

February 2025

Following the June 2024 elections to the European Parliament, the EU faces a host of pressing challenges including the need to carry through the European Green Deal, address the rise of populism and threats to the rule of law, and steer the future course of economic governance, amid growing inequalities. Meanwhile, geopolitical uncertainties have underscored the essential role of a strong and independent civil society in ensuring a solid and resilient democracy. In these testing times, civil society organisations play a crucial role in amplifying the voices of European citizens, fostering democratic resilience, and shaping the future of Europe. However, civil society itself is increasingly under pressure, with its operating space shrinking, limiting its ability to contribute to public policy, both within the EU and globally.

To address the continent's major challenges, it is vital to equip citizens with the knowledge and skills necessary to contribute actively to solutions. In this context, the 2025 edition of the [European Economic and Social Committee's Civil Society Week](#), to be held in Brussels from 17 to 20 March, will focus on safeguarding democracy, addressing the threats it faces, and exploring ways to strengthen democratic values. The event will highlight the indispensable role of civil society as a driver of change in European society. Through expert-led workshops and discussions with high-level speakers, the EESC will gather civil society's expectations for EU policymakers on critical issues such as digital transition, education, housing affordability, energy transition, climate neutrality, transparent governance, and social inclusion. This topical digest presents a selection of relevant publications from the European Parliamentary Research Service (EPRS), offering valuable insights into these key topics.



Charting Europe's course – Reconnecting polarised societies through community learning and citizenship education

Fostering participation in education and training throughout life

Briefing by Krisztina Binder, EPRS, December 2024

To keep up with the constant shifts in labour markets and societies caused by major developments such as globalisation and technological advances, people need to develop their knowledge, skills and competences continuously. A varied and future-oriented skill set unlocks opportunities for individuals, promotes inclusion, social mobility and civic participation, and supplies the economy with the workforce needed for growth and innovation, not least in the context of the green and digital transitions. Offering quality learning opportunities, including upskilling and reskilling, that are accessible to learners of all ages and backgrounds is key to making all this possible.

Citizenship education in national curricula

Briefing by Izabela Bacian and Marie-Astrid Huemer, EPRS, November 2023

Citizenship education has become an education policy priority at EU level. The goal is to enable young people to develop self-awareness as members of a social group, and then possibly play a role and become active citizens at local, national or EU level. Similarly, the EU Member States have been placing a stronger focus on the teaching of values such as democracy and tolerance in their national educational policies, although this is not yet translating into practice in a systematic way. School curricula reflect educational policy priorities; the nature, scope and time dedicated within those curricula to citizenship education indicate where citizenship education stands among those priorities. Based on broad EU research and a study, this briefing first examines how EU programmes tackle citizenship education, what the European dimension is, and what place active citizenship occupies in the current 2021-2027 programming period.

Euro-Mediterranean cultural cooperation

'At a glance' note by Krisztina Binder, EPRS, July 2024

The European Union (EU) has been pursuing cultural cooperation with its Mediterranean partners for decades, enhancing dialogue and understanding between people. The Union for the Mediterranean (UfM), an intergovernmental organisation composed of the 27 EU Member States and 16 Mediterranean partner countries, recently launched the Mediterranean Capitals of Culture & Dialogue initiative to promote diversity and shared cultural identity in the Euro-Mediterranean region. Alexandria in Egypt and Tirana in Albania have been chosen to become the first Mediterranean Capitals of Culture and Dialogue, in 2025.

Further reading:

Intergenerational dialogue: Addressing future challenges and consulting young people in the EU

Briefing by Tarja Laaninen, EPRS, December 2024

Young people and the news

'At a glance' note by Tarja Laaninen with Ka Yeong Kim, EPRS, November 2024

Teachers: Key to achieving the European education area

Briefing by Krisztina Binder, EPRS, April 2024

Horizon Europe: Protecting academic freedom

Study by Scientific Foresight Unit (STOA), EPRS, June 2024

The rise of religious intolerance in Europe

'At a glance' note by Fearghas O'Beara, EPRS, October 2024

Technology for the common good, artificial intelligence and disinformation

Ten issues to watch in 2025

In depth analysis by Étienne Bassot, EPRS, January 2025

This ninth edition of the annual EPRS publication identifies and frames some of the key issues and policy areas that have the potential to feature prominently in public debate and on the EU's political agenda in 2025. The topics analysed include economic productivity, the 2040 climate target, economic security, investment capacity, the EU's future finances, electric vehicles, competitiveness in artificial intelligence, European defence, migrant return policy, and trust within the public sphere.

What if Europe championed new AI hardware?

'At a glance' note by Andres Garcia Higuera with Adam Furman, Scientific Foresight Unit (STOA), EPRS, November 2024

Europe could gain a competitive edge by supporting the development of new hardware for artificial intelligence (AI). Current state-of-the-art hardware is not optimised for machine learning, and research in both academia and the private sector are already leading to new designs. At the same time, the need for more time- and energy-efficient machine-learning hardware is increasing as more consumers and companies want access to machine-learning applications. The EU has the opportunity to leverage its strong regulatory framework for AI products as a mark of trust and safety, while also investing to support the next generation of hardware, opening up a new market for Europe's high tech industry. What would happen if the EU formulated a cohesive plan to support these technologies through both research and economic policy?

Addressing AI risks in the workplace: Workers and algorithms

Briefing by Marketa, EPRS, June 2024

Algorithms and artificial intelligence (AI) are changing the way people live and work. Depending on how AI technologies are used and the purpose they serve, they can drive progress and benefit the whole of society. However, they also raise ethical concerns and may cause harm. When introduced to the world of work, their transformative potential runs into complex national and EU rules. Existing labour laws, put in place before AI systems came on the scene, do not appear fit to provide meaningful guiderails. As with any new technologies, tensions arise between two opposing regulatory approaches: strict regulation to safeguard society from potential hazards and minimum regulation to promote the technology's deployment and innovation.

Further reading:

Fact-checking compass: How to spot information manipulation

'At a glance' note by Naja Bentzen, EPRS, July 2024

Mis- and disinformation on social media and related risks to election integrity

'At a glance' note by Naja Bentzen, EPRS, December 2024

The geopolitics of technology: Charting the EU's path in a competitive world

Briefing by Marcin Szczepański, EPRS, September 2024

Investment in artificial intelligence in the National Recovery and Resilience Plans

Briefing by Velina Lilyanova, EPRS, April 2024

Benefit of an EU strategic innovation agenda – Cost of non Europe

Study by Jérôme Saulnier, Aleksandra Heflich and Lenka Jančová, EPRS, January 2025

The arrival of e-voting and campaign technologies in Europe: Promise, perils and preparedness

Briefing by Hendrik Mildebrath, EPRS, May 2024

Artificial intelligence and cybersecurity

'At a glance' note by Polona Car with Tristan Marcelin, EPRS, April 2024

Artificial intelligence, democracy and elections

Briefing by Michael Adam, EPRS, October 2023

Growing focus on digital skills

'At a glance' note by Krisztina Binder, EPRS, February 2025

Understanding EU data protection policy

Briefing by Hendrik Mildebrath, EPRS, January 2025

Towards more affordable, democratic and sustainable housing in Europe

A coordinated EU approach to housing

Briefing by Marketa Pape, EPRS, January 2025

The recent cost-of-living crisis has exacerbated a longstanding problem with housing affordability in the EU. Higher building costs and mortgage rates, together with a related decrease in housing construction, have made access to home ownership more difficult. At the same time, investors use housing as a vehicle for investment. Growing numbers of people are struggling to access affordable housing, whether to rent or to buy, particularly in cities. Across Europe, homelessness is rising. In addition, many residential buildings need to be made energy-efficient and decarbonised in order to achieve the EU's energy and climate goals, lower energy consumption and reduce energy bills. While the EU has no direct competence in the area of housing and only a limited scope of action to address social issues, it provides relevant guidance and funding, and has carried out several initiatives to support housing.

Social and youth housing in the EU

Briefing by Marketa Pape, EPRS, February 2024

Access to housing in the EU has become problematic in recent years. Demography and urbanisation-related structural factors, aggravated by the COVID-19 pandemic, the conflict in Ukraine, soaring energy prices, the cost of living crisis and (already high) housing prices that keep rising are preventing many people from accessing decent housing solutions. The lack of affordable housing supply only adds to this situation. These difficulties affect not only low- but now also middle-income households, as well as specific vulnerable groups, among them young people. Overall, there is not enough 'social housing' provision in the EU to meet increased demand. While both the EU and the United Nations recognise the right to housing, the longstanding crisis in housing affordability has had an adverse impact on people's living standards, well-being and social inclusion. This is especially the case with young people, many of whom are struggling to access any form of decent housing, in particular in cities.

Energy poverty in the EU

Briefing by Agnieszka Widuto, EPRS, September 2023

In 2022, over 41 million Europeans were unable to keep their homes adequately warm. Energy poverty is a multi-dimensional phenomenon, considered to be caused by a combination of low income, high energy expenses, and poor energy efficiency in buildings. The EU has been addressing this issue in various legislative and non-legislative initiatives, most recently in the context of its climate policies and energy transition, as well as the energy crisis. The Gas and Electricity Directives include provisions to protect vulnerable consumers, and the Energy Efficiency and Energy Efficiency of Buildings Directives require measures to alleviate energy poverty alongside efficiency efforts. The 'renovation wave' initiative under the European Green Deal aims to boost structural renovation in private and public buildings, while the Social Climate Fund includes households in energy poverty among its main beneficiaries.

Further reading:

Energy transition

Briefing by Agnieszka Widuto, EPRS, September 2024

Ensuring sustainable, decent and affordable housing in Europe

'At a glance' note by Marketa Pape, EPRS, October 2024

Revision of the Energy Performance of Buildings Directive

Briefing by Monika Dulian, EPRS, July 2024

Energy Performance of Buildings Directive

'At a glance' note by Monika Dulian, EPRS, May 2024

The future of cohesion policy: Current state of the debate

Briefing by Vasilis Margaras, Emmanuel Alvarez, EPRS, January 2025

Closing the blue loops: Responsible and sustainable innovation in the fields of water and ocean

Study by Scientific Foresight Unit (STOA), EPRS, July 2024

This report evaluates the need and scope for an EIT Knowledge and Innovation Community (KIC) focused on water, and marine and maritime areas (KIC WMM). It identifies existing gaps in innovation ecosystems and recommends thematic focus areas with the highest potential for technological development, market deployment, and benefits for EU citizens. Key stakeholders, public engagement methods, funding mechanisms, and legal and regulatory barriers are analysed. Policy options are provided to foster innovation and market deployment in alignment with the European Green Deal and other EU strategies. The report highlights high-impact technologies for sustainability goals and areas needing further research and regulatory changes. It concludes that a WMM KIC would enhance the innovation ecosystem, education and entrepreneurship in the relevant sectors, bolstering Europe's leadership in the global water and blue economy.

Action plan to protect marine ecosystems for sustainable fisheries

Briefing by Frederik Scholaert, EPRS, June 2023

On 21 February 2023, the European Commission published a 'fisheries and oceans' package, including an action plan for reconciling marine protection and fisheries. With this plan, the Commission is hoping to achieve more consistent implementation of EU environmental and fisheries policies. The main aim is to make fishing practices more sustainable by improving gear selectivity and reducing impacts on sensitive species (such as dolphins) and the seabed. On seabeds, the Commission is calling for a ban on mobile bottom fishing in marine protected areas (MPAs) by 2030. To address the negative socio-economic impacts of this, it is proposing measures to ensure a 'just transition' (by making better use of EU funding instruments, in particular for innovation – for instance, to develop new techniques – and for diversification of economic activities).

Social and labour market impact of the green transition

Briefing by Lasse Boehm with David Kläffling, EPRS, June 2024

The European Union's (EU) climate policies, part of the European Green Deal put forward by the von der Leyen Commission, will have profound consequences for other policy areas. During the 2019–2024 legislative term of the European Parliament, the EU adopted an overarching objective to cut net greenhouse gas emissions by at least 55 % by 2030, and achieve climate neutrality by 2050. This entails changing the way energy is produced and consumed in the EU, with knock-on effects for individual citizens, households, and businesses. This briefing explores and maps out some of the social consequences of the Green Deal, focusing in particular on the effect the green transition will have on labour markets. It also touches briefly on the housing and transport sectors. The briefing's purpose is to offer an overview of the most important impacts in these areas.

Further reading:

Sustainable water management in recovery and resilience plans

Briefing by Alessandro D'Alfonso, EPRS, July 2024

What if Europe ran out of water?

'At a glance' note by António Vale and Jurgita Lekaviciute, EPRS, November 2023

Europe's 2040 climate target and path to climate neutrality by 2050

Briefing by Aušra Rakštelytė, EPRS, September 2024

COP29 climate change conference: Outcomes

'At a glance' note by Gregor Erbach with Cecilia Meinardi, EPRS, November 2024

EU agenda for international ocean governance

Briefing by Frederik Scholaert, EPRS, November 2022

The Mediterranean fishing area: State of play

Briefing by Anne Altmayer, EPRS, November 2024

Horizon Europe support for the European Green Deal

Study by Scientific Foresight Unit (STOA), EPRS, July 2024

Pollutants in EU waters: Update of chemical substances listed for control

Briefing by Vivienne Halleux, EPRS, December 2024

Confirmation hearings of the Commissioners-designate: Costas Kadis – Fisheries and Oceans

Briefing by Frederik Scholaert, EPRS, October 2024

Economic impacts of the green transition

Briefing by Gregor Erbach and Martin Höflmayr, EPRS, September 2022

From growth to 'beyond growth': Concepts and challenges

Briefing by Agnieszka Widuto, Clément Evroux and Stefano Spinaci, EPRS, May 2023

Participatory budgeting: A pathway to inclusive and transparent governance

Briefing by Silvia Kotanidis with Christian Recchia, EPRS, September 2024

Broad public involvement and deliberation are the rule, with the aim being to make budgetary processes inclusive, transparent and democratic. What makes participatory budgeting different from other participatory methods is its focus on financial processes, openness to the public, cyclical nature, reliance on public deliberation and accountability. It is applied in thousands of towns, cities and regions across the world and enjoys the support of governments, civil society and international organisations. It addresses both socio-economic and democratic goals and seeks to enhance public infrastructure and services while promoting political equality and transparency.

European cross-border associations

Briefing by Rafał Mańko, EPRS, May 2024

The European Parliament has consistently advocated for the creation of an EU-wide legal framework for non-profit and not-for-profit entities operating within the EU. In 2013, it called for the adoption of common EU rules for mutual societies, and made a similar call in 2018 for social and solidarity-based enterprises. In February 2022, it adopted a resolution on cross-border associations and non-profit organisations, urging the European Commission to propose a regulation establishing a statute for a European association. This statute would outline the conditions and procedures for the establishment, governance, registration and regulation of legal entities in the form of a European association. The resolution also called for a directive that would simplify the process for non-profit organisations in the EU to exercise their rights in the internal market.

Strategic lawsuits against public participation (SLAPPs)

Briefing by Rafał Mańko, EPRS, February 2024

On 29 November 2023, the European Parliament and the Council of the EU reached a compromise on the proposed directive to protect journalists and human rights activists from abusive cross-border civil proceedings, known as strategic lawsuits against public participation (SLAPPs). The directive's aim is to enable judges to identify SLAPPs and order their early dismissal, and thus spare the journalists or activists targeted by such proceedings the need to defend the manifestly unfounded claim brought against them in bad faith with the sole purpose of harassing them. The main changes to the original proposal include a broadening of the scope of application of the directive through two new inclusive definitions – for 'cross-border implications' and 'public participation' – and the introduction of a rule on reimbursement of legal costs incurred by a SLAPP victim, unless it is shown that such costs were excessive. Although journalists are also targeted by criminal SLAPPs, this directive would only apply to civil litigation, and only in cross-border cases.

Further reading:

The shrinking space for civil society in Europe

'At a glance' note by Micaela Del Monte, March 2022

EU–UK civil society cooperation

'At a glance' note by Rosamund Shreeves, EPRS, June 2023

Citizens' initiative on animal testing

'At a glance' note by Lasse Boehm with Oleksandra Klochko, EPRS, July 2023

'Save bees and farmers': A European Citizens' Initiative on bee-friendly agriculture for a healthy environment

'At a glance' note by Claudia Vinci, EPRS, March 2023

'Stop Finning – Stop the Trade!': European Citizens' Initiative in defence of sharks and rays

'At a glance' note by Claudia Vinci, EPRS, May 2023

European Citizens' Initiative: 'Fur free Europe'

'At a glance' note by Beata Rojek, EPRS, October 2023

Regional and local participation in the EU project: How the European Parliament is responding to citizens' expectations

Briefing by Carmen-Cristina Cîrlig and Micaela Del Monte, EPRS, July 2022

Protecting EU shared values: How the European Parliament is responding to citizens' expectations

Briefing by Maria Díaz Crego and Rafał Mańko, EPRS, April 2022

Referendums on EU issues: Fostering civic engagement

In-depth Analysis by Micaela Del Monte, EPRS, April 2022

Laureates of the 2024 Sakharov Prize: María Corina Machado and Edmundo González Urrutia, fighting for democracy in Venezuela

'At a glance' note by Marc Jütten, EPRS, December 2024



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