



RULES GOVERNING THE 14th EESC CIVIL SOCIETY PRIZE

Rewarding excellence in civil society initiatives

1. Aim and overall objective of the Civil Society Prize

For the European Economic and Social Committee (the "EESC" or the "Committee"), the **aim** of the prize, which is awarded annually, is to reward and encourage initiatives by natural persons (i.e. individuals) and/or private law bodies (i.e. civil society organisations etc.) that have made a significant contribution to promoting the European identity and European integration.

The **overall objective** of the prize is thus to raise awareness of the contribution that civil society can make to creating a European identity and citizenship in a way that underpins the common values that are the foundation of European integration.

2. Theme of the 14th EESC Civil Society Prize: Mental health

The WHO defines mental health as "a state of mental well-being that enables people to cope with the stresses of life, realise their abilities, learn well and work well, and contribute to their community. It is an integral component of health and well-being that underpins our individual and collective abilities to make decisions, build relationships and shape the world we live in. Mental health is a basic human right. And it is crucial to personal, community and socio-economic development¹".

Mental health has a complex nature, affected by biological, psychological, educational, social, economic, occupational and cultural factors. Low income, poor living conditions, financial difficulties, low level of education, occupational problems, precarious work or unemployment, loneliness, lack of supportive relationships, perceived stigma and discrimination, advanced age and negative life events can contribute to a degradation of mental health. Environmental factors related to climate, natural catastrophes (such as floods or earthquakes), the degree of urbanisation, etc. also affect mental well-being.

¹ *Mental Health*, WHO Fact Sheet of 17 June 2022, <https://www.who.int/en/news-room/fact-sheets/detail/mental-health-strengthening-our-response>.

During the COVID-19 pandemic, the closure of schools and kindergartens, isolation, feelings of anger and dissatisfaction, and mistrust of information led to a deterioration of mental health and an unprecedented prevalence of anxiety and depression, in particular among young people, older people and vulnerable groups, with frontline healthcare workers experiencing additional stress². At the same time, disruptions in the mental health care services and increased demand for mental health support resulted in 23% of EU citizens reporting unmet mental care needs in the spring of 2022³. Particularly worrying in this context is the impact of the pandemic on young people. According to the OECD, the rate of depressive symptoms among young people aged 18-29 more than doubled in several European countries⁴.

The war in Ukraine, migration, unstable political situations, the energy crisis, the increased cost of living and uncertainty for the future, combined with changes in value systems and also new generations' adherence to these systems have also aggravated the risk of mental problems.

The impact of mental health is significant. According to Eurostat, 3.9% of all deaths in the EU are the result of mental and behavioural disorders⁵. From an economic point of view, the direct and indirect costs of mental health problems in the EU account for almost 4% of the GDP, with more than a third of these costs driven by lower rates of employment and lower productivity at work⁶.

In recent years, mental well-being has been increasingly acknowledged as a fundamental component of good health. It figures among the Sustainable Development Goals⁷ and is also high on the EU political agenda. In its resolution of 10 July 2020 on the EU's public health strategy post-COVID-19⁸, the European Parliament called for action in this area, while the European Parliament, the Council of the European Union and the European Commission also committed to paying special attention to addressing the issue of mental health in their Joint Declaration on the EU Legislative Priorities for 2023 and 2024⁹. This commitment resulted in the Commission adopting a comprehensive approach to mental health in June 2023. This new multistakeholder approach promotes mental health across all policies and focuses on three guiding principles: adequate and effective prevention; access to high-quality and affordable mental healthcare and treatment; and reintegration into society after recovery. It warns about the cost of non-action and provides for concrete interventions to promote good mental health, invest in training and capacity building, ensure good mental health at work, protect children and young people, and address vulnerable groups. Finally, it calls for "coordinated efforts, with and beyond the health system (...) to

² European Parliament Research Service, *Mental health and the pandemic*, July 2021.

³ OECD/European Union (2022), *Health at a Glance: Europe 2022: State of Health in the EU Cycle*, OECD Publishing, Paris, page 4, 52-53, 59-62.

⁴ https://read.oecd-ilibrary.org/social-issues-migration-health/health-at-a-glance-europe-2022_507433b0-en#page18

⁵ Eurostat, *Mental health and related issues statistics*, September 2022 (most updated edition, with data of 2017).

⁶ OECD: *A New Benchmark for Mental Health Systems - Tackling the Social and Economic Costs of Mental Ill-Health*, OECD Health Policy Studies, Paris 2021, page 129

⁷ SDG Target 3.4 – Noncommunicable diseases and mental health: By 2030, reduce by one third premature mortality from non-communicable diseases through prevention and treatment and promote mental health and well-being.

⁸ https://www.europarl.europa.eu/doceo/document/TA-9-2020-0205_EN.html.

⁹ <https://www.consilium.europa.eu/media/60852/joint-declaration-2023-2024.pdf>

mobilise society as a whole and take a life-course approach with the emphasis on equality and non-discrimination¹⁰.

Mental health is also a political priority for the EESC. At the request of the Spanish Presidency, in April 2023 the Committee adopted an opinion on precarious work and mental health¹¹, and is currently working on an exploratory opinion on measures to improve mental health.

This political focus is a clear answer to the conclusions of the Conference on the Future of Europe¹², which – following a special request from young people – called for initiatives to improve understanding mental health issues and how to deal with them. Similarly, teenage students attending the EESC youth event *Your Europe Your Say* in March 2023 asked the Committee to focus on mental health issues.

With its civil society prize the EESC wishes, first and foremost, to draw attention to the fact that civil society plays a key role in mental health treatment and prevention. It provides services that are currently not adequately supplied by the public health system, and addresses the special needs of vulnerable groups. Thanks to its close connection with local communities, it provides frontline assistance both in a formal and informal way and delivers services to difficult-to-reach populations, thus reducing healthcare inequalities. It also has a key role to play in service-user-led mental health projects and self-help groups. In addition, it can also play an important role in raising awareness of mental health needs and in fighting stigma against people with mental health conditions. Last but not least, it provides advocacy, enables users to have their voices heard at political level, and promotes community engagement, while taking the local context into account.

3. Eligibility

3.1 Eligible candidates

The EESC Civil Society Prize is open on equal terms to all natural persons (individuals) and private law bodies (civil society organisations etc.) under the conditions set out below. Public authorities, governmental organisations and other public bodies are not eligible.

1) Natural persons

For the purposes of this prize, natural persons are individuals or groups of individuals acting jointly without contractual ties. EU citizens are eligible, regardless of their country of residence. Third-country nationals are also eligible, provided they are legally resident in the territory of the EU. Groups of individuals must designate one of the natural persons as a point of contact (the leader) for the administrative and financial aspects of the prize.

EESC members, CCMI delegates, staff of EU institutions and other EU bodies, members of the evaluation committee and their relatives, are not eligible to submit an entry.

¹⁰ Communication from the Commission n to the European Parliament, the Council, the European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions on *a comprehensive approach to mental health*, COM(2023) 298 final of 7 June 2023 (quote: p. 28).

¹¹ EESC exploratory opinion of 27 April 2023 on [Precarious work and mental health](#).

¹² Conference on the Future of Europe – [Report on the final outcome](#), May 2022, Page 51

2) **Private law bodies**

Civil society organisations (hereafter: "CSOs") officially registered within the European Union and acting at local, national, regional or European level are eligible. For the purposes of this prize, CSOs as defined in the EESC opinion on *The role and contribution of civil society organisations in the building of Europe* are "organisational structures whose members have objectives and responsibilities that are of general interest and who also act as mediators between the public authorities and citizens"¹³. They are actively involved in shaping public affairs on the basis of their own concerns, drawing on their own specific knowledge, abilities and scope for action. They act autonomously, and membership entails a commitment by members of the general public to take part in the work and activities of those organisations. This definition includes the so-called labour-market players, i.e. the social partners, organisations representing social and economic players, non-governmental organisations which bring people together in a common cause, such as environmental organisations, human rights organisations, consumer associations, charitable organisations, cultural organisations, and educational and training organisations, etc.; community-based organisations, i.e. organisations set up within society at grassroots level which pursue member-oriented objectives, e.g. youth organisations, family associations and all organisations through which citizens participate in local and municipal life; religious communities. CSOs set up by a legislative or regulatory act and/or to which affiliation is partially or totally mandatory (e.g. professional associations)¹⁴, are also eligible.

Companies or firms: For the purposes of this prize, "companies or firms" means profit-making entities constituted under civil or commercial law, including cooperative societies and other legal persons governed by private law. Companies or firms are eligible if they are formed in accordance with the law of a Member State and have their registered office, central administration or principal place of business on the territory of the EU. Eligibility of firms/companies is limited to their **not-for-profit** activities such as selfless initiatives, charity projects, individual or corporate volunteering etc.

3.2 **Eligible initiatives**

3.2.1 **Formal eligibility criteria**

To be eligible, initiatives must fulfil the four criteria listed hereafter:

- they must be **not-for-profit**, such as selfless initiatives, charity projects, individual or corporate volunteering etc.;
- they must have **already been implemented** or be **still ongoing on 30 September 2023 (closing date for submission of applications)**;
- they must **fulfil the thematic eligibility criteria** set out below.
- they must be carried out **on the territory of the EU**.

The following initiatives are excluded:

- commercial (i.e. for-profit) initiatives;

¹³ Opinion of the Economic and Social Committee on *The role and contribution of civil society organisations in the building of Europe* – CESE 851/1999 of 22 September 1999 ([OJ C 329, 17.11.1999, p. 30](#)).

¹⁴ This applies for instance to Austrian labour-market players.

- initiatives which are planned but have not begun implementation by 30 September 2023 (closing date for submission of applications);
- documentation and/or information activities, journalistic, literary or scientific publications of any kind and in any format, audio-visual products, and any kind of artwork. However, projects which use art and creative expression as therapeutic support or as a tool to reduce mental health stigma are eligible.

3.2.2 Thematic eligibility criteria

The specific objective of the 14th EESC Civil Society Prize is to reward **effective, innovative and creative non-for-profit initiatives/activities carried out in the EU, which support people with mental health conditions and promote an environment which fosters mental well-being on an individual or collective basis.**

The activities/initiatives proposed for the prize can cover a wide range of themes, such as the following (non-exhaustive list):

- identifying individual, social and structural determinants of mental health; promoting early detection and reducing potential risks, and providing proactive outreach to people at risk, early intervention and timely support; offering specific support in crisis situations, after traumatic events and in coping with adverse life events and life transitions; increasing resilience and promoting mental well-being;
- preventing or combating occupational psychosocial risks; improving mental health at work; promoting supportive workplace cultures and adequate re-entry measures;
- providing person-centred and rights-based services for people with mental health care needs or intellectual and psychosocial disabilities;
- addressing the specific needs of disadvantaged, vulnerable or marginalised groups (migrants, minorities, the unemployed, the homeless, women, etc.) and of an ageing population; making sure that no one is left behind;
- implementing projects to promote the mental well-being of children and adolescents, also by addressing issues such as substance use and abuse, cyberaddiction, youth violence and bullying;
- developing an inclusive approach to tackling mental health issues, taking into account local needs, developing local solutions and empowering the key actors in the process; putting users and their families at the centre;
- promoting existing community-based mental health initiatives and support systems; creating new support mechanisms including self-help groups;
- developing networks to increase community involvement in tackling issues that affect mental health;
- establishing a supportive environment for mental health, also by facilitating multisectoral collaboration and coordination to reshape the physical, social and economic characteristics of environments – in homes, schools, workplaces and the wider community – to better protect mental health and prevent mental health conditions;
- improving mental health literacy; providing reliable information about mental health problems, available treatments and mental health resources; providing training on mental health, in particular for frontline professional and social workers, health professionals, local officials, teachers and

people working in the police and justice sector, as well as employers, with the aim of preventing, detecting and managing mental health problems;

- changing attitudes towards mental health, combating mental-health-related stigma, discrimination and social marginalisation, i.a. by fostering contacts between the general public and service users and addressing misconceptions;
- promoting mental health advocacy to drive policy change or as a means for development and empowerment; involving users and carers in policy and service delivery;
- promoting a human-rights-based approach to mental care, also in line with the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (freedom from violence and abuse; non-discrimination, autonomy and self-determination, inclusion and participation; access to good quality, timely, affordable and equitable mental health prevention, treatment and care etc.).

4. Application procedure and deadline

Applications are to be made by filling in the online application form (<https://www.eesc.europa.eu/eesc-civil-society-prize-2024>). In duly justified cases linked to documented technical problems, the EESC may allow candidates to apply by email or post.

The application must contain all the information the selection board requires in order to:

- ascertain that the candidate fulfils the formal entry criteria;
- ascertain that the candidate complies with the non-exclusion criteria;
- ascertain that the candidate accepts the provisions concerning liability, checks, audits and applicable law;
- evaluate the substantive merits of each entry in relation to the award criteria.

Before the prize is awarded, the EESC will ask candidates to provide the duly completed and signed Legal Entity Form and Financial Identification Form, as well as the relevant supporting documents. These forms are available at:

https://ec.europa.eu/info/publications/legal-entities_en

and the

https://ec.europa.eu/info/publications/financial-identification_en.

Applications can be drafted in any official EU language. However, to speed up the evaluation process, the EESC would appreciate receiving the application form in English or French.

Submission of an application implies acceptance of all the terms and conditions set out in the contest documents and, where appropriate, the waiver of the candidate's own general or specific terms and conditions.

The final deadline for sending applications is **30 September 2023, at 10:00 (CEST)**.

The EESC will disregard any application received after this date and time. **Candidates are strongly advised not to wait until the last day to submit their applications**, since heavy internet traffic or a

faulty internet connection could lead to difficulties in sending in the application. The EESC cannot be held responsible for any delay due to such difficulties.

Candidates can only submit one entry. Entering the competition is free of charge. If preparing and sending the application entails costs for a specific candidate, these will not be reimbursed.

Candidates will see a message on the screen thanking them for the application and offering them the possibility of printing it or saving it in PDF format.

5. Evaluation and award

5.1 Evaluation steps

The evaluation will be carried out by a panel of experts composed of 10 members (the "evaluation committee"), who are subject to the requirements on conflict of interests laid down in the Financial Regulation¹⁵. The evaluation will be based solely on the information provided in the submitted application form.

The EESC reserves the right not to disclose the identity of the members of the evaluation committee.

Participants should not contact the members of the evaluation committee for any reason related to the prize throughout the whole procedure. Any such attempt will result in disqualification.

The decisions of the evaluation committee are final, binding and not subject to challenge.

The procedure will take place in five steps:

- (1) verification of eligibility of candidates;
- (2) verification of eligibility of the initiatives proposed for the prize;
- (3) verification of non-exclusion of candidates;
- (4) evaluation of the quality of the initiatives proposed for the prize on the basis of the award criteria;
- (5) award of the prize.

The EESC will assess eligibility, non-exclusion and quality in no particular order. The applicants must pass all steps to be awarded the prize. No feedback will be provided to candidates until the end of the procedure. Results will be notified to all candidates as soon as possible, and in any case within 15 calendar days after the award decision has been taken by the authorising officer (step 5), provisionally by April 2024.

5.1.1 Verification of eligibility of candidates

To be eligible, candidates must fulfil the requirements of point 3.1 above.

¹⁵ Regulation (EU, Euratom) 2018/1046 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 18 July 2018 on the financial rules applicable to the general budget of the Union, amending Regulations (EU) No 1296/2013, (EU) No 1301/2013, (EU) No 1303/2013, (EU) No 1304/2013, (EU) No 1309/2013, (EU) No 1316/2013, (EU) No 223/2014, (EU) No 283/2014, and Decision No 541/2014/EU and repealing Regulation (EU, Euratom) No 966/2012 ([OJ L 193, 30.7.2018, p. 1](#)).

The EESC will evaluate the eligibility of candidates on the basis of the information provided in the application form. Before awarding the prize, it will ask the candidates to provide a duly completed and signed Legal Entity Form with its supporting evidence (see point 4 above).

The EESC reserves the right to require the above-mentioned form and supporting evidence from any candidate at any time during the evaluation procedure. In this case, the candidate must provide the form and the supporting evidence without delay. The EESC may reject the application if the form and the supporting evidence are not provided in due time.

5.1.2 Verification of eligibility of initiatives

Eligibility of the initiatives proposed for the prize will be checked on the basis of the online application form. To be eligible, the initiatives proposed for the prize must fulfil the requirements of point 3.2 above. Other activities carried out by the candidate will not be taken into consideration.

5.1.3 Verification of non-exclusion

Compliance of the candidates with the non-exclusion criteria referred to in Articles 136 and 141 of the Financial Regulation and listed in the application documents will be checked on the basis of the online application form.

The EESC reserves the right to verify whether the candidates are in one of the situations of exclusion by requiring to submit supporting documents. In this case, the candidate must provide the documents required within the deadline given by the EESC. The EESC may reject the application if the requested documents are not provided in due time.

A candidate is not required to submit a specific document if he/she/it informs the EESC that the document in question can be accessed on a public database free of charge.

5.1.4 Evaluation of quality

The evaluation committee will assess the quality of the applications on the basis of the award criteria set out below. The evaluators will only consider the initiatives proposed for the prize, not the candidate's other activities. There is no minimum threshold for each individual criterion. However, candidates that fail to obtain at least 50% of the maximum total score will be eliminated.

Prize award criteria	Points
<p>Criterion 1 – Long-term impact</p> <p>This criterion will assess the potential of the proposed initiative to have a long-term impact and to inspire others in Europe, i.e. to be applied or adapted to the same category of beneficiaries or to another category of beneficiaries elsewhere in the same or in another Member State of the EU. In this context, the impact will be evaluated in light of the human and financial resources employed to implement the proposed initiative.</p>	35 points
<p>Criterion 2 – Participation and collaboration</p> <p>This criterion will assess, on the one hand, how far the proposed initiative actively involves participants and beneficiaries and, on the other hand, its ability to share good practice and raise awareness on issues related to the theme for which the civil society prize is awarded. In this context both intersectionality and the collaborative multistakeholder approach with other relevant actors will also be taken into consideration.</p>	35 points
<p>Criterion 3 – Innovation and creativity</p> <p>This criterion will assess the creativity of the proposed initiative, its uniqueness and degree of innovation in its specific context. To this end, innovation is understood to mean both new ideas and new or improved ways to implement an existing solution or approach or to adapt it to a different context or target group.</p>	30 points
Total points	100 points (minimum 50 points)

5.1.5 Award of the prize

The prize will be awarded by the Committee, on the basis of the evaluation provided by the evaluation committee, who will be free to decide whether to recommend that prizes be awarded, depending on their appraisal of the quality of the entries.

The EESC may award a maximum of five prizes to the five top-ranked candidates.

6. Prize money

The Committee plans to award a maximum of five prizes. The first prize has a value of EUR 14 000. The amount of the second, third, fourth and fifth prize is EUR 9 000. If place one is shared among more than one winner *ex aequo*, the amount of each of the first prizes is respectively EUR 11 500 for two first prizes, EUR 10 600 for three first prizes, EUR 10 250 for four first prizes and EUR 10 000 for five first prizes. The Committee is not bound to award all five prizes. The EESC may decide not to award the Civil Society Prize.

The prize award ceremony is likely to take place during the EESC Civil Society Week in spring 2024. Up to two representatives per winner will be invited to the ceremony, with travel and accommodation organised by the EESC according to the rules which will be notified to winners in due time. Physical

presence might be replaced at any time with online attendance, if so required by health and safety rules in place on the day of the award ceremony.

Prizes will be paid by bank transfer within 30 days of the award ceremony, provided that the winners have submitted all the requested documents. Winners are responsible for the payment of taxes and charges applicable when using the prize money.

7. Personal data

Personal data contained in the application documents (such as name and address) will be processed pursuant to Regulation (EU) 2018/1725 on the protection of natural persons with regard to the processing of personal data by the Union institutions, bodies, offices and agencies and on the free movement of such data¹⁶. Unless indicated otherwise, the replies to the questions and any personal data requested to evaluate the application in accordance with the contest rules will be processed solely for that purpose by the Directorate for Communication and Interinstitutional Relations. Details concerning the processing of personal data are attached (Appendix 2).

The candidate's personal data may be registered in the Early Detection and Exclusion System (EDES) if the candidate is in one of the situations mentioned in Article 136 of the Financial Regulation. For more information, see the Privacy Statement on http://ec.europa.eu/budget/explained/management/protecting/protect_en.cfm

8. Disclosure requirements

Without prejudice to point 7 above, candidates grant the EESC the right to communicate to the public, in any language, in any format and using any kind of technique, the name of the candidates, the activities proposed for the prize and the amount of the prizes awarded to the winners.

Any communication or publication by the winners about the activity for which the prize was awarded must indicate that the activity has been awarded the EESC Civil Society Prize. This obligation applies for one year from the date of the awarding of the prize.

9. Liability

Candidates have sole liability in the event of a claim relating to the activities carried out in the framework of the prize.

10. Checks and audits

The winners must accept the checks and audits by the EESC, the European Anti-Fraud Office (OLAF) and the Court of Auditors referred to in Article 129 of the Financial Regulation and the publicity obligations in relation to the contest and the received prize, as detailed in point 8 above.

¹⁶ Regulation (EU) 2018/1725 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 23 October 2018 on the protection of natural persons with regard to the processing of personal data by the Union institutions, bodies, offices and agencies and on the free movement of such data, and repealing Regulation (EC) No 45/2001 and Decision No 1247/2002/EC ([OJ L 295, 21.11.2018, p. 93](https://eur-lex.europa.eu/eli/reg/2018/1725/oj)).

11. Law applicable, complaints and competent court

The Civil Society Prize is governed by EU law, complemented, where necessary, by the national law of Belgium.

Observations concerning the prize award procedure may be submitted to the authority awarding the prize using the contact details indicated in point 13 below.

If candidates believe that maladministration has occurred, they may lodge a complaint with the European Ombudsman within two years of the date when they become aware of the facts which form the basis for the complaint (see <http://www.ombudsman.europa.eu>).

The court responsible for matters relating to this prize is the General Court of the European Union:

General Court of the European Union
Rue du Fort Niedergrünewald
L-2925 Luxembourg
Tel.: +352 43031
Fax.: +352 4303 2100
URL: <http://curia.europa.eu>

Information about the lodging of appeals may be obtained at the address indicated above.

12. Penalties

Financial penalties of 2 to 10% of the value of the prize and exclusion decisions from all contracts, grants and contests financed by the EU budget may be imposed on participants who have made false declarations, or committed irregularities or fraud, in accordance with the conditions laid down in Article 136 of the Financial Regulation.

13. Further information

For more information, please contact: civilsocietyprize@eesc.europa.eu

If relevant to other potential candidates, questions and answers will be published on [the Civil Society Prize page of the EESC website](#). The EESC recommends that candidates check the prize website regularly in order to get the most up-to-date information.