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**THE SPANISH PRESIDENCY OF
THE COUNCIL OF THE EU:
OPPORTUNITIES AND CHALLENGES**

FOREWORD

The Spanish Presidency and other challenges

Séamus BOLAND (IE)

President, Civil Society Organisations' Group



Séamus Boland © EESC

On 1 July, Spain took over the Presidency of the Council of the EU from Sweden. Its **priorities**¹ include the development of strategic industries linked to a comprehensive strengthening of economic security.

The presidency also wishes to highlight the reality of climate change, while at the same time hasten the implementation of strategies designed to change our behaviour and achieve the main targets set out in this context in the numerous international agreements that now exist. The country claims that if we execute this well, the green transition will drastically reduce our dependency on fossil fuels and at the same time create up to one million jobs in the next ten years.

This is of course set against the backdrop of the World Meteorological Organization's (WMO) **report** on the "State of the Climate in Europe 2022"². The report states that 2022 was marked by extreme heat, drought and wildfires. Sea surface temperatures reached new highs and glacier melt was unprecedented. According to the report, Europe is the fastest-warming continent in the world. "In 2022, Europe was approximately 2.3 °C above the pre-industrial (1850-1900) average used as a baseline for the Paris Agreement on climate change". Several countries, including Belgium, France, Germany, Ireland, Italy, Luxembourg, Portugal, Spain, Switzerland and the United Kingdom had their warmest year on record. Domestically, Spain continues to experience one of the worst droughts in history. In 2022, Spain's water reserve decreased to 41.9% of its total capacity by 26 July, with even lower capacity in some basins.

In the social and wellbeing area, much is expected of this presidency, and while the presidency is a means to highlight the EU priorities of the day, it still retains the ability to reflect the views of the host country. No doubt

the reality in terms of food production will feature at our Group's **conference**³ in Santiago de Compostela in Spain in September. If, as some experts are already saying, we are at the climate change tipping point, then it is certain that we will encounter huge disruptions in the food chain, with knock on effects such as higher prices and scarcity.

On a different note, I recently had the pleasure of speaking to a group of students in Oporto in Portugal in the context of a project entitled "**Beyond NEET**"⁴. The meeting was organised by the Board of the Union of Portuguese Mutual Societies (UMP), which is the organisation represented in our Group by our colleague Edgar Vilares Diogo. The project that was supported by the Erasmus+ programme aims to introduce students to organisations involved in local and community development. It can help improve a range of different employment skills, but it can also introduce young people to various civil society organisations, which will be heartened by their involvement. Young people's enthusiasm and dedication in addition to valuable training, will add huge sustainability to the organisations involved and ensure that this work will continue into the future.

It is one of the reasons why the Civil Society Organisations' Group promotes the agenda of youth issues, as demonstrated again in the **youth seminar**⁵, which we organised in cooperation with the Young European Federalists (**JEF Europe**)⁶ on 4 July. Our Group very much welcomes the fact that EESC President Oliver Röpké has made young people and their concerns a central part of his presidency.

It is also why in the Civil Society Organisations' Group we are committed to including young people in our work and extending an open invitation to them to connect with our Group so that we can jointly promote a fundamental role for young people in the Europe of tomorrow.

Séamus Boland

THIS ISSUE

The Spanish Presidency of the Council of the EU: opportunities and challenges p. 3

Comments on current affairs p. 7

Members in leadership positions - term 2023-2025 p. 7

News from the Group p. 8

Highlights from the last plenary session p. 10

Overview of recent work p. 11

Upcoming events p. 11

What is EESC opinion SOC/758 all about? p. 12

1 Spanish Presidency of the Council of the EU, priorities, <https://spanish-presidency.consilium.europa.eu/en/programme/priorities/>

2 WMO, State of the Climate in Europe 2022, https://library.wmo.int/index.php?lvl=notice_display&id=22285

3 EESC, events, <https://europa.eu/ig8kItC>

4 UMP, Beyond NEET, <https://beyondneet.mutualismo.pt/>

5 EESC, Youth under pressure – Seminar, <https://europa.eu/INkIw3Q>

6 Young European Federalists, <https://jef.eu/>

THE SPANISH PRESIDENCY OF THE COUNCIL OF THE EU: OPPORTUNITIES AND CHALLENGES

The potential of age in intergenerational relations



Andreas Kruse © EESC

Andreas KRUSE (DE)
German Federal Association of Senior Citizens' Organisations (BAGSO)
Emeritus professor and director, Institute of Gerontology, University of Heidelberg

One of the key factors in ageing well and with meaning is the experience of **being able to take shared responsibility for the younger generation**, reflecting a belief in the value of dedicating one's own life to the service of society and helping to give young people a good future. There are plenty of examples, both nationally and internationally, of older people getting involved in the responsible management of **natural resources, climate action, democracy and peace** – always with a view to young people's future. The value, in terms of **intergenerational solidarity**, of these cognitive, emotional, social and cultural efforts by older people cannot be underestimated. And it is clear both from (scientific and practical) monitoring of intergenerational group activities

and from methodologically robust interviews with young people that they very much appreciate the engagement of older people: not just for their practical contributions, but for the feeling that older people are interested in their lives.

These individual and socio-cultural potentials of ageing were particularly highlighted in the [International Plan of Action on Ageing](#)¹ (which I was involved in drafting) and at the [Second World Assembly on Ageing](#)² (Madrid, 2002), where it was stressed that political and civil society organisations should put much more emphasis on these potentials and make much more use of them than in the past. Unfortunately,

the **recommendations** we made on exploiting the potential of older people in civil society (and in the world of work) **have not been adequately implemented at national or international level**.

This implementation is a major challenge for the present and the future, and in this regard, I am expecting a lot from the [Spanish Presidency](#)³, which has for a number of years been placing particular importance on the potential of ageing in political discourse. When it comes to exploiting this potential, it is important to develop **training programmes on the use of digital technology**, as this is a key factor in increasing participation by older people.



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- 1 International Plan of Action on ageing, Vienna, 1982, <https://www.un.org/en/conferences/ageing/vienna1982>
- 2 AGE Platform Europe, MIPAA, <https://www.age-platform.eu/policy-work/madrid-international-plan-action-ageing-mipaa>
- 3 Spanish Presidency of the Council of the EU, <https://spanish-presidency.consilium.europa.eu/en/>

People over profit - let EESC show the way



Irma Kilim
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Irma KILIM (SE)
Director of Advocacy, IOGT-NTO⁴

In the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic, we have learnt how important it is to **prioritise our health, both at the individual level and at societal level**. If people are ill, everything breaks down;

we cannot work, and we cannot care for each other or our environment. This therefore calls for a policy at EU level that puts people's health first. All decisions in the EU must be taken based on a health perspective, as all decisions affect our health in one way or another.

The phrase "health in all policies" has long been used in the EU, but, despite this, there is a lack of tools and methods **to really put health first in all EU policies**. This is

something that I believe the EESC could take the lead on and work towards. We, the Members of the EESC, represent civil society and the voice of the people. Let us carry the message that the EU of the future should and must put people's health first!

One clear threat and barrier to this approach is presented by **industries that are harmful to health, such as the tobacco and alcohol industries**. These industries advocate and push for

4 IOGT-NTO is part of a worldwide movement that fights to ensure that alcohol does not stand in the way of people's development and health, <https://www.iogt.se/>

legislative proposals aimed at increasing their profits and selling more of their products at the expense of people's well-being and health. This is a **clear conflict of interest** and these industries should therefore not have a place at the table when public health decisions are being taken.

As Spain takes over the presidency baton from Sweden, it is important to bear in mind that, regardless of whether we are

talking about the green transition, the digital transition or the social agenda, the most important thing is that people's health must take precedence over the profit-making interest of businesses.

Can we at the EESC have the courage to be the institution that starts working in earnest to **make "health in all policies" a reality?**



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Digital transformation and the Spanish EU Presidency



João NABAIS (PT)
Member, Portuguese
Association for Consumer
Protection (DECO)

The **Spanish Presidency**¹ of the Council of the European Union has just started. Expectations for **important steps to be taken to accelerate the EU's digital transition** are high.

The EESC has recently produced important opinions on digitalisation (**Company law / use of digital tools and processes**², **Interoperability Europe Act**³, **Further enhancing the EU's digital competitiveness**⁴, **Digitalisation of Justice**⁵) primarily on the basis of initiatives by the European Commission, European Parliament and the Council.

The **digital transformation of public services** must be intensified by speeding up interoperability at national

and European level. This must also be **extended to the private sector**, so that businesses and citizens in general can participate in this process, which is so important for improving living conditions in EU countries.

Accelerating digital transformation in the health sector is critical. This can be achieved by giving citizens access to their clinical data and by establishing links between the health systems of all EU countries to ensure greater protection for citizens when they need healthcare in countries in which they are residing temporarily – travelling, or for school or work-related reasons.

It is also important to pursue **digital transformation in the field of Justice**, giving citizens access to their legal trials both at national and European level, including full access to information contained in the commercial and land registers of all EU countries, and by **strengthening collaboration between**

European judicial authorities in combating crime.

In the field of tax, digital transformation is crucial for improving contact between citizens and tax administrations, whether this is to ask for clarifications, to send documents requiring action by the tax authority, or even for consulting the tax situation of citizens, and it is essential for making tax collection more efficient and more effective.



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1 Spanish Presidency of the Council of the EU, <https://spanish-presidency.consilium.europa.eu/en/>

2 EESC opinion INT/1029, <https://europa.eu/!J4WhDW>

3 EESC opinion INT/1003, <https://europa.eu/!CkN9VP>

4 EESC opinion INT/1010, <https://europa.eu/!JjVk8k>

5 EESC opinion INT/932, <https://europa.eu/!qw38kG>

Why Europe's economic agenda must be social and its social agenda must be economic



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President, EESC ECO
Section⁶
President, Greek National
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President, European
Disability Forum (EDF)

President, International Disability Alliance (IDA)
Member, Economic and Social Council of Greece (OKE)
Member, Greek National Commission of Human Rights (EEDA)

For too long we have treated economic and social policies as distinguishable. **At times the social agenda is almost seen as the antithesis of economic policy** – an attitude that slows the European Union down as it strives for faster and stronger economic growth.

However, now more than ever, we are bearing witness to just how central social issues are to our economic policies. **For what use is growth for the sake of growth if our quality of life is not**

increasing? In current times, following the COVID-19 pandemic and the Russian aggression in Ukraine, many of Europe's social and economic objectives appear to be aligning. This is to say that the **soaring cost of living and energy prices and the shrinking spending power** in real terms that many Europeans are facing are not only a danger to Europe economically, but also on a human level.

These are issues that are worrying economists and citizens alike across the EU,

6 EESC Section for Economic and Monetary Union and Economic and Social Cohesion, <https://europa.eu/!RD39rY>

particularly those with low incomes, those who face barriers to quality employment, or who typically have a higher cost of living, such as persons with disabilities and households with children. When inflation and cost of living rise at the rate they currently are, and when spending power shrinks, **it is not just people that suffer, but the stability of our economy as a whole.**

We need to take this as a sign that economic growth and prosperity need to be based on creating an economy that works for all people, and where each

person operating within it, even those in the most challenging situations, can make ends meet and can be supported to be active in the functioning of our societies. **The [Spanish Presidency](https://spanish-presidency.consilium.europa.eu/en/)¹ of the EU has a unique opportunity to make the economic agenda social and the social agenda economic,** putting in place a transparent and accountable framework that will promote a sense of ownership among EU citizens.



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1 Spanish Presidency of the Council of the EU, <https://spanish-presidency.consilium.europa.eu/en/>

Spanish Presidency of the Council of the EU: social economy in the spotlight?



Lourdes MÁRQUEZ DE LA CALLEJA

Director of Alliances and International Relations, Fundación ONCE¹

Lourdes Marquéz de la Calleja

The [Spanish Presidency of the Council of the EU](https://spanish-presidency.consilium.europa.eu/en/)² kicks off at a historic moment for the social economy. In April, the United Nations adopted its [resolution](https://www.un.org/development/desa/en/news/sustainable/resolution-promoting-the-social-and-solidarity-economy-for-sustainable-development/)³ on *Promoting the social and solidarity economy for sustainable development*, which is a major breakthrough for our sector. While both the EU and various national governments had, for quite a while, recognised the social economy as a driver of inclusive growth and competitiveness and had committed to protecting and promoting it, such recognition was missing at a global level. This gap was undermining the

development of our sector across the various continents.

A few weeks later, in early June, the European Commission adopted its [proposal](https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/detail/en/ip19_1111)⁴ for a *Council Recommendation on developing social economy framework conditions*, aimed at supporting Member States in integrating the social economy into their policies and creating supportive measures and a favourable environment for the sector. This instrument is a further step in the right direction. Once discussed and adopted by the Council, the governments of the 27 Member States will have to adopt or update their national strategies for the social economy within 18 months.

Spain, as the first EU country to adopt a [social economy law](https://www.boe.es/boe/L-2011-11-17/indiferente-11-17-2011-11-17.html)⁵ back in 2011, is particularly well placed to lead this exercise. The country's favourable legal framework has fostered the growth of world-leading social economy

enterprises that focus on empowering individuals with disabilities, such as [Grupo Social ONCE](https://www.once.es/)⁶ and [Fundación ONCE](https://www.fundaciononce.es/)⁷. These specialised economic ventures play a crucial role in achieving upward social and economic convergence. They also contribute to the global implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs⁸) and align with the [European Pillar of Social Rights](https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/detail/en/ip19_1111)⁹, as the foundation sector represented at EU level by [Philea](https://philea.eu/)¹⁰ does, by ensuring equal opportunities for all and leaving no one behind.

Needless to say, the Spanish government and the EU institutions can count on these organisations while promoting and raising awareness of the benefits of the social economy in the coming months.

1 Fundación ONCE, <https://www.fundaciononce.es/es>
 2 Spanish Presidency of the Council of the EU, <https://spanish-presidency.consilium.europa.eu/en/>
 3 United Nations, news, <https://unsse.org/2023/04/19/historic-moment-for-the-sse-at-its-66th-plenary-meeting-the-un-general-assembly-adopts-the-resolution-promoting-the-social-and-solidarity-economy-for-sustainable-development/>
 4 European Commission, news, <https://europa.eu/!fRn3CK>
 5 Spanish Law on Social Economy, Law 5/2011, <https://www.cepes.es/files/publicaciones/64.pdf>
 6 Grupo Social ONCE, <https://gruposocialonce.com/>
 7 Fundación ONCE, <https://www.fundaciononce.es/es>
 8 United Nations, Sustainable Development Goals, <https://sdgs.un.org/goals>
 9 European Commission, Social Pillar, <https://europa.eu/!XRkm6k>
 10 Philea, <https://philea.eu/>



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The Spanish Presidency is a unique opportunity to position the professions as safe socioeconomic players

An interview with Victoria Ortega



Victoria ORTEGA
President, Unión Profesional
First Vice-President of the European Council of the Liberal Professions (CEPLIS)

Victoria Ortega © Eva Vieira

What are the challenges for the Spanish Presidency?

As is well known, the Spanish Presidency of the Council of the European Union¹ will cover the second half of 2023, before the 2024 European Parliament elections. During this period, Spain has a responsibility as an EU Member State to continue working on strategic issues such as the green transition, the digital transformation and the Social Agenda for the next European cycle.

The presidency expects to play a leading role at the upcoming United Nations Summit² on the 2030 Agenda³, the Sustainable Development Goals⁴, as well as at the Climate Change Conference⁵. It has announced its intention to reform fiscal rules in order to enable Member States to maintain healthy public accounts while financing public services, the green transition and the digital transformation adequately.

Finally, the Spanish Presidency has announced that it will work to further deepen the internal market, strengthening the banking union⁶ and capital markets union⁷, and improve common instruments such as the NextGenerationEU⁸ funds while seeking to advance discussions such as the new Pact on Migration and Asylum⁹, which we consider urgent.

What are your expectations for the presidency?

As president of the Spanish interprofessional association Unión Profesional¹⁰ and vice-president of the European Council of the Liberal Professions (CEPLIS¹¹), I believe that this is a unique opportunity to position the professions as safe socioeconomic players in contexts of uncertainty but also preventing unfavourable situations.

Our constant concern in Spain's period of European leadership must be to demonstrate everything we have done so far, to share it and to learn from the exchange that will take place during this time. We hope to be able to discuss and share knowledge and views on all matters that concern us and that ultimately affect everyone.

What do you plan to do in the framework of the presidency?

We want to take this opportunity to:

- Highlight the concept of a European professional, on which we have worked over this last decade in CEPLIS, given the way the professions are directly concerned with safeguarding the fundamental rights of citizens;
- Show the progress that has been made with lifelong learning and ethical regulation as guarantees of social progress;
- Focus particularly on the digitalisation of the professions subsector, in line with the EU's and all the Member States' commitment with a view to a sustainable and equal future.

The presidency is an opportunity for dialogue. We will make it the subject of a column in our Profesiones [Professions] review¹², and we plan to organise meetings in line with initiatives already underway, such as the European Year of Skills.

- 1 Spanish Presidency of the Council of the EU, <https://spanish-presidency.consilium.europa.eu/en/>
- 2 United Nations, <https://www.un.org/en/common-agenda/summit-of-the-future>
- 3 United Nations, 2030 Agenda, <https://sdgs.un.org/2030agenda#:~:text=We%20resolve%2C%20between%20now%20and,protection%20of%20the%20planet%20and>
- 4 United Nations, SDGs, <https://sdgs.un.org/goals>
- 5 United Nations, COP28, <https://www.cop28.com/en/>
- 6 European Commission, banking union, <https://europa.eu/!KcnVvw>
- 7 European Commission, capital markets union, <https://europa.eu/!vnhJ7q>
- 8 European Union, NextGenerationEU, https://next-generation-eu.europa.eu/index_en
- 9 European Commission, New Pact on Migration and Asylum, <https://europa.eu/!vhqGff>
- 10 Unión Profesional, <https://unionprofesional.com/>
- 11 CEPLIS, <https://ceplis.org/>
- 12 Unión Profesional, Profesiones, <https://unionprofesional.com/revista-profesiones/>



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ON CURRENT AFFAIRS

The E-facility at the heart of a reformed electricity market



Jan DIRX (NL)
Vice-President, Civil Society Organisations' Group
Liaison Officer, Groene11 (Green11), Dutch nature and environmental organisations

Jan Dirx © EESC

The [European Sustainable Energy Week \(EUSEW\) 2023](#)¹ took place in Brussels and online on 20-22 June, under the theme of *Accelerating the clean energy transition – towards lower bills and greater skills*. This year's theme was very well chosen, as the urgent need for the clean energy transition is all too clear if you look at the rising energy bills that consumers and businesses have had to pay in recent times. **More renewable energy is a key condition for affordable energy bills.**

To address this properly, reform of the European electricity market is needed. This is why the European Economic and Social Committee has long called for such

reform. The [Spanish Presidency](#)² of the EU, which began this month, is also a strong supporter of reform. At the TEN section³ meeting in April this year, Albert Riera, adviser to the Spanish Secretary of State for Energy, put forward some ideas for the reform of the electricity market. **A key element is a new regulatory framework that secures investment in renewable energy by entering into long-term contracts.**

A new regulatory framework, centred on an government-established E-facility, is also in the [opinion](#)⁴ adopted by the EESC in its plenary session in June. **The premise is that energy should not be treated as a typical commodity**, such as coffee or steel. It is a key element of public service. It is therefore necessary to set up a regulatory framework for future energy that guarantees an environmentally friendly, affordable and reliable energy supply and the right to energy. This framework will become a hybrid model

of market forces and government-driven targeted management, with the motto "liberalisation where possible, regulation where necessary". The core of this hybrid model is a government-established E-facility which, through long-term procurement contracts, purchases electricity from generators and sells it to the suppliers of household customers, SMEs, large-scale consumers and, where appropriate and possible, to other countries too.

The EESC is also convinced that the market should be designed in such a way that **consumers or other small operators** which also generate their own electricity can benefit as much as possible from the electricity they generate themselves, even if they supply it to the grid. An example of another, fairer way to offer this opportunity to small producers is our idea of an "**electricity bank**" set out in the opinion.

1 European Sustainable Energy Week 2023, <https://europa.eu/FdbNvc>

2 Spanish Presidency of the Council of the EU, <https://spanish-presidency.consilium.europa.eu/en/>

3 EESC Section for Transport, Energy, Infrastructure and the Information Society

4 EESC Opinion TEN/793, <https://europa.eu/!Mxh9Y4>

MEMBERS IN LEADERSHIP POSITIONS TERM 2023-2025

Louise Grabo is re-elected as President of the EESC Observatory of the Digital Transition and the Single Market



Louise GRABO (SE)
Youth representative,
National Council
of Swedish Youth
Organisations (LSU)
President, EESC
Observatory of the Digital
Transition and the Single
Market (DSMO)⁵

Louise Grabo © EESC

I have a Bachelor's degree in European studies from the University of Gothenburg. I started to work for the Swedish Business Owners Associations and then became Secretary General of the new industry association [Swedish Fintech Association](#)⁶. I have been building up the organisation for five years and we now **represent 90+ innovative financial companies.**

In addition to my full-time job, I have been involved in several civil society organisations. I was the Swedish Youth Council's delegate to the [European Youth Dialogue](#)⁷ back in 2017-2018. Between 2020 and 2022 I was chair of a **gender equality** organisation called [Maktsalongen](#)⁸.

My first term chairing the DSMO was unique. I was a new member and COVID-19 changed the way the observatory worked. For the majority of the term all our work was online. It felt like I had just started, and I still have ideas for making the observatory more relevant and meaningful. I'm not done yet.

During my second half term as DSMO president, the Observatory will focus on

the **digital transition** as it is evolving very fast and affects us all. In the last few years, the European Union has pushed out many new regulations on the digital transition, and now it is time to evaluate them and see how they affect the single market, companies, workers and civil society.

There also will be some time next spring and summer while we are waiting for the [European elections](#)⁹ and for the new European Commission to be in place. I hope that the observatory will be more proactive and push the new Commission in the right direction so that **the digital transition benefits all citizens.**

5 EESC DSMO, <https://europa.eu/lvV99mU>

6 Swedish Fintech Association, <https://www.swefintech.se/>

7 European Union, EU Youth Dialogue, https://youth.europa.eu/eu-youth-dialogue_en

8 Maktsalongen, <https://maktsalongen.se/>

9 Council, European Parliament elections, <https://europa.eu/nDVHrx>

NEWS FROM THE GROUP

EESC President Oliver Röpke's priorities and links to the Civil Society Organisations' Group work programme

On 14 June 2023, the newly elected EESC President Oliver Röpke joined for the first time, in his new capacity, the Civil Society Organisations' (CSO) Group meeting to discuss on the priorities of his mandate 2023-2025¹, in connection to the [Civil Society Organisations' Group's work programme 2023](#)².

Several Members of the Civil Society Organisations' Group reiterated their full support for the new president's programme, which is very much in line with the priorities of the CSO Group such as **strengthening EU values and increasing youth participation in**

decision-making procedures, as stressed by the Group president Séamus Boland.

In this new political context, the critical importance of the stability and prosperity of EU neighbours in the Eastern Partnership and Western Balkans was also mentioned, supporting and empowering them to defend freedom and democracy, in parallel to closer cooperation with the EESC.



Séamus Boland and Oliver Röpke (from left to right) © EESC

In conclusion Mr Röpke said that civil society has a key role to play in bringing together European citizens and in shaping the future of Europe.

- 1 EESC President Oliver Röpke – 2023/2025 Manifesto, <https://europa.eu/!wKqrmJ>
- 2 EESC 2023 Work programme of the Civil Society Organisations' Group, <https://europa.eu/!qB3MVY>

Exploring farmers' perspectives: sustainable use of pesticides, CAP post-2027, and Ukraine's agricultural challenges

The second meeting of the [Farmers' Category](#)³ took place on 21 June, chaired by **Arnold Puech d'Alissac** and **John Comer**. This meeting saw the participation of three keynote speakers: **Andrew Owen-Griffiths**, Head of Unit, Plants and Organics, DG SANTE⁴, European Commission, **Catherine Geslain-Laneelle**, Director for Strategy and Policy Analysis, DG AGRI⁵, European Commission, and **Oleksandra Avramenko**, from the Ukrainian Agribusiness Club (UCAB)⁶.

During the debate on the revision of the [Sustainable Use of Pesticides Directive](#)⁷ with **Andrew Owen-Griffiths**, Members urged the Commission to consider the impact it will have. They raised concerns such as worries about the EP ENVI Committee's [proposal](#) for an 80% pesticide reduction⁸, the potential impact on fruit and vegetable production, food security, and the worrying consequences for the sensitive areas of the farming sector.

During the second debate on common agricultural policy (CAP) post-2027, the

speaker **Catherine Geslain-Laneelle** highlighted the compounding effects of crises such as COVID-19, climate change, and the war in Ukraine, posing multiple risks to the farming sector. Members addressed various topics such as the uncertain future

of the CAP, the need to increase its budget, differences in implementing regulations among Member States, partnerships with farmers to address global issues, and access to land for young farmers. As Members emphasised the need for continued collective discussions, **Ms Geslain-Laneelle** reiterated DG AGRI's willingness to listen to farmers' concerns.

Finally, **Oleksandra Avramenko** presented a comparison of Ukraine's agriculture before and after the Russian invasion, highlighting the decrease in



John Comer, Arnold Puech d'Alissac and Catherine Geslain-Laneelle (from left to right) © EESC

production, financial losses, animal deaths, and destroyed infrastructure. During the discussion, Members praised Ukraine's resilient agriculture amid the ongoing war and raised concerns about agricultural relations, the transit of seeds and grains, the allocation of funds to underdeveloped countries, and products from China passing through Ukraine. **Ms Avramenko** addressed the concerns and expressed appreciation for the support of the EU.

The next meeting of the Farmers' Category will be held on **18 October 2023**

- 3 EESC Farmers' Category, <https://europa.eu/!gY64Wf>
- 4 European Commission, Directorate-General for Health and Food Safety, <https://europa.eu/!KJ9TQX>
- 5 European Commission, Directorate-General for Agriculture and Rural Development, <https://europa.eu/!yKWpRP>
- 6 UCAB, <https://ucab.ua/en/>
- 7 European Commission, directive, <https://europa.eu/!CjrmHJ>
- 8 European Parliament, Committee on the Environment, Public Health and Food Safety (ENVI), Proposal for a regulation on the sustainable use of plant protection products, <https://europa.eu/!wNdyKH>

Social Economy Category: discussing the digital transition in the social economy

On 7 June, the [Social Economy Category](https://europa.eu/!ht47UK)¹ of the EESC held its second meeting of the year. The first part of the meeting was dedicated to a discussion on the recently adopted UN resolution on [Promoting the Social and Solidarity Economy for Sustainable Development](https://social.desa.un.org/sdn/new-un-resolution-on-social-and-solidarity-economy#:~:text=At%20its%2066th%20plenary%20meeting%20on%20April%2018%2C%202023%2C%20the,60)². **Simel Esim**, Social and Solidarity Economy Lead at the [International Labour Organization](https://www.ilo.org/global/lang-en/index.htm) (ILO)³, explained that the resolution recognises that the social and solidarity economy can contribute to the achievement and localisation of the [Sustainable Development Goals](https://sdgs.un.org/goals) (SDGs)⁴. In particular, it emphasises the contribution of the social and solidarity economy to **decent work**, the promotion of international labour standards and fundamental rights at work, **poverty alleviation and social transformation and inclusion**. It further underlines the role that the social and solidarity economy can play to enhance business

and entrepreneurial potential.

The second part of the meeting focused on the digital transition in the social economy. **Anna Sienicka** and **Davide Minelli** both represented [TechSoup](https://www.techsoupeurope.org/)⁵, as Vice-President for Europe and CEO for Italy respectively. They both explained how **TechSoup equips social economy actors with transformative technology solutions and the skills they need to improve lives globally and locally**. **Louise Grabo**, President of the EESC's Observatory of the Digital Transition and the Single Market⁶, and Secretary General of SweFinTech⁷, spoke about the need for **equal funding opportunities for tech entrepreneurs** from all backgrounds. **Karel Vanderpoorten**, Policy Officer for Social Economy at the European Commission's DG GROW⁸, presented the transition pathway on proximity and social economy.



Karel Vanderpoorten, Anna Sienicka, Giuseppe Guerini and Davide Minelli (from left to right) © EESC

At the end of the meeting, the mid-mandate election for the position of chair of the Category was held. Outgoing chair **Giuseppe Guerini** stood for re-election, joined by **Justyna Ochędzan**, who presented her candidacy for co-chair. Both were elected by acclamation.

The next meeting of the Social Economy Category will be held on **7 November 2023**.

1 EESC Social Economy Category, <https://europa.eu/!ht47UK>

2 UN Resolution on Social and Solidarity Economy, <https://social.desa.un.org/sdn/new-un-resolution-on-social-and-solidarity-economy#:~:text=At%20its%2066th%20plenary%20meeting%20on%20April%2018%2C%202023%2C%20the,60>

3 ILO, <https://www.ilo.org/global/lang-en/index.htm>

4 United Nations, SDGs, <https://sdgs.un.org/goals>

5 TechSoup Europe helps non-profits including grass-roots, small, local organisations in 53 European countries to use the best technology for social change, <https://www.techsoupeurope.org/>

6 EESC, DSMO, <https://europa.eu/!vV99mJ>

7 Swedish Fintech Association, <https://www.swefintech.se/>

8 European Commission, Directorate-General for Internal Market, Industry, Entrepreneurship and SMEs, <https://europa.eu/!gDX6gG>

Associational Life Category Members appoint new spokespersons and call for coordination in the field of youth

On **5 June 2023**, the [Associational Life Category](https://europa.eu/!VD38XB)⁹ held its second meeting of the year. First, the Category Members **unanimously confirmed the joint application of Andris Gobiņš and Sif Holst as co-spokespersons for the Category** for the second half of the EESC term of office. **Mr Gobiņš** is President of the European Movement in Latvia and **Ms Holst** is Vice-Chair of Disabled People's Organisations Denmark. As spokespersons, their priorities include civil dialogue and civic space, democracy, diversity and inclusivity, transparency or work-life balance. A work programme will be elaborated ahead of the next meeting with input of Category Members.

The meeting continued with a discussion on the [EU Youth Dialogue](https://youth.europa.eu/eu-youth-dialogue_en)¹⁰, a dialogue mechanism between young people and decision makers taking place in the framework of the [EU Youth Strategy](https://youth.europa.eu/strategy_en)¹¹. The panel was moderated by **Katrina Leitāne** and featured contributions from **Biliana Sirakova**, EU Youth Coordinator at the European Commission¹², **María José Tarrero Martos** from the Permanent Representation of Spain to the EU¹³, **Marta Renāte Jērica** from the National Youth Council of Latvia¹⁴, and **Tanja Herceg** from the Croatian Youth Advisory Board¹⁵. Following a presentation on the EU Youth Dialogue and the priorities for the next cycle, speakers and participants discussed

ways to **engage young people with EU decision making more meaningfully**, including better integrating the EU Youth Dialogue into other youth initiatives, making the process more inclusive and putting its results into practice.

Lastly, in a working session, Members gave input into the Category's work programme for the coming two and a half years. The next meeting of the Associational Life Category will be held on **18 October 2023**.



Andris Gobiņš, Biliana Sirakova, Katrina Leitāne and María José Tarrero Martos (from left to right) © EESC

9 EESC Associational Life Category, <https://europa.eu/!VD38XB>

10 EU Youth Dialogue, https://youth.europa.eu/eu-youth-dialogue_en

11 European Union, EU Youth Strategy, https://youth.europa.eu/strategy_en

12 European Commission, EU Youth Coordinator, <https://europa.eu/!x7mkp7>

13 Permanent Representation (REPER) of Spain to the EU, <https://es-ue.org/>

14 National Youth Council of Latvia, <https://www.ljp.lv/en>

15 European Commission, Croatian Youth Advisory Board, <https://europa.eu/!hXTD6b>

HIGHLIGHTS FROM THE LAST PLENARY SESSION

Electricity market reform: European Economic and Social Committee proposes “E-Facility”

At its last plenary session in June, the European Economic and Social Committee (EESC) held a debate on the reform of the electricity market, linked to the adoption of its opinions TEN/808 on the [EU Wholesale Energy Market](#)¹ and TEN/793 on [Electricity market reform](#)². The debate was joined by two guest speakers: **Bram De Wispelaere**, deputy head of cabinet for markets, Belgian Ministry of Energy, and **Pedro Linares**, professor at the Higher Technical School of Engineering (ICAI) in Madrid.

Co-rapporteur Lutz Ribbe and rapporteur Jan Dirx, both members of the EESC’s Civil Society Organisations’ Group, presented their respective opinions in the framework of the debate. In the opinions, the EESC supports the European Commission’s proposal to create a future electricity market based on a public-private partnership and a mix of regulation and liberalisation. At the heart of this model the Committee suggests a government-established “E-facility” which buys electricity from producers and sells it to suppliers, concluding long-term contracts with producers on the basis of tenders.

The EESC however believes that the Commission proposal is not enough and should have done more to adapt the market design to the new reality brought about by Russia’s invasion of Ukraine and an unprecedented surge in energy prices. The new market design must guarantee

an affordable basic energy supply at regulated prices and empower consumers by creating the right to share renewable energy directly.

Underlining that the Committee had been calling for a change in the market design towards more decentralised energy production for years, co-rapporteur **Lutz Ribbe** stressed that “the current energy market has allowed speculation, manipulation and huge profits. These need to be identified and removed, because people have to be at the heart of the new market design”.

Rapporteur **Jan Dirx** said that energy should be treated as a public service, which is why “a regulatory framework for future energy needs to secure an environmentally friendly, affordable and reliable energy supply as well as the right to energy”. He was convinced that the electricity market was in the middle of a paradigm shift, which would require further reform in the coming years.

In the general debate, three members of the Civil Society Organisations’ Group took the floor. **Baiba Miltovica**, president of the EESC’s TEN Section³, underlined that EU Member States needed to address current challenges on the wholesale and retail markets together in order to ensure investments and certainty for investment in these sectors.



Co-rapporteur Lutz Ribbe © EESC

Ileana Izverniceanu de la Iglesia, one of the Group’s vice-presidents, highlighted the need for electricity market reform to avoid a new energy prices crisis and to address the issues of the system in place. “Although this legislative proposal has much to be improved, it is nonetheless a step in the right direction,” she said.

Finally, **Zsolt Kükedi** considered that the Commission proposal for restructuring the market takes many positive steps but “does not do enough to support for example community energy projects and ignores the role of local ownership of renewable generation and supply in helping communities protect themselves from the effects of the energy crisis”. One of his suggestions was to create room for local actors to invest in local energy sharing projects.

Following the debate, opinions TEN/808 and TEN/793 were adopted.

1 EESC opinion TEN/808, <https://europa.eu/!4NkVtn>

2 EESC opinion TEN/793, <https://europa.eu/!Mxh9Y4>

3 EESC Section for Transport, Energy, Infrastructure and the Information Society (TEN)

Equal treatment of young people in the labour market

At the 579th plenary session of the EESC, a debate was held linked to the adoption of the EESC opinions on [Cooperation in the field of youth](#)⁴, with **Nicoletta Merlo** as the rapporteur, and [Equal treatment of young people in the labour market](#)⁵, with **Michael McLoughlin** as the rapporteur. It saw the participation of **María Rodriguez**, president of the European Youth Forum⁶,

Agata Meysner, president of Generation Climate Europe⁷, and **Mireia Nadal Chiva**, CEO of ReDI School of Digital Integration⁸/ Friends of Europe.

María Rodriguez commended the EESC’s youth agenda and called for a better transition from education to work which “can only be achieved by involving young people at every step of the

decision making process”. **Agata Meysner** stressed that listening to the voices of young people is essential for upholding the EU’s fundamental values of equality and democracy, while acknowledging that generational justice goes beyond that. **Mireia Nadal Chiva** emphasised the need to ensure that “young people’s first experiences in the labour market

4 EESC, opinion SOC/759, <https://europa.eu/!7Jkr4j>

5 EESC, opinion SCO/721, <https://europa.eu/!6w9V6j>

6 European Youth Forum: platform of youth organisations in Europe representing over 100 youth organisations, which bring together tens of millions of young people from all over Europe, <https://www.youthforum.org/>

7 Generation Climate Europe: the largest coalition of European youth-led networks on climate and environmental issues, bringing together 381 national organisations across 46 countries in Europe and guided by the voices of over 20 million young Europeans, <https://gceurope.org/who-we-are/>

8 ReDI School of Digital Integration: non-profit tech school providing migrants and marginalised people in local communities with free and equitable access to digital education., <https://www.redi-school.org/>

are positive and long-lasting". However, she acknowledged the challenges faced by refugees and migrants in achieving this initial participation, particularly for migrant women. The three speakers collectively emphasised the significance of intersectionality, recognising that the youth demographic is diverse and multifaceted.

Michael McLoughlin, rapporteur for the opinion on equal treatment of young people and Member of the Civil Society Organisations' Group, highlighted the importance of treating young people equally in the labour market: "These are real issues about paying people minimum wage rates, about young people who get a chance in the labour market but find out they will not be paid, and about social security systems which have complex structures based on age."

Members of the Civil Society Organisations' Group, **Katrina Leitane**, **Louise Grabo**,

Andreas Kruse and **Elena Sinkevičiūtė**, participated in the debate.

Katrina Leitane called for intergenerational solidarity and proper implementation of the **Youth Test**¹. "We must unlock the potential in our young people in order to work together for a better future," she said. **Louise Grabo** underscored the significance of the **EU youth dialogue**² as a means for young people to engage with policymakers. However, she pointed out that the young people it reaches are already connected to the power dynamics in Brussels so the dialogue is not accessible to all. She called on the EESC to "take the lead in pushing the topic of youth cooperation forward." **Andreas Kruse** highlighted the importance of ensuring equal access to education and high-quality, saying: "We need to improve training and education so that it is not just theoretical, but actually provides life experience". Lastly, **Elena Sinkevičiūtė** stressed the need to "keep



Rapporteur Michael McLoughlin © EU

in mind the challenges faced by young people and all the boxes they need to tick as they become adults."

The debate also touched on topics such as mental health concerns among young people, the distinction between curricular and post-curricular traineeships, the need to support young people as they transition to the labour market, and the importance of taking action based on conversations with youth organisations.

1 EESC, EU Youth Test, <https://europa.eu/!gvf8Rj>

2 European Union, EU Youth Dialogue, https://youth.europa.eu/eu-youth-dialogue_en

OVERVIEW OF RECENT WORK

The last EESC plenary session took place on 14 and 15 June 2023. The EESC plenary adopted 24 opinions of which 9 were drafted by Members of the Civil Society Organisations' Group. A list of the recent work can be found below.

Pietro Vittorio BARBIERI (IT), rapporteur, **SOC/758**¹ Measures to fight stigma against HIV

John COMER (IE), rapporteur, **NAT/900**² Digital labelling of EU fertilising products

Lutz RIBBE (DE), co-rapporteur **TEN/808**³ EU Wholesale Energy Market

Jan DIRX (NL), rapporteur **TEN/793**⁴ Electricity market reform

Thierry LIBAERT (FR), rapporteur **INT/1015**⁵ The right to repair

Michael MCLOUGHLIN (IE), rapporteur **SOC/721**⁶ The Equal Treatment of Young People in the Labour Market

Diego DUTTO (IT), co-rapporteur **SOC/756**⁷ Social Progress Protocol

Panagiotis GKOFAS (EL), rapporteur, **NAT/881**⁸ Ex-post evaluation of the European Union's Civil Protection Mechanism (including RescEU)

Anastasis YIAPANIS (CY), rapporteur, **CCMI/202**⁹, Proposal for an EU cyber defence policy

The **complete texts** of all EESC opinions are available in various language versions on the **Committee's website**¹⁰

The next **EESC plenary session** will take place on 20 and 21 September 2023. For more information on the upcoming plenary session please visit **our website**¹¹.

A list including all **new work appointments** of Civil Society Organisations' Group Members is available on the **Committee's website**¹².

10 EESC opinions, <https://europa.eu/!wfF86wY>

11 EESC plenary sessions, <https://europa.eu/!Dq84qG>

12 EESC, New work appointments, <https://europa.eu/!xtKfVQ>

1 EESC opinion SOC/758, <https://europa.eu/!kXr4gJ>

2 EESC opinion NAT/900, <https://europa.eu/!m6MGyj>

3 EESC opinion TEN/808, <https://europa.eu/!4NkVTn>

4 EESC opinion TEN/793, <https://europa.eu/!Mxh9Y4>

5 EESC opinion INT/1015, <https://europa.eu/!8XnGym>

6 EESC, opinion SCO/721, <https://europa.eu/!6wpV6j>

7 EESC, opinion SCO/756, <https://europa.eu/!jdMJ7Q>

8 EESC opinion NAT/881, <https://europa.eu/!FKYVkt>

9 EESC opinion CCMI/202, <https://europa.eu/!PvkkXj>

UPCOMING EVENTS

13/09/2023 – Conference of the Consumers and Environment Category:
The Spanish Presidency's new challenges for consumption and the environment,
<https://europa.eu/!q8kJtC>

WHAT IS EESC OPINION SOC/758 ALL ABOUT?

An interview with Pietro Vittorio Barbieri, rapporteur for EESC opinion SOC/758¹ on Measures to fight stigma against HIV



Pietro Vittorio Barbieri © EESC

Pietro Vittorio BARBIERI (IT)

Vice-President, EESC Civil Society Organisations' Group
Former Spokesperson, Forum Terzo Settore (Third Sector Forum)
President, Centre for Autonomy (Centro per l'Autonomia)

What are the three main findings of this opinion?

If we were to go by the commitments of the European Union and its Member States, HIV would appear to be a virus on the way out. Yet the ECDC² tells of a somewhat different situation. It is true that in western Europe, the WHO's goal seems achievable. Their test campaign is working as an element of prevention and awareness. Clinical treatments appear

to be succeeding in controlling chronic disease. The data is very comforting.

The same cannot be said for eastern Europe, both within and beyond the borders of the Union. It is clear then that some EU countries are not applying the [strategy put forward by the WHO](#)³, despite consolidated European

programmes. Additionally, some border countries, such as Ukraine, have never adopted a testing policy. And then there are other countries with high levels of immigration to the European Union, such as many African countries, that have important international cooperation projects that are, however, insufficient for guaranteeing HIV control.

How can these issues be addressed and what is the way forward to solve this problem of stigma?

The theme of stigma is added to this complex situation in a disruptive way: those who live with HIV suffer constant forms of discrimination, from privacy to employment barriers, right up to difficulties accessing financial loans and life insurance, even though life expectancies are now almost equivalent to those of the HIV-free population. In our opinion SOC/758, in addition to taking stock of the situation 12 years after the last intervention by the European Commission, we welcomed with great enthusiasm the

proposal of the [Spanish Presidency](#)⁴ to commit all the European institutions to this cause in a high-level declaration, in order to green and relaunch the commitment of the European Union and the Member States. It is not a question of adopting new rules, but of rediscovering a serious commitment on the part of institutions at all levels (European, national and regional), and with it the involvement of organised civil society in training programmes for population awareness starting in schools and universities. The theme is prevention,

but also and above all, stigma.

The EESC working group for this opinion had been very proactive, and convergence was easy. Very important contributions came from the hearing and from co-rapporteur Nicoletta Merlo, and from experts Nicoletta Orchi, an infectious disease specialist and one of the leading Italian HIV experts; and from Lorenzo Tamburrini, the Civil Society Organisations' Group expert.

The opinion was presented and adopted at the June plenary session in 2023.

Read the EESC opinion on Measures to fight stigma against HIV at: <https://europa.eu/!kXr4gJ>

1 EESC opinion SOC/758, <https://europa.eu/!kXr4gJ>

2 European Centre for Disease Prevention and Control, HIV surveillance report 2022, <https://www.ecdc.europa.eu/en/publications-data/hiv-aids-joint-report-surveillance-2021-data>

3 World Health Organization: Global Health Sector Strategies (GHSS) 2022-2030. The GHSS promote the disease-specific goals to end AIDS and the epidemics of viral hepatitis and sexually transmitted infections by 2030, <https://www.who.int/teams/global-hiv-hepatitis-and-stis-programmes/strategies/global-health-sector-strategies>

4 Spanish Presidency of the Council of the EU, <https://spanish-presidency.consilium.europa.eu/en/>

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