



**RULES GOVERNING THE 2021
EESC CIVIL SOCIETY PRIZE**
Rewarding excellence in civil society initiatives
CLIMATE ACTION

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 civil society organisations and/or individuals that have made a significant contribution to promoting European identity and integration.

The **overall objective** of the prize is thus to raise awareness of the contribution that civil society organisations and/or individuals 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 2021 EESC Civil Society Prize: Climate action

Climate change is a defining challenge for humanity in the 21st century and we are now at a critical time. It is clear that the world is not on track to achieve the objectives of the Paris Agreement on climate change and the UN Sustainable Development Goals. Stopping the runaway climate change must be a shared goal on a global scale. It requires efforts from all nations and all actors to achieve climate neutrality. Europe is positioning itself as the frontrunner, the global leader on climate. The presentation by Ursula von der Leyen of the Communication on the European Green Deal with its strong commitment on climate neutrality by 2050 has been hailed as a renewed sign of leadership, aimed at promoting ambitious climate and environment policies across the world. By endorsing a binding EU target of a net domestic reduction of at least 55% in greenhouse gas emissions by 2030 compared to 1990 in December 2020, the European Council placed the EU firmly on track to climate neutrality. It has also been made clear that, in order for the transition to climate neutrality to be just and inclusive, "a new pact is needed to bring together citizens in all their diversity, with national, regional, local authorities, civil society and industry working closely with the EU's institutions and

consultative bodies"¹. The strong commitment on climate neutrality by 2050 opens a positive perspective for the EU's contribution for the COP26 in Glasgow. Europe must demonstrate that a wellbeing economy that protects ecosystems, conserves biodiversity and delivers a just transition to a climate neutral way of life is feasible and beneficial for all.

It is absolutely clear that action and commitment by all actors is crucial to the success of the European Green Deal and to the achievement of the Paris Agreement objectives. This vision has been stressed repeatedly by the EESC in the past years. Bottom up climate action has the potential to drive climate ambition. The Climate Pact, based on **genuine participation and ownership by local climate actors**, can be a vehicle for delivering on the EU's climate ambition, but it must focus on **empowering people to change the systems** that led us to the brink of the climate crisis – through exploration, experimentation and demonstration.

Thousands of grassroots initiatives have emerged across the EU in recent years as civil society organisation, communities and citizens increasingly decide to be part of the solution rather than the problem. These actors are playing a critical role in driving local transition processes, transforming local economies and also helping to bring about a shift in norms and behaviour. Through these actions, they are reducing their carbon and ecological footprints to well below that of mainstream communities. Civil society has been calling forcefully for more ambitious and urgent climate action. The youth climate strikes are the most dramatic demonstration of these calls. Young people have been increasingly engaging in proposing solutions to the climate crisis.

The EESC is concerned about climate change and is strongly committed to support actions linked to the achievement of climate neutrality. It has been very attentive also to the demands of young people and used several opportunities to provide a forum for young climate activists in order to amplify their message. In March 2021, the EESC yearly flagship event "Your Europe, Your Say!", which brings together over one hundred teenage students from all EU Member States, the UK and candidate countries, took the form of a COP simulation and helped empower students to engage on climate solutions, also thanks to a public side event on social media on the topic of systemic change, which focused on the climate pact and youth engagement. The event conclusions have been forwarded to the other EU institutions. Moreover, their proposals for action will be presented at the European Parliament's biannual youth event in Strasbourg in May 2021, as well as during the high-level European Youth Climate Summit the EESC intends to organise jointly with the European Parliament (timing will depend on the state of COVID pandemic, the event was already postponed from summer 2021).

In the past few years, the EESC adopted several opinions focussing, on the one hand, on the need for a social dialogue for a just and rapid transition to a zero carbon world and, on the other hand, on the contribution which bottom-up initiatives led among others by civil society can bring to the objective of climate neutrality. In the Opinion on *Boosting climate actions by non-state actors*², for example, it deplored that "the bulk of climate actions in Europe are not or hardly recognised at the European

¹ Communication from the Commission to the European Parliament, the European Council, the Council, the European Economic And Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions "The European Green Deal", COM(2019) 640 final, p. 2.

² EESC opinion on *Boosting climate actions by non-state actors* [OJ C 227, 28.06.2018, p. 35](#).

level". It furthermore pointed out that recognising and highlighting effective, innovative, and creative climate actions – for example by awarding prizes to particularly accomplished climate actions in specific thematic areas – "can be a cost effective means of incentivising new actions and encouraging ongoing ones". In this context, it also stressed that it is important "not only to highlight and showcase actions, but also to respond to the needs of non-state actors by inspiring new partnerships among state and non-state actors; facilitating peer learning, training and advice sharing among non-state actors (...)". The EESC made very concrete proposals with regard to the European Climate Pact in its exploratory opinion and several preceding opinions³. Setting up an EU Climate Finance Forum as part of the Pact would stimulate truly mutual learning processes, access to finance and remove barriers. Appointing members of the EESC as EU-level ambassadors for the constituencies they represent would build on their extensive networks among civil society to reinforce the Pact. Moreover, the youth engagement mechanism on climate and sustainability, like the Youth Climate and Sustainability Round Tables, should be an integral part of this Pact, facilitated by youth organisations.

This is why the EESC has decided to award its 12th civil society prize to civil society organisations or individuals who have carried out, on the territory of the EU, effective, innovative and creative climate actions aimed at promoting a just transition towards a low-carbon and climate-resilient economy. In this way, the prize will also highlight the contribution that civil society can make to the European Green Deal.

3. Eligibility

3.1 Eligible candidates

The EESC Civil Society Prize is open to all civil society organisations (hereafter: "CSOs") officially registered within the European Union and acting at local, national, regional or European level. It is also open to individuals.

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"⁴. 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.

³ EESC Opinion on the European Climate Pact, EESC Opinion on Towards structured youth engagement on climate and sustainability in the EU decision-making process (own-initiative opinion), EESC opinion on Facilitating access to climate finance for non-state actors.

⁴ 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](#)).

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)⁵ are also eligible.

Individuals are natural persons. 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 acting jointly without contractual ties are also eligible. They 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.

3.2 Eligible initiatives

The specific objective of the 2021 Civil Society Prize is to reward **effective, innovative and creative initiatives carried out on the territory of the EU which aim to promote a just transition towards a low-carbon and climate-resilient economy.**

These initiatives must have already been implemented or be still ongoing. **Initiatives which are planned but which have not begun implementation by 30 June 2021 (closing date for submission of applications) are excluded.**

To be eligible, activities/initiatives must cover **at least one** of the following areas:

- Promoting full involvement and/or acceptance of civil society in the transition to a climate neutral society;
- Promoting citizens' participation in the climate debate;
- Designing/implementing projects that inspire and promote a transition to climate-friendly lifestyles for individuals in their local environments and places of work, including by employers or workers organisations;
- Promoting climate awareness among consumers or encouraging behavioural change and change in social norms in the context of climate crisis;
- Designing/implementing projects that advocate active climate policies at local/regional/national or European level;
- Promoting climate justice in a broad sense with consideration to human rights and social responsibility of enterprises; encouraging climate awareness among wider, more diversified and/or disadvantaged/marginalised audiences; ensuring that no groups of society are left behind in the transition to a climate-neutral economy and society;
- Promoting climate education at schools of all level; designing/implementing projects that raise awareness on climate change and solutions to it among children and young people;
- Raising awareness about impacts of climate change and promote actions that aim to increase resilience and adaptation to climate change;

⁵ This applies for instance to Austrian labour-market players.

- Promoting civil society involvement in the implementation of climate policies at local/regional/national or European;
- Fostering active citizenship and empowerment through involvement in projects that promote a just transition and create new civic interactions leading to a climate neutral economy;
- Promoting active youth engagement in proposing and implementing climate solutions, as well as empowering young people to get involved in the decision-making processes on climate and environment policies at local/regional/national or European level.

Literary or scientific publications of any kind and on any support, audiovisual products and any kind of artworks are not eligible for the prize.

4. Application procedure and deadline

Applications are to be made by filling in the online application form (www.eesc.europa.eu/civilsocietyprize). In duly justified cases linked to documented technical problems, the EESC may allow candidates to apply by email, fax or post.

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

- ascertain that the civil society organisations or the individuals concerned fulfil the formal entry criteria;
- ascertain that the civil society organisations or the individuals concerned comply with the exclusion criteria;
- ascertain that the civil society organisations or the individuals concerned accept the provisions concerning liability, checks, audits and applicable law;
- evaluate the substantive merits of each entry in relation to the award criteria.

To this end, each application must include the duly filled in and signed Declaration on honour on exclusion criteria and eligibility criteria (Appendix 1).

Before the prize is awarded, candidates will be asked to return the duly completed and signed Legal Entity Form and Financial Identification Form as well as the relevant supporting documents. The 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, waiver of the candidate's own general or specific terms and conditions.

The final deadline for sending applications is **Wednesday 30 June 2021, at 10:00 (Brussels time)**.

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 submit only 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 Regulation⁶. 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

⁶ 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](#)).

15 calendar days after the award decision has been taken by the authorising officer (step 5), provisionally at the end of November 2021.

5.1.1 Verification of eligibility of candidates

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

All candidates must provide a declaration on honour (Appendix 1), duly signed and dated (by an authorised representative in the case of CSOs), stating that they are eligible for the prize. This declaration is part of the declaration used for the exclusion criteria (see point 5.1.3 below). Therefore, only one declaration covering both aspects should be provided by each candidate.

The EESC will evaluate the eligibility of candidates on the basis of the declaration on honour. 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

All candidates must provide a declaration on honour (Appendix 1), duly signed and dated (by an authorised representative in the case of CSOs), stating that they are not in one of the situations of exclusion referred to in Articles 136 and 141 of the Financial Regulation and listed in that declaration on honour.

The EESC reserves the right to verify whether the candidates are in one of the situations of exclusion by requiring the supporting documents listed in the declaration on honour. 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 consider only 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.</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. In this context, social innovation will also be taken into consideration.</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 5 prizes to the 5 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 plenary session on **8-9 December 2021**. 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.

Prizes will be paid by bank transfer within 30 days of the award ceremony, provided 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 data⁷. 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 and indicated in the declaration on honour. 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, the candidates grant the EESC the right to communicate to the public in any language and by any medium and 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 prize award.

9. Liability

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

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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)).

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.

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 Niedergrünwald
L-2925 Luxembourg
Tel.: +352 43031
Fax.: +352 4303 2100
Email: GeneralCourt.Registry@curia.europa.eu
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 Union budget may be imposed on participants who have made false declarations (Declaration on honour, Appendix 1), 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 (www.eesc.europa.eu/civilsocietyprize). The EESC recommends that candidates check the prize website regularly in order to get the most up-to-date information.

