Discover what the EESC can do for you

2021 Edition
The European Economic and Social Committee (EESC) represents the voice of civil society within the EU institutions and connects stakeholders with the EU.
Get to know the European Economic and Social Committee

The EESC is an integral part of the EU: it was set up in 1957 by the Treaty of Rome to advise EU decision-makers and ensure that civil society organisations and networks across the continent have a say in Europe’s development.

The EESC is not like other EU bodies. It is a unique forum for consultation, dialogue and consensus between representatives from all the different sectors of “organised civil society”.

These organisations often act as intermediaries between decision-makers and the public, offering an avenue for people to play an active role in bringing about change or to support specific causes for the common good.
The EESC’s mission and vision

The EESC’s aim is to help ensure that EU policymaking and legislation is more democratic and more effective and genuinely reflects the needs of EU citizens.

It has three key tasks:
- to advise the European Parliament, the Council and the European Commission;
- to make sure the views of civil society organisations are heard in Brussels and to increase their awareness of the impact of EU legislation on the lives of EU citizens;
- to support and strengthen organised civil society both inside and outside the EU.

The EESC is dedicated to promoting participatory democracy, alongside parliamentary democracy, in Europe. The EESC’s vision of society is one in which everyone is included and actively involved. This means citizens having a meaningful say in their own future and in the future of their children. It means young people believing they have the hope of a job and a decent life and it means people feeling empowered, engaged, equally respected and safe and secure in their daily lives.
The EESC’s soul is its members

Based in Brussels, the EESC is made up of 329 members from all 27 EU Member States. The members come from all social and professional backgrounds and have a vast range of knowledge and experience. They represent employers' associations, industry, chambers of commerce, associations of small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs), trade unions, consumers, farmers, disability campaigners, academia, women's rights groups, environmentalists, cooperatives, youth organisations, human rights organisations, etc. In total, the EESC gathers around 250 organisations and networks at national level, representing millions of EU citizens.

EESC members are appointed by the Council for a term of five years on a proposal by Member States but they work independently for the EESC in the interests of all EU citizens.

Members are not based full-time in Brussels: most continue to do their own jobs in their home countries, ensuring that they maintain direct contact with their constituencies.

The EESC is made up of three groups: Employers’ Group, Workers' Group and Diversity Europe Group. The aim is to build consensus between these groups so that EESC opinions truly reflect the economic and social interests of EU citizens.

**Employers’ Group**
Group I

**Workers’ Group**
Group II

**Diversity Europe Group**
Group III
How the EESC works

The European Parliament, Council and Commission are legally obliged to consult the EESC when passing new laws on a wide range of topics. The EESC examines the proposals and draws up opinions based on agreement reached between its members.

In addition, the EESC adopts own-initiative opinions on topics members believe to be important in the interests of EU citizens. It also produces exploratory opinions, requested by EU law-makers when they want civil society’s views on specific policies. The EESC also reflects the demands of civil society by publishing declarations, resolutions, information reports and impact assessments of EU legislation.

The EESC has six sections and one consultative commission on industrial change, plus several observatories and ad hoc groups. These bodies cover different EU policies, ranging from the economy to social affairs, from transport to the environment, from the internal market to external relations, from the rule of law and the European Semester to Brexit. Members sit on one or more of these bodies, depending on their areas of expertise.

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The opinions are debated and adopted by simple majority at the EESC’s plenary sessions, which take place nine times a year in Brussels. The opinions are then sent to the EU law-makers in the Parliament and in the Council and contribute to the law-making process by influencing their thinking.

Each year, the EESC organises over 1000 meetings, both in Brussels and "back home" in the EU Member States, and publishes some 150 opinions in 24 languages.

To find an opinion go to: www.eesc.europa.eu/en/our-work/opinions-information-reports/opinions
Some success stories

The EESC empowers civil society on climate actions
The EESC’s recommendations were taken on board in the European Commission’s Communication on the European Climate Pact, including the establishment of an EU Climate Finance Forum.

The EESC has a say on the way EU money is spent
The EESC takes part in the expert group set up by the European Commission on sustainable finance.

The EESC reduces waste
The European Circular Economy Stakeholder Platform, jointly set with the European Commission, links policy to practice on circular economy.

The EESC claims for the right to vote for disabled people
800,000 EU citizens in 16 countries are denied the right to vote due to their disabilities. The EESC has launched a campaign to stop this discrimination.
The EESC wants cleaner, greener batteries
Sustainable batteries depend on third country raw materials, alternative fuels, technological expertise and recycling capacity, including "urban mining". The EU Strategic Action Plan for Batteries has taken these recommendations on board.

The EESC cares about migrants
The EESC and the European Commission organise jointly a European Migration Forum, in which policy makers and civil society monitor migration, asylum and integration issues.

The EESC leaves no territory behind
The 2030 Territorial Agenda was delivered in 2020 with the contribution of the EESC: better links between urban and rural areas; decent living conditions for all; a healthy environment… No EU citizen should be left without access to public services simply because of the region they live in.

The EESC models civil society supervision of international trade
The EESC participation model in policy making is now the standard in civil society advisory groups within international trade agreements.

The EESC regrets Brexit, but keeps in touch with British civil society
Thanks to the EESC, the post-Brexit EU-UK agreement includes now a joint civil society advisory group, so that civil society monitoring of future relations is preserved.
Young Europeans

As part of this mission, the EESC wants to hear what young people have to say. Young people are not just Europe's future workforce, activists and politicians – they also have a lot of ideas that are valuable right now.

The EESC has made working with young people one of its top priorities.

Specific initiatives include:

- Issuing opinions that address the specific needs and aspirations of young people
- Organising events for young people, such as the annual Your Europe, Your Say! (YEYS) debate with school pupils from all EU Member States and from the candidate countries
- Facilitating regular visits by EESC members to schools and universities "back home" to explain how the EU works, and to listen to young people's concerns and expectations.
The challenges facing Europe and the EESC

The current EESC president, Christa Schweng, was appointed on 28 October 2020 and her motto is

**United for the future of Europe**


"The European Union should prosper economically and be socially inclusive and environmentally sustainable. It should provide sound conditions for all of civil society to thrive and live in open, values-based democracies. The EESC will focus on supporting the active contribution of civil society actors to this overarching vision of a more participatory Europe by providing valuable expertise to policy-makers, for policies that are more effective and which tie in better with the economic, social and civic situations on the ground.

**Christa Schweng**, EESC President
Employers’ Group, Austria

"Europe must once again become a place where it is possible to improve the social situation for all. To create good quality jobs, open up the labour market to young people, the unemployed and people without job security. Particularly to women: gender equality is one of the foundations of social sustainability and in this area we must do more. As a trade unionist, I think that it is our responsibility to show European citizens that the European Union and its unique social model can help find the way to step out of the Covid-19 crisis.

**Giulia Barbucci**, EESC Vice-President for Budget
Workers’ Group, Italy

"The EESC can bring an added value in the sense that we build consensus around our input into new policies, and we identify gaps in legislation, making concrete proposals to fill them. Our outputs are the result of tireless work amongst our staff and members to produce valuable unique perspectives that critically have the support of all these different civil society groups. Amplifying this work will be my priority as vice-President.

**Cillian Lohan**, EESC Vice-President for Communication
Diversity Europe Group, Ireland

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