



European Economic and Social Committee | Comité économique et social européen

PERIOD **END OF TERM-OF-**
2021 **OFFICE REPORT**
2023 **PERMANENT GROUP**
SUSTAINABLE FOOD

DIR. B — LEGISLATIVE WORK

PRESIDENT: ANDREAS THURNER

Introduction

During the 2021-2023 term-of-office, the work of the Permanent Group (PG) on Sustainable Food Systems aimed to contribute to the general objective of the NAT Section "*Delivering on the European Green and Social Deal (EGD) as a means to achieving sustainable recovery and the implementation of the Agenda 2030 and the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)*". More precisely, the group analysed and promoted how transforming food systems constitutes a lever for the implementation of the sustainable development and climate agendas as a whole.

This term-of-office had a pronounced international focus with the UN Food Systems Summit organised in 2021, and the reinforced cooperation with the FAO and the Committee on World Food Security (CFS). At the European level, our work focused on identifying tools to make our food systems more inclusive and fairer in the context of the Farm to Fork strategy, with a specific focus on sustainable production and food labelling to empower consumers to make sustainable choices.

We are convinced that our work will contribute to the development of the new framework legislation on Sustainable Food Systems that the European Commission will publish by the end of 2023. The menu for the new members of this group is therefore still quite extensive, as the work towards more sustainable food systems has only started. However, the numerous inspiring examples that we have heard during this mandate show that we are progressing to this goal.

Andreas Thurner

President of the Permanent group "Sustainable food systems"

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Activities and main conclusions

During the 2021-2023 term of office, the study group promoted more sustainable food systems at EU level and brought together the various actors across the food supply chain both inside and outside the EESC.

The Group met seven times under the chairmanship of Andreas Thurner and focused on the following key objectives:

- **Highlight how transforming food systems contributes to the implementation of the sustainable development and climate agendas as a whole.** In the context of the UN Food Systems Summit, the high-level public hearing organised by the Permanent group highlighted the need for more inclusive and fairer sustainable food systems for a wellbeing economy post-Covid 19, focusing on decent work and fair trade in the food supply chain, and on empowering women and young people to play an active role in sustainable food systems.
- **Promote transparent and sustainable food labelling to empower consumers to make more sustainable and healthier food choices** (application of concrete specific aspects on the F2F strategy). By looking to the different aspects of sustainability and promoting mutual understanding between the various actors in the food chain, the EESC facilitated dialogue on labelling and certification and supported the drawing-up of recommendations for a labelling framework (see the own-initiative opinion [NAT 857 Towards a sustainable food labelling framework to empower consumers to make sustainable food choices](#)).
- **Highlight the role of the private sector in the transition towards sustainable, equitable and secure food systems.** By promoting a cross-sectoral approach and acting as a forum for cooperation, the group analysed the game changers to support the role of the private sector in the transition towards sustainable, equitable and secure food systems. This exchange contributed to the own-initiative opinion [NAT/821 Aligning food business strategies and operations with the SDGs for a sustainable post-COVID-19 recovery](#).
- **Analyse the governance of food markets and the role of local/short food supply chains, geographical indications, and organic production as drivers of sustainable food systems.** By organising thematic debates on these topics, the PSG brought together various stakeholders to discuss the role of key leverages such as organic production and food

public procurement to foster sustainable and healthy food production and consumption (cfr [NAT/818 Action Plan for the development of EU organic production](#)).

- **Incorporate food sustainability considerations into other policy areas.** Food is at the crossroads of several policy areas, and food sustainability is linked to a number of other issues on which the EESC works, including the circular economy. The joint meeting with the Sustainable Development Observatory (SDO) for example looked at the links between sustainable food systems and climate, biodiversity and animal welfare.
- **Monitor and assess EU and international policy from a civil society perspective.** The participation of an EESC delegation (three members) in the annual meetings of the Committee on World Food Security (CFS) made it possible to increase the visibility of the EESC in a forum of this scope, and to maintain and develop new contacts (through bilateral meetings) with the FAO, the EU Delegation to the United Nations in Rome and the Civil Society Mechanism of the CFS.
- **Contribute to the discussion on food waste reduction,** by participating and reporting back from the EU Platform on Food Losses and Food Waste, where the PSG President has an official seat as observer.

In conclusion, during the half-term-of-office, the PSG represented a meaningful space for exchange and discussion among members, stakeholders across the food supply chain, academics, and EU and international policy-makers on a wide range of issues related to sustainable food systems. The debates provided useful input into ongoing opinions and added value to the EESC's participation in EU and international fora. This also allowed to further reinforce cooperation with key institutional players, especially in the Commission and FAO, and to remain part of the conversation for the future planning of the FSFS.

Appendix I — Meetings and events

	2020	2021	2022	2023	Total
Study group meetings	0	3	3	1	7
Conferences and hearings organised by the study group	0	3	3	1	7
Participation of PSG President in events	2	15	7	3	27

26/02/2021: Thematic debate: "Transparent and sustainable food labelling in the Farm to Fork strategy: how can we empower consumers to make more sustainable and healthier food choices?"

28/05/2021: Public hearing "Towards the UN Food Systems Summit: More inclusive and fairer sustainable food systems for a wellbeing economy post-Covid 19"

10/12/2021: Webinar - "Farm to Fork Strategy - Aligning the food industry with the European Green Deal's climate neutrality objectives and the UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)"

29/03/2022 (joint SDO/ SPS meeting): Sustainable food systems' contribution to climate neutrality and biodiversity protection + Approaches for sustainable (or not) food systems

17/06/2022: Thematic debate: "How much sustainability is in organic, fair trade and geographical indications?"

17/06/2022: Thematic debate: "Local/short food supply chains as drivers of sustainable development"

23/3/2023: Thematic debate: "The role of food labelling and certification as drivers towards sustainable food systems"