What is the EESC?

A consultative body that represents Civil Society

“The European Parliament, the Council and the Commission shall be assisted by an Economic and Social Committee and a Committee of the Regions acting in an advisory capacity.”

Treaty on European Union, Art. 13
Where is the EESC located?
Mission statement

Committed to the European project, the EESC helps strengthen the European Union’s democratic legitimacy and effectiveness by enabling civil society organisations from the Member States to express their views at European level.

It has three main tasks, which are to:

• ensure that **EU policies** reflect the true economic, social and civic picture,
• build a more **participatory EU**, closer to its citizens, and
• promote **EU values** and civil society organisations globally
More than half a century of experience

- **1957** The EESC is established by the Rome Treaties
- **1986** The *Single European Act* further develops the EESC's role
- **1989** The EESC issues the opinion that inspired the Community Charter of Fundamental Social Rights
- **1992** The *Maastricht Treaty* broadens the scope of EESC consultations
- **1997** The *Amsterdam Treaty* grants the EESC the right to be consulted by the European Parliament
- **2001** The *Nice Treaty* further extends the range of policy areas on which the EESC must be consulted
- **2007** By recognising participatory democracy alongside representative democracy, the *Lisbon Treaty* strengthens the EESC's role as intermediary between organised civil society and EU decision-makers.
What does Civil Society mean?

People “on the ground” - those most directly affected by EU legislation!
That is, representatives of organisations of

- employers
- workers
- various interests (including farmers, the professions, consumers, NGOs…)

Those who are committed to defending their interests (trade unions, employers, consumers ...) or convictions (human rights, children's rights, environment, poverty, the fight against racism and discrimination...)

What is the structure of the EESC?

- It is an assembly of **353 members** from the **28 Member States** of the EU.

- Members are appointed for a **renewable five-year term by the Council** on a proposal by Member States, but they work independently for the EESC in the interest of all EU citizens.

- **Members are not paid**, although their travel and accommodation costs are met.

- **Members are not based full-time in Brussels**: most continue to do their own jobs in their home countries, which means they can stay in touch with people “back home”.
Number of EESC Members by country
An assembly divided into 3 GROUPS

**Group I – Employers**
- Representatives of business associations working in industry, commerce, services and agriculture
- President: **Jacek Krawczyk** (Poland)

**Group II – Workers**
- Representatives of national trade unions, confederations and sectoral federations
- President: **George Dassis** (Greece)

**Group III – Various Interests**
- Other representatives of and stakeholders in civil society, particularly in the economic, civic, professional and cultural spheres
- President: **Luca Jahier** (Italy)
The EESC’s decision-making bodies

**The Presidency**
Elected for a two-and-a-half-year term

**The Bureau**
Elected for a two-and-a-half-year term

**The Plenary Assembly**
Nominated by national governments and appointed by the Council of the EU for a renewable five-year term
The EESC’s working bodies: 6 sections

ECO  Economic and Monetary Union and Economic and Social Cohesion  Joost Van Iersel (Group 1)
INT  Single Market, Production and Consumption  Martin Siecker (Group 2)
TEN  Transport, Energy, Infrastructure and the Information Society  Stéphane Buffetaut (Group 1)
REX  External Relations  Jose Maria Zufiaur Narvaiza (Group 2)
NAT  Agriculture, Rural Development and the Environment  Dilyana Slavova (Group 3)
SOC  Employment, Social Affairs and Citizenship  Maureen O’Neill (Group 3)
The EESC’s other working bodies

CCMI  The Consultative Commission on Industrial Change
Steering Committee  Europe 2020
SMO  The Single Market Observatory
SDO  The Sustainable Development Observatory
LMO  The Labour Market Observatory
Working methods

- The EESC works in all 24 official languages of the EU, so that each member is able to speak and draft texts in his/her mother tongue.

- To issue opinions (mandatory, own-initiative or exploratory opinions), the sections usually set up “study groups”, each with a rapporteur.

- There is a continual quest for a “dynamic compromise”.

- Constructive debate takes place, on the basis of real expertise.

- A vote is taken in the section, and then in the plenary session.

- The final opinion is sent to the European institutions and published in the Official Journal of the EU.
How we work: opinions

European Commission, Parliament or Council makes a request

- Authorisation of work by the Bureau
- Rapporteur and Study Group Members appointed by Groups
- Drafting by Rapporteur, often assisted by Study Group
- Discussion and adoption by sections
- Adoption by plenary

EESC uses its own initiative

Opinion is sent to EU institutions and publicised as appropriate
Why do we need the EESC?

- The EESC is the only way for Europe’s interest groups to have a formal and **institutionalised say on draft EU legislation**
- Democracy cannot exist without the participation of civil society
- All **topics affecting people’s daily lives** are covered (employment, health, consumer rights, farming, the fight against organised crime etc.)

So is the EESC a kind of lobby group, then?

No, not at all

The Committee is the only institutional meeting-place and forum for dialogue at European level that enables a consensus to be reached between diverse interests.

**Whereas, lobbies are obviously there to tell just one side of the story.**
Our vision: European values

- freedom, democracy and equality
- global solidarity, social justice
- environmental responsibility
Pattern of work

- 9 plenary sessions per year
- Each of the 6 sections generally meets once a month
- Each study group meets between one and three times
- The members and the various working bodies are assisted by a secretariat-general
Does the EESC influence EU law?

Yes. The European Commission acts on 4 out of 5 EESC opinions.
Challenges for the future

• To optimise the Committee's role as a consultative body for the European Parliament, Council and European Commission by **stepping up cooperation**

• To improve the EESC's **representativeness and credibility** as the institutional representative of civil society

• To raise the EESC's profile in the **debate on the future of Europe**
Examples of key policy issues covered

- Employment for young people
- Climate change
- Renewable energy
- Sustainable development
- Demographic change
- Active ageing
- Immigration and integration
- Cost of non-Europe
- Research and innovation
- Education
- SMEs
- Disability