



The EC work programme 2022 is of high importance in this transition and crisis time Europe is going through; on one side the recovery and on the other side the Future of Europe Conference. We as civil society organisations members of the LG are deeply concerned about the role and resources that will be given to us in the implementation of both processes. We have shown our commitment to support a stronger Europe during the crisis by multiplying our actions of solidarity and continuously raising citizens' concern. The next year's work programme has to recognise our key role in the implementation of the national recovery and facility plans and our key role as co-designers of the future of Europe in the CoFoE.

The everlasting tendency (political option) to bring all possible essential services (health care, social services, juridical services, education,) to the market is a major concern shared by CSOs. The assumption that the market will solve the problems is not only an illusion but it also 'disconnects' citizens from their communities and makes interpersonal relations pure utilitarian. It alienates committed citizens that want to tackle societal problems and erodes social cohesion.

The European Commission works more and more with consultancies to explore issues, do research and communicate with citizens under the excuse of "evidence based policy making". By doing this the communication with the actors in the field is instrumentalism and hampered; the outcome often is window dressing. The consultancies see input from CSOs as a product and ignore networks and structures overburdening them with multiple questionnaires. Another negative side effect is the eroding understanding by the civil servants of their 'terrain'.

With this in mind the members of the Liaison Group of civil society would like to raise and wish to see in the European Commission work programme 2022 the following main issues:

Chapter 7 - A new push for European democracy

- **Participation of civil society in the decision making:** The participation of all citizens, through civil society organisations, associations and networks, will make the process of recovery and reshaping the future of Europe on a truly democratic basis. The Member States and the EU institutions must therefore ensure that in this complex process no one is left behind, in particular, the most vulnerable. This means enabling civil society organisations to be key and equal partners in decision making. Better implementation of art. 11.2 of TEU on civil dialogue is more needed than ever. A specific pillar on civil society participation should be added to the European Democracy Action Plan.

- European core principles of Article 2 such as democracy, rule of law, and fundamental rights including civic space are closely linked. The **rule of law report** as well as the **democracy action plan** should be interconnected and monitor civic space issues including civil society space. The **EC should follow up on these action plans** and consider stronger mechanisms to defend these principles and civil society space. Where national laws are against EU law, infringement procedures should be started.
- We support the 2022 Commission plans about a new "Initiative on Social Dialogue", but we urge the **EC to extend it to “Civil Society Dialogue”**, that will put civil society on an equal level with social partners in policy-making. This will be crucial for connecting citizens with the Pillar of Social Rights and the new Action Plan and is something that is missing from the announced Action Plan.

Chapter 4 - An economy that works for people

- **Social and sustainable exit from the crisis:** beyond economic and environmental issues, the social agenda must drive the EU work programme in 2022. This means the Commission’s commitment to a social and sustainable Europe shall be a priority while obviously accompanied by new indicators for economic progress that go beyond GDP. Civil society organisations play an important role in this regard. There is an opportunity in promoting social innovation as a model for recovery through co-creation, co-design and co-production. In a complex social landscape with massive societal challenges, the only way to reach a successful recovery is to mobilise all resources in society, acting in a cross-sectoral and multi-disciplinary manner in order to identify joint solutions to common challenges. Organised civil society is a catalyst for social innovation.
- Implement the **Action Plan for the European Pillar of Social Rights** and its suggestions for **overcoming barriers to philanthropy and public benefit organisations’ cross-border work** via the creation of a code of conduct for a better implementation of the non-discrimination principle and tax effective cross-border philanthropy. The creation of a European Statute for public benefit organisations/supranational legal recognition could facilitate cross-border work and stimulate more European initiatives for the public good. As part of the Action Plan, the European Commission invites the Council and the European Parliament to endorse three targets and calls on the Member States to define their own national targets. It is crucial that all Member States endorse these targets and set national ones to ensure that the EU jointly at least achieves, but hopefully exceeds these targets by 2030.
- **Funding and resources for CSOs:** Civil society organisations (CSOs) themselves are among the victims of inequalities and weaknesses in the system. Their current and future ability to respond to needs is threatened by often scarce and fluctuating resources (*EESC Diversity Group Study on impact of covid19 to CSOs*). This needs to be addressed by

ensuring funding mechanisms for CSOs in the recovery and implementation of the Social Pillar and beyond. CSOs need sufficient operational funding to carry out their activities, from support in reaching out to citizens to watchdog activities, which is even more relevant in times where Europe and the world is experiencing a threatening phenomenon of shrinking civic spaces. Moreover, the COVID-19 pandemic hit many sectors particularly hard, and when it comes to civil society organisations, with face-to-face educational and political participation activities suspended, their related projects were also put on hold, causing uncertainties and problems in the financial management of the organisations. The EC work programme 2022 following the crisis is a huge opportunity to review the EU engagement towards civil society organisations in terms of more sustainable and structural financial support vs project based funding, including via adapting the co-financing rates across the EU programmes to account for the impact of COVID-19.

Chapter 6 - Promoting our European way of life

- A vibrant civil society is at the heart of the European Union. Our way of life is characterised by a sense of fairness, justice, solidarity, and an understanding of the need to contribute to the common good for the benefit of all. Considering the fact that the COVID-19 crisis has had a particularly negative impact on certain societal groups, such as women, youth and mobile EU citizens, who have been experiencing a “double lock down”, it is now more important than ever for civil society organisations to play a central role in contributing to strengthening this way of life and should be regarded as allies in protecting, promoting and preserving our way of life based on inclusiveness and respect for others. As such, CSOs should receive proper, targeted support and recognition from policymakers and in this way, preserving the civic space and democratic right to association that is essential to our way of life.
- European civil society networks like the members of the EESC Liaison Group contribute to co-shaping EU policies and to build capacity of their members locally to understand and engage with the European Pillar of Social Rights and other key frameworks, but also to build consensus across countries to have a strong voice in the EU policy/legal discussions, address common challenges like COVID-19, strengthen the civil society sector essential for European democracies. This essential role must be recognised by improving social and civil dialogue equally.
- Philanthropy and civil society have a key role to play to promote key European policy areas and they could do even more if they had a better operating environment (see points above also).
- The EU could develop measures that stimulate more collaboration and co-investment opportunities among the philanthropy/foundation/CSO sector.

- The **new EU Money laundering and terrorism financing policy** must be risk based and proportionate to the risks it seeks to address and must not unduly restrict legitimate public benefit and philanthropy work.