



EESC section for Agriculture, Rural Development and the Environment (NAT)
**Permanent Group on the Conference of the Parties of the United Nations Framework
Convention on Climate Change (PG on COP)**

Executive Summary

Introduction

The Permanent Group on COP (PG on COP, formerly the Ad Hoc Group) plays a key role in enhancing the European Economic and Social Committee's (EESC) strategic and meaningful participation in meetings of the climate and biodiversity Conferences of the Parties (COPs) and beyond, ensuring a continuous and meaningful contribution from civil society (including young people) to international climate and biodiversity governance, while fostering cross-cutting collaboration across EESC bodies.

Building on its long-standing participation in UN climate and biodiversity negotiations, including its engagement in the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) process since COP20 and in the United Nations Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD) process since COP15, the EESC aims to further strengthen its participation in the COPs in a strategic way.

The PG on COP Work Programme 2026 sets out a forward-looking and action-oriented approach, in line with NAT priorities and work programme, reinforcing civil society engagement and collaboration with EU institutions, and enabling to turn the Committee's efforts throughout the year into meaningful action at COPs.

Strategic priorities for 2026

1. Increase synergies between the Rio Conventions
2. Just transition
3. Climate mitigation - Transitioning away from fossil fuels
4. Climate adaptation
5. Climate governance - Improvement of civil society involvement in the COP processes
6. Biodiversity - Governance and implementation

Working methodology

The PG on COP will strategically prepare the upcoming COP31 and COP17 participation of the EESC delegation, ensuring its actions and contributions are closely aligned with the established PG on COP and NAT work programme. The PG on COP will **work on the different topics selected as strategic, through continued cooperation with identified stakeholders and partners** to help strengthen civil society views.

The EESC will maintain a structured approach to channeling the **perspectives of youth organisations and young people** into climate and biodiversity initiatives, through its Youth Delegate to COP programme and the Youth Task Force.

Regular exchanges with other sections, permanent groups and observatories could be developed. Each PG on COP meeting will be accompanied by a **concise document** summarising the meeting's outcomes, which will also serve to highlight the EESC's political perspectives and opinions on various issues.

PG on COP Work Programme 2026

Context

Addressing the triple planetary crises – climate change, biodiversity loss and pollution – and the consequent water crisis (water scarcity, extreme drought and flooding) has long been a core priority of the EESC and the NAT section. For many years, the Committee has been at the forefront of advocating for ambitious climate and environmental action through domestic and international action, while advancing concrete and inclusive pathways towards decarbonisation and nature restoration that are socially just and economically fair. In this context, the EESC consistently **supports strong EU leadership in global efforts to address climate change and biodiversity loss**, notably through active engagement in **the UNFCCC and the CBD processes**, and **by amplifying the voice of organised civil society in international climate and biodiversity governance**.

Within this context, the **EESC PG on COP** plays a key role in enhancing the EESC's strategic and meaningful participation in meetings of the climate and biodiversity COPs and beyond, ensuring a continuous and meaningful contribution from civil society to international climate and biodiversity governance while fostering cross-cutting collaboration across EESC bodies.

Ten years after the Paris Agreement and four years after the Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework, the role of civil society is more vital than ever. Organised civil society must pressure the way forward, holding the line for ambitious and inclusive climate and environmental action, improving the effectiveness of commitments through new forms of governance as well as translating commitments into sustained, tangible action on the ground. It is against this background that the **PG on COP Work Programme for 2026** offers a strategic vision with concrete actions points, in line with the NAT priorities and work programme.

Overall objective and proposed actions

Since the establishment of the PG on COP in February 2022, mandated to **foster a strategic and inclusive engagement on climate and biodiversity COPs**, the EESC has tried to influence and strengthen its strategic role as a bridge between EU institutions and civil society, effectively amplifying messages and impact. The PG on COP is composed of **six EESC members from the Employers' Group, the Workers' Group and the Civil Society Organisations' Group, as well as a youth delegate**. As a follow-up to its opinion on structured youth engagement on climate and sustainability, the EESC included a youth delegate in its delegation to UNFCCC COP meetings for the first time in 2021 and committed to repeating this successful experience in the following years through the establishment of [EESC Youth Delegate to COP programme](#). The programme, carried out in collaboration with Generation Climate Europe and the European Youth Forum, enriches the EESC's work on climate and biodiversity by incorporating youth perspectives, while providing a structured, meaningful mechanism for youth participation, amplifying their voices in climate and biodiversity forums.

The EESC has been actively taking part in UNFCCC COPs since COP20 in Peru and in the CBD COPs since COP15 in Montreal, as part of the EU delegation and with observer status. Through these experiences, the EESC delegations, and the NAT Section, have had the opportunity to learn how COPs are conducted, what role national delegation negotiators and the various stakeholders play, and what positions and demands the different civil society actors hold. In essence, it has been a journey of learning about the COPs framing and operation, using participation into COPs to deliver targeted messages based on EESC opinions and contributions, strengthening inter-institutional collaboration, and seeking new ways to contribute to specific negotiation workstreams.

At this point, the **PG on COP Work Programme for 2026** aims to take a leap forward and **strengthen even further the EESC's participation in the UNFCCC and CBD processes in a strategic way**. The aim is to leverage all the knowledge acquired in previous years to play a more strategic role. The PG on COP provides an **ideal space to influence EU institutions' and Member States' positions ahead of COPs, convene with civil society actors, as well as to translate the work of the whole year into action when the COPs takes place**.

In 2026, the PG on COP is encouraged to work on **several topics, which are to be strategic at UNFCCC COP31 and CBD COP17**: 1) Increase synergies between the Rio Conventions; 2) Just transition; 3) Climate mitigation; 4) Climate adaptation; 5) Climate governance; 6) Biodiversity. Building on previous work, the PG on COP will continue ensuring a strategic cross-sectoral approach by providing an opportunity to jointly address different dimensions of the planetary crisis together.

Strategic priorities

1. Increase synergies between the Rio Conventions

Developing systemic approaches to address climate, biodiversity, pollution and water challenges is essential. In line with the NAT priority to address the triple planetary crisis altogether, enhancing synergies between the Rio Conventions - the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC), the United Nations Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD) and the United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification (UNCCD) - offers potential to streamline processes and deliver transformative results. With this in mind, the PG on COP will align climate and biodiversity action and governance throughout its work and discussions, and will examine practical approaches to reinforce synergies among processes and outcomes of the Rio Conventions building from one COP to another. The PG on COP will also seek to deliver targeted messages on enablers of climate and biodiversity action such as nature-based solutions, circular economy and bioeconomy.

2. Just transition

The Committee, together with civil society organisations, has actively championed the just transition agenda at both the European Union and international level, namely through its flagship opinions on just transition as well as the EESC [contribution to the UNFCCC Just Transition Work Programme \(JTWP\)](#). Acknowledging its strategic role as the EU institution representing organised civil society on the ground, the EESC has built up a regular cooperation with the EU Just Transition Task Force, a group of technical experts on just transition policy, that falls under the [Working Party on International Environment Issues \(WPIEI\)](#) of the Council of the EU, that helps preparing positions ahead of UNFCCC COP.

COP30 was a milestone for just transition with the adoption of a [Just Transition Mechanism](#), thanks to inclusive collaboration and civil society's efforts, but this is only the beginning of its practical delivery. This year will be decisive for the operationalisation of the JTWP, as efforts shift from political commitment to developing, implementing, and enforcing frameworks for global rollout. The EESC is well positioned to help define effective implementation methods for the JTWP. As such, the PG on COP should continue its cooperation with the EU Just Transition Task Force and consider actively participating in the Bonn dialogues and workshop prior to COP31.

3. Climate mitigation – Transitioning away from fossil fuels

Although UNFCCC COP decisions show weakened commitment to fossil fuels, alternative initiatives/processes still offer a positive movement ahead of COP31. Acting as a bridge between civil society and the institutions, the EESC is uniquely positioned to help build a consensual, positive and solutions-oriented narrative around climate mitigation. The EESC remains committed to pushing for stronger efforts and clear pledges to cut greenhouse-gas emissions and transition away from fossil energy in a fair and equitable way, building on previous work such as the [European Climate Law amendment](#) and [fossil fuel subsidies](#) opinions.

Specifically, the upcoming partnerships event on '[The European leadership on fossil fuel phase out: Lessons learned and future directions](#)', hosted by the SUS POL project and the EESC, will bring together high-level representatives from the European Commission, Parliament, Member States and civil society

to discuss lessons learned about transitions away from fossil fuels and identify possible future directions for EU leadership. The event presents an excellent opportunity to follow up on the EESC's previous work on fossil fuel subsidies and just transition. It will be a very timely and strategic opportunity for the EESC to advance EU's efforts on dialogues and initiatives aimed at building fossil fuel phase out roadmaps, in particular ahead of the [Summit on the Just Transition Away from Fossil Fuels](#), which will be hosted by Colombia and the Netherlands in April 2026 in Santa Marta, and of COP31.

3. Climate adaptation

Historically, adaptation has not received as much attention as mitigation in climate negotiations, but this trend has been gradually changing since the Paris Agreement included the Global Goal on Adaptation in its Article 7.

Precisely because of the importance of adaptation policies in Pacific Island countries, it is expected that the Australian political presidency of COP31 will give it a prominent position on the agenda. The conversations on adaptation will inevitably be influenced once again by the aspirations of developing countries to increase financial flows for adaptation.

The EESC already has a relevant [contribution](#) published on the topic, but this year it will adopt new opinions on the [EU Water Resilience Strategy and Climate Resilience Framework](#) and the upcoming Commission's legislative proposal on the Adaptation Law. The PG on COP will build on this work on adaptation.

4. Climate governance - Improvement of civil society involvement in the COP processes

Debates on reforming climate governance have often taken place outside the UNFCCC framework. Historically, both scholars and civil society have criticised the fact that any country has the power to veto any decision and that the demands of civil society are left out of the negotiating rooms.

The UNFCCC has made small progress, such as the adoption of the [Marrakech Partnership or Global Climate Action](#), which was launched after COP21 in Paris to mobilise stronger and more ambitious climate action by all Parties and non-Party stakeholders.

This debate is gaining momentum, and although it is unlikely that it will become an object of the negotiations in the short term, the general impression is that it will eventually be addressed at some point to increase the legitimacy of the process. This debate runs parallel to the growing number of climate change litigation cases, also outside the UNFCCC process, which reinforces the narrative on governance reform and introduces increasing pressure on countries to deliver more ambitious obligations.

5. Biodiversity - Governance and implementation

The biodiversity loss crisis showcases how urgent it is to rethink our relationship with nature and to protect and – where necessary – restore the natural ecosystems on which human beings and the majority of their economic activities depend, including agriculture and fisheries. It is estimated that more than 50% of global GDP is dependent on nature, and some 40% of jobs globally directly depend on healthy ecosystems. In this context, NAT will continue to engage in discussions at international level and in the CBD process, support implementation of the Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework, and contribute to the ambitious path to securing the global vision of living in harmony with nature by 2050.

In particular, this mandate will focus on assessing the EU's and the Member States' contributions to COP17 Global Review and following up on recent the recent opinions on [One Health](#) and [Nature Credits](#), which will feature prominently on the agenda of the CBD and the European Commission.

To ensure consistency with the work carried out in previous years, the PG on COP will also continue the follow-up work to CBD COP15 and COP16. In particular, it will explore the link between the circular economy and the bioeconomy as catalysts for the conservation of natural resources. It will also continue the work on governance, supporting farmers', fishers' and forest owners' organisations in playing a more active role in the CBD process by facilitating training and/or partnership events on important CBD milestones and different negotiation trends.

Working methodology

The PG on COP convenes five times a year, using each meeting as an opportunity to deepen its understanding of the climate and biodiversity COPs processes and to stay informed about the core aspects of ongoing negotiations. Through these meetings, the PG on COP will strategically prepare the participation of the EESC delegations in the upcoming COP31 and COP17, ensuring its actions and contributions are closely aligned with the established PG on COP and NAT work programmes.

It is therefore proposed to **work on the different topics selected as strategic, through continued cooperation with identified stakeholders and partners to help strengthen civil society views**. Actors outside the EESC who will be invited to the meetings of the PG on COP will not only be relevant for their substantive contribution to the topic in question but also enable the establishment of partnerships for joint events during COP31.

In order to **contribute to the EU strategic and political positions**, representatives from the Commission, EP, and Council (Member States) will regularly be invited to the PG on COP meetings. This will allow the members of the PG on COP to ask questions and deliver recommendations, ensuring structured dialogue and timely, effective EESC contributions for the negotiations.

The EESC will maintain a **structured approach to channeling the perspectives of youth organisations and young people into climate and biodiversity forums**, through the [EESC Youth Delegate to COP programme](#), the Youth Task Force meetings and [the Youth Climate and Sustainability Round Tables](#). In particular, the EESC will seek to organise a Round Table / Youth Policy Dialogue with Commissioner Hoekstra before the summer, in collaboration with the European Commission and youth organisations, in order to contribute to the preparation of the EU position for COP31.

Regular exchanges with other sections, permanent groups and observatories will be established. Each PG on COP meeting will be accompanied by a **concise document summarising the meeting's outcomes**, which will also serve to highlight the EESC's political perspectives and opinions on various topics. These outcome documents will constitute the background material to be included in the COP31 and COP17 briefings and used during the meetings to be organised during COPs.