



Discover what
the **EESC**
can do **for you**



European Economic and Social Committee



Get to know the European Economic and Social Committee

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", including employers, trade unions and groups such as professional and community associations, youth organisations, women's groups, consumers, environmental campaigners and many more.

The EESC has always been 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 ordinary people across the continent have a say in Europe's development.

What is organised civil society?

"Organised civil society" comprises all the groups and organisations in which people work cooperatively – whether at local, national or European level. These groups often act as intermediaries between decision-makers and citizens, and enable people to get actively engaged in improving their living conditions.



The EESC mission

The EESC's aim is to help ensure EU policy-making and legislation is more democratic, 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's soul is its members

Based in Brussels, the EESC is made up of 350 members from 28 EU Member States. The members come from all social and professional backgrounds and have a vast range of knowledge and experience. They 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, which means they can stay in touch with people "back home".

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 an overview of civil society's views, and publishes information reports on topical issues. The EESC also develops ideas reflecting the demands of civil society on a project basis and carries out impact assessments to monitor the effect of EU legislation.

The EESC is made up of **three groups**: Employers – Group I, Workers – Group II and Various Interests – Group III. 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 I**
- **Workers – Group II**
- **Various Interests – Group III**

The EESC has **six sections**, covering different aspects of the EU's work, ranging from the economy to social affairs, from transport to environment, from the internal market to external relations: members sit on one or more of these sections depending on their areas of expertise:

- **Economic and Monetary Union and Economic and Social Cohesion – ECO**
- **Single Market, Production and Consumption – INT**
- **Transport, Energy, Infrastructure and Information Society – TEN**
- **External Relations – REX**
- **Agriculture, Rural Development and Environment – NAT**
- **Employment, Social Affairs and Citizenship – SOC**

In these sections the members do the groundwork, drafting opinions on proposals for EU legislation. During this process, all the different participants have to negotiate to reach a **consensus**. This is what makes the EESC unique, because it has to reflect the wishes of all interests in society, through a process of compromise and mutual respect.

The EESC also has a **Consultative Commission on Industrial Change – CCMI***, which has been important in helping EU industry anticipate and adapt to the impact of globalisation.

- Consultative Commission on Industrial Change – CCMI*

The opinions are debated and adopted by simple majority at EESC **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 the Council and contribute to the law-making process by influencing their thinking.

The EESC has set up three specialist **observatories**: on the Single Market, the Labour Market and Sustainable Development, plus a **Steering Committee** to coordinate support for the **EU's 2020 Strategy** for Growth and Jobs.

- Single Market Observatory – SMO
- Labour Market Observatory – LMO
- Sustainable Development Observatory – SDO
- Europe 2020 Steering Committee

Every two-and-a-half years, EESC members elect a **President** and two **Vice-Presidents**, responsible for communication and the budget. The current President is Georges Dassis (Workers' Group) from Greece, and the Vice-Presidents are Gonçalo Lobo Xavier (Employers' Group) from Portugal and Michael Smyth (Various Interests Group) from the United Kingdom.

*CCMI: acronym used only in French for *Commission consultative des mutations industrielles*.

The EESC President



On 7 October 2015, **Georges Dassis**, Workers' Group, from Greece, became the EESC's 31st president. During his mandate he will work for a united, democratic, solidarity-based, peaceful and prosperous Europe close to its people. Find out more on the president's personal website:

www.eesc.europa.eu/president

"We need to lift Europe up, improve and keep Europe, but not for systems, structures and abstract concepts; we must do this for the men and women of Europe."

Georges Dassis, EESC President



EESC opinions touch many aspects of life

In almost 60 years, the EESC has adopted thousands of opinions to help improve the lives of EU citizens. These range from protecting EU consumers from dangerous or inappropriate products, to championing equal rights for all EU citizens, especially the most vulnerable, those promoting good practice in areas like the environment and energy policy, and those which encourage the principles of democracy, freedom and human rights throughout the world.

To find any one of these go to:
www.eesc.europa.eu/opinions

Young Europeans

The EESC has made working with young people (www.eesc.europa.eu/youth) one of its top priorities. Specific initiatives include:

- "Your Europe, Your Say!" debate with school students from all EU Member States:
www.eesc.europa.eu/YourEuropeYourSay
- "Europe in harmony" video competition:
www.eesc.europa.eu/video-challenge
- EESC members regularly visit schools and universities "back home" to explain how the EU works, and listen to young people themselves.

The challenges facing Europe and the EESC



"The EU has experienced such marked successes that it has been seen as κτήμα ἐξ ἁεί – a given. It is not, however, and never will be. At all times, the EU must be safeguarded, maintained and developed. As members of the European Economic and Social Committee, we should not find this troubling: we have become involved in all forms of European economic and social life precisely because we know that there is still work to be done."

Georges Dassis, EESC President



"The work that is done by the members of the EESC can be critical to the European construction process. We must therefore promote the added value of this work in order to reflect the real life concerns of the EU citizens. Real people need real solutions. That's why we are encouraging «going local» initiatives to get closer to people and together make a difference."

Gonçalo Lobo Xavier, EESC Vice-President



"At this difficult time for Europe the EESC tries to uphold those fundamental pillars of a civilised society – dignity, freedom, equality, solidarity, citizens' rights and justice."

Michael Smyth, EESC Vice-President



The EESC makes a difference

EESC opinions have a real impact on EU policy-making. European Commission reports show how EESC views have been integrated into vital areas of legislation; EU presidencies and Member States have paid tribute to EESC work and many civil society organisations recognise the value of the work that is done in their interests.

Each year, the EESC organises over 2 000 meetings in Brussels and "back home" in EU Member States, and publishes some 200 opinions in 24 languages. To maximise synergy, the EESC shares many resources with other EU bodies, such as the Committee of the Regions, with which it shares the same premises.

Over the years, the EESC has notched up many achievements. It was instrumental in persuading EU leaders to declare a European Year for Development in 2015, and it has taken a leading role in measures to help immigrants to integrate into European society. For 17 years it has organised the

annual European Consumer Day. It continues to push for an EU focus on youth unemployment and poverty as well as growth and entrepreneurship. It works for greater recognition for the role of women in the workplace, for a more coordinated approach to EU energy policy, to build food security and discourage food waste, to encourage a more pro-active EU approach to global peace-building and much, much more.

The EESC vision

The EESC is dedicated to promoting participatory democracy, alongside parliamentary democracy, in Europe. The EESC's vision of society is one where everyone is included and actively involved. This means citizens having a meaningful say in their own future and that 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.



European Economic and Social Committee

Rue Belliard/Belliardstraat 99
1040 Bruxelles/Brussel
BELGIQUE/BELGIË

Published by: "Visits and Publications" Unit
EESC-2015-82-EN

www.eesc.europa.eu



© European Union, 2015

Reproduction is authorised provided the source is acknowledged.



Print
QE-01-15-875-EN-C
ISBN 978-92-830-2958-8
doi:10.2864/53262

Online
QE-01-15-875-EN-N
ISBN 978-92-830-2998-4
doi:10.2864/16431

EN