



## Europe listening to its citizens for a sustainable Europe

**Sustainable growth** means that growth should be based not only on quantity but also – in fact even more – on quality, which means (a) no exploitation of the environment or of labour, (b) fair living conditions, (c) economic growth measured not only by annual flow, but also by stocks of wealth and their distribution, (d) meeting the needs of all within the means of the planet, (e) developing economies that allow us to thrive, regardless of whether or not they grow, and (f) a closed flow of income cycling between households, businesses, banks, government and trade, operating in a social and ecological way. Energy, materials, the natural world, human society, power, and the wealth we hold in common, all are missing from the current model. The unpaid work of carers – principally women – is ignored, though no economy could function without them.

As to **sustainable competitiveness**, it is a model that balances economic prosperity, environmental issues and social inclusiveness. In this context, the sustainability-adjusted global competitiveness index needs to take into consideration two new dimensions – environmental and social.

### Future of Europe

The EESC is a bridge between the EU and its citizens and as such would like to propose its vision for the future, with **Europe becoming the world leader on sustainable development**. This requires a **new strategy** based on a global, cross-sectoral approach focusing on the needs of the citizens with the primary goal of sustainability, in order to ensure that economic, social and environmental challenges are tackled together.

This strategy must ensure that **competitiveness, growth, investments and businesses in general become sustainable** and serve the well-being of all citizens. **The economy must be the catalyst for the EU's social, economic and cultural renewal**.

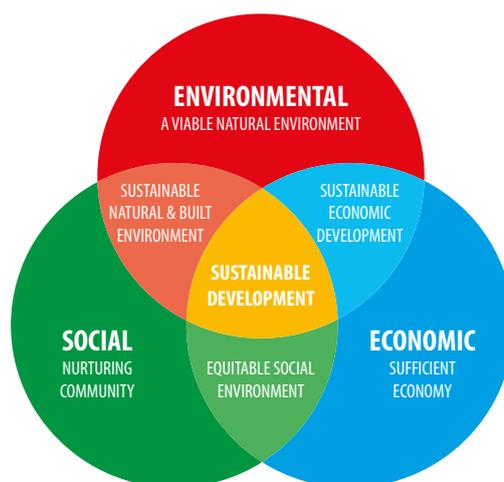
The **single market** in all its economic, social and environmental dimensions is at the **core of the European integration**. It should generate sustainable growth and

innovation, attract investment and foster sustainable competitiveness of its companies.

But the future of Europe can only be conceived and developed if the **values** which have underpinned the European project from the outset **remain at the heart of the development of the EU** and its future policies. Similarly, the **cultural dimension** of the European project

must be recognised, affirmed and factored into all EU policies.

The United Nations' 2030 Agenda must therefore encourage the private sector to contribute to the achievement of sustainable economic, social and environmental objectives, thereby fostering equitable and sustainable growth of well-being for all and the protection of social, human and labour rights.



### An overarching strategy for sustainability

The EESC calls for an **overarching strategy** for sustainability in implementing the Agenda 2030 with an ambitious EU budget.

Competitiveness and sustainability are not in opposition as the social and environmental aspects are part and parcel of the definition of competitiveness. Competitiveness must not be defined only in terms of quantity and price, but preferably also with reference to **European values, quality and sustainability**.

Europe needs a **new model of growth** which is qualitatively

different from what we have at present, that is socially inclusive and environmentally sustainable, and able to foster and support convergence of the digital and ecological transitions in our countries and societies.

**Sustainable investment** is a key instrument for steering and fostering the process of strengthening Europe's leadership towards a sustainable society. It has to stimulate high-quality job creation, renewable energy, affordable and accessible green public transport, eco-designed digital technology, research and innovation. This is particularly

crucial for young people and regions which have high unemployment or are experiencing structural changes.

**European companies** need to fulfil their role and responsibilities and **act as leaders** in the eyes of the rest of the world if the competitiveness and economic sustainability of our European system is redefined in respect of our planet.

## Social Europe

### Peoples' Europe and communication policy

*A successful implementation of the strategy proposed by the EESC requires significant public involvement and an effective communication policy based on a real dialogue avoiding a top-down approach.*

*An increase of citizen participation in defining EU policies is indispensable to regain support and restore faith in European integration, particularly among young people.*

*Structured civil dialogue and active citizenship must become genuine tools for participatory democracy.*

*Measures should be taken to ensure increased accountability and transparency of decision-making by EU institutions and national governments.*

### Migration

*Migration should be seen not as a threat but as an opportunity for Europe's economic and social model and there is an urgent need to change the narrative and policies in this field. Integration is a two-way process and both the host community and migrants have rights and duties.*

*Europe needs a comprehensive approach to migration policy.*

### Governance

*Implementing the sustainable development agenda requires a new holistic and cross-sectoral governance approach to ensure that the economic, social and environmental challenges are addressed together and that all its internal and external policies are coherent and aligned with the SDGs.*

### Budget

*To face the economic, social and environmental priorities, new as well as ongoing, the EESC calls for EU financial resources to be set at 1.3% GNI for the next Multiannual Financial Framework 2021-2027.*

*Budgetary resources have to be transferred to the Member States in accordance with criteria of distributive justice to restore the path of economic and social convergence.*

### Fair taxation

*A fair tax system requires that individuals and legal entities tax their income and profits proportionally.*

*The fight against fraud, tax evasion, money laundering and tax havens should include measures against corporate base erosion and profit shifting.*

A new '**Social Deal**' that offers all citizens a fairer and more equal society is indispensable. A **social action programme** is needed to transpose the UN Agenda 2030 to all levels.

A general **improvement** of and **increased investment in education system**, as well as support for a **universal entitlement to lifelong learning** that enables people to acquire skills and to reskill and upskill are crucial.

Public policies and legislative measures must ensure that EU citizens and residents enjoy the **same level of protection** and can exercise their fundamental rights and freedoms. The EU must improve its policies and actions to ensure **gender equality**, in addition to guaranteeing that all people facing multiple discrimination have equal **opportunities** in society.

Measures to ensure a **minimum wage and income** may constitute

an important element of social protection and contribute to achieving a decent standard of living in all countries, while also helping to support growth and for enhancing convergence, or avoiding divergence, within the EU.

A **sustainable transition** requires investment in effective and integrated social protection systems offering quality services and **social dialogue** is key to anticipate and manage changes.

## Sustainable environment

The strategy advocated by the EESC must ensure that at least the **Paris Agreement** is fully and immediately implemented through ambitious EU climate policies, with the commitment to limit temperature increases to max. 1°C.

The EU should accelerate the **just and sustainable transition**.

A **comprehensive food policy** is needed.

The EU must transform a linear economy into a **circular, carbon-free economy and common standards** should be set up to deliver clean air, water and to protect our oceans.

## EU business and sustainability

**Business is an enabler** for societal and environmental development. European companies have to remain **innovation and creativity drivers** and respect high standards regarding labour, consumers and the environment across Europe.

There are already frontrunners among companies in the EU, but they have to be more ambitious and spread this sustainable mindset

across value chains, giving particular encouragement to SMEs.

Europe needs a **true digital transformation** to regain global sustainable competitiveness and deliver sustainable growth and jobs.

A business environment that helps prepare for the future is based on **open markets and fair competition**, where social and environmen-

tal aspects are part of its definition, and which provides **enabling and supportive conditions for doing business**.

The **new economic models** of production and consumption represent an opportunity for the EU to become a leader in innovative and sustainable economic growth.

## Free and fair trade

The EU's trade policy must **reflect and be consistent** with its own values as the global leader in sustainability.

An **ambitious trade policy agenda** at all levels will create growth and

jobs in the EU while promoting a rules-based trade policy at the global level.

The EU should continue to **open new markets** and increase business opportunities and consumer satis-

faction while ensuring high social and environmental standards and it should play a **leading role in the reform of the WTO** to ensure that the latter makes a fundamental contribution to achieving the SDGs.

**Related EESC opinion:** "Listening to the citizens of Europe for a sustainable future (Sibiu and beyond)", adopted at the plenary session n° 542 on 20/03/2019  
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