



European Economic and Social Committee | Comité économique et social européen

PERIOD **END OF TERM**
2023 **REPORT**
2025 **PERMANENT GROUP**
SUSTAINABLE FOOD

DIR. B — LEGISLATIVE WORK

PRESIDENT: PIROSKA KÁLLAY

Introduction

During the 2023-2025 term, the work of the Permanent Group (PG) on Sustainable Food Systems contributed to the NAT section's general objective of *Fostering a Comprehensive Food Policy and sustainable rural/urban development*. More precisely, the group analysed how transforming food systems helps to drive the implementation of the sustainable development and climate agendas as a whole and it promoted that transformation.

This term, the group pursued its international focus with the follow-up to the UN Food Systems Summit convened by the UN Secretary-General in 2021, contributing to its stocktaking exercises planned in 2023 (UNFSS +2) and 2025 (UNFSS +4), participating in the Committee on World Food Security (CFS), promoting sustainable food systems in the context of the COP on climate change and biodiversity and achieving closer cooperation with the FAO.

At European level, our work focused on highlighting meaningful existing action and projects, discussing strategic recommendations to feed into the European Commission's 2024-2029 work programme. In particular, more structured involvement of civil society in the governance of sustainable food systems has been promoted, through opinions, meetings and hearings, where the group tirelessly facilitated and promoted dialogue among all stakeholders along the agri-food chain, including farmers, workers, food processing businesses, retailers and consumers, on the above-mentioned issues. One tangible effect of our work was the European Commission's creation of the European Board on Agriculture and Food (EBAF), as well as the current proposal to strengthen food policy dialogue, which both reflect the EESC's past recommendations for a European Food Policy Council. The Committee is now a partner in the work and development of these structures and will continue to be a forum for dialogue on working towards sustainable food systems.

We hope the new members of the group will be able to continue this inspiring work to achieve more sustainable food systems.

- Piroška Kallay

President of the Permanent group on Sustainable food systems

Activities & main conclusions

During the 2023-2025 term of office, the study group promoted **more sustainable food systems at EU level** and brought together the various actors across the food supply chain both inside and outside the EESC. In addition, two joint meetings of the Sustainable Development Observatory (SDO) and of the Permanent Group (PG) took place during this term, as greater synergies between the two bodies were provided for in their respective Work Programmes.

The Permanent Group met seven times under the chairmanship of Piroska Kallay and focused on the following key objectives:

- **Advancing sustainable and inclusive food systems:** as the EESC continues to work towards transforming the EU's food systems to make them more sustainable and resilient, the PG continued to focus its work on assessing progress and identifying gaps in the EU's path towards fairer, more inclusive and sustainable food systems as part of work of the 2021 UN Food Systems Summit (UNFSS) and ahead of the 2023 and 2025 Stocktaking Moments. The PG contributed to these UNFSS Stocktaking Moments with tangible recommendations, which were an outcome of public hearings organised together with FAO, the European Commission and other relevant stakeholders from the agri-food chain. Discussions focused on how to strengthen governance and support practical implementation at all levels and on expectations for the future;
- **Strengthening agri-food sector resilience and strategic autonomy:** the PG also focused on how to promote open strategic autonomy for sustainable food while fostering thriving rural areas and ensuring competitive, fair, sustainable food supply chains. It has been a forum feeding into the discussion on how to address systemic challenges and identify necessary action to foster resilient food systems during ongoing global crises;
- **Fostering sustainable food labelling to empower consumers to make more sustainable and healthier food choices:** by looking to the different aspects of sustainability and promoting mutual understanding between the various actors in the food chain, the PG reiterated the importance and highlighted the role of food information, labelling and community-led initiatives, including food policy councils, in empowering consumers to become actors in the transition and supporting farmers;
- **Linking food systems with climate, SDGs and Agenda 2030:** food is at the intersection between several policy areas and food sustainability is linked to a number of other issues

on which the EESC is working. The joint meetings with the Sustainable Development Observatory (SDO), for example, looked at the links between sustainable food systems and climate, biodiversity and the circular economy. These meetings explored the role of sustainable food systems as a driver for the implementation of the SDGs and for achieving food security and nutrition, and addressed the intersection between climate action and food systems, with reference to COP28 and COP29. In addition, the meetings highlighted the link with Agenda 2030 and the connection between the SDO and PG work programmes. Discussions fed into the EESC's contribution to the High-Level Political Forum (HLPF) in New York, with SDG 2- Zero Hunger as a focus. The PG, together with the SDO, promoted the alignment of EU external policies and trade with sustainability goals, ensuring a level playing field and coherence across sectors;

- **Promoting circular economy and rural-urban synergies:** the PG looked at how circular economy and bioeconomy can help reduce food waste, revitalise rural areas and foster partnerships that strengthen rural-urban synergies, addressing pressing challenges such as rural depopulation, economic inequalities and climate change. Sustainable agri-food systems (including fisheries and aquaculture) can also drive development across both rural and urban areas in the EU through innovative approaches. The meetings demonstrated how these models can revitalise rural areas, create jobs, reduce inequalities and combat climate change and explored the role of governance and partnerships as in fostering sustainable communities;
- **Monitoring and assessing EU and international policy from a civil society perspective:** the participation of an EESC delegation (four members) in the annual meetings of the Committee on World Food Security (CFS) increased the visibility of the EESC in a forum of this scope and enabled it to maintain relationships and develop new contacts (through bilateral meetings) with the FAO, the EU Delegation to the United Nations in Rome and the Civil Society Mechanism of the CFS;
- **Contributing to the discussion on food waste reduction:** the PG discussed new projects for reducing food loss and waste and the PG president participated in the EU Platform on Food Losses and Food Waste, where the PG president has an official seat as observer, reporting back.

In conclusion, during the half-term, the PG provided a meaningful forum for exchange and discussion among members, stakeholders across the whole agri-food supply chain, academics and EU and international policymakers on a wide range of issues related to sustainable food systems. The debates provided useful input into ongoing opinions and

added value to the EESC's participation in EU and international forums. This also made it possible to maintain and further reinforce cooperation with key institutional players such as the European Commission and FAO and to remain part of the conversation on the future of the EU's food systems.

Annex I — Meetings and events

	2023	2024	2025	Total
Permanent group meetings	2	3	2	7
Conferences and hearings organised by the permanent group	2	2	1	5
Participation by PG president in events	11	15	2	28

22/06/2023: PG internal meeting and public hearing on the *State of progress in the EU after the 2021 UN Food Systems Summit: The EU's contribution to the UN Food Systems Summit (UNFSS) Stocktaking Moment (UNFSS +2)*. The public hearing explored how the Farm to Fork strategy could support the UN Coalitions of Action in the transformation of food systems, presented EU action and leadership for achieving global food systems transformation and discussed how the UNFSS follow-up can further upscale actions from the EU in the global context, ahead of the July's Stocktaking Moment. Based on this exchange of views, a written contribution to the UNFSS + 2 was drafted and published.

17/11/2023: Joint meeting of the Sustainable Development Observatory (SDO) and Permanent Group on Sustainable Food Systems (PG). Public hearing on *Sustainable food systems as a driver for the implementation of the SDGs*. The meeting explored how sustainable food systems can contribute to the implementation of the SDGs and highlighted the link with Agenda 2030 and the connection between the SDO and the PG work programmes. **PG internal meeting** on the *Implementation of the Farm to Fork strategy towards sustainable food systems: state of play and monitoring of the achievements in the context of the sustainable development goals*.

29/02/2024: PG internal meeting with an exchange of views with PG members on action needed to foster sustainable food systems and upcoming works and a debate on *How sustainable food systems can contribute to achieving food security and nutrition, in line with SDG2 on Zero Hunger*, linking to the FAO's Roadmap on Achieving SDG 2 without breaching the 1.5°C threshold.

14/06/2024: PG internal meeting with an **Orientation debate** on the exploratory opinion

[NAT/935 - Fostering sustainable and resilient food systems at times of growing crises](#), exploratory opinion drafted at the request of the Hungarian Presidency.

15/10/2024: Joint meeting of the Sustainable Development Observatory (SDO) and Permanent Group on Sustainable Food Systems (PG). Public event: *Circular economy and bioeconomy to support sustainable agri-food systems for a sustainable rural/urban development in the EU*. This event explored how circular economy and bioeconomy can drive sustainable agri-food systems development across both rural and urban areas in the EU, through the presentation of innovative approaches that support the balanced development of rural and urban communities.

31/03/2025: PG internal meeting on the role of food information and labelling to equip consumers to become actors in the transition and the role of community-led initiatives, including food councils to support sustainable food systems and fair income for EU farmers. **Public hearing** on the *State of progress in the EU after the 2021 UN Food Systems Summit: The EU's contribution to the UN Food Systems Summit (UNFSS) Stocktaking Moment (UNFSS +4)*. The hearing explored the state of progress of the EU on the path to more sustainable, fairer and inclusive food systems, following the new actions agreed upon during the UN Food System summit in 2021 and the recent publication of the Commission's vision for agriculture and food. On the basis of this exchange of views, a written contribution to the UNFSS + 4 was drafted and published.

11/06/2025: PG internal meeting on *Fostering healthy diets in a One Health approach*.

Activities of the president: please refer to Annex II.