



European Economic and Social Committee | Comité économique et social européen

**PERIOD** **END OF MANDATE**  
**2020** **REPORT**  
**2023** **SECTION FOR**  
**EMPLOYMENT, SOCIAL**  
**AFFAIRS AND CITIZENSHIP**

**DIRECTORATE C – LEGISLATIVE  
WORK**

**PRESIDENT: LAURENTIU PLOSCEANU**

## Introduction

*The 2020-2023 half-term was marked by the **fight against the COVID-19 pandemic** and its consequences and the **impact of the war in Ukraine**. The pandemic laid waste to the European economy and wreaked havoc in society with rising unemployment and inequalities as a consequence. Successive waves of infections hit many Member States harder than the first wave, which led to additional lockdowns. Gradually, the focus had moved towards taking steps **towards economic and social recovery from the impact caused by the pandemic** with the Next Generation EU recovery plan as the main EU instrument when **Russia's attack on Ukraine** further accelerated the **increase in energy prices and the cost of living** that had resulted from the pandemic.*

*Implementation of the **European Pillar of Social Rights (EPSR)** aimed at consolidating the EPSR as the guiding instrument for EU social policy in the recovery strategy to ensure that the digital and green transitions, in the context of which the recovery are unfolding, would be just and fair. **Extreme political movements and the authoritarian drift** have continued to spread with the risks this poses to the quality of democracy, the rule of law, the protection of fundamental rights and the possibilities for civil society to organise itself. Next Generation EU acknowledged these developments with an explicit **link between the recovery funds and the respect for the rule of law**.*

*Against this background and reflecting the priorities of the EESC President of an **economically prosperous, socially inclusive and environmentally sustainable Europe**, the section focused on:*

- ***Economic and social recovery from the COVID-19 pandemic, effective health policies and the fight against unemployment and poverty***
- ***Implementation of the European Pillar of Social Rights***
- ***Strengthening fundamental rights and the rule of law and the socio-economic inclusion of migrants and refugees.***

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President of the SOC Section

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## Economic and social recovery from the COVID-19 pandemic, effective health policies and the fight against unemployment and poverty

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*The Section worked extensively on the social and economic consequences of the COVID-19 Pandemic.*

*In the field of health, several opinions were adopted on the new instruments put in place to react to the pandemic, namely the European Health Union and the setting up of HERA (the European Health Emergency Preparedness and Response Authority). In addition, a conference was organised to discuss the current challenges and to look into possible actions to exit the crisis, to prevent the next health threat from spiralling out of control, and to build stronger and more resilient health systems.*

*The section contributed to the fight against poverty and social exclusion, focusing on the effects of the conflict in Ukraine and the ongoing energy crisis. It addressed issues related to energy and water poverty and their socio-economic consequences, namely for vulnerable groups. Particular attention was devoted to the alleviation of homelessness, adopting a 'housing first' approach.*

*The section further addressed the fight against unemployment and the economic and social recovery, focusing namely on how the pandemic had affected the labour market, the issues of youth participation and of rural areas in the EU labour market, as well as the importance of lifelong learning and training. Related opinions further addressed, among others, the issues of labour mobility, decent work worldwide and the implementation of the European Pillar of Social Rights.*

## Implementation of the European Pillar of Social Rights

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*Under the umbrella of the European Pillar of Social Rights (EPSR), the section analysed the policy and legislative measures proposed in the Action Plan on the EPSR.*

*The section was particularly active in the field of care, adopting a number of opinions drawing attention to the need for accessible, affordable and high-quality care services for everybody in the EU, the importance to improve working conditions for care workers, including informal carers and family caregivers and calling for European Strategy for*

*Older People. The section also looked into the impact of the Covid pandemic and teleworking on the distribution of care responsibilities. The Labour Market Observatory also examined how the pandemic has affected the labour market and its events focused, among others, on groups and areas who had also been affected by the crisis, such as young people and the labour market in rural areas.*

*The section's permanent groups on disability rights and on inclusion of the Roma raised awareness on the specific needs of these disadvantaged groups. With their activities, they contributed to assessing the implementation of the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities and of the EU Roma Strategic Framework 2020-2030 in the EU. Detailed results are available in dedicated reports.*

*In the area of gender equality, particular attention was devoted to promoting pay transparency, female entrepreneurship and women's participation in the labour market, under the framework of the EU Gender Equality Strategy. The section also continued to focus on the importance of education, training and lifelong learning and to ensure them as a right for everyone, both in view of the green and digital transitions but also to boost civic and social participation. The Labour Market finalised the study on "The work of the future: ensuring lifelong learning and training of employees", and the issue of upskilling and reskilling was at the heart of its work as well.*

## Strengthening fundamental rights and the rule of law and the socio-economic inclusion of migrants and refugees

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*The section made recommendations on the New Strategy for the Implementation of the Charter of Fundamental Rights and the European democracy action plan, and focussed strongly on media freedom and equality. It held a joint conference with the Commission on its first thematic Charter report in 2022 focused on fundamental rights in the digital age. The section also held two conferences on the rule of law looking into the country specific recommendations on rule of law and the EESC's own reports on fundamental rights and the rule of law in the member states. Special attention was given to the impact of Covid-19 and the restrictions in rights that had resulted from attempts to counter the pandemic.*

*In the area of migration, the section's emphasis was on the New Pact on Migration and Asylum with eleven opinions on its legislative and non-legislative initiatives. Concrete proposals to improve the Pact and its related measures were put forward on the new screening regulation, on the proposal revising the Eurodac regulation, on migrants' return and reintegration and on the new action plan on integration and inclusion, among others.*

*Two annual European Migration Forum meetings, took place in October 2021 and 2022. The 6th EMF was a virtual event and focussed on migration management during the pandemic highlighting the indispensable role of migrants during the pandemic and the great potential of their contribution to the EU's economic and social recovery after the COVID-19 crisis. The 7th EMF, in conjunction with the 2022 European Year of Youth, focussed on the inclusion of young people of migrant background across our society as the key to successful integration.*

## Interinstitutional echo

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*Again, a major share of the exploratory opinions requested by the EU Member States holding the presidency during the half-term fell under the remit of the SOC section, which prepared a total of 19 exploratory opinions for the rotating presidency (with another 5 ongoing by the end of the half-term). In April 2023, the section also adopted an exploratory opinion requested by the European Commission to feed into its preparatory work on the European disability card and in April 2021 it prepared a resolution as contribution to the Social Summit.*

*Various commissioners, ministers and state secretaries representing the Council presidency, Members of the European Parliament and directors of EU agencies participated in conferences and public hearings organised by the SOC section, events co-organised with the European Commission or EU agencies, such as CEDEFOP, as well as in section meetings for topical debates. These events included the annual meetings of the European Migration Forum, high-level conferences on fundamental rights and the rule of law and on homelessness, the annual policy-learning forum meetings organised together with CEDEFOP, as well as key conferences organised in cooperation with other EESC sections and bodies [on "Energy poverty at the crossroads of the European Pillar of Social Rights and the European Green Deal" with the TEN section](#), on "Health challenges*

*in the EU in the pandemic context" with the INT, REX and NAT sections and the CCMI, on "Relief and reconstruction of Ukraine and its European perspective" with the REX section, on how to "Accelerate transitions to build an open strategic autonomy for Europe" with the INT section and the CCMI, on "Skills and talents as key drivers for personal fulfilment, economic growth and competitiveness" with the President's private office as well as joint conferences organised by the section's Labour Market Observatory together with the Observatory of the Digital Transition and the Single Market and the Sustainable Development Observatory about the green, digital and social recovery, and on how the recovery plans are supporting a wellbeing economy for people and the planet.*

## Communication achievements

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*The section's work on migration, including the meetings of the [European Migration Forum](#), and on [disability rights](#) reliably results in media coverage, both on events and opinions. The EESC's work on the New Pact on Migration in 2021 was no exception with widely noted [debates](#) and [opinions](#). The section also held particularly widely noted events on "[Challenges of teleworking: organization of working time, work life balance and the right to disconnect](#)" in January 2021 to prepare for a [key opinion](#) on this issue and on "[Energy poverty at the crossroads of the European Pillar of Social Rights and the European Green Deal](#)" in April 2021. Also its work in view of the [European Year of Youth](#) in 2022 and its contributions to the EP's [Gender Equality Week](#) in 2022 were frequently referred to.*

## Perspective/outlook

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*Key priorities for the section over the next half-term will continue to be the **economic and social recovery** from the impact caused by the pandemic and Russia's attack on Ukraine and the increase in energy prices and the cost of living they have led to. In the ongoing **green and digital transition, fighting high unemployment and poverty**, the **implementation of the European Pillar of Social Rights, equality** in all its facets, **skills, fundamental rights and the rule of law** and **migration** will continue to be important issues that need to be addressed.*

*Key legislative files for the section in 2023 will be:*

- Reinforced quality framework for traineeships

- *Defense of democracy package*
- *Recognition of qualifications of third country nationals*
- *European Disability Card*

## Appendix I – Key statistics

	As of 29 October 2020	2021	2022	Until 25 April 2023	Total
<b>Section meetings</b>	2	9	8	4	23
<b>Section Bureau meetings</b>	2	11	10	4	27
<b>Study Group meetings</b>	2	83	72	34	191
<b>Permanent Study Group meetings</b>	3	14	12	2	31
<b>Observatory meetings</b>	-	4	3	-	7
<b>Opinions</b>	11	40	43	17	111
Referrals	5	28	25	7	65
Exploratory opinions	4	6	3	7	20
Own-initiative opinions	2	4	14	2	22
Information reports	-	1	-	-	1
Evaluation reports	-	1	1	1	3
<b>Studies</b>	-	-	-	-	-
<b>Fact-finding missions</b>	1	17	20	6	44
<b>Conferences and hearings organized by the Section</b>	3	34	42	8	87
<b>Participation of Members in meetings/events/conferences</b>	13	89	86	22	210
<b>Meetings between EESC/EP rapporteurs or Section/EP Committee presidents</b>	-	23	20	2	45
<b>Meetings of EESC members with Commissioners, members of Cabinet, Commission directors-general or directors</b>	-	53	21	6	80
<b>Meetings of EESC members with Council representatives, permanent representatives or EU presidency representatives</b>	-	11	13	7	31