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PERIOD **END OF MANDATE**
2023 **REPORT**
2025 **SECTION FOR**
EMPLOYMENT, SOCIAL
AFFAIRS AND CITIZENSHIP

**DIRECTORATE C – LEGISLATIVE
WORK**

PRESIDENT: CINZIA DEL RIO

Introduction

The 2023-2025 half-term was marked by the cost-of-living crisis in the aftermath of the COVID-19 pandemic, which was aggravated by the continued Russian war against Ukraine, geopolitical instability and economic uncertainty arising from important policy decisions on the other side of the Atlantic, further progress of authoritarian tendencies and the growing impact of artificial intelligence. The green and digital transitions and the need to ensure a just transition, the skills that are needed, the new forms of work and working conditions and the impact of labour shortages continued to be important issues in the work of the SOC section. Priorities included pushing for effective implementation of active labour market policies to include economically inactive and unemployed people, fostering quality female and youth employment and entrepreneurship, and tapping into the potential of economic migration and labour mobility. Also, the implementation of the European Pillar of Social Rights, equality in all its facets, poverty reduction, fundamental rights and the rule of law, migration, asylum and integration continued to be key elements of the section's activities. Against this background, the section focused on:

- ***promoting just digital and green transitions for social fairness, competitiveness and resilience;***
- ***striving for an equal and inclusive society; and***
- ***standing up for democracy, fundamental rights and the rule of law.***

Cinzia Del Rio

President of the SOC section

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Promoting just digital and green transitions for social fairness, competitiveness and resilience

*Recognising the aim of fostering a **competitive and sustainable economy as a cornerstone for the European social model**, the section firmly believes that a competitive social market economy should ensure productivity, innovation and full employment, environmental sustainability, economic prosperity and social and territorial cohesion. In our opinions, we called for stronger policies to **promote quality jobs and to combat undeclared work and insecure working conditions**, as well as to address the **challenge of labour shortages**. The section highlighted the importance of **upward convergence** and of enhancing the European Semester's role in coordinated economic and social policy responses.*

*In the area of **occupational safety and health (OSH)**, the section explored the role and potential of prevention in contributing to the zero-deaths goal, as well as the current and future challenges in relation to traditional and new technologies, with a focus on AI. It also looked into the different models in the Member States regarding reducing working time.*

*In the field of **social dialogue and collective bargaining**, the section stressed the need to strengthen collective bargaining power and coverage and recommended that enabling conditions at national level be established for trade unions, employers and governments to play a more effective role in a dynamic and changing labour market and to identify opportunities for ensuring the viability of sound and solid structures for social dialogue. The section advocated a more efficient and meaningful **information and consultation process** within the European Works Councils, and it also promoted green collective bargaining and democracy at work.*

*The section emphasised the need to reinforce the **social dimension** of the EU, particularly in the light of the ongoing **green and digital transitions** and **persistent inequalities** between groups and regions. It called for a stronger focus on **social investment, quality employment, inclusive labour markets, fair mobility and accessible social protection systems**.*

*The section also promoted progress on **competence and skills development** –notably in relation to digital skills – in particular in the context of the green and digital transitions; it considered the benefits of apprenticeships and dual learning schemes and also looked into the impact of education on wages and labour productivity. The section worked on the **Traineeships***

***Directive**, stressing the importance of fair compensation, to ensure equal access to a traineeship experience for all. The section supported the new strategic framework on the 'Union of Skills'.*

*The section underlined the importance of **involving civil society and the social partners** at all levels and recommended establishing clear targets, effective monitoring and adequate funding to ensure the full implementation of the **European Pillar of Social Rights (EPSR)** principles, especially in view of the **new EPSR Action Plan**.*

*The section capitalised on the work of the **Labour Market Observatory (LMO)** to address a range of key issues. This included analysis of the **social impact of the National Recovery and Resilience Plans**, and how effectively they responded to pressing social challenges. In the context of the **European Year of Skills**, the LMO joined forces with CEDEFOP to foster **upskilling opportunities for all adults**, and especially the lower skilled. Through close cooperation with the European Commission, the LMO also promoted **vocational education and training (VET)** as a high-quality, future-proof path to employment. Another forward-looking topic was the impact of **artificial intelligence on jobs and skills**. SOC members actively drove this conversation at high-level EU and international events. Furthermore, the LMO contributed with valuable insights to the revision of the **European Pillar of Social Rights (EPSR) Action Plan** through a dedicated study on employment and adult learning. The section continued to promote youth participation in decision-making, applying the **youth test** to a number of opinions. The results of the study and detailed outcomes of the LMO's work are presented in separate reports.*

Striving for an equal and inclusive society

*The section fostered further development of inclusive and adequate **social protection for workers and the self-employed**. The EESC encouraged the EU and the Member States, within their respective competences and in keeping with national practices, to adapt social protection systems to cover non-standard work, ensuring sufficient benefits for **decent work** and a **decent life for all workers**. The section also worked on the impact of demographic shifts on the world of work – active labour market policies, work organisation, up- and reskilling of workers required due to an ageing active population – and on the sustainability of welfare systems and social security. In joint efforts to combat **homelessness**, the EESC called for an EU framework for national homeless strategies based on the principle of '**Housing First**'. In addition, the*

section supported the upcoming **Anti-Poverty Strategy**, stressing it must aim to help people obtain access to the essential protections and services they need as well as to address the root causes of poverty. Furthermore, the section explored the issue of **intergenerational fairness**, aimed at a cohesive and sustainable society that ensures equitable rights and opportunities for all generations across policy areas.

The section has been very active in the field of **healthcare**, putting forward recommendations for a comprehensive EU strategy aimed at addressing key challenges. These included reducing health inequalities, establishing a European care and healthcare guarantee, implementing the integrated One Health approach, protecting both formal and informal caregivers, and leveraging digitalisation and artificial intelligence (AI) to modernise healthcare systems. **Mental health** remained a core focus, with the section emphasising the need for a rights-based, community-centred approach aligned with the principles of the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UN CRPD). Additionally, the section strongly advocated the adoption of an EU Action Plan for **Rare Diseases** to help close the gaps that exist in patient care pathways across the Member States.

The section's **Permanent Group on Disability Rights (PG DIS)** continued its mission to assess and raise awareness about the implementation of the UNCRPD within the EU. It also worked to promote the participation of organisations representing persons with disabilities and to share good practices. Detailed outcomes of its work are presented in a separate report.

The **Permanent Group on Inclusion of the Roma** continued to pursue its objectives, namely, to monitor the progress achieved in the Member States in implementing the recommendations set out in the EU Roma strategic framework 2020-2030, and to raise awareness and facilitate discussions on policy areas that still require urgent action to ensure Roma inclusion. Detailed outcomes of its work are presented in a separate report.

The EESC continues to go from strength to strength in promoting **gender equality**, which it addresses as a cross-cutting issue within its various sections and its ad hoc group on equality. In 2024 and 2025, it took the unprecedented step of publishing the priorities of EU organised civil society ahead of the 68th and 69th sessions of the UN Commission on the Status of Women. Furthermore, it adopted an instrumental own-initiative opinion outlining the state of play in measures across the EU to combat violence against women. It continued its productive cooperation with the European Institute for Gender Equality (EIGE). The section also stressed the urgent need to adapt strategies for **work-life balance** taking into consideration the shifting demographics, new forms of work, flexible working arrangements and rising care demands.

*In the area of **migration**, the section maintained a strong focus on the New Pact on Migration and Asylum with opinions adopted on the Pact's new tools and components, including the integrated border management strategy, the talent mobility package, and the anti-smuggling package. Specific proposals to improve legal migration to the EU were put forward in two own-initiative opinions. The section also contributed specific recommendations for improving the new proposal on the Common European System for Returns.*

***The Permanent Group on Immigration and Integration** continued its work to promote the development of a common European immigration and integration policy based on the principles of fundamental rights and solidarity, with strong involvement of civil society. Detailed outcomes of its work are presented in a separate report.*

*Two annual **European Migration Forum** meetings took place – in November 2023 and 2024. The 8th EMF addressed the issues of migrants' specific needs, skills and communication to ensure stronger inclusion. The 9th EMF focused on strengthening the role of civil society in implementing the Pact on Migration and Asylum.*

Standing up for democracy, fundamental rights and the rule of law

2024 was a major election year, with the European elections being the most important for the EU. As part of the EESC's commitment to representative democracy, SOC participated in the drafting of two resolutions: one calling on the public to vote at the European elections and the other detailing its demands to the European Parliament and the European Commission for the 2024-2029 term of office.

*Between 2023 and 2025, the **EESC's Fundamental Rights and Rule of Law (FRRL) Group** focused on reinforcing the EU's core values amid growing threats to democracy. The Group completed its first cycle of country visits to all EU Member States and began a second round, expanding to candidate countries such as Moldova, Albania, and Serbia. The first cycle of visits engaged over 600 civil society representatives (employers, trade unions, CSOs, media and legal professionals, etc), providing first-hand insights into the state of fundamental rights and the rule of law in Europe. Findings were consolidated in a 2018-2024 report highlighting widespread challenges, from implementation issues to deep rule of law crises, and providing recommendations based on the EESC's opinions.*

The FRRL Group held ten meetings and thirteen country visits during this term. It hosted major conferences, including two annual rule of law conferences and several joint events with the European Commission on civic space, access to justice, and legal protection. These forums enabled exchanges among civil society, legal experts, and institutions.

The Group initiated several own-initiative opinions on key topics such as civil society funding, corruption in procurement, violence against women, and the labour rights of journalists. It also organised interactive dialogues with the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights, strengthening global ties with both the UN and EU CSO networks. Internally, the Group updated its operating guidelines and intensified its communication efforts, using statements to highlight key issues. Externally, it reinforced collaboration with European and international stakeholders, including the EU Agency for Fundamental Rights (FRA), the Council of Europe, and the UN. Detailed outcomes of the FRLL Group's work are presented in a separate report. In addition to the work of the FRRL Group, the section also actively worked on issues related to democracy and citizen engagement covering shrinking civic space, promoting civil dialogue and safeguarding democratic principles. Further work covered the role of civil society in preparedness stressing its crucial contribution to defending democracy, building trust and cohesion, and supporting vulnerable groups.

Interinstitutional echo

Again, a major share of the exploratory opinions requested by the EU Member States holding the presidency during the half-term fell under the remit of the SOC section, which prepared a total of 13 exploratory opinions for the rotating presidencies. The section also prepared two exploratory opinions at the request of the European Commission to feed into its preparatory work: 'Fostering opportunities and managing risks from new technologies for public services, the organisation of work and more equal and inclusive societies' and 'EU Anti-poverty Strategy'.

Various Commissioners, ministers and state secretaries representing the Council presidencies, Members of the European Parliament and directors of EU agencies participated in conferences and public hearings organised by the SOC section, in events organised with the European Commission, EU agencies (e.g. CEDEFOP, Eurofound), the International Labour Organization and the Council of Europe, as well as in topical debates at section meetings. These events included high-level events organised by the Labour Market Observatory with the International Labour Organization (ILO) in the context of the EESC's participation in the Global Coalition for

Social Justice, since 2024; a joint event of the LMO with the European Commission inspiring young people across Europe, notably by interacting with 35 young champions of skills competitions ('Meet the champions of excellence'); and a side event of the LMO and the French Economic, Social and Environmental Council on the sidelines of the AI Global Action Summit. Events also included the annual meetings of the European Migration Forum, high-level conferences on fundamental rights and the rule of law, as well as key conferences organised in cooperation with other EESC sections and bodies, including on 'Health Cybersecurity' with the CCMI and "For an EU commitment to tackling rare diseases" with the TEN section.

SOC member delegations took part in a variety of high-level events, such as informal EPSCO Councils, the European Employment and Social Rights Forum, key events of EU agencies, and the launching forum and annual forum of the Global Coalition for Social Justice.

Communication achievements

The section's work related to events and opinions regularly results in media coverage. Communication about the section's activities focused on work under its communication priorities 'Strengthening democracy through active participation' (2024) and 'Inclusive societies' (2025). Relevant work covered by other EESC communication priorities, such as 'Artificial intelligence: a game-changer for economy, society and workers', 'Disinformation', 'Gender equality' and 'Youth perspective' was also promoted. Examples of media coverage include the events on migration – notably the meetings of the European Migration Forum – on disability rights, and on skills, including a major event on the skills of young people ('Meet the champions of excellence'). The section provided enhanced follow-up for SOC/796 on 'The impact of demography on Social Europe', SOC/799 on 'Mental health community services' and SOC/803 on 'Pro-worker AI: levers for harnessing the potential and mitigating the risks of AI in connection with employment and labour market policies', and focused on SOC/822 on the 'New action plan for the European Pillar of Social Rights', SOC/829 on the 'Anti-poverty Strategy' and SOC/837 on the 'Union of Skills'. Enhanced follow-up includes interinstitutional follow-up meetings, and participation in events and communication activities with the aim of maximising the potential impact of opinions.

Prospects/outlook

The SOC section bureau will agree on the section's priorities at the beginning of its term. However, it can be expected that the section will continue to work on topics closely linked to the green and digital transitions, the Union of Skills and quality jobs, the new Action plan for the European Pillar of Social Rights, the Anti-poverty strategy, and topics fostering social and civil dialogue, defending democracy, and promoting human rights and a humane migration management system.

Annex – Key statistics

	As from 26 April 2023	2024	Up to 18 Sep. 2025	Total
Section meetings	5	9	6	20
Section bureau meetings	6	10	6	22
Study Group meetings	33	60	45	138
Permanent Study Group meetings	9	11	9	29
Observatory meetings	2	4	1	7
Opinions	24	27	32	83
Referrals	10	12	4	26
Exploratory opinions	6	6	11	23
Own-initiative opinions	8	8	15	31
Information reports	-	-	-	-
Evaluation reports	-	1	1	2
Resolutions	-	2	1	3¹
Studies	-	1	-	1
Fact-finding missions	10	24	5	39
Conferences and hearings organised by the section	22	45	20	87
Participation of members in meetings/events/conferences	99	133	69	301
Meetings between EESC/EP rapporteurs or section/EP Committee presidents	2	4	4	10
Meetings of EESC members with Commissioners, members of	4	3	1	8

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The SOC section provided the secretariat to the Ad hoc group on European Elections for the drafting of two resolutions.

Commissioners' cabinets, Commission directors-general or Commission directors				
Meetings of EESC members with Council representatives, permanent representatives or EU presidency representatives	6	9	4	19