



# REX

**External Relations  
Section**



European Economic  
and Social Committee



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## EUROPEAN CIVIL SOCIETY AND EU SOFT POWER

At international level, the European Union (EU) advocates for the principles of multilateralism and a rule-based world order. Amidst increasing geopolitical competition, we all face **common challenges**: fighting climate change, improving epidemic preparedness, ensuring food safety and building more resilient supply chains for strategic goods, to name just a few. Through initiatives like the Green Deal and the Global Gateway, the EU is trying to lead by example: a practical application of “soft power”.

**Soft power** is about reaching common goals in a peaceful and consensual way, convincing counterparts to get on-board. It is also used to promote fundamental values like human rights, democracy and the rule of law, and can consist of cultural diplomacy, economic diplomacy, climate diplomacy, health diplomacy, etc.

The **European Economic and Social Committee** (EESC) is a natural partner of the other EU institutions for soft power in the external dimension, due to its experience and networks of civil society contacts.

## THE EESC IN THE WORLD: THE REX SECTION

The main task of the EESC in the field of external relations is supporting the European Union's activities through a **dialogue with civil society organisations** of non-EU countries and geographical groupings with which the EU has formal relations.

To do so, the EESC counts on the work of its External Relations Section (REX). Composed of 129 members, the REX section is led by a president, three vice-presidents and a bureau of 12 members.



### The REX section:

- draws up opinions and information reports on issues related to EU external relations, development and trade policy, or to external aspects of the EU internal policies. These documents, addressed to the European Parliament, the Council, and the Commission, represent the viewpoint of European organised civil society on current topics;
- follows developments in different countries and areas of the world thanks to its specialised bodies, including joint civil society bodies created by EU agreements with non-EU countries and regions, and facilitates dialogue with socio-economic actors in non-EU countries;
- participates in the Domestic Advisory Groups (DAGs) foreseen by the EU's free trade agreements with the rest of the world;
- organises conferences, civil society summits and other initiatives, to raise awareness and gather leading experts' opinions on topical issues with the participation of civil society from non-EU countries.



## THE REX SECTION: GEOGRAPHICAL AREAS

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The REX section works with **different regions of the world**, such as the Mediterranean, the ACP (Africa, Caribbean and Pacific) countries, the Western Balkans, the countries covered by the Eastern Partnership policy, the UK, the European Economic Area and Turkey, as well as with the USA and Canada, Latin America and Asian economies like Japan, South Korea, Singapore or Vietnam. It also follows developments in Russia and China, and more countries will be added following new agreements with the EU.

Depending on the region, the work of REX is organised in **bilateral bodies** like Joint Consultative Committees, Civil Society Platforms, Round Tables etc., or in **internal specialised bodies** such as Follow-up Committees, which like all others, are in permanent contact with their non-EU counterparts.

During their meetings, the REX bodies and their counterparts usually draw up **joint declarations** illustrating civil society views on different issues. These declarations are then transmitted to the European institutions and to the authorities on the partner's side for feed-back.



## THE REX SECTION: MAIN TOPICS

In its work with civil society from non-EU countries, the REX section always looks for ways to promote sustainable development and economic and social rights, and keeps an eye on the impact that EU free trade and association agreements have on these topics.

Moreover, the REX section exchanges views with civil society organisations from the rest of the world on all issues that are strategic for the future and can improve the lives of EU and non-EU citizens alike: from multilateralism and international cooperation for solving common problems, to specific issues affecting the different countries' abilities to interact with the European Union.

Sustainable development	Trade	Civil dialogue	Energy	Social economy
Labour rights	Supply chains	Youth	Water	Education and skills
Green transition	New forms of work	Gender equality	Digitalisation	Migration

*Table: Some cross-cutting issues discussed with civil society of non-EU countries*

## SOME RECENT OPINIONS AND INFORMATION REPORTS

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The EESC has been adopting a series of opinions prepared by the REX section on strategic issues that concern the EU's position and role in the world. These include:

[REX/569](#) - The EU Climate diplomacy

[REX/566](#) - Youth action plan in the EU external action

[REX/565](#) - Forced labour products ban

[REX/563](#) - The implementation of the EU-UK Withdrawal Agreement, including the Protocol on Ireland and Northern Ireland

[REX/562](#) - The EU Strategic Compass

[REX/561](#) - The power of trade partnerships: together for green and just economic growth

[REX/558](#) - Setting the course for a sustainable blue planet, an update of the international ocean governance agenda

[REX/555](#) - Energy policies and strategies in the Euro-Mediterranean region

[REX/554](#) - Instrumentalisation of migrants

[REX/552](#) - Socio-Economic situation in Latin America following the Covid-19 crisis – the role of civil society in the recovery process

[REX/551](#) - Multilateral investor-state arbitration court: assessment of the UNCITRAL process and its achievements in light of civil society recommendations

[REX/548](#) - Cultural diplomacy as a vector of EU external relations. New partnerships and role of CSO

[REX/547](#) - The Global Gateway

[REX/543](#) - Analysis of the role of organised civil society in the new EU-Organisation of African, Caribbean and Pacific States (OACPS) agreement, including the situation of the EPAs in this framework





## FOR AN UPDATE ON THE LATEST DEVELOPMENTS AND THE FULL LIST:

**Opinions:** [www.eesc.europa.eu/en/sections-other-bodies/sections-commission/external-relations-section-rex/opinions](http://www.eesc.europa.eu/en/sections-other-bodies/sections-commission/external-relations-section-rex/opinions)

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## TO LEARN MORE...

The REX section has a **web site**, [www.eesc.europa.eu/en/sections-other-bodies/sections-commission/external-relations-section-rex](http://www.eesc.europa.eu/en/sections-other-bodies/sections-commission/external-relations-section-rex), as well as a **newsletter**, to which you can subscribe, free of charge, at [www.eesc.europa.eu/en/sections-other-bodies/sections-commission/external-relations-section-rex/subscribe-newsletter](http://www.eesc.europa.eu/en/sections-other-bodies/sections-commission/external-relations-section-rex/subscribe-newsletter).

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## REX newsletter | The EESC in the world

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