

**Conference of the Civil Society Organisations' Group
of the European Economic and Social Committee
in the framework of the Irish Presidency of the Council of the European Union
University College Cork, 30 June 2026**

Civil society driving the EU sustainability agenda

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS



CONFERENCE 

Civil society driving the EU sustainability agenda

30 June 2026 | 10:00 - 13:00 (IST) | University College Cork,
Boole Basement 3, College Rd

X @CSOGroupEESC #Ireland2026EU #SDGs #ResilientCommunities



**Civil society from across the EU gathers in Cork to reinforce
Europe's sustainability agenda – civil society must be fully part of it.
University College Cork (UCC), Cork - 30 June 2026**

The aim of this event was to give fresh momentum to the European sustainable development agenda at a time when sustainability policy is coming under increasing pressure, despite being urgently needed. The event highlighted the role of local communities and civil society organisations in designing, implementing and monitoring sustainability measures that make our communities more resilient. The message that emerged from the event is that civil society is, in any case, a force to be reckoned with and should be fully involved at every stage of designing and implementing the European sustainability agenda. The Civil Society Organisations' Group has invested heavily in sustainability, maintaining its support for this agenda through numerous EESC opinions and, more so recently, through a series of key events from the Cypriot to the Irish Presidencies of the EU. These events renew and reaffirm the basis for the Civil Society Organisations' Group to continue its efforts and support for the sustainability agenda beyond 2030.

The path and vision of the Civil Society Organisations' Group continues from Larnaca to Cork and beyond

Sustainability agenda

The EESC's Civil Society Organisations' Group:

- maintains, more than ever, its commitment to and support for the European sustainability agenda, which includes implementing the European Green Deal and ensuring a just and fair energy transition, and is available to provide practical recommendations, gathered during this event and others, to ensure its effective implementation.
- highlights that its commitment to the sustainability agenda has been steadfast; with its new Presidency, it has renewed and strengthened this commitment, incorporating it as one of the key drivers of its work programme, alongside the strengthening of resilient communities. The feedback received during this conference – from local and national civil society organisations, academia, public authorities and others – confirms the importance of this commitment. It will inform the Group's work.
- has invested in this priority and concrete vision, enshrining it in a series of key events building on previous work: in Larnaca, in the framework of the Cyprus Presidency, mainly focussed on water resilience; in Brussels, in partnership with ASviS, a major Italian stakeholder in sustainability, focussed on the state of play of the sustainability agenda at European level; and in Cork, which highlighted the crucial and unique role that civil society must play in shaping and implementing the sustainability agenda, bringing local knowledge and practical experience into the conversation and building public trust and support.
- reaffirms its commitment to the European sustainability agenda, inspired by the United Nations' 2030 Agenda and its 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), which set out a consistent and coherent broad strategy that goes well beyond environmental policy, enshrining economic, social, environmental and democratic dimensions. As such, they must serve as the compass for the EU, both now and for future generations.

- believes that the United Nations’ SDGs must absolutely continue to serve as the compass for Europe’s future well beyond 2030. Civil society organisations and policymakers must therefore actively take part in the review process of the SDGs planned for the end of the decade with the aim of strengthening the goals and reflecting current and future challenges.
- is aware that the objectives and goals set out by the United Nations will, in all likelihood, not be achieved by 2030. While a delay in meeting this deadline can no longer be avoided, what could never be accepted is the SDGs being abandoned.
- reaffirms that the sustainability agenda, as an overall agenda that efficiently combines and promotes high social, economic and environmental standards, must be supported. The Circular Economy Act is a concrete tool that brings together these dimensions, proving, once again, that competitiveness and environmental protection can be complementary rather than at odds with each other.
- is convinced that the energy transition must play a central role in the European agenda, especially today, when Europe, more than ever, must end its dependence on fossil fuels, especially because of the complex geopolitical situation.
- recalls, finally, that the objective of the sustainability agenda is firmly enshrined in Article 3 of the Treaty on European Union: ‘The European Union shall work for the sustainable development of Europe based on balanced economic growth and price stability, a highly competitive social market economy, aiming at full employment and social progress, and a high level of protection and improvement of the quality of the environment.’
- commits to combating disinformation and populist and unsubstantiated narratives on the European sustainability agenda and singles out the role of research and education in that context and calls for a robust and consistent housing strategy, combined with an ambitious anti-poverty EU strategy.

Civil society and resilient communities

The EESC’s Civil Society Organisations’ Group:

- is part of the EESC, where building a dynamic consensus among all walks of life across the 27 Member States is in its DNA. As such, it can interact with thousands of organisations and NGOs and millions of citizens. It gives a voice to those who have none.
- stresses that the role of communities is of paramount importance: they are the foundation of our society; they demonstrate resilience, commitment and innovation. As such, resilient communities are the drivers that can make a real difference.
- knows that civil society will need to remain committed to its objectives and identify the steps to be taken.
- is aware that civil society will need to bring communities and people along with it.
- is aware that sustainability and democracy are two sides of the same coin.

- calls for genuine and consistent empowerment of civil society, which must be involved at every stage of the European agenda. This must include robust funding, in line with a strong and consistent AgoraEU programme.
- reaffirms that the EESC provides a well-structured mechanism for effective civil society engagement.

Brussels, 18 July 2026