



CONCLUSIONS

One year after the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic, during which organised civil society has been playing a key role in coping with the countless pandemic-related challenges at all levels, around 1 500 citizens from Europe and across the world attended the 2021 Civil Society Days conference to address, together with European organisations and institutions, the challenges of a sustainable recovery for Europe and to propose solutions that are very timely considering the crucial political situation that the EU is experiencing.

Against this backdrop, the following recommendations were put forward in the eight workshops, each of which focused on a different key topic in an effort to ensure a sustainable recovery in Europe:

Multilevel Sustainable Democracy in Europe

- ✓ The role of organisations acting as a bridge between Europeans and governments (civil society organisations, political parties, trade unions, etc.) needs to be reinforced as this will create positive synergies for society.
- ✓ Governments and administrations should boost effective civic education and digital literacy at all levels to encourage people to become active in society. It is also critical that administrations ensure fair and affordable digital access for all so that people can participate in democratic processes.
- ✓ Administrations should take more decisive steps to establish deliberative bodies that reinforce democratic societies and representativeness at all levels.

The social economy and youth entrepreneurship for a sustainable and fair recovery

- ✓ The social economy plays a key role in boosting entrepreneurship, the creation of high-quality jobs and the active participation of EU citizens through people-led and democratic business-models, and should be mainstreamed in the European Union's social, economic and environmental policies.
- ✓ The EU recovery plan and NextGenerationEU need to provide funding opportunities for Member States to enable them to invest properly in the social economy sector.
- ✓ The upcoming European Action Plan for the Social Economy that will be published by the European Commission in the fourth quarter of 2021 will be a key tool to boost the development of social economy enterprises and organisations across the EU and beyond. The active participation of social economy stakeholders in co-designing this public policy is crucial.

The role of education and culture in Europe's sustainable recovery

- ✓ Cultural values should be incorporated into all educational settings, formal, non-formal and informal, starting from an early age. Inclusive education must be accompanied by lifelong and intergenerational learning to ensure that education and culture can keep reinforcing each other and are able to overcome interrupted educational processes.
- ✓ A 360-degree approach to education and training is needed. We must recognise the equal value of cultural and arts education by mainstreaming STEAM education – science, technology, engineering, arts and mathematics. At the same time, we should encourage dialogue and solidarity, and foster empathy and mutual understanding to become more flexible and adaptable.
- ✓ As the EU prepares to recover from the pandemic, it must be acknowledged that culture and education are crucial assets and that investments must be directed towards them with a view to building a more resilient and sustainable future for Europe. Funds must be earmarked for these sectors in the national recovery and resilience plans that are being prepared by the Member States and that will be validated by the EU institutions. Infrastructure is clearly critical, but it is essential that the recovery strategy centre around people.

The future of work in the wellbeing economy

- ✓ The Finnish Basic Income is one of many pilot schemes underway, but there are barriers to wider implementation such as access to funding, legal challenges, lack of communication and

misperceptions. UBI and job guarantee schemes could help society move towards a wellbeing economy, but further debate is needed on these options. The entire question needs to be depoliticised and more pilot schemes should be launched across the EU in order to demonstrate that these are feasible solutions that are beneficial for people and the planet and can be scaled up.

- ✓ Cooperatives are one way of increasing democracy at work. However, despite a number of very positive and successful examples, this form of enterprise needs to be promoted more energetically, hand in hand with the necessary legal changes and frameworks at EU level. The economy needs a mix of forms of enterprise that are more resilient, support workers, give back to society and have a lower environmental impact.
- ✓ The discussion on reduced working hours needs to address various issues. For instance, how can we make it more financially rewarding for companies to employ more people for fewer hours and what can be done about the correspondingly reduced salaries, especially for jobs which are already at the lower end of the payscale.

Youth activism, systemic change and recovery in Europe

- ✓ The European Union should ensure that Member States give all young people access to education, information and technology so that they can become active members of society and make their voices heard by the EU institutions.
- ✓ Young people are now living in societies where democracy is being eroded. This makes it even more necessary to ensure that young people have the chance to participate meaningfully and engage across Europe on all policy areas, not just youth policy. Furthermore, young people should also take the lead when it comes to implementing policies, ensuring that organisations led by or working with young people have access to funding.
- ✓ Through mobility, young people can broaden their world view and gain invaluable skills which will enable them to become active citizens and connect with other young people from around Europe and the world. After the health crisis, reintroducing learning mobility and continuing and stepping up exchanges within Europe under the Erasmus+ and European Solidarity Corps programmes and others must be made a top priority.
- ✓ A platform along the lines of an EU Youth Advisory Panel must be set up to convey the views of young people by giving them a seat at the decision-making table and ultimately providing them with knowledge, information and financial resources. Only structured, empowered and effective two-way participation in decision-making processes at all levels can ensure that grassroots initiatives become a reality and can be scaled up to drive transformation.

A Social Green Deal for a sustainable recovery

- ✓ Climate action and the European Green Deal should do more to eradicate poverty, injustice and gender inequality, with all EU policies and programmes linked by an overarching post Europe 2020 strategy centred around the SDGs.
- ✓ Structured and meaningful stakeholder engagement in the Just Transition and recovery processes is needed, with strong social and civil dialogue at all levels.
- ✓ The European Green Deal should be flanked by stronger social protection systems in all countries.

The role of key civil society groups in the Renovation Wave

- ✓ The workshop demonstrated that a Renovation Wave in Europe cannot be achieved without the mobilisation of key civil society groups, notably representatives of owners and architects. These groups play a crucial role in engaging, advising and supporting people in their renovation journey and ensuring that quality projects are delivered. They are also key partners for public authorities at all governance levels.
- ✓ It is crucial to make people more aware of the challenges and opportunities of building renovation, if we really want to accelerate the rate of renovation in Europe. Public authorities and civil society groups have a key role to play here. The New European Bauhaus initiative, whose co-design phase is currently in full swing, is an interesting and promising initiative which can help raise awareness, collect people's ideas and be a platform for imagining the built environment of tomorrow.
- ✓ Two principles for building renovation are paramount: *affordability* and *quality*. These principles are not contradictory; they can be achieved in parallel. A holistic approach to renovation is needed: an approach that is not blinkered by energy efficiency and economic savings and endeavors to improve the well-being and comfort of occupants, as well as the value of buildings.
- ✓ Policy objectives must be achievable and fit for purpose, based on trust, common effort and dialogue.

The role and economic value of volunteers in the road to recovery and beyond

- ✓ Civil society organisations have been only marginally involved in preparing the National Recovery Plans but we must ensure that this trend is reversed when the plans are implemented. This is especially important as regards the input and contribution of volunteers, and allowing volunteer hours to be used as a form of co-financing for grants and subsidies

would make it much easier for civil society to access funds. Support must target the specific needs met by volunteers. This will ensure that volunteers can contribute more effectively to future resilience as part of the recovery, taking us beyond where we were before.

- ✓ Without comparable, robust and reliable data on volunteering in Europe, it will not be possible to shape the policies and programmes that will truly make the most of this huge renewable resource in Europe. Policymakers need to work with other stakeholders to reach a better understanding of the meaning and impact of volunteering on the road to recovery and for the future of Europe.

- ✓ Volunteering is an expression of European values and sets an example of a society based on solidarity, inclusion and democratic principles: the society that we want for Europe. Policymakers and society itself need to see volunteering as more than just what is achieved during a few hours; they must recognise that it is a contribution to the future of Europe. The 10th anniversary of the European Year of Volunteering (#EYVPlus10) should shine a spotlight on this.
