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Civil Society Organisations'
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EDITORIAL: Making all voices heard in decision-making

4 June 2026

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Cillian Lohan ©EU/EESC

By Cillian LOHAN, President, EESC Civil Society Organisations' Group

We begin the summer months with a farewell to the [Cyprus Presidency of the Council of the European Union](#) and in keen anticipation of the **Irish Presidency**, which will kick off on 1 July. In this context, the [Civil Society Organisations' Group](#) of the European Economic and Social Committee (EESC) will be following its [mission to Larnaca](#) with a [conference in Cork on 30 June](#). This event will be an important opportunity to continue our work on

resilient communities and the sustainability agenda.

I am also looking forward to the upcoming **EESC plenary session in June**, where members will adopt the [EESC's exploratory opinion on the Circular Economy Act](#), for which I myself was the rapporteur. Teresa Ribera, Executive Vice-President of the European Commission for a Clean, Just and Competitive Transition, will participate in the related plenary debate. We will then receive direct feedback from the highest political level of the European Commission. Our opinion will certainly have an important and concrete impact on the CEA, which the Commission is expected to adopt in a few months.

In this month's edition of the Civil Society Organisations' Bulletin you can get the full up-to-date context surrounding the European Sustainable Development Report 2026. Our Insider Briefing focuses on the upcoming Circular Economy Act. You will also find an article on Erasmus+, the EU's programme to support education, training, youth and sport in Europe, highlighting that education is at the heart of resilience.

Last month, at the invitation of Enrico Letta, Dean of the School of Politics, Economics, and Global Affairs at the [IE University](#) in Spain and former Prime Minister of Italy, I attended the **launch of the university's IE Competitiveness Hub in Brussels**. This may be the start of a move towards more European universities establishing hubs at the centre of EU policymaking.

Well informed, evidence-based policymaking is a cornerstone of effective democracy. It works best when coupled with efforts to ensure that **all voices are heard in decision-making**. This is part of our group's motivation for organising events outside Brussels and in cities that are not necessarily the capitals of EU Member States. It's also why our group is continuing to expand partnership events.

Our members bring a wide variety of representative voices and specific expertise to the EESC. We also try to expand beyond our members wherever possible to ensure that we are fulfilling our role as the link between organised civil society and the European institutions.

Following our [partnership event](#) with the European Anti-Poverty Network (EAPN), focusing on the **eradication of poverty**, we worked with the Italian Alliance for Sustainable Development (ASviS) to hold a [conference](#) in Brussels

celebrating the 10th anniversary of the Italian Sustainable Development Festival, at which we **called for a renewed focus on sustainable development in EU politics**.

Last week, I had a very informative and productive meeting with the co-chair of the [EESC Liaison Group](#), Piotr Sadowski, to discuss how we can **ensure we always give space to the wide variety of civil society voices** active in the EU.

I hope you are all keeping well, and that you will be able to enjoy a good break at the end of the busy next couple of months. I am looking forward to the end of July, when I will take the greatest pleasure in spending a few weeks at home by the sea and recharging through nature and my community before continuing our work to strive for sustainable communities, the beating heart of civil society and democracy.

[Cillian LOHAN](#)

President, EESC Civil Society Organisations' Group

CURRENT AFFAIRS: 2026 Hungarian parliamentary election

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By Rudolf KOLBE, Vice-President of the EESC Civil Society Organisations' Group, representing the Austrian Federal Conference of the Liberal Professions and the Austrian Federal Chamber of Architects and Chartered Engineering Consultants

SPRING IN BUDAPEST – AND WHAT COMES NEXT

It was an evening that gave rise to hope. When **Péter Magyar** was speaking to celebrating crowds in Budapest and the projections were confirming his [victory over Viktor Orbán](#), half of Europe was glued to their screens ... breathing a sigh of relief. Finally! After 15 years of erosion, press freedom on paper only, democracy in form only, and formal demands from Brussels going unheeded ... at last a result that counted.

And yes, I am delighted! Genuinely so!

But after the relief, there is a serious question that needs to be addressed: **who is Péter Magyar, actually?** A man who only two years ago was part of the 'system'. He has been catapulted into politics as a result of a [divorce drama](#),

not decades of quiet persuasion. He has no established party structure, no experienced administrative ranks behind him, no clear European policy agenda – beyond being the antidote to Orbán.

Europe and his voters have high expectations of him. Restoring the rule of law, guaranteeing media freedom, unlocking frozen EU funds, bringing civil society out of the defensive: all that is a lot for a beginner.

Civil society in particular has shown during all these years in Hungary what is possible when people stand together under pressure. It has survived – painstakingly, with support from European friends, and with one eye on the authorities and the other on the exit. Now it needs more than just a friendlier tone from the occupant of the government palace. It **needs genuine legal protection, financial independence and the political will to recognise its function** as a corrective to the state and not as a troublesome critic.

The **first hundred days** will show if Magyar has the will to deliver this. **Europe** should be kindly disposed towards him during this time – providing him with support, although also setting out clear expectations. And civil society, which has managed to withstand that long winter, will be reminding him of those expectations whenever he hesitates.

The fact that [Magyar has already reached an agreement with Commission President von der Leyen on releasing the frozen EU funds](#) is a first concrete sign pointing in the right direction.

Spring really has arrived in Budapest. And sometimes a new beginning is all that is needed!



[Rudolf KOLBE](#) (Austria)

Vice-President, EESC Civil Society Organisations' Group

Member of the Executive Board, [Austrian Federal Conference of the Liberal Professions](#) (BUKO)

Member of the Executive Board, [Austrian Federal Chamber of Architects and Chartered Engineering Consultants](#)

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CURRENT AFFAIRS: Europe Sustainable Development Report 2026

4 June 2026

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By **Stoyan TCHOUKANOV**, President of the EESC's Section for Agriculture, Rural Development and the Environment ([NAT](#)) and member of the Civil Society Organisations' Group, representing the Beef Breeders Association of Bulgaria

EUROPE MUST RENEW ITS COMMITMENT TO SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT

The **latest [Europe Sustainable Development Report 2026](#)**, developed by the UN Sustainable Development Solutions Network ([SDSN](#)) in collaboration with the European Economic and Social Committee ([EESC](#)), sends a clear and worrying message: **progress on the Sustainable Development Goals ([SDGs](#)) in Europe has stalled and is even reversing in some areas**. This signals that current efforts are not sufficient to meet the ambition of the [2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development](#).

Despite Europe's strong global leadership, **no country is on track** to achieve all 17 SDGs. Environmental pressures are increasing, inequalities persist, and the "Leave No One Behind" principle is increasingly under strain. At the same time, declining public trust in institutions and a weakening political focus on the SDGs risk undermining coherent and effective action.

This comes at a critical moment. With **less than five years to 2030**, Europe cannot afford complacency. The SDGs are not an abstract global agenda, they are a practical framework to guide policies, ensure coherence and deliver tangible results for citizens.

Geopolitical tensions and global competition are reshaping priorities, but they must not lead to a retreat from sustainable development. On the contrary, they mean there is an even greater need for Europe to act with clarity and ambition. **Strengthening our internal market, investing in green and digital transitions, and ensuring fair and sustainable supply chains** – these are essential to maintaining Europe's leadership.

The report also highlights that Europe's environmental footprint extends beyond its borders. A significant share of emissions is generated through global trade, reminding us that sustainability must be addressed across value chains and through stronger international partnerships.

The way forward is clear: **Europe must reaffirm its commitment to the SDGs**, strengthen policy coherence, scale up sustainable finance, and ensure measurable progress across all sectors. Only a **systemic, coordinated approach** can deliver a transition that is environmentally sound, socially fair and economically viable.

The SDGs remain our compass – what is needed now is renewed political ownership and concrete delivery.



Stoyan TCHOUKANOV (Bulgaria)

President, NAT section, EESC

President, Beef Breeders Association of Bulgaria (BBAB)

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CURRENT AFFAIRS: Visit of Commissioner McGrath to Spain

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Michael McGrath, during a meeting with consumer representatives in Madrid (20/04/2026) © EU

By Ileana IZVERNICEANU DE LA IGLESIA, member of the EESC Civil Society Organisations' Group, representing the Spanish Organisation of Consumers and Users (OCU)

MCGRATH OUTLINES KEY POINTS OF EUROPEAN CONSUMER AGENDA

On 20-21 April 2026, Madrid hosted a visit by European Commissioner Michael McGrath, responsible for the EU's consumer portfolio, as part of an institutional **meeting with representatives of the Spanish Consumers and Users Council**.

Beyond the formal nature of the meeting, the visit was also constructive and inclusive, reflecting a shared concern: **how to ensure that European citizens remain protected at a time of rapid change in the economy and in consumer habits.**

The meeting took place at a key moment, following the recent adoption of the [2030 Consumer Agenda](#), a document that not only sets regulatory priorities but also outlines a long-term vision for the role of consumers in the European Union. In his remarks, Mr McGrath repeated a central idea: **consumers are no longer passive actors, but key players in the digital and green transitions**, and public policies must support this transformation without leaving anyone behind.

One of the main topics discussed was the **impact of digitalisation**. The Commissioner spoke openly about the challenges of a market increasingly shaped by online platforms, where speed and an overload of information coexist with growing risks. He referred to **algorithms** that influence decisions, advertising that is sometimes difficult to distinguish from content and, more specifically, to so-called '**dark patterns**': interface designs that push or guide users to make decisions they might not take in a fully transparent environment. From **subscriptions** that are hard to cancel to hidden or confusing options, Mr McGrath stressed that these practices are a key area for action in European consumer policy.

Within this context, the [protection of minors in the digital environment](#) was given special attention. Far from being a secondary issue, the Commissioner presented it as **one of the major challenges** of today and the future. He acknowledged that children and teenagers grow up in a digital ecosystem full of opportunities, but also specific risks, such as hidden advertising or design features that encourage excessive or even addictive use of certain platforms.

He then outlined some of the priorities already included in the **European Consumer Agenda**. On the one hand, the need for platforms to build in safety for minors by default, avoiding settings that could put their privacy or well-being at risk. On the other, limiting certain commercial practices aimed specifically at young users, especially those that take advantage of their lower level of awareness or use aggressive persuasion techniques. At the same time, he highlighted the importance of education: **digital literacy**—for children as well as for their families—as an **essential tool** to create a safer and more informed environment.

Another key point of his statement was **sustainability**, approached from a practical, everyday perspective. Mr McGrath referred to the growing public demand for products that are more durable, repairable and environmentally friendly, and to the need for the market to respond with **clear and reliable information**. In this regard, he stressed the importance of **tackling 'greenwashing'**, not only to protect consumers but also to maintain trust in the green transition.

The discussion with the [Spanish Consumers and Users Council](#) also addressed the **current economic context**. Inflation, price volatility and uncertainty in certain sectors were identified as factors directly affecting consumer decisions. In response, the Commissioner called for **stronger market monitoring and closer coordination between authorities to prevent abuses and ensure fair conditions**.

The visit also included a [breakfast briefing organised by Europa Press](#), which provided a more open setting for dialogue with representatives from different sectors. In this forum, in addition to expanding on the main policy ideas, the Commissioner was asked about the judicial and political situation in Spain. Rather than avoiding these questions, he answered them with caution but clearly, placing his comments within the framework of respect for national competences and the rule of law, and underlining the importance of institutional stability for consumer confidence and for the proper functioning of markets.

Overall, the visit conveyed a **sense of an ambitious agenda**, but also one that is aware of the complexity of the current environment. Beyond regulatory frameworks, the Commissioner's message was clear: **consumer protection is** not just a technical or legal matter, but **a fundamental element in maintaining trust in the European project**.



Ileana IZVERNICEANU DE LA IGLESIA (Spain)

Member, EESC Civil Society Organisations' Group

Director for Communication and Institutional Relations and Spokesperson, Organisation of Consumers and Users ([OCU](#))

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Circular Economy Act: Towards a circular economy and responsible resource consumption within planetary boundaries

4 June 2026

→ [READ ONLINE](#)



By Cillian LOHAN, rapporteur for the EESC exploratory opinion requested by the European Commission on the Circular Economy Act, and President of the Civil Society Organisations' Group, representing the Irish Environmental Pillar

WHAT IS THE CIRCULAR ECONOMY

ACT ABOUT?

The EU is facing a growing “**triple planetary crisis**” – climate change, pollution and biodiversity loss – driven largely by increasing resource use.

At the same time, [the EU remains off track to meet its 2030 circular material use targets](#), highlighting the limits of current policies.

Against this backdrop, the European Commission is preparing a **Circular Economy Act (CEA)** for 2026, intended to accelerate the **shift from a linear (“take-make-waste”) economy to a circular one** and strengthen EU competitiveness and resilience.

The upcoming **EESC exploratory opinion** on the matter will feed directly into this process, offering civil society recommendations on how to **align resource use with planetary boundaries while maintaining economic and social balance**. The opinion has been requested by the European Commission and will be presented and adopted at the **EESC plenary session in June 2026**.

WHAT IS AT STAKE?

The debate goes beyond recycling or waste management. It raises **fundamental questions** about:

- **How much the EU consumes**, not just how efficiently;
- **Dependence on imported raw materials**, affecting strategic autonomy;
- **Whether economic growth can be reconciled with ecological limits**;
- **Fairness across society**, including impacts on workers, consumers and SMEs.

In simple terms: the **CEA** will shape how Europe produces, consumes and competes in a resource-constrained world.

WHAT DOES THE EESC SAY IS MISSING TODAY?

The Committee points to several structural weaknesses in current EU policy:

1. **Too much focus on supply, not enough on demand:** Existing measures prioritise efficiency and recycling, but do not sufficiently address overconsumption and material demand.
 2. **Slow progress at Member State level:** Many countries are not on track to meet circularity targets, indicating implementation gaps.
 3. **Weak markets for secondary raw materials:** Barriers persist in the single market for recycled materials, including price, quality and regulatory issues.
 4. **Limits of existing tools:** Instruments such as Extended Producer Responsibility (**EPR**) have not delivered sufficient incentives for circular design and waste reduction.
-

WHAT DOES THE EESC PROPOSE? WHAT ARE ITS KEY MESSAGES?

1. PUT RESOURCE USE REDUCTION AT THE CENTRE

[The EESC opinion](#) calls for demand-side policies and primary material reduction to complement recycling and efficiency. This marks a shift from “better use” to “use less”.

2. INTRODUCE MATERIAL FOOTPRINT TARGETS

The EESC supports developing targets to limit the EU’s overall resource use, aligned with planetary boundaries. Similar to climate targets, but focused on materials and consumption.

3. BUILD A WELL-FUNCTIONING MARKET FOR SECONDARY MATERIALS

The [CEA](#) should address:

- Supply and demand imbalances;
- Price competitiveness of recycled materials;
- Regulatory barriers across Member States.

The goal: make recycled materials the default choice.

4. STRENGTHEN CIRCULAR GOVERNANCE ACROSS EU POLICIES

The opinion calls for integrating a resource-use perspective into all EU policies (industry, trade, digital, etc.). Circularity becomes a horizontal principle, not a niche policy.

5. ADDRESS SYSTEMIC BARRIERS AND REAL ECONOMY IMPACTS

The EESC highlights the need to:

- Analyse material flows and price mechanisms;
- Understand impacts on business models and consumers;
- Consider social justice and fairness.

Transition must be economically realistic and socially fair.

6. SUPPORT WASTE PREVENTION AND BETTER RECYCLING SYSTEMS

While going beyond waste, the opinion still stresses:

- Better collection and recycling systems;
- Tackling inefficiencies in [EPR](#) schemes.

Waste remains important—but not sufficient alone.

7. RECOGNISE LINKS WITH STRATEGIC AUTONOMY

Reducing material use and scaling circularity will:

- Lower dependence on imports;
 - Improve resilience to supply shocks;
 - Support [EU industrial strategy](#).
-

WHAT IS NEW IN THIS APPROACH?

Compared to previous circular economy debates, the EESC opinion introduces a clearer shift towards:

- Absolute reduction in resource use (not just efficiency);
- Planetary boundaries as a policy benchmark;
- System-wide change across production and consumption;
- Stronger integration with competitiveness and security agendas.

This reflects a broader EU narrative: circularity is no longer only environmental policy, but also economic and geopolitical strategy.

ARE THERE ANY VOICES FROM THE EESC?

[Cillian Lohan](#), President of the EESC Civil Society Organisations' Group, one of the initiators of the European Circular Economy Stakeholder Platform ([ECESP](#)), and rapporteur for the [EESC opinion](#) (requested by the European Commission to inform their [proposal](#)), stated:

We cannot continue with a system where we take resources, make products and then simply dispose of them. Humans are amazing when we collaborate, work together and share ideas and resources. Circularity may be a new term, but the concept is natural and ancient. The circular economy is one of those transformative ideas that can change the world for the better.

For EESC Civil Society Organisations' Group and broader civil society, the [CEA](#) will influence:

- *Consumer rights and affordability of products;*
- *Jobs and skills in circular sectors;*
- *Access to resources for local economies;*
- *Participation in shaping sustainable production models.*

The EESC positions civil society as a key actor in designing and implementing circular solutions on the ground.

WHAT'S THE BOTTOM LINE?

The Circular Economy Act represents a **turning point**:

- From improving waste management;
- To redefining how much and how we produce and consume.

The **EESC's message** is clear:

The EESC considers the Circular Economy Act ([CEA](#)) a **strategic and urgent step to position the EU as a global leader in the transition to a circular economy**, calling for a comprehensive, coherent framework that integrates existing policies and accelerates implementation. It emphasises the need to **move beyond recycling towards a systemic approach focused on reducing material use**, strengthening markets for secondary raw materials, and supporting circular business models such as reuse, repair and remanufacturing. The Committee highlights the importance of **strong incentives**, harmonised extended producer responsibility schemes, eco-design, and public procurement as key levers, alongside better traceability and data on material flows. It also underlines the critical role of **investment, innovation, and new indicators** to close the circularity gap and enable informed decision-making. Crucially, the EESC frames circularity as not only an environmental and economic priority, but also a social and geopolitical one, stressing the need for a just transition with decent working conditions, affordable circular products and active participation by civil society, communities and social economy actors, supported by tools such as the [ECESP](#) to scale solutions and overcome implementation barriers.

Without reducing overall resource use, the EU will not stay within planetary boundaries—nor achieve a truly resilient circular economy.

WHAT'S NEXT?

The upcoming negotiations on the Circular Economy Act are likely to focus on:

- Binding vs. voluntary resource targets;
- Impact on industry competitiveness and costs;
- Distributional effects across Member States and sectors;
- Balancing environmental ambition with social acceptance.

European Parliament position on the Circular Economy Act: At this stage, the [European Parliament](#) has not yet adopted a formal legislative position on the Circular Economy Act (as the Commission proposal is still forthcoming in 2026).

As with the EU budget debate ([MFF](#)), the key question will be: how ambitious can the EU be—and who will bear the cost of the transition?

KEY SOURCES, FURTHER READING AND OTHER VOICES FROM CIVIL SOCIETY

- EESC opinion: [Circular Economy Act: Circular economy and responsible resource consumption within planetary boundaries \(NAT/986\)](#)
- European Commission: [Circular Economy \(policy overview and Circular Economy Act context\)](#)
- European Circular Economy Stakeholder Platform ([ECESP](#))
- IEEP policy brief: [Circular Economy Act: material consumption and secondary materials](#)
- A group of European civil society organisations: [Civil society recommendations for a Circular Economy Act](#) (Circular Economy Platform contribution)



Cillian LOHAN (Ireland)

EESC rapporteur, [NAT/986](#) Circular Economy Act

President, EESC Civil Society Organisations' Group

CEO, [Green Economy Foundation](#)

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REFLECTIONS BY CIVIL SOCIETY PARTNERS: Building resilient communities

4 June 2026

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Davie Philip facilitating the Feeding Ourselves Community of Practice © Oliver Moore

By Davie PHILIP, facilitator and community coach, Cloughjordan Ecovillage, Ireland

RESILIENCE IS ROOTED IN PLACE

Community resilience is not simply the ability to bounce back from shocks. It is the capacity of people rooted in place to **adapt to change**, care for each other, steward shared resources and work

together to shape a fairer, sustainable future.

This matters because people across Europe face **rising costs, food insecurity, precarious work, loneliness, eroding social trust and accelerating ecological breakdown**. These pressures fall hardest on people made

vulnerable by poverty, exclusion, disability, rural isolation or lack of access to services. Yet too often, communities lack the resources and meaningful opportunities to engage in decisions that affect their places. This leaves people feeling powerless and unheard, weakening the capacity to adapt.

Local food is a pillar of territorial resilience, linking land, livelihoods, health, ecology, nature restoration and local democracy. **Strengthening [food sovereignty](#)** gives communities greater say over the food systems that nourish them, helps retain value locally and reduces dependence on fragile supply chains and fossil-fuel-based inputs. This is not isolationism or protectionism; it is resilient self-reliance rooted in agroecology, cooperation, fairer trade and stronger local markets. Ultimately, local food resilience is about building the relationships, skills, infrastructure and democratic capacity needed to feed people before, during and after crises.

However, this is **difficult within an extractive, unequal and growth-based economy** which often exacerbates the problems communities are trying to solve. We need [wellbeing economies](#) that **serve people and the planet within ecological limits**, value care and civic engagement and advance social inclusion and nature restoration.

Frameworks such as [Community Wealth Building](#), now being advanced in [Scotland](#) and [Dublin](#), provide a path to reclaiming the economy by keeping wealth local and ownership rooted in place. They connect climate action with economic justice, making the transition real through livelihoods, local services and democratic control of shared assets.

To enable resilient communities, **Europe must view and invest in civil society as essential infrastructure**. This requires long-term support, meaningful participation and support for initiatives like [local food economies](#), [community-led housing](#), [Community Land Trusts](#) and Community Wealth Building. **Resilience is ultimately grown where people have the resources, relationships and power to shape a fairer, more sustainable future in place.**



Davie PHILIP is a facilitator and community coach based in [Cloughjordan Ecovillage](#). For over 25 years, he has supported community-led approaches to sustainability, resilience and food system transformation across Ireland and Europe. He is a coordinator of the [Feeding Ourselves](#) Community of Practice and a steering group member of the [Wellbeing Economy Alliance Hub](#) in Ireland. From 2015 to 2021, he served on the Council of [ECOLISE](#) – the European network for community-led climate and sustainability initiatives – including two years as co-president. His work focuses on local food economies, wellbeing economy approaches, cooperatives and community resilience.

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REFLECTIONS BY CIVIL SOCIETY PARTNERS: Building resilient communities

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THE GLAS COMMUNITY GARDEN MODEL: COMMUNITY RESILIENCE THROUGH SHARED GREEN SPACE

On a summer morning, the [GLAS community garden in Ballymun](#) is a sensory feast; the scent of pollinator-friendly plants, the taste of a fresh strawberry, the sound of volunteers working together or children learning through play. This unique space is managed as a **hub for biodiversity, environmental education and social inclusion**.

The **GLAS model** is effective because it brings together a range of complementary actors. **Foremost are the volunteers whose dedication brings the space to life**. A horticulturalist welcomes and supports them to engage and learn, ensuring the inclusion of people with disabilities, those in temporary accommodation and individuals with no gardening experience. The **Local NGO Global Action Plan (GAP)** manages strategy and operations, obtaining funding for accessibility improvements, on-site projects and events; some funding is donated by local businesses whose employees volunteer. Finally, the garden is further strengthened by a vibrant network of local voluntary and community groups, which both contribute to and benefit from its activities.

GLAS **enhances community resilience in a variety of ways**. [Inner-city communities in Dublin have less access to safe, useable green spaces than more affluent areas](#), with implications for mental and physical health; [shared green spaces foster a sense of belonging](#) and encourage the development of skills and values linked to participation and cohesion. Community voices are amplified and shared through education and workshops. The garden also hosts key services such as parent-and-toddler and rehabilitation groups, while supporting [youth-led initiatives](#). Thus rooted in the local community, GAP is well-placed to contribute to wider campaigns for [environmental](#), [climate](#) and [social](#) justice.

The [Planning and Development Act](#), introduced by the Irish Government in 2024, formally recognised community gardens and placed a statutory duty on councils to provide them. Despite this, [Ireland still has one of the lowest levels of provision in Europe](#). **Government guidance, a national umbrella network and a legal framework for [Community Land Trusts](#) could enhance support for grassroots adoption of this model**. Local authorities must commit to embedding community gardens into development plans, ensuring community groups have straightforward access to land, facilities, support and funding.

Community gardens offer a locally-situated, integrated approach to **building community resilience and sustainability**. The challenge for policymakers is to nurture these spaces so they can do the same for the communities and individuals they serve.



Alex GRAY

Community programme manager, Global Action Plan Ireland ([GAP](#))

Strengthening public trust in Romanian NGOs: Insights from the BOSC 2025 Report

4 June 2026

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By **Ionuț SIBIAN**, member of the EESC Civil Society Organisations' Group, representing the Romanian Civil Society Development Foundation (FDSC)

The **Barometer of Opinions on Civil Society (BOSC 2025)**, conducted by the Civil Society Development Foundation ([FDSC](#)), shows that **non-governmental organisations (NGOs) continue to enjoy a relatively constant level of public trust in Romanian**

society, even in a context marked by crises, polarisation and declining trust in institutions.

According to the study, around one in two Romanians say they trust NGOs, a level that has remained relatively stable in recent years. At the same time, distrust has become more intense, with the share of those declaring they have "no trust at all" doubling over the past decade (from 14% to 27%). NGOs continue to enjoy higher trust than other forms of public representation, such as trade unions or political parties.

At the same time, a majority of respondents (**62%**) **believe that a democratic society cannot function without NGOs, while 63% say these organisations step in where the state fails to act.**

Interaction with NGOs has also increased. 66% of Romanians report having had some form of contact with an NGO, most often through information and communication materials. Donations and the redirection of 3.5% of income tax remain the most common forms of civic engagement.

However, the study highlights a key **gap between perceived relevance and personal experience**. While many respondents acknowledge that NGOs have a positive impact on their direct beneficiaries, a majority (62%) say these organisations do not influence their own lives. This perception – that NGOs "do good, but not for me" – is identified as **one of the central explanations for the relatively low level of formal civic involvement**.

Young people stand out as an important exception. Those aged 18–29 report higher levels of trust (57%) and are more actively involved in civic life, with higher participation rates in public demonstrations, volunteering and institutional activism.

The BOSC is a research programme initiated by the Civil Society Development Foundation in 2010, which follows the evolution of public perceptions of civil society and non-governmental organisations in Romania in 2010, 2016, 2023 and 2025. The BOSC analyses over time the trust, attitudes, roles assigned to NGOs, forms of association and civic involvement of the population. The **full report** is available here: https://www.fdsc.ro/wp-content/uploads/2026/02/BOSC_2025.pdf (in Romanian).



Ionuț SIBIAN (Romania)

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NEWS ON OUR ACTIVITIES: Members and staff welcome visitors to the EESC on Europe Day

4 June 2026

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EESC members and staff on Europe Day 2026 © EU/EESC

On 9 May 2026, Open Day at the EESC brought together more than 3,500 visitors from across Europe and beyond for a vibrant celebration of dialogue, democracy and unity.

EESC MARKS #EUROPEDAY WITH A UNIQUE OPPORTUNITY TO EXPERIENCE THE SPIRIT OF ENGAGEMENT FIRST HAND

This year's Open Day at the EESC brought together **more than 3,500 visitors from across Europe and beyond** for a vibrant celebration of dialogue, democracy and unity – values that remain at the heart of the European project first envisioned in the Schuman Declaration.

Open Day is an annual event to mark Europe Day, which is celebrated on 9 May.

Europe Day marks the 76th anniversary of the [Schuman Declaration](#), the historic speech by French foreign minister Robert Schuman in 1950 which paved the way for European integration. Europe Day is a chance to acknowledge the achievements of the European project and to celebrate the community of values that the EU represents and that we, as Europeans, protect and nourish every day.

The **EESC** is the only EU institution representing organised civil society. Its 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 and many more.

EESC members come from all EU Member States and speak for those whose voice could not otherwise be heard. They bring their expertise and make sure that, when advising EU institutions, EESC opinions reflect citizens' views, concerns and expectations.

Throughout the day, **visitors explored the EESC's work** through thematic stands hosted by the Committee's groups, sections and CCMI, **discovering how organised civil society contributes to shaping European policies and decision-making.**

EESC members and staff welcomed guests into the heart of the institution, sharing insights into the Committee's role and engaging in meaningful conversations. **Guided tours of selected meeting rooms** offered visitors a unique opportunity to discover the EESC building and learn more first hand by EESC members about the Committee's function in the interinstitutional context.

From the Civil Society Organisations' Group, the event also benefited from the valued participation of [Séamus Boland](#), [Karolina Dreszer-Smalec](#), [Norbert Geisen](#), [Katrīna Leitāne](#), [Thierry Libaert](#), [Anna Schoemakers](#), [Rebecca Sunnus](#), and [Simo Tiainen](#), who actively engaged with visitors.

But Open Day at the EESC was also filled with fun and interactive experiences for all ages! Visitors took part in the **EESC Puzzle Sticker Game**, collecting stickers for the chance to win prizes, while the **Wheel of Fortune**, **digital quizzes and postcard station** added to the festive spirit of the day. The **kids' corner** was once again a lively hub of creativity, featuring activities for younger visitors. A **caricaturist** created memorable portraits, while the **photo booth** captured smiles shared with friends and family. **Live music performances** created a warm and welcoming atmosphere, making the EESC a place of celebration and togetherness.

Open Day 2026 at the EESC was a true celebration of civic engagement, highlighting the essential role of organised civil society in building Europe's future.

Click [here](#) to see photos from Open Day 2026.

EUROPE DAY 2026 AT THE EESC | CELEBRATING UNITY, VALUES AND DEMOCRACY

NEWS ON OUR ACTIVITIES: Civil Society Organisations' Group hosts event as part of the Festival for Sustainable Development

4 June 2026

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Hosted by the Civil Society Organisations' Group on 8 May, the event entitled **'European leadership for the future: Civil society driving the post 2030 agenda'** was attended by Teresa

Ribera (Executive Vice-President of the European Commission for a Clean, Just and Competitive Transition), Directors-General of the European Commission, civil society representatives and others.

Relaunching European global leadership by bringing together competitiveness, sustainability and civil society participation: this was the theme of the second stage of the [Festival for Sustainable Development](#), held for the first time in Brussels, entitled ['European leadership for the future: Civil society driving the post 2030 agenda'](#).

Hosted by the [Civil Society Organisations' Group](#) of the European Economic and Social Committee (EESC), on the eve of Europe Day celebrations on **8 May**, the event was attended by Executive **Vice-President of the European Commission** for a Clean, Just and Competitive Transition, **Teresa Ribera**, Directors-General of the Commission, representatives of social partners and leading European think tanks.

The event, **promoted by the Italian Alliance for Sustainable Development ([ASviS](#) ETS)**, took place at a delicate **moment for the future of the Union**: in response to current poly-crises, Europe, rather than accelerating, risks slowing down precisely on the ecological and social transition mapped out by the Green Deal and the European Pillar of Social Rights, despite the continued declarations by European leaders in favour of implementing the 2030 Agenda signed at the United Nations in 2015.

The meeting opened with a presentation by **Enrico Giovannini, Scientific Director of ASviS**, of data compiled by **the Alliance on the state of sustainable development in the European Union**.

Since 2010, three Sustainable Development Goals have seen deterioration at European level: reduced inequalities (Goal 10), protection of terrestrial ecosystems and biodiversity (Goal 15), and partnerships for sustainable development (Goal 17). **The picture regarding inequalities is particularly critical**: 23 European countries are recording a worsening, three remain broadly stable, and only one shows a slight improvement. Even more stark is the situation regarding biodiversity, with all EU member states falling behind compared to 2010. **Positive signals are emerging on certain Goals**, particularly on gender equality, where 21 European countries show significant improvements, as well as in the areas of clean energy, innovation and climate action. Overall, only 10 of the 19 quantitative European targets analysed (53%) appear achievable by 2030, while seven (37%) are experiencing delays significant enough to make their attainment unlikely without a strong acceleration of European policies.

"The data shows that the EU is the world champion of sustainable development. Precisely because of global instability, it must place the ecological transition and social justice, positive drivers of competitiveness, back at the heart of its policies. But the involvement of civil society must also be relaunched," said **Giovannini** and added: "The Spring 2026 Report, which we presented at the opening of the Festival on 6 May in Milan calls for the need to move from incremental progress to genuine systemic transformation, capable of combining economic growth, ecological transition, democratic quality and social cohesion."

Cillian Lohan, President of the Civil Society Organisations' Group, said: "Urged the European Commission to put the European Green Deal back at the top of its agenda. 'European civil society stands ready to do its utmost to relaunch the EU's sustainable agenda and to encourage the European Commission, once again, to take the lead. This

agenda was the right compass in 2019, and it is even more so today. It promotes high social and environmental standards and acts as a powerful firewall for democracy, while also supporting economic growth. Civil society must relentlessly forge alliances to enable the EU to lead the way in shaping the post-2030 agenda."

Mariana Kotzeva, Director-General of Eurostat, spoke about the role of Eurostat and European official statistics in monitoring EU progress towards the Sustainable Development Goals. She highlighted the importance of clear and easily understandable communication of Eurostat's annual SDG Report through interactive tools and visualisations. Ms Kotzeva said: "The civil society has played a vital role in designing the EU SDG indicator set and in using statistical evidence for driving public debates on the 2030 Agenda".

In the course of the debate on European policies, **Mario Nava, Director-General of the DG for Employment, Social Affairs and Inclusion at the European Commission**, stressed that "Competitiveness, sustainability and social fairness can and must go together: clean technologies, efficient resource use and strong social standards all make Europe more resilient. Civil society helps shape solutions that work for European businesses, workers and communities".

Subsequent debates involved different institutional and civil society representatives. They focused on the need for **the EU to place sustainable development back at the centre of its policies**.

The event was moderated by **Donato Bendicenti** (RAI Chief Correspondent from Brussels), was also attended by **Luca Jahier** (Former EESC President and member of the EESC Civil Society Organisations' Group), **Lidija Pavić-Rogošić** (Vice-President of the EESC Civil Society Organisations' Group), **Maria Nikolopoulou** (President of the SDG Observatory of the EESC), **Ingeborg Niestroy** (Stakeholder Forum and SDG Watch Europe), **Andrea Renda** (Director of Research, CEPS), **Francesco Tramontin** (Vice President Global Public Affairs, Ferrero), **Elena Avenati** (Private Sector and SDGs Manager, Save the Children), **Karl Falkenberg** (President EU Chapter of the Club of Rome) and **Patrizia Heidegger** (Deputy Secretary-General, of the European Environmental Bureau).

For more information on the **event**, visit the EESC's website at: <https://www.eesc.europa.eu/en/agenda/our-events/events/european-leadership-future-civil-society-driving-post-2030-agenda>

Watch the **video of Cillian Lohan** recorded during the event at: <https://x.com/i/status/2052797948610650250> and a wrap-up video of the conference: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=MOYBVA9R9yY>

Read the full **Press Release** at: <https://www.eesc.europa.eu/en/news-media/news/second-stage-10th-edition-festival-sustainable-development-held-brussels>

STATEMENT BY CILLIAN LOHAN IN THE CONTEXT OF THE CONFERENCE



NEWS ON OUR ACTIVITIES: Domantas Tracevičius participates in annual conference of the ECESP

4 June 2026

→ [READ ONLINE](#)



EESC President Séamus Boland and Commissioner Jessika Roswall (left to right) © EU

By **Domantas TRACEVIČIUS**, member of the EESC Civil Society Organisations' Group, representing the Lithuanian NGO Circular economy

CAN THE EU DELIVER A MEANINGFUL CIRCULAR ECONOMY ACT?

The [2026 annual conference of the European Circular Economy Stakeholder Platform](#) (ECESP) took place on 22-23 April in Brussels. Organised jointly by the [European Commission](#) and the European Economic and Social Committee ([EESC](#)), this was already

its ninth edition.

Ten EESC members participated, including EESC President [Séamus Boland](#), EESC NAT Section president [Stoyan Tchoukanov](#), Sustainable Development Observatory president [Maria Nikolopoulou](#) and **Domantas Tracevičius** from the Civil Society Organisations' Group. Some of the delegates were also involved in the work on the EESC's upcoming [exploratory opinion](#) on the future Circular Economy Act, for which the Civil Society Organisations' Group president [Cillian Lohan](#) serves as rapporteur.

This year's conference focused on **building a competitive and fair circular Europe**. Discussions explored the ambitions and policy direction of the [Circular Economy Act](#) (CEA), alongside investment needs and global developments.

Opening the conference alongside Commissioner **Jessika Roswall**, **Séamus Boland** stressed the importance of the circular economy in today's unstable geopolitical context. He highlighted that more efficient resource use, waste reduction and sustainable innovation can strengthen Europe's industrial base while ensuring a fair and inclusive transition.

[In 2024](#), the **EU's circular material use rate** reached 12.2%, around 1 percentage point higher than in 2015. However, **large differences remain among Member States, with some countries at around 2% and the leading country exceeding 30%**. Total material use per capita stood at approximately 13.4 tonnes, only slightly lower than a decade ago. Although EU citizens generated more waste during this period, recycling rates also increased.

"Over the years, several European Commission initiatives to strengthen the circular economy have been weakened by irresponsible business lobbying. A recent example is the ["call by 138 CEOs from the single-use packaging industry and other sectors"](#) to delay implementation of the Packaging and Packaging Waste Regulation (["PPWR"](#)). I hope the Commission will now succeed in proposing a meaningful Circular Economy Act, because Europe's future is at stake", stated **Domantas Tracevičius** in the context of the ECESP' annual conference.

BACKGROUND

As global environmental crises escalate and the EU generates 2.2 billion tonnes of waste annually, a circular economy is not just an option—it is a necessity. The model revolutionises how we manage resources, eliminating waste by keeping products and materials in use through recycling, reusing, and repairing, unlike the outdated ‘take-make-dispose’ approach.

In 2014, the EESC recognised this need and took decisive action. In 2017, in partnership with the European Commission, the EESC launched the [European Circular Economy Stakeholder Platform](#) (ECESP). The ECESP unites civil society, businesses, trade unions, think tanks and public bodies in a shared mission: to accelerate Europe’s transition to a resource-efficient circular economy.

Since its inception, the ECESP has become the driving force behind Europe’s circular transition. It houses nearly [800 examples of successful circular practices](#), offering concrete solutions to stakeholders and companies ready to implement sustainable initiatives.

Today, the ECESP is a global leader in circularity, inspiring action worldwide and playing a pivotal role in international forums such as the World Circular Economy Forum (WCEF) and COP conferences.

The EESC plays a critical role in connecting stakeholder insights directly to EU policy, ensuring that the circular economy stays at the heart of the legislative agenda. Flagship events like #EUCircularTalks and the platform’s annual conference are vital forums for gathering input and addressing challenges.



[Domantas TRACEVIČIUS](#) (Lithuania)

Member, EESC Civil Society Organisations' Group

Director, Lithuanian NGO [Circular economy](#)

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NEWS ON OUR ACTIVITIES: Civil Society Organisations' Group hosts launch of EAPN Poverty Watch Report 2025

4 June 2026

→ [READ ONLINE](#)



Anna Schoemakers speaking at the launch event of the Poverty Watch Report 2025 © EU/EESC

On 14 April, the European Anti-Poverty Network (EAPN) launched its latest EU Poverty Watch Report, *Promoting and Strengthening National and Local Anti-Poverty Strategies (NAPS & LAPS)*, at an event in Brussels hosted by the Civil Society Organisations' Group of the European Economic and Social Committee (EESC).

POVERTY ERADICATION DEMANDS COORDINATED ACTION ACROSS LOCAL, NATIONAL, AND EU LEVELS

On 14 April, the European Anti-Poverty Network ([EAPN](#)) launched its latest [EU Poverty Watch report, *Promoting and Strengthening National and Local Anti-Poverty Strategies \(NAPS & LAPS\)*](#), at an [event](#) in Brussels hosted by the [Civil Society Organisations' Group](#) of the European Economic and Social Committee (EESC). The event took place against the backdrop of rising cost-of-living in EU Member States, with rather negative prospects due to current geopolitical developments.

The report provides a comprehensive analysis of current National Anti-Poverty Strategies (NAPS), highlighting common challenges as well as good practices across Europe.

Built on a bottom-up approach, the report draws on **findings from nineteen EAPN national networks**. These findings clearly demonstrate the **crucial role of coordinated action** across all levels of governance, local, national, and EU, in achieving the eradication of poverty in Europe, a goal EAPN has been pushing forward. This objective has also gained renewed political momentum following the commitments made by European Commission President Ursula von der Leyen in September 2025.

"While the upcoming EU Anti-Poverty Strategy marks an important step forward in the fight against poverty in Europe, the shared competences between the EU and Member States - when it comes to social rights, as well as the multidimensional nature of poverty - require strong and coherent strategies at all levels, especially at national level", said **Juliana Wahlgren, Director of EAPN**.

"National Anti-Poverty Strategies only matter if they lead to real change in people's lives. This report clearly sets out what needs to be in place for these strategies to be effective. If we want to ensure no one is left behind, governments must turn these elements into concrete and sustained action," said **Bridget Kelly, a Traveller Woman from the Irish Traveller Movement and Board Member of EAPN Ireland**.

"From job insecurity and rising living costs to declining pensions, over a fifth of Europeans are at risk of poverty or social exclusion. Reversing poverty trends and ensuring that no one has to choose between eating and heating and social participation is crucial for the cohesion of our societies and the stability of our democracies. Since civil society organisations are essential for combatting poverty, we must protect the civic space in which they operate and support all its initiatives," said **Anna Schoemakers, member of the EESC Civil Society Organisations' Group**, and rapporteur for an [EESC opinion](#) on *Shrinking democratic space as a barrier to achieving the Sustainable Development Goals in the European Union – placing civil society at the heart of Europe's fight against poverty (SDG1)*. The opinion will be presented at and put to the vote of the [EESC plenary session](#) in October 2026.

EAPN and the Civil Society Organisations' Group have collaborate for the third consecutive year on the event for the launch of the annual Poverty Watch report. The group has been a strong advocate for sustainable development and the eradication of poverty for years and also provided the rapporteur for the [EESC opinion on the EU Anti-Poverty Strategy](#).

The EU Poverty Watch 2025 highlights that eradicating poverty requires coordinated action at local, national, and EU levels, strong government commitment, and strategies that address the multidimensional nature of poverty. EAPN calls on policymakers, governments, and civil society to step up efforts and ensure that no one is left behind, translating commitments into concrete actions that move Europe closer to ending poverty.

EESC PLENARY: Interview with co-rapporteur Katrīna Leitāne on Erasmus+

4 June 2026

→ [READ ONLINE](#)



Katrīna Leitāne © EU/EESC

We spoke with Katrīna Leitāne, the co-rapporteur for the EESC opinion [SOC/842](#), representing the National Youth Council of Latvia in the EESC Civil Society Organisations' Group

WE SPOKE WITH KATRĪNA LEITĀNE, THE CO-RAPPORTEUR FOR THE EESC OPINION SOC/842 ON THE 'PROPOSAL FOR A REGULATION ON ERASMUS+ '.

WATCH HER VIDEO STATEMENT ON THE OPINION AND READ THE INTERVIEW BELOW:

WHAT ARE THE THREE MAIN FINDINGS OF THE OPINION?

As negotiations on the next EU budget ([Multiannual Financial Framework](#)) heat up, our findings emphasise that [Erasmus+](#), the EU's programme to support education, training, youth and sport in Europe, must evolve to reflect the reality of young people on the ground:

- First, we advocate including a **dedicated ‘Youth Chapter’** in the regulation.
 - Second, we call for a **significant budget increase** to expand youth exchanges, policy dialogues and soft-skill development, ensuring the programme unlocks its full potential (this is also in line with the [2024 Draghi report](#) on European competitiveness).
 - Finally, we believe that Erasmus+ must **include the wider European family**, ensuring all candidate countries can participate fully to strengthen continental solidarity.
-

WHAT ARE THE MAIN RECOMMENDATIONS OR PROPOSALS OF THE OPINION?

We propose simplifying administrative burdens for grassroots NGOs and ensuring the programme remains a bridge for those beyond the EU-27 who uphold democracy and human rights. Furthermore, we celebrate the [United Kingdom rejoining the programme in 2027](#), a vital step towards rebuilding the people-to-people links, which the European Economic and Social Committee championed in its work on [EU-UK youth engagement](#).

AFTER THE ADOPTION OF THIS OPINION, WHAT HAVE YOU DONE/WILL YOU DO TO PROMOTE IT?

The opinion was presented at the [European Parliament stakeholder consultation on 14 January 2026](#) and now serves as a strategic roadmap for coordinating advocacy at national level for national youth councils, youth organisations and other civil society organisations.

IS THERE ANYTHING ELSE YOU WOULD LIKE TO HIGHLIGHT?

Once again, I would like to extend my sincere thanks to our advisor [Caillum Hedderman](#) from the [European Youth Forum](#), youth representative [Franziska Sophia Knogler](#) from the European Students' Union, and the youth delegates from the [EU Youth Conference in Denmark](#), whose contributions ensured this opinion was truly '[youth-tested](#)'.

The EESC opinion on the 'Proposal for a regulation on Erasmus+ ' was presented and adopted at the EESC plenary session in January 2026. Read it at: <https://link.europa.eu/j4dRHg>

Katrīna LEITĀNE (Latvia)

EESC co-rapporteur, SOC/842 Proposal for a regulation on Erasmus+

Vice-President, EESC Youth Group

Vice-President, EESC Civil Society Organisations' Group

Advocacy expert, National Youth Council of Latvia

EESC PLENARY: Video statements on adopted EESC opinions

4 June 2026

→ [READ ONLINE](#)



Watch our rapporteurs and co-rapporteurs on INT/1107, SOC/853, NAT/970 and ECO/696

WATCH OUR RAPPORTEURS AND CO-RAPPORTEURS ON INT/1107, SOC/853, NAT/970 AND ECO/696, ADOPTED DURING THE APRIL EESC PLENARY SESSION

Rapporteurs and co-rapporteurs © EU/EESC

STATEMENT BY RAPPORTEUR THIERRY LIBAERT ON INT/1107 2030 CONSUMER AGENDA

STATEMENT BY RAPPORTEUR LUCA JAHIER ON SOC/853 A CULTURAL COMPASS FOR EUROPE

EESC PLENARY: EESC hosts debate with António Costa on competitiveness and the role of the EU in the current geopolitical environment

4 June 2026

→ [READ ONLINE](#)



At its plenary session on 29 April, the EESC held a debate with the European Council President. **Read the key messages of the members of the EESC Civil Society Organisations' Group.**

The current geopolitical context is shining a harsh spotlight on the price that Europe is paying for its dependence on third countries, according to European Council President **António Costa**, speaking at a plenary debate with the European Economic and Social Committee ([EESC](#)) on 29 April. The EU must boost its competitiveness to be able to deliver tangible results in terms of jobs, income and affordable housing.

The debate comes amid sustained geopolitical and economic pressure. Russia's war against Ukraine, tension in the Middle East and disruptions in energy and supply chains continue to affect prices, investment and economic stability. Global competition is getting fiercer, with major economies investing heavily in strategic sectors. Together, these pressures are exposing how closely Europe's economic performance is tied to external developments.

The **EESC President, Séamus Boland**, stressed that: "Europe's competitiveness and global role cannot be separated from its core democratic values. Respect for the rule of law, fundamental rights, social dialogue and an inclusive social market economy are not constraints: they are our comparative advantage."

Members of the Civil Society Organisations' Group participated in the debate:

[Cillian Lohan](#), President of the EESC Civil Society Organisations' Group, said that "It is essential that the EU remain firmly committed to the ["17 Sustainable Development Goals"](#) set out by the United Nations. They constitute the compass for the EU's future and for future generations. As civil society, we are ready to make our contribution to achieving climate neutrality by 2050."

[Elena-Alexandra Calistru](#), President of the [EESC ECO Section](#), urged that ambitions and strategies such as "competitiveness, [the] green and digital transition, and social and territorial cohesion (...) be backed by adequate resources; otherwise they will [be] abandoned". "Organised civil society can bring something to the table".

[Luca Jahier](#), former EESC President, highlighted that "competitiveness is inseparable from Europe's place in the world". To address this challenge, "building unity among leaders is essential for credible delivery, but unity must mean shared ambition including progress on all resources and investment capacity".

[Read the EESC's press release.](#)

[Watch the debate.](#)

PRESIDENT CILLIAN LOHAN IN THE EESC PLENARY DEBATE WITH PRESIDENT ANTÓNIO COSTA

EESC PLENARY: EESC reaffirms LGBTIQ+ rights as fundamental and calls for effective implementation of the EU strategy

4 June 2026

→ [READ ONLINE](#)



At its plenary session on 29 April, the EESC held a debate on a 'Union of Equality: Advancing LGBTIQ+ rights and banning conversion practices'. **Read the key messages of the members of the EESC Civil Society Organisations' Group.**

The European Economic and Social Committee ([EESC](#)) placed fundamental rights, dignity and equality at the centre of its plenary session on 29 April, holding a high-level debate on a **Union of Equality: Advancing LGBTIQ+ rights and banning conversion**

practices. The debate was followed by the adoption of two key EESC opinions calling for stronger enforcement of the EU's LGBTIQ+ Equality Strategy 2026–2030 and a comprehensive EU-wide ban on conversion practices, both prepared by rapporteurs from the EESC Civil Society Organisations' Group.

Despite progress in recent years, speakers pointed out that discrimination, violence and harassment continued to affect many LGBTIQ+ persons across the European Union, with particularly severe impacts on trans, non-binary and intersex people. Conversion practices (aimed at changing, suppressing or erasing a person's sexual orientation, gender identity or expression) still existed in parts of Europe, despite being widely condemned as harmful, akin to hate crimes and incompatible with fundamental rights.

Participating in the debate were **Caleb Stocco**, representative of the [European Citizens' Initiative entitled 'Ban conversion practices in the European Union'](#), European Association Against Conversion Therapy (ACT); **Francesco Zoia Bolzonello**, member of the European Commissioner Hadja Lahbib's cabinet; **Béatrice Fresko-Rolfo**, Chair of the Committee on Equality and Non-Discrimination, Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe; and **Graeme Reid**, United Nations Independent Expert on Protection against violence and discrimination based on sexual orientation and gender identity.

EESC President Séamus Boland rejected any justification for such conversion practices, saying: "These so-called conversion practices or therapies are not only harmful, they are a profound violation of human dignity and fundamental rights. Let us be absolutely clear: there is nothing to fix or cure. What needs to change is not people, but the systems, attitudes and structures that deny them their dignity."

Members of the Civil Society Organisations' Group participated in the debate:

Ionuț Sibian, member for the Civil Society Organisations' Group and co-rapporteur for SOC/854 [Ban on conversion practices in the European Union](#), stated that: "Legislation alone is not enough: we also need education and support mechanisms and we need to raise awareness. This opinion is not just about protecting the rights of LGBTIQ+ persons: it is also about defending the integrity of our democratic societies."

Julianne Marie Neiiendam, Vice-President for the Civil Society Organisations' Group and rapporteur for SOC/849 [Union of Equality: LGBTIQ+ Equality Strategy 2026-2030](#) addressed the assembly: "LGBTIQ+ rights are fundamental rights for all Europeans. We must protect, implement and truly live them in all Member States. The [LGBTIQ+ Equality Strategy 2026-2030](#)" is a key tool to turn this into reality."

Rosario Valastro condemned the practice of conversion therapy, saying "if you try to convince someone that they are abnormal or sick, that is violent and an infringement of human rights". He stressed the need for EU action and for Member States to introduce "sanctions against these inhuman forms of behaviour".

[Read the EESC's press release.](#)

[Watch the debate.](#)

EESC PLENARY: Culture at the heart of a resilient European democracy, urges EESC

4 June 2026

→ [READ ONLINE](#)



Plenary debate on 'Europe for Culture - Culture for Europe' © EESC/EU

At its plenary session on 30 April, the EESC held a debate on the theme 'Europe for Culture – Culture for Europe'. **Read the key messages of the members of the EESC Civil Society Organisations' Group.**

The European Economic and Social Committee ([EESC](#)) held a high-level debate demonstrating that culture is not a luxury, but a strategic asset for democracy, social cohesion and Europe's economic resilience. Speakers called for stronger political recognition and sustained investment to turn ambition into action.

Participating in the debate on 30 April were: **Glenn Micallef**, European Commissioner for Intergenerational Fairness, Youth, Culture and Sport; **Nela Riehl**, Member of the European Parliament and Chair of the Committee on Culture and Education; **Tanja Hristova**, Member of the Committee of the Regions, Vice-chair of the Commission for Social Policy, Education, Employment, Research and Culture; and **Lars Ebert**, Secretary-general of Culture Action Europe.

EESC President Séamus Boland stressed that, even in times of geopolitical uncertainty, culture must not be sidelined: "In today's geopolitical context, it may be tempting to see culture as a luxury. I believe the opposite is true. Culture carries values, protects freedom and helps sustain Europe as a united political project. We cannot imagine a resilient European democracy without culture at its heart".

Members of the Civil Society Organisations' Group participated in the debate:

[Luca Jahier](#), rapporteur for the EESC opinion SOC/853 on [A Culture Compass for Europe](#), said: "The Culture Compass sends a strong political message: **culture is not at the margins of the European project, but at its heart**. Culture is a vector to defend and strengthen democracy, counter populist and authoritarian narratives, and enhance preparedness, sustainable development, social cohesion and a stronger sense of belonging."

[Laura Albu](#) entered the debate highlighting current challenges in the cultural sector, in particular women artists who face the "instability of freelance work and unequal burden of unpaid care". "We cannot talk about the status of the artist without talking about social security, maternity rights and childcare".

[Zornitsa Rousinova](#) pointed out that "the success of the Culture Compass will depend on inclusive multi-level governance" and to this end "civil society, local actors, cultural sectors and youth organisations must be fully involved".

[Read the EESC's press release.](#)

[Watch the debate.](#)

EESC PLENARY: Adopted opinions

4 June 2026

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The last EESC plenary sessions took place on 29-30 April 2026. The EESC plenary adopted several opinions, some of which were drafted by members of the Civil Society Organisations' Group.

The [complete texts of all EESC opinions](#) are available in various language versions on the Committee's website.

The next EESC plenary session will take place on 17 and 18 June 2026. For more information on the upcoming plenary session please visit our [website](#).

AGENDA: Overview

4 June 2026

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- 5 June – Meeting of the EESC's Social Economy Category
- 17-18 June - [EESC plenary session](#)
- 30 June - Conference on '[Civil society driving the EU sustainability agenda](#)', Cork, Ireland

AGENDA: Join our conference on 30 June in Cork!

4 June 2026

→ [READ ONLINE](#)



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On 30 June 2026, the Civil Society Organisations Group will host a high-level conference entitled 'Civil society driving the EU sustainability agenda' in Ireland. For in-person participation, please register by 24 June 2026 via our [registration form](#). The event will also be webstreamed. Prior registration for the streaming is not required.

On **30 June 2026**, the **European Economic and Social Committee's (EESC) [Civil Society Organisations Group](#)** will host a high-level conference in **Cork**, in light of the upcoming Irish Presidency of the Council of the EU.

Entitled '[Civil society driving the EU sustainability agenda](#)', this event will take place at **University College Cork** from **10.00 to 13.00** local time.

At a time when the EU's sustainability policies are facing increasing pressure, the role of civil society has never been more vital. Hard-won commitments on environmental protection, climate justice, societal resilience and other sustainability aspects risk being diluted just when they are most urgently needed. In these complex geopolitical times, Europe must strengthen its strategic autonomy and reduce its energy dependence to progress on its objectives under the EU Treaties. The only way forward is to invest massively and consistently in the energy transition and in a sustainable pathway. Civil society organisations (CSOs) and local communities are best placed to drive this change for the long term.

Civil society organisations, rooted in communities and guided by shared values rather than short-term interests, are uniquely placed to defend these ambitions and to reinvigorate the sustainability agenda with credibility, innovation and public trust beyond 2030. In addition to policy influence, CSOs play a crucial role in fostering public acceptance, implementing policies and supporting personal well-being, strengthening social cohesion and empowering people to shape their own futures. This conference will address the role of CSOs in advancing the sustainability agenda and the pivotal role of (local) communities in the endeavour to make European societies greener and more resilient.

Guest speakers include:

- **Christopher O’Sullivan**, Minister of State for Biodiversity
- **Frans Timmermans**, former Executive Vice-President of the European Commission

Simultaneous interpretation will be available in English and French.

For more information, please consult the [programme](#). Please note that the times indicated refer to Irish Standard Time (IST).

We warmly invite you to join us in person at this event in Cork. [Registration](#) is open until **24 June**.

The event will also be [webstreamed](#). Prior registration for the streaming is not required.

Please note that the EESC does not cover travel or accommodation costs.

For further information, please write to: [Events-CSOGroup\(at\)eesc\(dot\)europa\(dot\)eu](mailto:Events-CSOGroup(at)eesc(dot)europa(dot)eu)

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4 June 2026

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