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Civil Society Organisations' Bulletin



**INTER-GENERATIONAL
SOLIDARITY WITHIN THE EU**

FOREWORD

EU Renewal

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Séamus Boland © EESC

Let me first begin by wishing you all a good start after the summer break.

Before the European elections¹ at the beginning of June, there were fears that the centre would collapse and that the people

of Europe would end up with an unworkable European Parliament. While we have seen many changes in the Parliament's membership and some shifts in the strengths of the various political parties and groups, the fact remains that the Parliament has stayed close to the centre.

In her political guidelines for the next European Commission², President von der Leyen has already noted that voters still have major concerns regarding a range of diverse issues, in particular the cost of living, housing and energy, and the management of migration and asylum processes. She has also stressed that the EU is feeling the effects of at least two major wars, with no immediate signs of peace. In addition, the effects of global climate change continue to threaten our planet's stability. President von der Leyen has called for solidarity from all citizens in ensuring that the EU continues to promote the preservation of democracy and fundamental values, especially equality.

Clearly, from a civil society perspective, the attitude of the European institutions towards the millions of citizens who devote time and energy on a daily basis to improving their communities must be improved. To give just one example, the recent EESC study³ entitled 'How to eradicate skills poverty among the most vulnerable?' highlights that civil society organisations have a unique opportunity to make a significant impact by actively identifying and reaching out to vulnerable individuals in need of upskilling support. By collaborating with local communities and leveraging their networks, these organisations can play a vital role in ensuring that no one is left behind in the pursuit of education and in developing their skills. I see the study as an

invitation for policymakers to cooperate with and support civil society organisations. With their flexibility and hands-on experience, these organisations can complement traditional education, serving as knowledge hubs for targeted and inclusive approaches, but also helping to teach life skills and enhancing social cohesion. These organisations' expertise and outreach to under-represented groups constitutes an opportunity for policymakers to improve the quality of a legislative process and its implementation on the ground. You will learn more about this study in this bulletin.

In this context, the EU institutions must take concrete measures to implement an open, transparent and regular dialogue with civil society organisations, as set out in Article 11 of the Treaty on European Union, and in all policy areas⁴. Involving civil society solely in AI, agriculture and food systems, specific societal issues, human rights, policy implementation and tackling administrative burdens, as mentioned in President von der Leyen's political guidelines, is not enough. The Civil Society Organisations' Group reiterates its call to the EU institutions to connect with civil society organisations in all policy areas, as this is the only way that the democratic deficit can be tackled.

I emphasised this demand during the various meetings held during my visit to Cyprus at the end of July. The Cypriot delegation to the EESC (across all groups) assisted me in organising this visit, for which I am very thankful. In particular, I would highlight the work carried out by Anastasis Yiapanis and his colleague Panagiotis Champas on behalf of their organisations in Cyprus. One of the key meetings I attended was with the President of the Cypriot House of Representatives, Annita Demetriou. At this meeting, there was agreement on the importance of ensuring a strong EU, based on its founding values and a strong belief in the need to give citizens a voice.

This links with the theme of this bulletin – intergenerational solidarity – which will also be the topic of a conference⁵ organised by the Civil Society Organisations' Group on 10 October. You will note from the many contributors to this bulletin a strong sense of the importance of including voices from all generations when

designing policies that affect people's daily lives. Intergenerational solidarity should not be used simply as a convenient phrase to describe inclusion. Unfortunately, the demands made by young people, older people and children are often pitted against each other when it comes to distributing resources. The reality is that all generations need to work hard to prevent this and unite against being used as scapegoats to explain away shortages of funds for the vital services that each age group needs.

Finally, I hope that the new European Parliament, along with the new European Commission, do everything in their power to respect all citizens and civil society organisations, in order to strengthen our democracy and create a real Union of Equality⁶.

Séamus Boland

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1 European Parliament, European elections 2024, <https://elections.europa.eu/en/>

2 European Commission, political guidelines for the European Commission 2024-2029, <https://europa.eu/!wywg4P>

3 EESC, study entitled 'How to eradicate skills poverty among the most vulnerable?', <https://europa.eu/!QJccgK>

4 EESC Civil Society Organisations' Group, open letter #EUCivilDialogueNow, <https://europa.eu/!yG8b6t>

5 EESC, Civil Society Organisations' Group, events, <https://europa.eu/!g8kJtC>

6 European Commission, Union of Equality, <https://europa.eu/!XkKMxf>

INTER-GENERATIONAL SOLIDARITY WITHIN THE EU

Connecting generations: fostering intergenerational dialogue, justice and solidarity in the European Union



Krzysztof Balon © Krzysztof Balon

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Krzysztof Balon is the rapporteur for the EESC opinion SOC/800 on Promoting European intergenerational solidarity – towards an EU horizontal approach. The opinion will be presented and put to the vote of the September plenary session (18-19 September 2024). Follow the plenary session at <https://www.eesc.europa.eu/en/agenda/plenary-sessions> and find the opinion after adoption at: <https://europa.eu/WYJDJj>.



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The Treaty on European Union states that 'The Union ... shall promote ... solidarity between generations'¹.

However, ageism, negative attitudes towards certain age groups, and demographic trends paired with multiple crises are dividing European societies and creating barriers to real inclusion and participation. These issues affect not only older generations but will also affect today's younger generations in the future. At the same time, intergenerational dialogue and positive influences on economic development (thanks to the intergenerational design of the labour market and the silver economy) would cover the needs of different generations in a sustainable way, strengthening both democracy and social cohesion. Intergenerational dialogue, characterised by an exchange of knowledge and experience between generations, would work as a particular form of civil dialogue. **We therefore need a new political approach of intergenerational solidarity – here and now!**

To begin, the European Economic and Social

Committee (EESC) calls on the European Commission to publish a **Green Paper on intergenerational solidarity**. This should include proposals mentioned in the EESC opinion on Promoting [European intergenerational solidarity](#)², including those related to the world of work, the silver economy, pension systems, health and care services, local development, housing, mobility, climate policy, lifelong learning and participation and volunteering. The **Member States**, in turn, are advised to **exchange their best practices** in those fields. To support these efforts, intergenerational solidarity should be established as one of the objectives under the European Social Fund 2027-2034 regulations.

Civil society organisations and social partners play a key role in planning and implementing specific policies in the fields mentioned above. They represent different generations, provide services in cooperation with volunteers of all ages, and raise awareness about intergenerational solidarity across the EU (e.g. by celebrating the European Day of Solidarity between

Generations on 29 April). Therefore, also in response to Commission President Ursula von der Leyen's initiative to install 'a commissioner whose responsibilities will include ensuring intergenerational fairness'³, the EESC ought to establish an **Intergenerational Solidarity Forum**. This forum should provide a platform for exchanging information and experience and for developing new ideas in close cooperation with the civil society organisations and other relevant actors working in intergenerational dialogue, justice and solidarity. With the participation of the European Commission, the forum might also monitor the implementation and further development of the intergenerational solidarity approach across the EU.

1 EUR-Lex, Article 3(3) Treaty on European Union, <https://europa.eu/IG4N6nV>

2 EESC opinion SOC/800, <https://europa.eu/WYJDJj>

3 European Commission, Political Guidelines 2024-2029, <https://europa.eu/wywg4P>

Needs-based work-life balance for all generations



Kinga Joó © EESC

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Ensuring a needs-based work-life balance is crucial for a socially inclusive EU that also promotes intergenerational solidarity. But how can working arrangements become more responsive to the needs of different generations? This is what the exploratory [opinion SOC/808](#)¹ of the European Economic and Social Committee (EESC) aims to examine.

The [Work-Life Balance Directive](#)² adopted in 2019 addresses the needs of working parents and carers. Since its transposition, **significant progress has been made** in fostering policies that facilitate flexible work arrangements. However, with **new trends and challenges** emerging, such as the spread of new forms of work and demographic changes, workers are

Kinga Joó is the rapporteur for the EESC opinion SOC/808 on Ensuring a needs-based work-life balance for all: How adequate flexible working conditions can support intergenerational solidarity and the empowerment of women. The opinion will be presented and put to the vote of the October plenary session (23-24 October 2024). Follow the plenary session at <https://www.eesc.europa.eu/en/agenda/plenary-sessions> and find the opinion after adoption at: <https://europa.eu/IJd9R4R>.

still struggling to better balance their careers with changing and often increasing care responsibilities.

Moreover, from an intergenerational perspective, the **reconciliation of paid and unpaid work is unevenly distributed**. 70% of informal carers are over 45 years of age, with the majority carrying out care tasks in addition to (or by giving up) their work responsibilities³. This is especially true for women, who provide care more frequently and for longer periods than men. Unmet care needs are causing difficulties for young people as well, leading them to postpone starting families or to have fewer children than planned.

It is therefore **time to reconsider the provisions of the Directive** and explore what more can be done to **support Europeans in**

their roles both in family life and at work.

The EESC opinion SOC/808 examines ways to offer a secure and flexible working environment that accommodates diverse caregiving responsibilities for individuals navigating the intersection of paid and unpaid work. It identifies areas for improvement and promotes exemplary practices within workplaces that foster a family-friendly environment and offer flexible, needs-based working arrangements for all generations.



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- 1 The EESC opinion will feed into the Council conclusions on ensuring a needs-based work-life balance for all generations, which are planned for adoption during the Hungarian Presidency of the Council of the EU. The opinion will be put to the vote of the EESC plenary in October. EESC opinion SOC/808, <https://europa.eu/IJd9R4R>
- 2 EUR-Lex, Work-Life Balance Directive, COM (2019) 1158 final, <https://europa.eu/!M8JKPF>
- 3 EUR-Lex, European Care Strategy, COM(2022) 440 final, <https://europa.eu/!tGhtwK>

Promoting intergenerational solidarity to enhance social cohesion



Miguel Ángel Cabra de Luna
© Foundation ONCE

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At a time when the EU is undergoing profound demographic changes, intergenerational solidarity will be crucial for fostering social cohesion. The European Economic and Social Committee will continue working to provide policy tools to keep encouraging solidarity and cooperation between generations, suggesting initiatives at local, national and EU level to enhance intergenerational cooperation and support.

Local-Level Initiatives

At local level, **family policies** should focus on developing services that support families,

including affordable and quality care services for children and older people. Programmes like Denmark's Substitute Grandparent Scheme¹ exemplify initiatives that foster intergenerational solidarity. **Employment policies** should explore new forms of intergenerational cooperation, such as mentoring programmes where older workers pass on their skills to younger colleagues. **Housing policies** should promote age-mixed communities and shared intergenerational housing to integrate the ageing dimension into urban planning. In **health and long-term care**, improving coordination and integrating informal carers and volunteers into the care process are essential steps.

National-Level Strategies

Nationally, policies should **support family carers**, including older generations, and develop age-friendly workplaces to eliminate age discrimination in labour markets. Luxembourg's Long-

Term Care Insurance Act² serves as a model for supporting family carers. **Pension reforms** should ensure minimum pensions to combat poverty among older people and promote equity and solidarity. **Health policies** should adopt preventive measures to improve quality of life and create better work environments for professional carers, thereby reducing chronic diseases.

EU-Level Policies

At EU level, policies should be promoted through the exchange of best practices, policy



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- 1 Age Platform Europe, The Substitute Grandparent Scheme in Denmark, <https://www.age-platform.eu/family-policy/>
- 2 Age Platform Europe, The Long-Term Care Insurance Act 1998 in Luxembourg, <https://www.age-platform.eu/family-policy/>

coordination and funding. **Employment policies** should develop a European Quality Framework for Internships to ensure learning opportunities, appropriate remuneration and social protection. Promoting intergenerational mentoring schemes and longer working lives is also recommended. **Social inclusion policies** should aim to combat poverty and inequalities and implement all relevant EU tools to ensure an adequate minimum income for all. In **health and long-term care**, it is vital to ensure access to healthcare systems based on solidarity and to strengthen the open method of coordination for the exchange of good practices.

All these elements should be grouped together and reflected in a **new EU Strategy on Age**.

Intergenerational solidarity significantly contributes to social cohesion and civic participation. By fostering relationships between generations, communities can enhance civic engagement, volunteering and community service. Programmes that encourage older adults to volunteer and mentor younger generations not only provide valuable knowledge transfer but also strengthen community bonds. Addressing ageism and loneliness is another critical

aspect; intergenerational initiatives help break down stereotypes and promote mutual understanding and respect. For instance, shared intergenerational housing can reduce feelings of isolation among older adults and foster a sense of belonging. These efforts collectively build more inclusive and resilient communities, where all age groups feel valued and connected.

The Hidden Crisis: Student poverty and the need for a future-proof education area in Europe



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Iris Kimizoglu © European Students' Union

When we students speak up about our socioeconomic hardships, our voices are often ignored and dismissed. Yet the reality is that **student poverty across Europe is undeniable and increasing**, as shown by 2024 Eurostudent VIII data². The effects are catastrophic, and not only lead to severe mental health issues, but also force many students to make impossible choices – for example eating or heating – as they struggle to make ends meet.

In recent decades, **higher education has undergone significant transformations** which have been shaped by, evolving societal challenges, European efforts to harmonise the sector, and an increasingly diverse student population. Labour market policies have had a particularly strong impact on the strategic direction of higher education, driving initiatives such as the European Skills Agenda³, the push for excellence, and the development of public-private partnerships within academia. Expectations of students are higher than ever, with the pace of learning intensifying and policies pushing for faster progression through academic programmes.

Despite the critical need for skilled graduates in Europe's knowledge-based societies, the **living and studying conditions** of students



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have eroded considerably in recent years. This decline, exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic, the housing market crisis, rising inflation and energy costs, has led to a troubling increase in student poverty. This poverty is not only unacceptable in itself, but also has wider implications for society, affecting students' health, financial stability and ability to study. Many students and their representatives feel abandoned, forced to confront these challenges with little support from those in power.

As demands on students – both in terms of academic expectations and skills / formal qualifications needed for a wide range of jobs – **have increased drastically** in recent years, students with financially challenging backgrounds are often left to navigate financial hardships (including during the multiple recent crises) with little or no public support.

If we are truly committed to intergenerational solidarity, we must **reverse the trend of disinvestment in education** seen in recent years. Students have a fundamental right to live with dignity, and investing in their education now will reduce the risk of future poverty and increase the skills needed to tackle emerging societal challenges, ultimately benefiting society as a whole. The European Students' Union (ESU) has proposed several measures⁴ at European and national levels to address student poverty. In addition, education needs to become future-proof. To this end, the ESU is proposing 24 objectives for the newly elected European Parliament and incoming European Commission⁵, including the creation of an EU investment framework for higher education. The time to act is now!

1 European Students' Union, <https://esu-online.org/>

2 Eurostudent, Social and Economic Conditions of Student Life in Europe, https://www.eurostudent.eu/download_files/documents/EUROSTUDENT_8_Synopsis_of_Indicators.pdf

3 European Union, European Skills Agenda, <https://europa.eu/lup49hm>

4 European Students' Union, Resolution on student poverty, <https://esu-online.org/policies/esu-resolution-on-student-poverty-education-is-freezing/>

5 European Students' Union, Resolution on Students Manifesto – 24 proposals for the 2024 European elections, <https://esu-online.org/policies/bm83-resolution-on-student-manifesto-24-proposals-for-the-2024-european-elections/>

Social cohesion and participation



Andreas Kruse © Fotografie
Lauterwasser

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Intergenerational solidarity is a core element of civil society. On the one hand, civil society is stimulated and revitalised by relationships between generations; on the other hand, civil society initiatives can themselves motivate and promote long-term intergenerational relationships.

It is not uncommon for **intergenerational relationships** to be viewed as conflictual in society. There is also not enough explicit recognition of the many local initiatives based on reciprocity between generations. These were impressively demonstrated in various countries during the **coronavirus**

pandemic: generations did not only focus on their own particular needs or lose sight of members of other generations. Instead, there were numerous and effective forms of contact (including outside the family) and support among members of the young, middle and older generations. These underline the *new caring communities* model in local areas, even across generational boundaries.

Members of different generations have also been seen to come together and stand together as part of **political initiatives** – especially to protest against radical right-wing political movements and parties. And it is precisely such *intergenerational solidarity in the fruitful and courageous fight for democracy* that conveys the real impression of the possibilities for solidarity in society.

Exchanges between generations in **political, social and cultural initiatives**, in support (solidarity) networks, and in individual, more personal contacts in voluntary work (visiting services, accompanying families, neighbourhood support and hospice services) can be interpreted very differently in terms of their *potential for society*. Firstly, such exchanges form the “social cement” of a society. Secondly, they stimulate political, social and

cultural participation. Thirdly, they help to prevent loneliness (as everyone feels that they are “part of society”). And fourthly, it helps to prevent stereotypes and discrimination against individual generations by encouraging people to take a closer look at the lives of individual generations.

This constitutes one area of enormous potential for **civil society**, and for this reason, corresponding **initiatives need to be provided with solid political and administrative support**, without there being any suggestion of them being “captured” politically. Especially nowadays, this in itself would be an **important contribution to promoting democracy** – in particular, the European idea of democracy!



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Intergenerational considerations in the face of the climate crisis: time value of carbon – not time value of money – is what really counts



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© EESC

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investments, hoping for a cheaper alternative in the future.

How do we **assess value and costs of climate investments** from an intergenerational perspective? And how should we invest in effective mitigation measures and design resilient adaptation policies? One useful concept is the economic rate of discount – the interest rate used to calculate the present value of future cash flows.

Classical economic theory asserts that ‘a dollar today is more valuable than a dollar tomorrow’, which leads to reluctance in frontloading investments in climate action today.

Instead of this theory, our societies should all consider the **time value of carbon** in our investment decisions. Greenhouse gas emissions eliminated today are worth more than future cuts due to escalating risks associated with climate inaction. **Failing to address the climate crisis now will lead to immeasurable costs** related to future wars, global famine and flows of climate refugees estimated in hundreds of millions.

A company (or society in general) that invests in climate action today creates ongoing future benefits. These **investments should be incentivised** regardless of current euro area



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interest rates. Given the huge future costs of inaction, one euro invested in climate action today is worth more in the future. This would suggest the use of negative discount rates to assess the financial attractiveness of climate investments (think of retrofitting buildings, mass transit (especially rail), smart grids and wind and solar energy). The European Economic and Social Committee should urgently address this matter in its future work.

For decades, most of us – and most of our parents – have disregarded the **true risk of radioactive waste**¹, stalling the search for a sustainable solution for secure storage. Almost all Member States of the European Union currently consider a permanent solution for storage to be too expensive. Since the danger mostly affects future generations, **current generations have avoided necessary**

1 Ongoing EESC opinion TEN/842, available at: <https://europa.eu/RpJJV6>

Intergenerational solidarity – a concept spanning many generations



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AGE Platform Europe¹

Dr Heidrun Mollenkopf © AGE
Platform Europe

In her political guidelines for the [next European Commission](#)², President von der Leyen proposed creating a Commissioner for Intergenerational Fairness to ‘ensure that decisions taken today do not harm future generations’.

This call is fully in line with the long-standing efforts of AGE Platform Europe as a civil society organisation of and for older people to promote intergenerational solidarity in a society for all ages. We are committed to a European policy that enables all age groups to overcome the challenges they face, which may be different, but in many areas are equally urgent.

However, conditions must first be created to allow this union of equality to grow. Younger people and young families are often at the centre of political discourse, to an extent that other age groups are not. For example, the concerns of older people are less likely to be addressed, despite a number of facts:

- [old-age poverty has increased since 2015, and the gender pension gap is of 26%](#)³,
- less than half of those in need of long-term care are able to receive care while continuing to live in their homes,
- 80% of care is unpaid and provided by relatives, and
- those who lose employment after 55 years of age are more likely to retreat from the labour market than to find a new job.



© Centre for Ageing Better

We therefore need to **develop life-course approaches**, which was also a call put forth by the EESC opinion on intergenerational solidarity (SOC/800)⁴.

The EESC has also called for a European strategy for older persons ([SOC/757](#)⁵), echoing our own call for a [European age equality strategy](#)⁶. This strategy must address ageism, age discrimination and intersectional discrimination in all areas of life, including in the labour market, in access to health, in care and support, and in freedom from poverty and social exclusion. This should be part of both the European Commission's next strategy to build a Union of Equality⁷ and of the mandate of the Commissioner for Equality, and also of the next plan to implement the [European Pillar of Social Rights](#)⁸.

We therefore endorse the EESC's call for the European Commission to coordinate policies for younger and older people. We equally applaud the plan to encourage more dialogue between generations, echoing the [intergenerational declaration](#)⁹ we signed together with the European Youth Forum.

For intergenerational dialogue, however, **all parties concerned need to come together**. It must be the task of both newly proposed Commissioners¹⁰ to bring together the perspectives of young and older people and **balance their respective interests and needs** in order to secure dignified, active and healthy ageing with equal rights at all ages.

1 AGE Europe, <https://www.age-platform.eu/>

2 European Commission, Political Guidelines 2024-2029, <https://europa.eu/mVFwTg>

3 AGE Europe, Pension Adequacy, <https://www.age-platform.eu/pension-adequacy-halt-the-increase-of-old-age-poverty/>

4 The European Economic and Social Committee (EESC) opinion SOC/800 is expected to be adopted at the EESC plenary session in September 2024, <https://europa.eu/WYJDj>

5 EESC opinion SOC/757, <https://europa.eu/UJBmbQw>

6 AGE Europe, 2024 European elections: AGE Manifesto, <https://www.age-platform.eu/2024-european-elections-age-manifesto/>

7 European Union, Union of Equality, <https://europa.eu/IXkKMxf>

8 European Commission, European Pillar of Social Rights, <https://europa.eu/IMC96Vn>

9 AGE Europe, EU Day of Solidarity between Generations launches the 'United Across Generations' Declaration', <https://www.age-platform.eu/eu-day-of-solidarity-between-generations-launches-united-across-generations-declaration/>

10 The Commissioner for Equality and the Commissioner for Intergenerational Fairness.

Intergenerational equity and fiscal policies: Finding sufficient financial resources to invest in future generations



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Juraj Sipko © EESC

The most recent three **systemic shocks** in the last four years and more have had a profoundly **damaging effect on public finances**. COVID-19, Russia's invasion of Ukraine and the climate crisis all greatly exacerbated the deficit and public debt in every single EU Member State.

The question inevitably arises of how to move forward with delivering intergenerational equity given the worsening fiscal position in individual Member States. No decision on **investing in future generations** can be taken without considering the current state of public finances and the margin for carrying out these investments.

Economic growth in the Member States is historically at its lowest level in decades. In 2022 economic growth in the eurozone countries reached 3.4% – but only 0.5% in 2023. In a medium term, **economic growth is expected to remain at fairly low levels**.

It is reasonable to suppose that given the



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sluggish pace of economic growth, there is not going to be any real upswing in the amount of money flowing into national budgets. Furthermore, outgoings are vastly much higher than they used to be, largely owing to increased expenditure on defence, pensions, servicing public debt, covering the costs of the green and digital transitions and unpredictable expenses linked to the climate crisis.

Those responsible for implementing economic policies at national and EU level are faced with a fundamental question: **how can they create additional fiscal space to invest in future generations?** Reserves are needed in terms of both income and expenditure, but private individuals and companies have hidden considerable financial resources in tax havens; a

significant volume of potential resources is also taken up by opaque operations and corruption, there is ineffective public expenditure, etc.

The current generation is responsible for **creating long-term, systemic solutions** to find sufficient financial resources to invest in future generations. Consequently, every effort must be made to guarantee that the newly found financial resources are redistributed fairly to every member of society. A **fair tax system could create a sufficient fiscal buffer** to be able to allocate the resources needed to ensure social stability – and ensure that there is sufficient money available to invest in future generations. One possibility would be to **introduce progressive taxation**.

The mighty oak of intergenerational solidarity



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Neža Repanšek © EESC

Intergenerational solidarity is akin to a mighty oak tree, standing resilient through the seasons. Its roots symbolise the wisdom and experience of older generations, providing stability and nourishment. Meanwhile, its branches, representing the energy and vitality of younger generations, stretch towards the sky, embracing new opportunities. This interconnectedness and mutual support of the individual elements of the tree allow the tree to thrive, weathering storms and flourishing over time.

The **benefits of intergenerational solidarity** are manifold, particularly for youth. They include enhanced mental and physical health, increased life satisfaction, and strengthened



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social bonds. By fostering connections between generations, young people gain access to valuable knowledge and mentorship, enhancing their skills and personal growth opportunities.

Intergenerational partnerships empower

young people to engage in innovative activities like entrepreneurship, contributing to economic empowerment and diversity. This solidarity also plays a crucial role in eliminating ageism, promoting inclusivity and providing opportunities for youth to showcase their skills. A more connected society emerges, where

both younger and older generations actively participate in policy design and evaluation, striving towards sustainable development goals.

Beyond individual well-being, intergenerational solidarity fosters a **more sustainable workforce** by ensuring a continuous transfer of skills and knowledge across generations. This leads to a dynamic and resilient work environment, breaking down stereotypes and barriers that hinder productivity and cohesion within teams. Embracing intergenerational collaboration in the workplace results in improved performance, employee satisfaction and organisational success.

In essence, the **oak tree of intergenerational solidarity** stands as a testament to the enduring strength that comes from unity and support between generations. As the roots draw wisdom from the past and the branches reach for the future, a flourishing tree emerges, mirroring the strength derived from intergenerational interconnectedness.

For all these reasons, I welcome Commission President Ursula von der Leyen's announcement in the [political guidelines](#) for her second term in office¹ on the intention to appoint a commissioner whose responsibilities will include ensuring intergenerational fairness. If European policymakers want to

build a sustainable and fair society, they must **pay much more attention to the issue of intergenerational solidarity**. Civil society stands ready to support the Commission and to continue to act as a watchdog for intergenerational solidarity.

1 European Commission, Political Guidelines 2024-2029, <https://europa.eu/ImVFwTg>

COMMENTS ON CURRENT AFFAIRS

A painful presidency



Jan Dirx © EESC

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This year marks the 68th anniversary of the **brave Hungarian people rising up against the Soviet occupation**¹. But the dictator in the Kremlin², who believed he could and should oppress a large part of Europe, crushed the protests in 1956 at the cost of thousands of lives. It is therefore extra painful that it is now a Hungarian Prime Minister, **Viktor Orbán, who is abusing the Hungarian Presidency of the Council of the EU**³ to travel to the same Kremlin under the flag of a **so-called peace mission**⁴ to have a friendly conversation with the current dictator who wants to bring a large part of Europe back under his authority. A dictator who is rightly regarded as persona non grata by the EU.

And then this radical right-wing prime minister travels to China to shake hands with that other dictator⁵, **who is doing everything he can to bring the entire world under Chinese influence economically and ideologically**, and to continue talking about expanding Chinese investments in Hungary.

In response to this completely unacceptable behaviour, unworthy of the presidency of the

Council of the EU, the European Commission has rightly decided not to travel to meetings of the European Union in Hungary in the coming period⁶. A decision that should actually have been adopted by the 26 other EU Member States for their ministerial delegations.

This arrogant solo performance by the Hungarian government becomes even more painful when you place it next to the **conclusions of the European Commission on the state of the rule of law in Hungary**⁷: the Hungarian government has been mistreating organised civil society, intimidating civil society, persecuting NGOs, and attacking the LGBTIQ community and migrants.

Therefore, if the Hungarian government continues to ignore and obstruct the values of the EU – such as participatory democracy, including the role of civil society organisations, the rule of law, freedom of the press, and protection of human rights, including the freedom and rights of its LGBTIQ citizens – in its policies during the current presidency, I would urge the Council, the Commission and the European Parliament **to impose the most severe sanctions possible**. They must do this to maintain the credibility of a European Union built on values.



© EU

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- 2 Britannica, Nikita Khrushchev was First Secretary of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union (1953-64), <https://www.britannica.com/biography/Nikita-Sergeyevich-Khrushchev>
- 3 Hungarian Presidency of the Council of the EU, <https://hungarian-presidency.consilium.europa.eu/en/>
- 4 Chatham house, On 5 July, Hungarian Prime Minister visited Russian President Vladimir Putin, <https://www.chathamhouse.org/2024/07/orban-using-hungarys-eu-council-presidency-bulldoze-eu-norms>
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- 6 Reuters, EU Commission will not send commissioners to Hungary's EU presidency informal meetings, <https://www.reuters.com/world/europe/eu-commission-will-not-send-commissioners-hungarys-eu-presidency-informal-2024-07-15/>
- 7 European Commission, 2024 Rule of Law Report – Country Chapter Hungary, https://commission.europa.eu/publications/2024-rule-law-report-communication-and-country-chapters_en

REFLECTIONS

Civil Society calls for a stronger role in EU policy making



Heather Roy

Heather ROY
President,
Social Platform¹

According to Eurobarometer, 76% of Europeans think civil society has **an important role in promoting democracy and common values**, while 87% believe it should operate freely and keep those in power accountable.

All over Europe, **civil society actors are key** in protecting and promoting democracy and fundamental rights, making sure that underrepresented voices are heard and supporting governments and institutions in responding to people's needs.

However, **a number of obstacles still limit the space for civil society in the EU and the opportunities to meaningfully contribute to policy making**. Civil society continues to experience² threats and attacks, legal and administrative barriers and difficulty accessing funding, documents and decision-makers. Trends of shrinking civic space have also been highlighted by the European Parliament³, the European Commission and the Council of the European Union⁴.

To reverse these trends, Social Platform has been leading the **campaign Civil Society for EU**⁵. The **campaign manifesto**⁶, endorsed by **250 organisations**, calls on EU and national decision-makers to **take concrete steps during the next five years to better recognise, support and engage civil society at all levels**. Social Platform was also one of the 156 signatories of an **open letter**⁷ on the **implementation of an open, transparent and regular dialogue with civil society organisations** in all policy areas that was initiated by the



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EESC's Civil Society Organisations' Group and Civil Society Europe and sent to the three main EU institutions in January 2024.

Civil society first of all needs its role to be better recognised, to allow a clear understanding of the value, specific nature and needs of the sector and avoid unjustified attacks and scapegoating.

Secondly, **European civil society needs a dedicated strategy to improve the overall political, legal and administrative environment and provide better support**, while addressing existing policy gaps. Specific measures should be implemented to support civil society actors under attack, starting from an EU-wide protection mechanism. The amount and accessibility of funding for civil society also needs to be improved to allow for long-term sustainability, independence and ultimately to fully unlock the potential of civil society to fulfil its multiple roles.

Thirdly, **civil society needs to be meaningfully involved in all stages of the decision-making process**. Civil dialogue should be recognised as an essential element of European participatory

democracy and be properly supported through an ad hoc agreement between EU institutions, aiming at improving the overall consistency and quality of the exchange between civil society and policy makers. Building on existing good practices, standards and procedures for engaging civil society should be assessed, improved and harmonised.

In times of increasing social crisis and distrust in democratic processes, **now more than ever the EU needs a strong, empowered civil society** to help respond to people's needs and close the representation gap.

1 Social Platform, <https://www.socialplatform.org/>

2 European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights, Protecting civil society, update 2023, <https://europa.eu/IXrHc4B>

3 European Parliament, European Parliament resolution of 8 March 2022 on the shrinking space for civil society in Europe, <https://europa.eu/IVGvWp4>

4 Council of the EU, Council Conclusions on the application of the EU Charter of Fundamental Rights; The role of the civic space in protecting and promoting fundamental rights in the EU, <https://europa.eu/ImTqQyW>

5 Campaign Civil Society for EU, <https://civilsocietyforeu.eu/>

6 Civil Society for EU, Manifesto, <https://civilsocietyforeu.eu/the-manifesto/>

7 EESC, Civil Society Organisations' Group, Open Letter, <https://europa.eu/lyG8b6t>

NEWS FROM THE GROUP

Breaking the cycle of disadvantage

How to eradicate skills poverty among the most vulnerable? On 10 July, the Civil Society Organisations' Group of the European Economic and Social Committee (EESC) held a **thematic debate** exploring this question. The debate marked the **launch of a new exploratory study**¹ on this same issue, **commissioned by the EESC at the request of the Group** and in connection with the 2023 European Year of Skills². The event included contributions from Juliana Wahlgren, Director of the European Anti-Poverty Network (EAPN) and Agnieszka Maj, economist at the Center for Social and Economic Research (CASE), which carried out the study.

In the wake of the green and digital transitions and with current demographic trends, experts expect changes in employment trends and increased **demand for the skills and competences** required to enable and accompany these transitions. The changes will therefore require specific action with regard to **training, upskilling and reskilling**.

'When investing in education and training, it is necessary to ensure that these measures also **effectively reach people experiencing or at risk of poverty and social exclusion**,' said **Séamus Boland**, president of the Civil Society Organisations' Group, opening the panel discussion. 'The pace of this change will require a proactive approach: Civil society organisations play an important role in this regard, by proposing targeted and inclusive learning approaches but also by transmitting essential life skills, enhancing social cohesion.'

The new study sheds light on the link between today's skills divides and poverty by examining the concept of 'skills poverty'. It proposes a definition and investigates possible drivers and



Skills debate: Séamus Boland, Juliana Wahlgren and Agnieszka Maj (from left to right) © EESC

solutions, paving the way for further research into this topic in the future.

Agnieszka Maj, from CASE, presented the research by drawing attention to **employment trends**. Forecasts anticipate growth in the ICT, professional, scientific and technical sectors, as well as in health and social work. While this requires appropriate skills, the study also points to **skill divides**, in which individuals or communities lack the necessary competences to join the labour market. 'Lower-educated, older individuals are at the highest risk of being affected, followed by foreign residents and the rural population,' said Ms Maj. Furthermore, certain - sometimes overlapping - characteristics such as age, disability or migration background could make it more difficult for individuals to access their rights. 'It is imperative to establish **equal access to high-quality education** right from early childhood,' said Ms Maj. At the same time, education and training must equip people with technical skills linked to the green and digital transition, along with **cross-cutting and social skills**.

Juliana Wahlgren, EAPN Director, discussed the topic of skills poverty from a structural and systemic perspective, giving examples of the **underlying factors affecting access to**

skills. Addressing digital welfare, she stressed the highly digitalised nature of the job market. **Those who don't have access to internet and digital skills are finding themselves left behind**. Likewise, the assumption that young people are inherently proficient in digital skills is misguided, as there are exceptions depending on the country or context. 'We need a context-specific approach that takes into account the multiple challenges that people may face, specifically people experiencing poverty,' said Ms Wahlgren.

In the ensuing debate, Members of the Civil Society Organisations' Group charted out additional questions and points of action, such as access to skills and education and internet in rural areas, the risk that technology and AI may reproduce societal biases, and the role played by access to housing and energy in preventing poverty.

- The full study and the executive summary are available at: <https://europa.eu/IQJccgK>
- Continue reading the interview with the authors.

1 EESC study, How to eradicate skills poverty among the most vulnerable, <https://europa.eu/IQJccgK>

2 European Union, European Year of Skills, https://year-of-skills.europa.eu/index_en

New EESC study on how to eradicate skills poverty among the most vulnerable

Interview with the co-authors Izabela Marcinkowska, Agnieszka Maj and Delia Agostinelli from the Center for Social and Economic Research (CASE)



Izabela Marcinkowska



Agnieszka Maj



Delia Agostinelli

What is this study about and why is it relevant?

The European Union is facing complex challenges in employment and skills demand. This **study**¹ addresses these issues by

examining **skills divides and their impact on poverty and social exclusion**, offering evidence-based insights for policymakers. It advocates tailored policies to bridge skills gaps, recognising the labour market's dynamic nature and the complex interplay

between various social characteristics. The findings aim to guide strategic decisions at European and national levels, promoting a fair and inclusive future for everyone.

1 EESC study, How to eradicate skills poverty among the most vulnerable, <https://europa.eu/IQJccgK>

What are the study's main findings?

Employment trends up to 2035 will be shaped by the digital and green transitions and increased demand for care services, presenting opportunities in the silver economy. Skills strategies must address this demand while promoting social participation, personal fulfilment, health, employability, and social inclusion. Effective labour market integration and poverty alleviation require **five core skills categories: literacy and numeracy, basic digital skills, multilingualism, transversal skills, and social (life) skills**.

The uneven distribution of these skills results in skills poverty, where individuals or communities lack the necessary skills for effective labour market integration and participation in economic, social, and technological advancements. In the EU, older individuals with lower education levels, non-EU citizens, and rural populations are most at risk, while gender plays a relatively small role. Ethnic minorities and people with disabilities also face skills poverty in some contexts.

Addressing the issue of skills poverty requires targeted strategies that are sensitive to the needs of disadvantaged groups, ensuring no one is left behind.

On the basis of the findings, what are your main recommendations for action and further research?

Firstly, equal access to **high-quality education from early childhood is crucial**. Early intervention equips individuals with the foundational skills needed to thrive in a complex and competitive world. In the short term, there is a need for lifelong learning activities designed to support disadvantaged individuals. These initiatives should focus on providing high-quality upskilling opportunities for marginalised or underserved groups.

Secondly, national policies must adopt a holistic approach to skills development. **While digital literacy is important, policymakers should also emphasise a broader spectrum of the skills** required in today's rapidly evolving job market. For example, promoting political participation among marginalised groups can significantly enhance civic engagement and democratic processes. Similarly, encouraging formal volunteering, particularly among those with the lowest levels of education and those with lower incomes, can foster social cohesion and provide valuable experience and skills that enhance employability.

Additionally, **civil society organisations have a unique role to play in identifying and supporting vulnerable individuals** who need upskilling and should work closely with local communities and authorities, leveraging their networks and ensuring

that no one is left behind in the pursuit of education and skills development.

The study identified significant **data gaps concerning LGBTQIA+ individuals and persons with disabilities**. The lack of comprehensive data limits our understanding of how diverse identities impact skill levels.

Further research is needed to address skills poverty and create more inclusive educational opportunities.

How to eradicate skills poverty among the most vulnerable?

The full study and the executive summary are available at: <https://europa.eu/!QJccgK>



The EESC Consumers and Environment Category examines the path towards a greener, consumer-friendly single market

The [Consumers and Environment Category](#)¹ of the EESC met on 3 July 2024, with the meeting being chaired by the two spokespersons, **Thierry Libaert** and **Bernardo Hernández Bataller**.

A conference entitled '[Expectations on consumption and the environment in the next legislative period](#)'² was held during the category meeting and featured four guest speakers: **Isabelle Pérignon**, Director for consumer policy in the Directorate-General for Justice and Consumers, European Commission; **Sandro Gozi**, Member of the European Parliament and the category's contact point on consumption and environment issues, Renew Europe Group; **Agustín Reyna**, Director General, BEUC; and **Ester Asin Martínez**, Director of the European Policy Office, Worldwide Fund for Nature (WWF).

The speakers discussed their common desire to update the single market to make it more sustainable and more consumer-friendly. They mentioned their support for the [European Green Deal](#)³, eco-design, the right to repair⁴,

proper information on products (including through a directive on green claims⁵), targeting subsidies in order to combat climate change, and science-based policy-making. They also called for an inclusive green transition that includes all Europeans.

In the exchange that followed, the category Members debated various dimensions of the issues at hand, such as the impacts of the green transition on Europe's economy and industry, European trade, the circular economy, and consumers' attitudes towards sustainable products and the green transition.

Séamus Boland, president of the EESC's Civil Society Organisations' Group, concluded the discussion by stressing that if European consumers were able to have choices in terms of environmental improvement, honouring a



Agustín Reyna, Ester Asin Martínez, Sandro Gozi and Isabelle Pérignon (from left to right) © EESC

series of Sustainable Development Goals⁶, this would make Europe much more competitive compared to the rest of the world. He also highlighted civil society organisations' role in the green transition as a platform of trust delivering a whole range of messages that could inform and strengthen partnerships with the EU institutions, for the benefit of consumers and the environment.



1 EESC, Consumers and Environment Category, <https://europa.eu/!NF36rW>

2 EESC, conference, <https://europa.eu/!QY366Q>

3 European Commission, European Green Deal, <https://europa.eu/!8bB4bR>

4 European Commission, Directive on repair of goods, <https://europa.eu/!KbKh7n>

5 European Commission, green claims, <https://europa.eu/!qWYjD6>

6 United Nations, SDGs, <https://sdgs.un.org/goals>

The Associational Life Category appoints new co-spokesperson and discusses outreach to new European Parliament with a view to protecting civic space

The EESC's [Associational Life Category](https://europa.eu/IVD38XB)¹ held its second meeting of the year on 2 July 2024. The category appointed **Juliane Marie Neiiendam** as co-spokesperson, who is joining co-spokesperson **Andris Gobiņš** for the second half of the EESC term of office. Ms Neiiendam is Board Member of the Women's Council in Denmark and joined the EESC in 2023.

The agenda included debates on civil society's activities and demands in the wake of the European elections², along with ongoing work being carried out within the EESC.

As part of a panel discussion on *Civil society's demands and their implementation after the elections to the European Parliament*, **Carlotta Besozzi**, Director of Civil Society Europe, presented the [Civil Society for EU](https://civilsocietyforeu.eu/)³ campaign. As part of this initiative, Civil Society Europe has called on newly elected Members of the European Parliament (MEPs) to undertake to

support civil society and civic space all over Europe; over 70 MEPs have already done so. **Matteo Vespa**, Policy and Project Officer at Civil Society Europe, spoke about how important civil dialogue is for the effective implementation of policies. He asked the category Members to share the pledge and reach out to MEPs in their Member State. "Civil society matters for everyone. It matters if we want to have efficient services, engaged citizens and functioning democracies", concluded **Ms Besozzi**.

The category also discussed work being carried out within the EESC. **Sif Holst**, president of the EESC's Ad hoc Group on Equality⁴, presented the survey on Members' inclusion, work distribution and well-being and listened to Members' comments and suggestions for the work of this group. **Justyna Kalina Ochędzan**, co-spokesperson for the Social Economy Category⁵, spoke about common interests

and possible synergies between the two categories. She also identified topics relevant to both categories, such as the protection and resilience of civil society organisations and the taxation of social economy entities.

Lastly, the category meeting gave Members the opportunity to discuss topical questions. Members gave updates on ongoing EESC legislative files, including the opinions on *Promoting European intergenerational solidarity – towards an EU horizontal approach*⁶ (rapporteur: Krzysztof Balon) and *Strengthening the EU Youth Dialogue follow-up via monitoring and transparency guidelines*⁷ (rapporteur: Kātrīna Leitāne).



Andris Gobiņš and Juliane Marie Neiiendam © EESC

The Farmers' Category convened to discuss cooperatives and farmers' priorities after the EU elections

On 1 July 2024 the [Farmers' Category](https://europa.eu/IgY64Wf)¹ of the EESC held its second meeting of the year, chaired by the two spokespersons, **Arnold Puech d'Alissac** and **John Comer**.

The Members first debated cooperatives with **Damien O'Reilly**, EU Affairs Manager of the Irish Co-operative Organisation Society (ICOS), and then on farmers' priorities after the European elections² with **Patrick Pagani**, Deputy Secretary-General at Copa-Cogeca.

In his statement, **Mr O'Reilly** discussed reputational issues affecting farming and agriculture. He also highlighted the issues of generational renewal, gender balance and the opportunity offered by cooperatives in the farming sector.

In the debate, category Members raised a number of aspects such as the support of people for farmers, the need to invest in better communication and education towards consumers, notably by promoting quality food and the issue of fair competition in international trade.

In his response, **Mr O'Reilly** stressed the role that farmers and all those involved in agriculture can have in shaping the public attitude towards farming, including by educating people on the local and democratic dimension of cooperatives.

In the second debate, **Mr Pagani** presented Copa-Cogeca's strategy to 'reposition agriculture as a strategic sector for tomorrow's Europe' as well as their priorities for the future of EU farming and EU agriculture policy. He advocated the need for a Vice-President of the European Commission with responsibility for agriculture and rural areas, a trade policy more in line with farmers' concerns and more feasibility studies.

In the discussion Members mentioned the importance of the equivalence of standards



Arnold Puech d'Alissac, John Comer and Damien O'Reilly (from left to right) © EESC

for trading with Mercosur countries, the improvement of the common agricultural policy (CAP³), their goal of recentring policy-making around agriculture and rural areas, farmers' discontent, civil dialogue in agriculture and the impact of climate change.

In his response, **Mr Pagani** stressed the fight to put agriculture at the centre of politics, including in trade policy. He concluded by reiterating Copa-Cogeca's call for a renewed CAP in a new world characterised by geopolitical uncertainties and climate change.

1 EESC, Farmers' Category, <https://europa.eu/IgY64Wf>

2 European Parliament, European elections 2024, <https://elections.europa.eu/en/>

3 European Commission, common agricultural policy, <https://europa.eu/IjjhWqj>

MEMBERS IN THE SPOTLIGHT

The new president of the OVE Foundation comes from the EESC's Civil Society Organisations' Group



Dominique Gillot © EESC

Dominique GILLOT

*Member, Civil Society Organisations' Group
General Federation of Children in Care in Public Education (FG PEP)*

National Consultative Council of People with Disabilities (CNCPH)

Our Member Dominique Gillot was appointed as the President of the OVE Foundation. The foundation's mission is to welcome and support children, adolescents, adults and older people, with or without disabilities, in order to promote their inclusion in society and provide other

legal entities and individuals with advice and assistance in its area of expertise.¹

The OVE Foundation aims to create equality between all citizens, leading it to pursue several lines of action:

- organising access to human rights;
- anticipating needs and changes;
- innovating in the search for solutions and in modes of cooperation with users, families and partners;
- disseminating its know-how and helping associations pursuing the same goals.

The foundation's objectives include:

- changing the position that people with disabilities and dependent

people have in society;

- developing the capacities of people who are supported, helping them exercise their rights and enabling them to live independently, demonstrate solidarity and engage in active citizenship;
- help increase and disseminate knowledge and therefore provide assistance to other medico-social stakeholders.

The foundation's actions are entirely dedicated to serving individual people – children, men and women – whom it considers to be equal in law and capable of autonomy beyond their disability, difficulties or vulnerability.

¹ Fondation OVE, <https://www.fondation-ove.fr/qui-sommes-nous/>

Kęstutis Kupšys appointed to stakeholder groups



Kęstutis Kupšys © EESC

Kęstutis KUPŠYS (LT)

*Member, Civil Society Organisations' Group
Vice-President,
Lithuanian Consumers Alliance*

Our Member Kęstutis Kupšys was appointed to three different stakeholder groups under the European Supervisory Authorities, namely:

1. The Banking Stakeholder Group¹ (BSG), to which he was appointed by the European Banking Authority (EBA). The BSG is a key advisory group for the EBA's work on regulatory and implementing technical standards, guidelines and recommendations, in line with Article 37 and Recital 48 of its Founding Regulation. The group consists of 30 members appointed by the EBA's Board of Supervisors through

an open selection process that aims for a geographical and gender balance. These members represent various groups, including financial institutions in the EU, their employees' representatives, consumers, banking service users, representatives of small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs), and prominent independent academics. The BSG's main role is to facilitate consultations with stakeholders on matters related to the EBA's tasks. Mr Kupšys was appointed a member of the BSG with effect from 1 July 2024.

2. The Securities and Markets Stakeholder Group (SMSG)², to which he was appointed by the European Securities and Markets Authority (ESMA), the EU's financial markets regulator and supervisor. The new term started on 1 July, during which its members will provide ESMA with advice on its policy work and will be consulted on technical standards and guidelines.

3. The Occupational Pensions Stakeholder Group³ (OPSG), where he was selected by the Board of Supervisors of the European Insurance and Occupational Pensions Authority (EIOPA). The four-year term started on 4 July 2024. The group plays an important role by facilitating EIOPA's consultation with stakeholders in the EU on issues that apply to the insurance and pensions sectors, in terms of both regulation and supervision. The stakeholder group was formed keeping in mind EIOPA's responsibilities and the work anticipated in areas such as sustainable finance, digitalisation and operational resilience. The OPSG is composed of high-ranking representatives from the insurance and pension industry, consumers, academia, SMEs, employees and professional associations.

His appointment to these three stakeholder groups is an exceptional recognition of Mr Kupšys' expertise and work.

¹ European Banking Authority, Banking Stakeholder Group, <https://europa.eu/IHbHHtC>

² European Security and Markets Authority, Securities and Markets Stakeholder Group, <https://europa.eu/IQvMVww>

³ European Insurance and Occupational Pensions Authority, Occupational Pensions Stakeholder Group, <https://europa.eu/lfkVP8w>

HIGHLIGHTS FROM THE LAST EESC PLENARY SESSION

The Hungarian Presidency presents its priorities to the EESC

At the July plenary session, Member of the European Economic and Social Committee (EESC) discussed the priorities of the [Hungarian Presidency of the Council of the EU](#)¹ with **János Bóka**, the Hungarian Minister for European Union Affairs.

Pointing out that the Committee had a long-standing history of working well with Council presidencies, EESC President **Oliver Röpke** reiterated the Committee's commitment to working closely with the Hungarian Presidency, and spoke about the institution's role as a guardian of European values.



János Bóka © EESC

Mr Bóka stated that 'the 2024 Hungarian Presidency of the Council comes at a time of multiple crises. We are witnessing war in our neighbourhood, declining European competitiveness, increasing tensions in the EU's trade relations, demographic challenges, uncontrolled migration and decreasing prospects for European farmers'. The adoption of a new European competitiveness deal would be a key priority for the Hungarian Presidency. The presidency would also be keen to create the conditions for sustainable growth, to focus on supporting small and medium-sized enterprises and more.



Séamus Boland © EESC

Members of the EESC's Civil Society Organisations' Group participated in the debate. Speaking about the new European competitiveness deal, **Séamus Boland**, president of the Civil Society Organisations' Group, said that it would be crucial to balance competitiveness and social policies in order



EESC plenary session at the European Parliament © EESC

to combat poverty: 'the challenge is to create a Union that goes forward, that develops policies that strengthen it in terms of the green transition and social adjustment and that leaves no one behind'.



Zsolt Kükedi © EESC

Zsolt Kükedi stated that 'we need to work together to make Europe stronger, more resilient, competitive and innovative and greener, and to keep its solidarity and social dimension. He invited the presidency to use the exploratory opinions the EESC was drafting for it².



Kinga Joó © EESC

Kinga Joó highlighted the need for a common European approach to demographic challenges all Member States were facing, such as brain drain, an ageing population and rural depopulation. This would be crucial for achieving cohesion goals.

Jan Dirx, vice-president of the Civil Society Organisations' Group, said that it was painful to see the Hungarian Prime Minister visiting Moscow, and he wondered whether the Hungarian Presidency would abide by European values.



Ágnes Cser © EESC

Ágnes Cser stated her hope that the spirit of cooperation mentioned by the Minister would remain during the whole presidency in order to achieve important work on a healthy and peaceful Europe.

Simo Tainen, vice-president of the Civil Society Organisations' Group, reminded those present that the Presidency of the Council would not entitle Hungary to act as High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs, thus deeming Victor Orban's visit to Moscow inappropriate. The EU needed to increase its support to Ukraine and could not carry out discussions on Ukraine without Ukraine.



Simo Tainen © EESC

1 Hungarian Presidency of the Council of the EU, <https://hungarian-presidency.consilium.europa.eu/en/>

2 The Hungarian Presidency had requested ten exploratory opinions from the EESC: <https://europa.eu/16PNN3K>

EESC Members call on MEPs to strengthen cooperation on civil dialogue

At its July plenary session, the European Economic and Social Committee (EESC) hosted a debate on the **state of democracy in Europe**. This was the first EESC plenary debate that the President of the European Parliament, **Roberta Metsola**, and other newly elected Members of the European Parliament (MEPs) had attended since the European elections¹.

EESC President **Oliver Röpke** said that ‘the European elections in June were a wake-up call and it is our duty to reflect on the state of democracy today, especially after these election results’.



Oliver Röpke and Roberta Metsola © EESC

Roberta Metsola said that democracy was vibrant and that enthusiasm for Europe was still alive, particularly with first-time voters. In order to consolidate support for democracy in Europe, the EU must prove that politics was still the best agent for positive change in societies and communities.

Željana Zovko (Group of the European People's Party EPP) said that the group expected policies that had begun during the previous mandate to continue. **Ana Catarina Mendes** (Group of the Progressive Alliance of Socialists and Democrats S&D) said that it was vital to focus on implementing the European Pillar of Social Rights² and combating poverty. **Dan Barna** (Renew Europe Group) urged the new European Commission to defend the rule of law using existing tools in a more effective way. **Kira-Marie Peter-Hansen** (Group of the Greens / European Free Alliance) spoke about how important it was to keep the Green Deal³ as a crucial EU policy. **Martin Schirdewan** (Left Group) made it clear that they would call on the new Commission to deal with the cost of the housing crisis.

Dennis Radtke (EPP), **Cecilia Strada** (S&D), **Reinhold Lopatka** (EPP), **Evin Incir** (S&D), **Sandro Gozi** (Renew), **Tilly Metz** (Greens/EFA) and EESC Members from the Civil Society Organisations' Group also took part in the debate.

Séamus Bolland, president of the Civil Society Organisations' Group, stressed the importance of strong political alliances and called for deeper collaboration between the European Parliament and the EESC on civil dialogue: ‘the chasm between the electorate and the elected



Panel debate with MEPs © EESC

has become dangerously wide. We have to reach out to citizens – and we can do this best working together as partners. Through the EESC, the Parliament can reach civil society organisations, which are the bedrock of European societies and communities’.



Pietro Vittorio Barbieri © EESC

Vice-president **Pietro Vittorio Barbieri** underlined the fact that civil society organisations had long denounced the fact that spaces for public participation and demonstration were shrinking. Structured participation paths that had measurable outcomes and shared agendas needed to be built, and civil dialogue facilitated, as enshrined in the EU Treaties.

In this era of multi-crises, **Chiara Corazza** emphasised that to face them ‘we need all talents, all competences and all resources. Half of the planet cannot be left behind. We need women and their competences’.



Chiara Corazza © EESC



Christian Moos © EESC

Christian Moos called on MEPs to defend the rights of organised civil society and to support those who stood up for democracy and the rule of law on a voluntary basis. He also called for a better dialogue with civil society at EU level.

Dragana Djurica, secretary general of the European Movement in Serbia and EESC enlargement candidate member for the Civil Society Organisations' Group, proposed focusing on three key principles when addressing current challenges to democracy: commitment, cohesion and communication.



Dragana Djurica © EESC

Watch the debate:
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Xh45Tq42K4U&t=7885s>

1 European Parliament, European elections 2024, <https://elections.europa.eu/en/>

2 European Commission, European Pillar of Social Rights, <https://europa.eu/IMC96Vn>

3 European Commission, European Green Deal, <https://europa.eu/18b4b4R>

The EESC calls for a ban on unpaid traineeships: No trainee should work for free

On 11 July, the **European Economic and Social Committee (EESC)** held a high-level debate on improving the EU legislation on traineeships amid calls from civil society and youth organisations to stop the widespread practice of unpaid internships.

Nearly half of the EU's more than three million trainees are unpaid and almost a third have no access to social protection.



Nicolas Schmit © EESC

In the debate with the Commissioner for Jobs and Social Rights, **Nicolas Schmit**, the EESC welcomed the Commission's latest proposals to improve traineeships in Europe, which consist of:

- a [proposal for a directive](#)¹ on improving and enforcing working conditions for trainees and combating regular employment relationships disguised as traineeships: however, the Commission proposals do not provide for the necessary measures to prevent the misuse of traineeships in the first place;
- a [proposal to revise](#)² the 2014 Council Recommendation on a reinforced Quality Framework for Traineeships to address issues of quality and inclusiveness, such as fair pay and access to social protection; nevertheless, the measures listed in the revised Council Recommendation are not binding.

EESC President **Oliver Röpkke** said that 'Traineeships are a pivotal tool enabling young people to acquire first-hand work experience. We must ensure that no young person is excluded from these opportunities due to financial constraints.'

Mr Schmit said that 'Traineeships can be a great way for young people to get initial work experience, learn new skills and build their network. However, they must be good-quality traineeships. We also need to make every effort to make traineeships more accessible and inclusive: they should not be just for a privileged few.'

In its opinion on the [Traineeship Directive and a Reinforced Quality Framework for Traineeships](#)³, the EESC sees the package as an important first step but calls for wider and stronger protection.

It calls for provisions ensuring that workers' representatives can always act to safeguard trainees, **even if the traineeship does not constitute an employment relationship**, in line with national legislation and practices. It also recommends defining minimum quality criteria for each type of traineeship throughout the EU, in order to ensure a common basic framework in all Member States.

The leaders of the EU umbrella organisations representing Europe's employers, workers and young people also took part in the plenary debate: the Director of BusinessEurope, **Maxime Cerutti**, the Confederal Secretary of the European Trade Union Confederation (ETUC), **Tea Jarc**, and the newly appointed president of the European Youth Forum, **Rareş Voicu**.



Maxime Cerutti © EESC



Tea Jarc © EESC



Rareş Voicu © EESC

Several Members of the EESC's Civil Society Organisations' Group took the floor in the plenary debate.

Neža Repanšek drew attention to the fact that career paths were often seen as a ladder, implying a linear progression. However, in reality, they were more like a spiral – 'a series of experiences where we returned to the start with greater knowledge.' This spiral metaphor



Neža Repanšek © EESC

captured the twists and turns shaping professional journeys, which should always start with high-quality traineeships.



Michael McLoughlin © EESC

Michael McLoughlin stressed that traineeships remained a key issue for young people and attention must be paid to ensuring quality and positive experiences. Unfortunately, the Commission's proposals had a weak legal basis. 'Our opinion raises issues of concern. Therefore, we should not stop working to secure improvement in this area.'



Rachel Brishoual © EESC

Rachel Brishoual emphasised that many young people today were trapped in a system where, in order to enter the job market, they had to go through an increasingly long phase of traineeships. Moreover, abusive practices in this area kept too many young people in a precarious situation. The aim of this directive should be to put an end to the use of traineeships as a substitute for employment, but there were still shortcomings in making it a comprehensive instrument.

1 European Commission, Traineeships Directive, <https://europa.eu/!BCjMdf>

2 European Commission, Proposal for a Council Recommendation on a reinforced Quality Framework for Traineeships, <https://europa.eu/!N4qBWx>

3 EESC opinion SOC/805, <https://europa.eu/!nYR4hx>

EESC urges new EU leaders to strengthen and preserve cohesion policy as key investment tool

The European Economic and Social Committee (EESC) adopted a resolution at its July plenary session rejecting the idea of transforming [cohesion policy](#)¹ into a mechanism similar to the [Recovery and Resilience Facility](#)². The EESC calls for cohesion policy to be strengthened and for civil society to be involved, just as it was for the 2021-2027 programming period. Cohesion policy should not become a crisis management tool and must continue being overseen by a dedicated commissioner.

Following the European elections³ in June, some are arguing in favour of dismantling cohesion policy – the EU's main funding mechanism for regional development, which aims to correct imbalances between countries and regions – and cut its budget. The EESC resolution [No one should be left behind! For an inclusive and participatory cohesion policy in support of social, economic and territorial cohesion](#)⁴ therefore comes at a pivotal moment.

'We want to be very clear and call on the Commission and the Parliament not to give in to pressure,' insisted EESC President **Oliver Röpké**. 'The EESC is opposed to transforming cohesion policy into a mechanism similar to the Recovery and Resilience Facility, which lacks significant stakeholder involvement and shared management.'



Ioannis Vardakastanis © EESC

The president of the EESC's ECO Section⁵ and rapporteur for the resolution, **Ioannis Vardakastanis**, strongly believed that the core principle of the EU's cohesion policy, which asserts that '**no one should be left behind**', continued to be crucial and valid. 'Civil society partners are committed to working together to meet this goal through robust EU investment policies,' he stressed.

Several Members of the EESC's Civil Society Organisations' Group took the floor in the plenary debate on the resolution. **Giuseppe Guerini**, co-spokesperson of the EESC's Social Economy Category⁶, pointed to a report by the World Competitiveness Center which showed that among the top 20 most competitive



Giuseppe Guerini © EESC

countries in the world, 6 were EU countries and two others were part of the EEA⁷. This leads to the conclusion that countries with fewer inequalities ranked among the most competitive worldwide. 'Social and territorial cohesion are vital infrastructure for ensuring competitiveness,' he concluded.



João Nabais © EESC

João Nabais had the following to say on the resolution: 'In the text, cohesion encompasses the ideas of solidarity, equality and balance. All of these are essential principles when it comes to creating a stronger European Union. Investing in interregional cohesion is as important as enlargement.'



Lidija Pavić-Rogošić © EESC

'Regional differences have been reduced in the past 20 years and this is an achievement that can be attributed to cohesion policy,' said **Lidija Pavić-Rogošić**, vice-president of the Civil Society Organisations' Group. Persisting major differences in living standards required cohesion policy to be continued. As

well as stimulating the economy, Member States needed to alleviate and prevent social inequalities through investment in human capital, education and strengthened social cohesion.



Justyna Kalina Ochędzan © EESC

The partnership principle has to be safeguarded in cohesion policy, and capacity building should be offered to NGOs, social partners and public administrations in order to improve the quality of governance, according to **Justyna Kalina Ochędzan**, co-spokesperson of the EESC's Social Economy Category. 'The future of cohesion policy is the future of all of us.'



Corina Andrea Murafa Benga © EESC

Corina Andrea Murafa Benga said that cohesion policy was the EU financing and investment tool with the highest added value for the long run and needed a higher budget to match its purpose. Alongside the partnership and the multi-governance principles, the principle that climate and social goals must go hand in hand should underpin the policy. She added: 'Cohesion policy must become the key investment policy to support EU regions in their efforts to mitigate and adapt to climate change in a socially just way.'

Read the resolution:
<https://europa.eu/twGHpK>

1 European Commission, cohesion policy, <https://europa.eu/!43QqDX>

2 European Commission, Recovery and Resilience Facility, <https://europa.eu/!7kKRw7>

3 European Parliament, European elections 2024, <https://elections.europa.eu/en/>

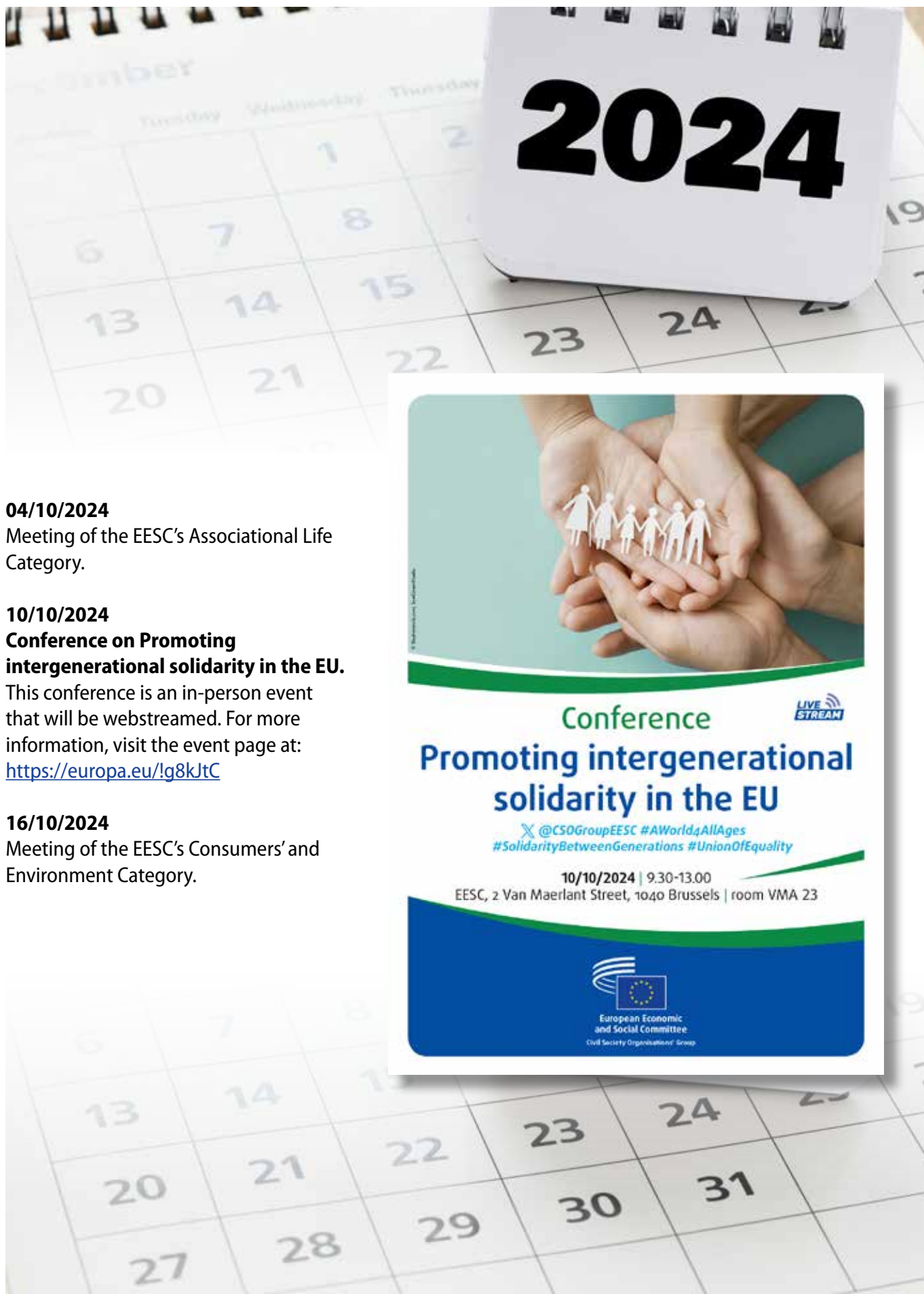
4 EESC, No one should be left behind resolution, <https://europa.eu/twGHpK>

5 EESC, Section for Economic and Monetary Union and Economic and Social Cohesion (ECO), <https://europa.eu/!RD39rY>

6 EESC, Social Economy Category, <https://europa.eu/!ht47UK>

7 Eurostat, European Economic Area (EEA), <https://europa.eu/!b8XpNP>

UPCOMING EVENTS



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04/10/2024

Meeting of the EESC's Associational Life Category.

10/10/2024

Conference on Promoting intergenerational solidarity in the EU.

This conference is an in-person event that will be webstreamed. For more information, visit the event page at: <https://europa.eu/!g8kjtC>

16/10/2024

Meeting of the EESC's Consumers' and Environment Category.



Conference Promoting intergenerational solidarity in the EU

[X @CSOGroupEESC #AWorld4AllAges](#)
[#SolidarityBetweenGenerations #UnionOfEquality](#)

10/10/2024 | 9.30-13.00
EESC, 2 Van Maerlant Street, 1040 Brussels | room VMA 23



European Economic
and Social Committee
Civil Society Organisations' Group

OVERVIEW OF RECENT WORK

The last EESC plenary session took place on 10 and 11 July 2024. The EESC plenary adopted 13 opinions and 1 resolution of which 8 were drafted by Members of the Civil Society Organisations' Group. A list of the recent work can be found below.

Anastasis YIAPANIS (CY), rapporteur, [CCMI/227](#)¹ Advanced materials for industrial leadership

Anastasis YIAPANIS (CY), rapporteur, [CCMI/229](#)² Low-carbon and renewable fuels: building the capacity of European industry to decarbonise the aviation and maritime sectors in a spirit of European autonomy

Diana INDJOVA (BG), co-rapporteur, [SOC/804](#)³ Combatting child sexual abuse

Giuseppe GUERINI (IT), rapporteur, [ECO/641](#)⁴ Taxation Framework for Social Economy Entities

Ioannis VARDAKASTANIS (EL), rapporteur, [ECO/650](#)⁵ Resolution No one should be left behind! For an inclusive and participatory cohesion policy in support of social, economic and territorial cohesion

Kęstutis KUPŠYS (LT), rapporteur, [TEN/838](#)⁶ Energy digitalisation: balancing opportunities and risks for European consumers

Pietro Vittorio BARBIERI (IT), rapporteur, [SOC/761](#)⁷ Caregivers

Stoyan TCHOUKANOV (BG), rapporteur, [NAT/924](#)⁸ How to ensure the social, environmental and economic sustainability of the EU agri-food sector with future enlargement?

1 EESC opinion CCMI/227, <https://europa.eu/!VcbQCG>

2 EESC opinion CCMI/229, <https://europa.eu/!GxK88n>

3 EESC opinion SOC/804, <https://europa.eu/!PbKQkH>

4 EESC opinion ECO/641, <https://europa.eu/!fJ3cTq>

5 EESC opinion ECO/650, <https://europa.eu/!hFKvFw>

6 EESC opinion TEN/838, <https://europa.eu/!D9pJqG>

7 EESC opinion SOC/761, <https://europa.eu/!vy9B8j>

8 EESC opinion NAT/924, <https://europa.eu/!QrHJHw>

The **complete texts** of all EESC opinions are available in various language versions on the [Committee's website](#)⁹

The **next EESC plenary session** will take place on **23 and 24 October 2024**. For more information on the upcoming plenary session please visit [our website](#)¹⁰.

A list including all **new work appointments** of Civil Society Organisations' Group Members is available on the [Committee's website](#)¹¹.

9 EESC opinions, <https://europa.eu/!wF86wY>

10 EESC plenary sessions, <https://europa.eu/!Dq84qG>

11 EESC, New work appointments, <https://europa.eu/!xGvQwM>



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