policy making and said that 'We can collectively build a Europe that young people can truly believe in and take part in'.

Since the Youth Test was launched in September 2024, 40 opinions have used it, with 27 of them already adopted. The network now includes 72 youth organisations from EU Member States and candidate countries.

[Michael McLoughlin](#) said that 'In Europe, despite progress, we still need to move away from one-off events towards more meaningful youth engagement. Young people need to speak for others, not just for themselves. I support the idea of re-examining the concept of internships and we want to see a substantial Erasmus budget that maintains the youth chapter and youth participation initiatives.'

[Neža Repanšek](#) said that 'Despite many efforts, the EU is still marked by *youthwashing* and tokenism. I truly hope that this Committee and the other EU institutions will commit to doing everything in their power to listen to the expertise of those working in the field of youth and meaningful participation and to making decisions together with young professionals and young people and not without them.'

[Krzysztof Balon](#), group vice-president, said that 'The EESC is considering hosting an [Intergenerational Solidarity Forum](#) to exchange information and experience and evaluate existing and develop new concepts and strategies for intergenerational solidarity. I hope that we can cooperate with you in this field.'

[Louise Grabo](#) said that 'I hope that what we do here at the EESC could be an inspiration for other institutions. Young people must have the opportunity to be heard, but also be given the opportunity to follow up on what they start. What are you, as youth commissioner, going to do to improve the position of young people in the civil service and the EU institutions?'

Read the EESC's press release: <https://www.eesc.europa.eu/en/news-media/press-releases/youth-test-showcases-eescs-commitment-young-people-says-commissioner-micallef>

Watch the debate at: <https://webcast.ec.europa.eu/eesc-plenary-session-2025-07-16>

EESC PLENARY: Candidate countries commend EESC for elevating civil society in enlargement process

17 September 2025

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The European Economic and Social Committee (EESC) organised the Enlargement High-Level Forum, with representatives of the European candidate countries, on 17 July. Read the key messages of the members of the EESC Civil Society Organisations' Group.

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At an Enlargement Forum hosted by the European Economic and Social Committee (EESC), civil society representatives from candidate countries commended the Committee's Enlargement Candidate Members initiative as a vital tool for shaping their countries' European integration process and bolstering public support for EU accession.

At its plenary session on 17 July, the EESC held an Enlargement Forum focusing on *Building an Inclusive Future in the Enlarged EU: The Role of Social Dialogue, Civil Society and Youth Engagement*. The event opened with a high-level debate featuring Maida Gorčević, Minister for European Affairs in Montenegro, Orhan Murtezani, Minister for European Affairs in North Macedonia, and Antoine Kasel, Director for Labour Mobility and International Affairs at the European Commission's Directorate-General for Employment, Social Affairs and Inclusion.

The forum brought together approximately 75 representatives from social partners and civil society organisations across the EU candidate countries. It was part of the EESC's pioneering Enlargement Candidate Members initiative ([ECM](#)), which enables civil society organisations from candidate countries to participate in the process of drafting opinions and get involved in EESC debates. The project's success has already led to additional financial backing by the European Commission to reinforce it and make it a permanent structure.

Several members of the EESC's Civil Society Organisations' Group took part in the debates. Three members spoke during a session on *Institutionalising civil society and strengthening social dialogue in EU candidate countries*:

[Ionuț Sibian](#), rapporteur for the [REX/598](#) opinion on *The importance of institutionalising civil and social dialogue in EU candidate and partner countries* presented some of the main elements of the opinion: 'We put forward some recommendations about how to align the national legislation in candidate countries in the area of social dialogue and civil dialogue with the EU's institutional set-up. We developed some principles and standards for good practice, including an appropriate national regulatory framework. Civil and social dialogue should be among the conditionalities for the EU accession negotiations and we recommend that National Economic and Social Councils include civil society.'

[Lidija Pavić-Rogošić](#), group vice-president, said that 'Strong civil and social dialogue is not just a technical thing; it is a basis of social stability. Structural dialogue between governments, trade unions and civil society organisations can enable inclusive decision making, protects workers' rights and strengthens people's trust in institutions. Without dialogue, there is no sustainable development or just transition. It is very important to develop common standards and a comprehensive regulatory framework for civil dialogue.'

[Andris Gobiņš](#) thanked civil society representatives from the candidate countries for participating in the Enlargement Forum and called for continued cooperation with them. He said that 'We need strong partnerships with all the neighbour countries now and in the future.'

[Corina Andrea Murafa Benga](#) participated in the session on *Creating opportunities for youth – from education to employment*. She said that 'Across the candidate countries young people are sounding the alarm on climate. However, they lack access to climate information. It is not just an information deficit; it is a failure to include young

people in the decisions that will shape their future.’ She asked the guest speakers how their countries were including young people in shaping the low-carbon transition and what the EU could do to support them.

Read the EESC’s press release: <https://www.eesc.europa.eu/en/news-media/press-releases/candidate-countries-commend-eesc-elevating-civil-society-enlargement-process>

Watch the debate at: <https://webcast.ec.europa.eu/eesc-plenary-session-2025-07-17>

EESC PLENARY: Adopted opinions

17 September 2025

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The last EESC plenary sessions took place on 17-18 September and 21-23 October 2025. The EESC plenary adopted several opinion, several of which were drafted by members of the Civil Society Organisations’ Group.

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

The next EESC plenary session will take place on 3-4 December 2025. For more information on the upcoming plenary session please visit our [website](#).

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24/11/2025 - Extraordinary
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3-4/12/2025 - EESC plenary
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