

THE EESC IN A NUTSHELL

Introduction

Established in 1957, the European Economic and Social Committee (EESC) is a unique advisory body of the European Union which ensures that civil society organisations have a decisive say in Europe's development. Committee Members are appointed for a five-year term of office, whereas key posts, such as the EESC President and two Vice-Presidents, are filled every two and a half years. The 2015-2020 term has expired and the reappointment process, referred to as 'the Renewal', has just taken place.

The new Members of the Committee have been formally appointed and it around 40 % of them are wholly new to the EESC. The rest are reappointed Members who have already served on the Committee in previous terms. The Renewal also involves the election of the Committee President and other key positions.



What is the role of the EESC?

The EESC is the bridge between Europe and civil society. The Committee fulfils three key missions:

- ensuring that European policies and legislation tie in better with economic, social and civic circumstances on the ground;
- promoting the development of a more participatory European Union which is in touch with public opinion; and
- promoting the values on which European integration is founded and advancing the role of civil society organisations¹.

Organised civil society describes a wide range of organisations, networks, associations, groups and movements that are independent from government and come together to advance their common interests through collective action.

Who are the Members?

The EESC is made up of 329 Members from all 27 Member States. Nominated by their governments, they are appointed by the Council of the European Union for a period of five years. They then work independently in the interests of all EU citizens. These Members are not politicians but employers, trade unionists and representatives of groups such as professional and community associations, farmers, youth organisations, women's groups, consumers, environmental campaigners and many more.

EESC Members are not paid to work for the EESC, although their expenses are reimbursed. Members are not based full time in Brussels: most continue to do their jobs in their home countries, which means that they can stay in touch with people 'back home'. The EESC Members' declarations of interest are public and can be found on each Member's dedicated page on the EESC's website². More information is available in the Members' Statute of the European Economic and Social Committee³.

1. EESC mission statement, <https://bit.ly/2Hlh1US>

2. See: <https://bit.ly/34fQUaD>

3. See Members' statute, article 5a, <https://bit.ly/37tnaJG>

The national allocation of seats, proportionate to the population, is as follows⁴:

Members per country

- 24** Germany, France and Italy
- 21** Spain and Poland
- 15** Romania
- 12** Belgium, Bulgaria, Czechia, Greece, Hungary, the Netherlands, Austria, Portugal and Sweden
- 9** Denmark, Ireland, Croatia, Lithuania, Slovakia and Finland
- 7** Estonia, Latvia and Slovenia
- 6** Cyprus and Luxemburg
- 5** Malta

How are Members appointed?

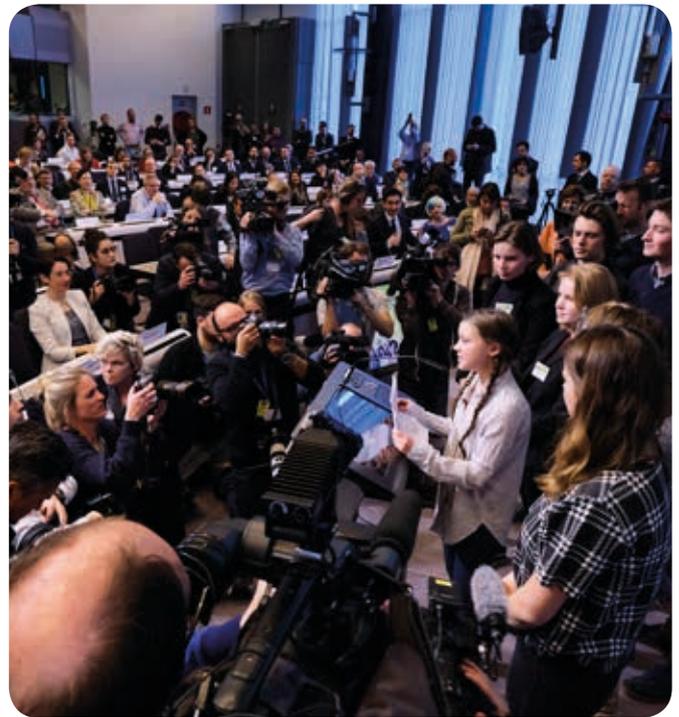
The process of nominating prospective EESC Members for a renewable five-year term - and their subsequent confirmation by the Council of the European Union - is referred to as 'the Renewal'. This process culminates in a new intake of Members who began their term on 21 September 2020⁵. Over 40 % of the EESC's 329 Members have been replaced, while the remaining Members return for another term.

National governments begin this process by holding consultations with key organisations that represent employers, workers and other civil society stakeholders (farmers, retailers, the liberal professions, consumers, etc.). A list is then drawn up and sent to the Council's General Secretariat (the deadline for the 2020 renewal was 1 June). Member States must ensure that the various categories of economic and social activity are adequately represented⁶.

Once the list of proposed Members has been received, it undergoes legal scrutiny by the European Commission. The draft Decision appointing Members can only be adopted once the Commission's opinion has been transmitted⁷. The Council adopted this Decision on EESC Renewal on 2 October 2020.

"I would like to express my personal appreciation for the excellent work done by the Committee over the last five years. In particular in the past months, when an unprecedented crisis confronted our institutions with major challenges you have taken on great responsibilities. I hope that this fruitful bilateral cooperation will continue in your new mandate"

Commission President Ursula von der Leyen⁸



Greta Thunberg addressing the EESC plenary, February 2019

What role do Members play in influencing EU policy?

New Members find themselves in a position of real influence. Through the EESC's opinions, they can contribute to shaping European legislation. These opinions take three different shapes:

- **Opinions drawn up at the request of the European Parliament, the Council or the European Commission.**
These requests for opinions are technically known as referrals and can be either mandatory, when the treaties so provide, or optional, depending on the policy area concerned.
- **Own-initiative opinions** on subjects of interest to civil society to draw the attention of the European institutions to them.
- **Exploratory opinions**, issued at the request of EU institutions in spheres where they think that the EESC's expertise can provide useful input.

The EESC examines proposals and adopts opinions based on a consensus reached between Members, meeting nine times a year at plenary sessions. Each year, some 160 opinions are published in the EU's Official Journal in the 24 languages of the Union.

These opinions can have a real impact on EU policy-making. For example, the EESC was the **first EU body to call in April 2020 for a strong Health Union** to be put in place as the COVID-19 pandemic broke out across Europe⁹.

4. See Council Decision (EU) 2019/853 of 21 May 2019 determining the composition of the European Economic and Social Committee, <https://bit.ly/3o6jaV8>

5. See information note from the Council of the European Union: <https://bit.ly/3jluDwg>

6. See article 301 of the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union: <https://bit.ly/2HoJZTP>

7. See article 302 of the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union: <https://bit.ly/2HoJZTP>

8. Ursula von der Leyen - video message to the EESC's plenary session, September 2020, <https://bit.ly/2G063DL>

9. See the EESC's Declaration of 6 April 2020 (<https://bit.ly/37twvRA>) and its President's statement of 16 April 2020 (<https://bit.ly/3m7YU3D>)

How is the EESC organised?

The Presidency

Renewal involves the election of a President and two Vice-Presidents, chosen from each of the three Groups (see below) in rotation for two-and-a-half-year terms. The President and Vice-Presidents of the Committee are elected by a simple majority during the inaugural assembly session. After election, the President presents a work programme for his or her term of office, and presents a review of achievements at the end of term¹⁰.

The President is responsible for the orderly conduct of the Committee's business, and represents the EESC in relations with other institutions and bodies¹¹. The two Vice-Presidents - elected from among the Members of the two groups to which the President does not belong - are responsible for communication and the budget respectively. These positions may not be renewed¹².

The Groups

"The Economic and Social Committee shall consist of representatives of organisations of employers, of the employed, and of other parties representative of civil society, notably in socioeconomic, civic, professional and cultural areas."

Treaty on the functioning of the EU, article 300 (2)

EESC Members work in three groups:

Employers (Group I), Workers (Group II) and Diversity Europe (Group III).

Members work to build consensus between all three Groups, so that EESC opinions reflect the economic and social interests of a wide variety of citizens. Groups work in conjunction with the Bureau and the Committee secretariat (see below) in the preparation, organisation and coordination of the Committee's business.

During the renewal process, each Group elects a President and Vice-President for renewable two-and-a-half-year terms of office. Group Presidents meet with the Committee President to prepare the work of the Bureau and the assembly, and assist the Committee Presidency in the formulation of policy and, where appropriate, in the monitoring of expenditure¹³.

Who are the Groups?

The **Employers' Group** (Group I) is made up of entrepreneurs and representatives of entrepreneur associations working in industry, commerce, services and agriculture in the 27 Member States of the European Union¹⁴.

The **Workers' Group** (Group II) comprises representatives from national trade unions, confederations and sectoral federations.

Its Members represent over 80 trade union organisations - the vast majority of them affiliated to the European Trade Union Confederation (ETUC) or its sectoral federations¹⁵.

The **Diversity Europe Group** (Group III) brings together a wide range of social, occupational, economic and cultural organisations that make up civil society in the Member States (farmers' organisations, small businesses, the professions, social economy actors, consumer and environmental organisations, associations representing specific social groups, the voluntary sector and many others)¹⁶.

Sections and other bodies

Members are appointed to Sections for two-and-a-half-year renewable terms, and can participate in one or more of these Sections depending on their areas of expertise. It is here that much of the preparatory work on opinions is carried out. For example, Sections establish study groups and appoint rapporteurs to deal with referred questions.

Renewal also involves the selection of Section Presidents who are elected by Committee Members for renewable two-and-a-half-year terms of office by a simple majority. However, the same Group may not hold the Presidency of any Section for a period exceeding five consecutive years¹⁷.

The EESC has six Sections covering different aspects of the EU's work along with a Consultative Commission, three Observatories and two specialised groups:

- Economic and Monetary Union and Economic and Social Cohesion (ECO)
- Single Market, Production and Consumption (INT)
- Agriculture, Rural Development and Environment (NAT)
- External Relations (REX)
- Employment, Social Affairs and Citizenship (SOC)
- Transport, Energy, Infrastructure and Information Society (TEN)
- Consultative Commission on Industrial Change (CCMI)¹⁸
- Single Market Observatory
- Sustainable Development Observatory
- Labour Market Observatory
- European Semester Group
- Group on Fundamental Rights and the Rule of Law.

10. EESC Rules of Procedure, rule 14 (6), see <https://bit.ly/37u03i6>

11. EESC Rules of Procedure, rule 14 (4), see <https://bit.ly/37u03i6>

12. EESC Rules of Procedure, rule 4 (3), see <https://bit.ly/37u03i6>

13. EESC Rules of Procedure, rule 30, see <https://bit.ly/37u03i6>

14. For more information on the Employers' Group, see: <https://bit.ly/34fScT1>

15. For more information on the Workers' Group, see: <https://bit.ly/37tE8Y3>

16. For more information on the Diversity Europe Group, see <https://bit.ly/35jwsoD>

17. EESC Rules of Procedure, rule 19 (4), <https://bit.ly/37u03i6>

18. The CCMI has an interesting history, see: <https://www.eesc.europa.eu/en/sections-other-bodies/sections-commission/consultative-commission-industrial-change-ccmi>

The Bureau

Every two and a half years, the EESC elects a Bureau made up of 40 Members, chosen from across the three Groups. The Bureau includes the President, the two Vice-Presidents, the three Group Presidents and the Section Presidents, and must include at least one - and a maximum of three - representatives from each Member State¹⁹. The Committee votes on the Bureau as a whole, and at least two-thirds of the total number of valid votes must be cast in favour.

The Bureau's main task is to organise and coordinate the work of the EESC's various bodies and to lay down policy guidelines for this work.

Administration and budget

In total, 665 staff²⁰ work at the EESC, whose headquarters - the Jacques Delors building - is situated in the heart of Brussels' European quarter. The Committee is serviced by a secretariat-general, headed by a Secretary-General who reports to the President, representing the Bureau.

The **EESC's 2017 budget totalled EUR 133.8 million**, representing approximately 1.45 % of the EU's overall administrative expenditure. In addition, an agreement with the Committee of the Regions facilitates economies of scale.

The EESC drafts its budget within the framework set by the European Parliament, the Council and the Commission, and strictly follows the Commission's guidelines and indicators.

How does the EESC cooperate with other EU institutions?

The EESC works closely with the other key EU Institutions in order to operate efficiently and ensure that the voice of European civil society is heard²¹. A protocol of cooperation with the European Commission was signed, which strengthens strategic political dialogue and fully recognises the Committee's role of enabling civil society participation in the policy-shaping and decision-making processes of the EU.

A cooperation agreement with the European Parliament aims to improve coordination of activities, saving public money and resources through shared research and other services. The agreement also gives the EESC a wider role in monitoring the impact of EU legislation.

Finally, a long-standing cooperation agreement with the Committee of the Regions allows the two Committees to share buildings and have joint translation services, while a more recent agreement extended cooperation to a joint Library and Information Centre, the medical services, meeting room management and general administrative matters.

19. EESC Rules of Procedure, rule 4, see <https://bit.ly/37u03i6>

20. As of 2017, compared to 711 in April 2015. The lower figure is part of the 5 % overall reduction effort planned for all EU institutions over the 2013-2017 period

21. For further information on this topic see <https://bit.ly/34ffpEW>

Further information

Council Decision (EU) 2019/853 of 21 May 2019 determining the Composition of the European Economic and Social Committee: <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/PDF/?uri=CELEX:32019D0853&from=EN>

Rules of Procedure and Code of Conduct of the Members of the European Economic and Social Committee: <https://www.eesc.europa.eu/en/about/rules/rules-procedure-and-code-conduct-members-eesc-march-2019>

Budget of the European Union - Section VI - The European Economic and Social Committee: <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/budget/data/DB/2020/en/SEC06.pdf>

Information Note from the Council on Renewal of the European Economic and Social Committee for the period 2020-2025: <https://data.consilium.europa.eu/doc/document/ST-8795-2020-INIT/x/pdf>

Members Statute of the European Social and Economic Committee: http://www.eesc.europa.eu/resources/docs/ces285-2012_admin_en.doc

Discover what the EESC can do for you: <https://www.eesc.europa.eu/en/our-work/publications-other-work/publications/discover-what-eesc-can-do-you-2018-edition>

The EESC on social media

Facebook: www.eesc.europa.eu/facebook

Twitter: www.eesc.europa.eu/twitter

YouTube: www.eesc.europa.eu/youtube

LinkedIn: www.linkedin.com/company/european-economic-and-social-committee

Instagram: [eu_civilsociety](https://www.instagram.com/eu_civilsociety)