



2022

**European Economic
and Social Committee**
A Year in Review



European Economic
and Social Committee

This publication is based largely on the *Annual Activity Report 2022*, issued in June 2023, which is the European Economic and Social Committee's main tool for reporting annually to the budgetary authority. Additional source materials include the EESC's Statistics 2022, published by the Directorate for Communication and Interinstitutional Relations, the EESC's website and social media content and general activities at the Committee throughout 2022.

The full *Annual Activity Report* can be viewed here: www.eesc.europa.eu/en/about



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FOREWORD

Dear readers,

It is my pleasure to introduce this publication, based on the European Economic and Social Committee's 2022 Annual Activity Report, providing an overview of all the Committee's activities in 2022.



As an EU citizen and civil servant, it is my firm belief that the European Union is about building bridges and breaking down barriers, and promoting citizens' participation in the EU policy-making process.

With the EESC bringing European civil society closer to the EU institutions every day, I would like to briefly share some success stories from the past year which I am particularly proud of. They demonstrate the EESC's outstanding, tireless work to narrow that gap between people and institutions.

2022 was a year marked by dramatic events. On 24 February 2022, war returned to Europe when Russia launched an unprovoked war against Ukraine. Following this aggression, the EESC took several measures to support Ukrainian civil society in the shape of resolutions, opinions and major events, such as a high-level conference in Krakow on Relief and reconstruction of Ukraine and the Civil Society Prize rewarding initiatives helping civilians suffering as a result of the war.

Our Committee also opened its premises to Ukrainian civil society organisations active in Brussels, providing them with a safe place to continue working and keep Ukrainian civil society alive.

In response to the rise in energy prices following the war, the EESC worked on a comprehensive approach for the energy transition, built on the need for a new energy model and an energy independent EU.

While the EU is still fighting the consequences of the COVID-19 pandemic, investments in the green and digital transformations are more essential than ever. Therefore, we have worked tirelessly to encourage European institutions and national governments to speed up the implementation and enforcement of the national Recovery and Resilience Plans.

2022 was also an important year in forging closer relations with the other European institutions: a revised protocol on cooperation was signed with the European Commission, increasing political and legislative cooperation between the two institutions, and the Cooperation Agreement with the Committee of the Regions was implemented, reinforcing the existing administrative cooperation with closer collaboration between departments.

In this interinstitutional context, the EESC also actively helped to create a “full civic experience” for all Europeans, working extensively to promote the Conference on the Future of Europe (CoFoE) with an 18-member delegation.

These are just a few examples of what we achieved in 2022. Because the EESC never stops moving – its involvement in the Green Deal, the continuous and increasing geopolitical challenges, promoting participatory democracy – it is always looking for new ways to convey the views of European citizens to EU lawmakers.

I firmly believe that, as a forum for debating and for drawing up opinions, our Committee makes a unique contribution to the democratic legitimacy of European integration.

Gianluca Brunetti

Gianluca Brunetti
Secretary-General of the European
Economic and Social Committee



The EESC is continuously bringing participatory democracy to the heart of EU politics, giving civil society organisations a voice in European decision-making. We are proud to share some of our success stories with you, and hope you enjoy reading them!





THE EESC, CONNECTING LAWMAKERS WITH ORGANISED CIVIL SOCIETY

WHAT IS THE EESC?

The European Economic and Social Committee (EESC) is an EU consultative body that was established in 1958 to advise European decision-makers by delivering **opinions** to the European Parliament, the Council and the European Commission. The EESC ensures that citizens, through their organisations, have a say in Europe's development. A unique body, the Committee provides a forum for consultation, dialogue and consensus-building among representatives from the various sections of organised civil society.

WHAT IS THE EESC'S MISSION?

The EESC is committed to European integration. It helps to reinforce the EU's democratic legitimacy and make it more effective by conveying the views of civil society organisations from the Member States to European decision-makers.

In other words

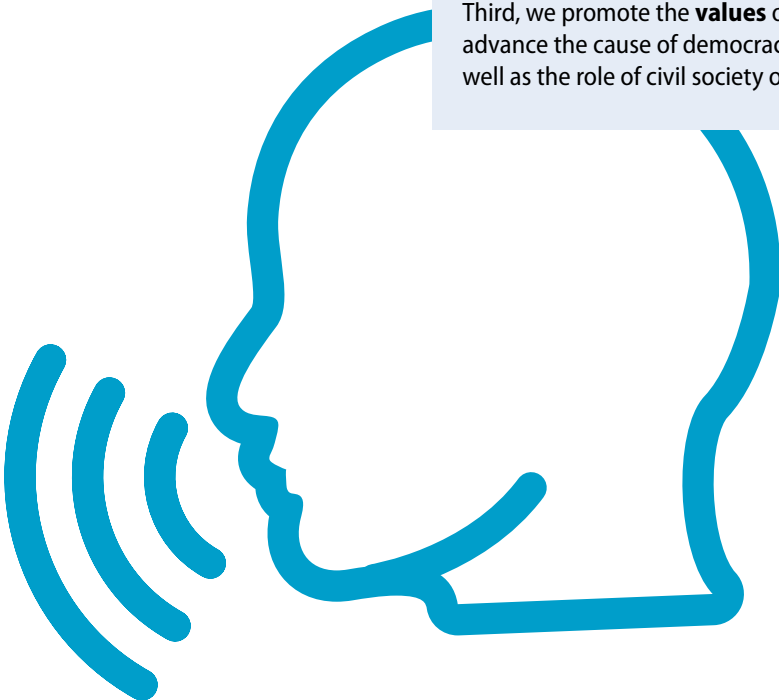
The EESC's purpose is to give civil society organisations a voice in Europe.

But how do we do that?

First, we help to ensure that **European policies and legislation** better reflect economic, social and civic situations on the ground by advising the European Parliament, the Council and the European Commission. We do this by tapping into EESC members' experience and stimulating dialogue and efforts to secure consensus, which serves the general interests of the EU.

Second, we promote the development of a **more participatory EU** that is more closely in touch with public opinion, by acting as an institutional forum representing, informing, expressing the views of and securing dialogue with organised civil society.

Third, we promote the **values** on which European integration is founded and advance the cause of democracy – in particular participatory democracy – as well as the role of civil society organisations, in Europe and around the world.



WHAT IS ORGANISED CIVIL SOCIETY?

The term civil society embraces a wide range of organisations and their activities to improve the well being of their members or communities. Employers’ organisations, trade unions, networks, associations, non-governmental organisations (NGOs), interest groups and movements are formed to advance their common interests through collective action. These groups often act as intermediaries between decision-makers and the public, providing a channel for people to play an active role in bringing about change or to support good causes.

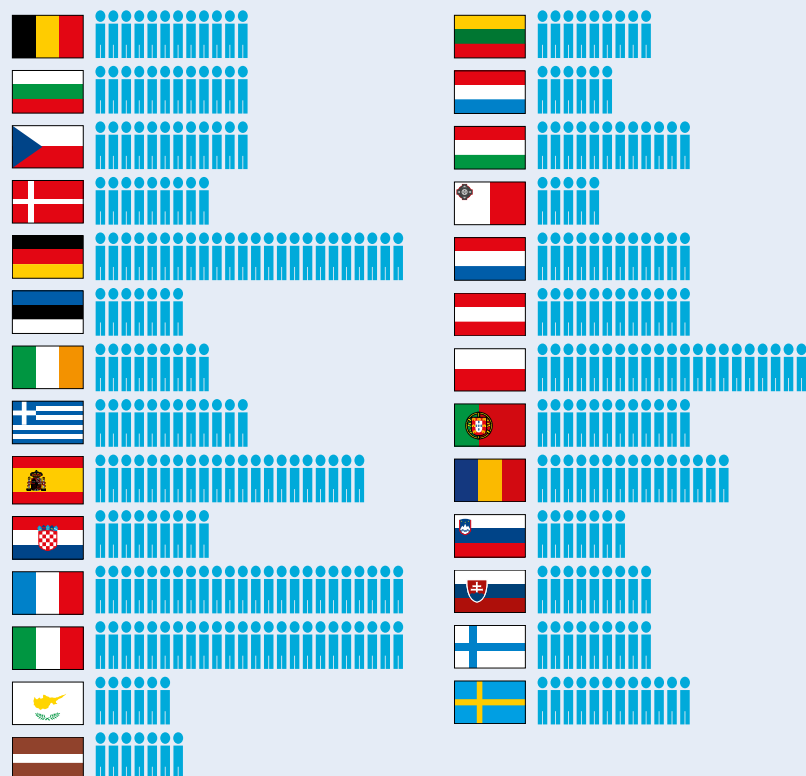
HOW IS CIVIL SOCIETY REPRESENTED?

The EESC is made up of **329 members** from the **27 Member States**. They are not politicians, but employers, trade unionists, farmers and representatives of professional and community associations, youth organisations, women’s groups, consumer associations, environmental campaigns, and many more. They come from all social and professional backgrounds and have a vast range of knowledge and experience.

Members have their own jobs in their home countries, meaning that they maintain direct grassroots contacts. They are completely independent in carrying out their duties, working in the general interest of the European Union and its citizens. By debating issues that involve and affect civil society and adopting opinions on those subjects, Committee members play an integral part in EU policy formation and decision-making.

Members are appointed for a renewable five-year term by the Council of the EU on a proposal from each Member State.

329 Members for 5 years

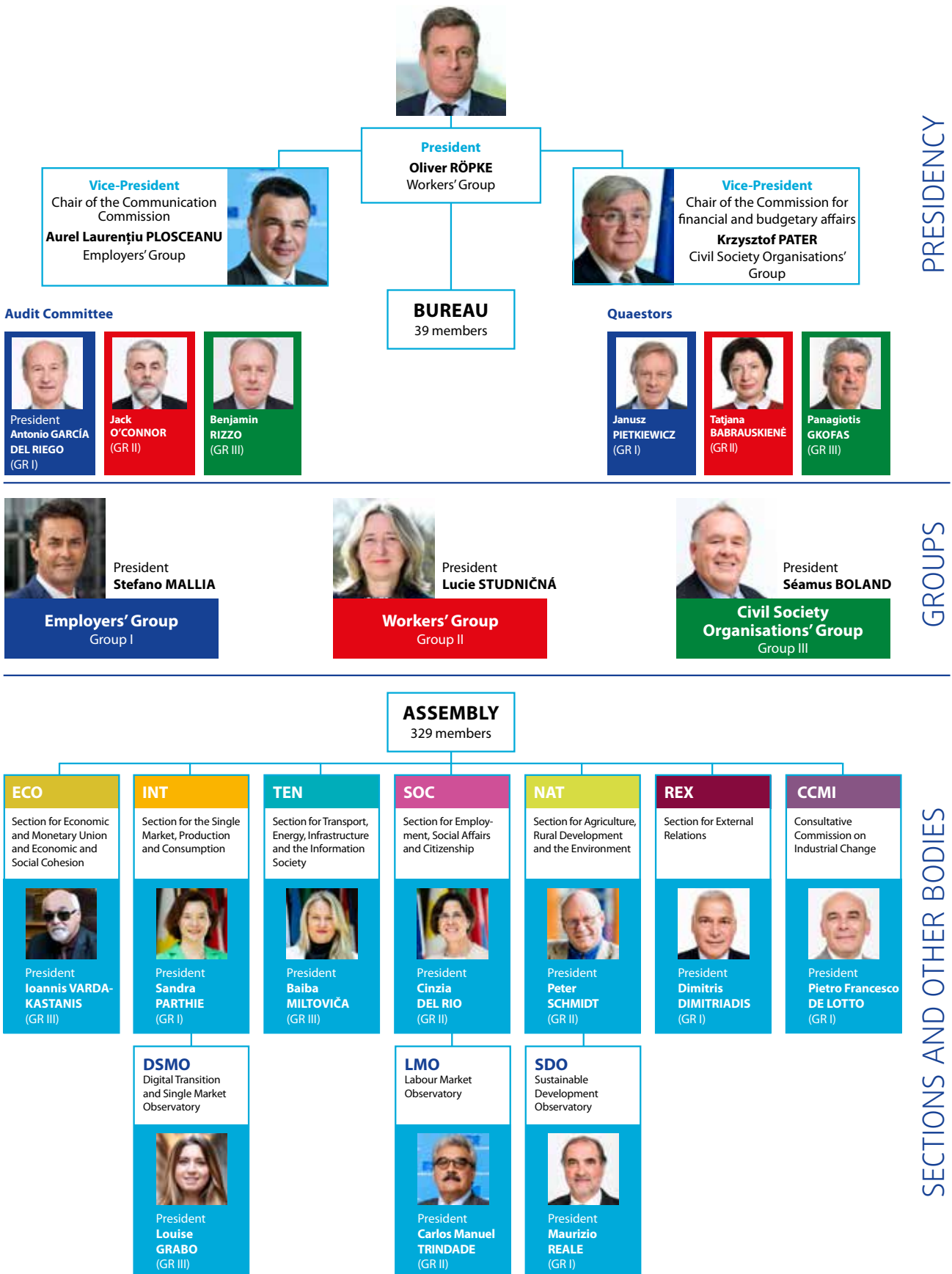


HOW IS THE EESC ORGANISED?

Presidency and political bodies 2020-2023



Presidency and political bodies 2023-2025



PRESIDENCY

GROUPS

SECTIONS AND OTHER BODIES

The Presidency and the Bureau

Every two-and-a-half years, the EESC elects a **Bureau** made up of the EESC president and two vice presidents, the presidents of the three groups and a varying number of members. The Bureau's main task is to organise and coordinate the work of the EESC's various constituent bodies and to lay down policy guidelines.

Elected **president** in 2020 for a term of office ending in April 2023, Christa Schweng (Group I) was responsible for the orderly conduct of the EESC's business and represented it in its relations with other institutions and bodies. The **two vice-presidents**, Italian member Giulia Barbucci (Group II) and Irish member Cillian Lohan (Group III), were responsible for the budget and communication, respectively.

On 26 April 2023, Oliver Röpke (Group II) replaced Ms Schweng as EESC president. At the same time, Polish member Krzysztof Pater (Group III) replaced Ms Barbucci as vice-president responsible for the budget, and Romanian member Laurențiu Plosceanu (Group I) took over from Mr Lohan as vice-president responsible for communication.



Christa Schweng (October 2020 – April 2023)

Christa Schweng took office as the EESC president in October 2020 at a challenging time, when Europe was gripped by the COVID-19 pandemic. The motto for her term of office - United for the future of Europe - reflected her belief that unity is what the EU and its citizens needed the most to overcome the pandemic and the ensuing economic crisis. Ms Schweng set as her goals helping to bring about a swift recovery and shaping a vision for a post-COVID-19 Europe. Following Russia's invasion of Ukraine, she also advocated strongly for European solidarity, taking practical action to help Ukraine by

sharing the EESC's premises with Ukrainian civil society, and voicing strong support for Ukraine's path to EU membership.

Ms Schweng's priorities focused on three pillars: a Europe that prospers economically, a Europe that is socially inclusive and a Europe that is environmentally sustainable. She firmly believed that the future of Europe should be founded on these three pillars and she advocated actively for this during the Conference on the Future of Europe. The future of Europe should provide the right conditions for all of civil society to thrive and live in open, values-based democracies. She steered the EESC's work towards focusing on the digital and green transitions with the aim of ensuring that the EU fully reaps the benefits of this change and that no one is left behind.

Her top priorities also included rebuilding trust within the EESC and working on strengthening its external reputation. Ms Schweng bolstered the EESC's ethical standards and transparency with a more robust Code of Conduct. She also succeeded in brokering greater interinstitutional cooperation and brought civil society organisations closer together.



Strengthening participatory democracy and listening to social partners and other civil society organisations is the only way to successfully meet today's and tomorrow's challenges, and to adapt to the current highly dynamic environment. It was an honour and pleasure to represent the EESC and organised civil society.

Christa Schweng, President of the EESC

Oliver Röpke took office as EESC president on 26 April 2023

He set out the priorities for his term of office in a political manifesto entitled “Stand up for democracy. Speak up for Europe”.

As Europe is navigating the aftermath of the pandemic and grappling with Russia’s war of aggression against Ukraine, Mr Röpke’s term will focus on upholding EU values: democracy, fundamental rights and the rule of law. He is committed to ensuring that the EESC makes a valuable contribution and engages constructively with the EU institutions to create a more inclusive and resilient Europe.

His term of office will coincide with the biggest democratic exercise in Europe – 2024 European elections. One of Mr Röpke’s key priorities is for the EESC to take on a more active role ahead of the elections, to engage with voters and increase their participation.

Mr Röpke is committed to “Stand up for democracy” not only at home but also abroad, since European stability and prosperity are deeply intertwined with those of our neighbours in the Eastern Partnership and the Western Balkans. In this context, the president will work to actively promote an open-door policy at EESC towards the EU’s neighbours.

Finally, Mr Röpke is determined to make the EESC a place which “Speaks up for Europe”, its citizens and in particular young people. Creating a new generation forum, where young people can freely express their concerns, ideas, and opinions is an important priority for Mr Röpke. Youth should be able to shape their own future, which is the future of Europe.



We [Commission and EESC] crafted our Recovery Plan NextGenerationEU. We saw eye to eye that workers and employers should be involved in the national plans, because they are the beating heart of our economy, and the success of any economic policy depends on our social partners.

Ursula von der Leyen, President of the European Commission



The European Parliament will continue to take on board the European Economic [and] Social Committee’s authoritative and legitimate input. It can help Parliament optimise its own legislative mandate. Together, we form part of European participatory democracy that must pursue common priorities.

Roberta Metsola, President of the European Parliament

The Groups

Members belong in principle to one of three groups: Employers (Group I), Workers (Group II) or Civil Society Organisations (Group III). The aim is to build dialogue and consensus between all three groups so that EESC opinions reflect the economic, social and civic interests of society.

Employers' Group

The Employers' Group brings together over 100 representatives of entrepreneurs and business associations active in a wide array of sectors, from industry to retail and from agriculture to services. The Group represents more than 20 million European companies – large and small – that provide citizens with jobs, deliver goods and services for consumers and form the backbone of our European economies and the welfare of our societies.

Employers' Group members bring the day-to-day reality of business from all EU Member States to the European table. They are genuinely committed to using own experience to further the European project.

The work of the Employers' Group is framed by priorities reflecting the key needs of European businesses. So that they keep pace with European businesses, these priorities are reviewed regularly. The Group's current priorities are focusing on creating competitive, resilient and thriving businesses that are able and empowered to **create common good** and generate economically, socially and environmentally sustainable development, both domestically and globally. Together, the Employers' Group members have consistently advocated for a more strategic approach to competitiveness, proposing in 2022 the idea of a competitiveness check in the framework of the Conference on the Future of Europe. The Group's vision is an overarching **competitiveness agenda for Europe**.

The Employers' Group works closely with Europe's six leading business organisations (BusinessEurope, Copa-Cogeca, Eurochambres, EuroCommerce, SGI Europe and SMEunited) to promote and defend the interests of European enterprises.



Turning the motto “United for the future of Europe” into reality means representing the EESC in its entirety. While being composed of three groups, the EESC draws its real strength and its unique selling point from what we are able to deliver across groups. Our concrete proposals, stemming from the intelligence and the real-life experience of all three groups constitute our competitive advantage.

Christa Schweng, President of the EESC

Workers' Group

This Group is comprised of representatives from more than 80 national trade unions, confederations and sectoral federations.

It is firmly committed to enlarging and strengthening the EU as an area of prosperity, freedom and democracy, mutual support and social cohesion, and aims to ensure that **workers play a real part in European policy-making**. In view of the significant challenges posed by the pandemic, climate change and digitalisation for both European economies and the world of work, giving workers a strong voice will be key to ensuring sustainable recovery and socially balanced and just transitions. Although the European social model is an example for much of the world, there are still too many people suffering hardship or exclusion from society because of poverty, discrimination, lack of education or other disadvantages, and the pandemic has exacerbated these precarious conditions. The Workers' Group's priorities stem from the vision that the trade union movement has a responsibility to defend democracy and the European social model: the most important achievements of the last century were based on peace, human rights, workers' social and environmental rights, diversity and inclusiveness, and fair and equal living and working conditions - including quality public services and education systems, full employment and the well-being - for all Europeans and for workers and their families on other continents.

Civil Society Organisations' Group

This Group ensures that the EESC voices the concerns of the various economic, social, occupational and civic organisations that make up civil society in the Member States. Its overall aim is to strengthen participatory democracy across the EU and to make sure that EESC opinions on EU legislative proposals reflect the interests of all Europeans. Its activities therefore focus on three pillars: **diversity in democracy, European civic engagement – local action**, and outreach to the European institutions and other institutional actors.

Its members are drawn from organisations representing the following fields: academia, citizens' participation and empowerment, civil society development, consumers, environment, heritage and sustainable development, farming, fisheries and coastal communities, forestry, protection of human rights (issues concerning children, elderly people, families, gender equality, marginalised and underprivileged groups, migrants and refugees, minorities, people with disabilities, women and young people), liberal professions, craft, small and medium-sized enterprises, and the social economy.

During the 2020-2023 term of office, Stefano Mallia (Malta) was president of the Employers' Group, Oliver Röpke (Austria) was president of the Workers' Group, and Séamus Boland (Ireland) was president of the Civil Society Organisations' Group.

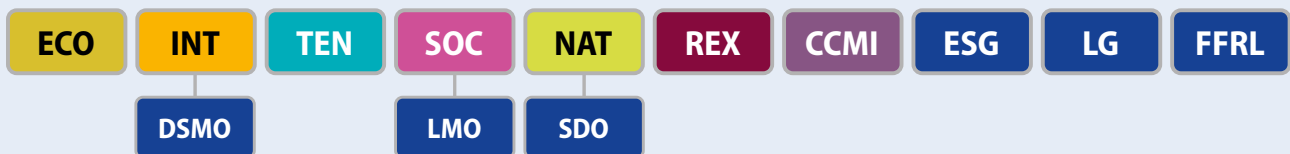
The EESC'S main bodies

The EESC has **six sections**, specialised in different policy areas: agriculture and environment (NAT); the single market (INT); social issues (SOC); economic issues (ECO); energy, transport and IT infrastructure (TEN); and EU external policies (REX). Members belong to one or more of these sections depending on their areas of expertise, and it is here that the groundwork is laid for the EESC's opinions.

The Committee also has a Consultative Commission on Industrial Change (CCMI), which monitors the industry's ability to anticipate and adapt to the impact of globalisation.

The EESC has set up three specialist observatories – on the digital transition and the single market (DSMO), the labour market (LMO) and sustainable development (SDO). It also has a group focused on the European Semester (ESG) which considers European civil society proposals on growth and employment, a group on Fundamental Rights and the Rule of Law (FRRL), and a Liaison Group (LG) promoting civil dialogue and participatory democracy.

Working bodies



6 Sections

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

1 Commission

- CCMI** Consultative Commission on Industrial Change

3 Observatories

- DSMO** Digital Transition and Single Market Observatory
- LMO** Labour Market Observatory
- SDO** Sustainable Development Observatory

3 specialist bodies

- ESG** European Semester Group
- LG** Liaison Group
- FRRL** Group on Fundamental Rights and the Rule of Law

The secretary-general

Gianluca Brunetti is the EESC's secretary-general. The chief task of the secretary general is to implement decisions made by the Committee's plenary assembly, the Bureau and the president. He is also responsible for managing the administration and the budget of the institution and assisting members in carrying out their duties.



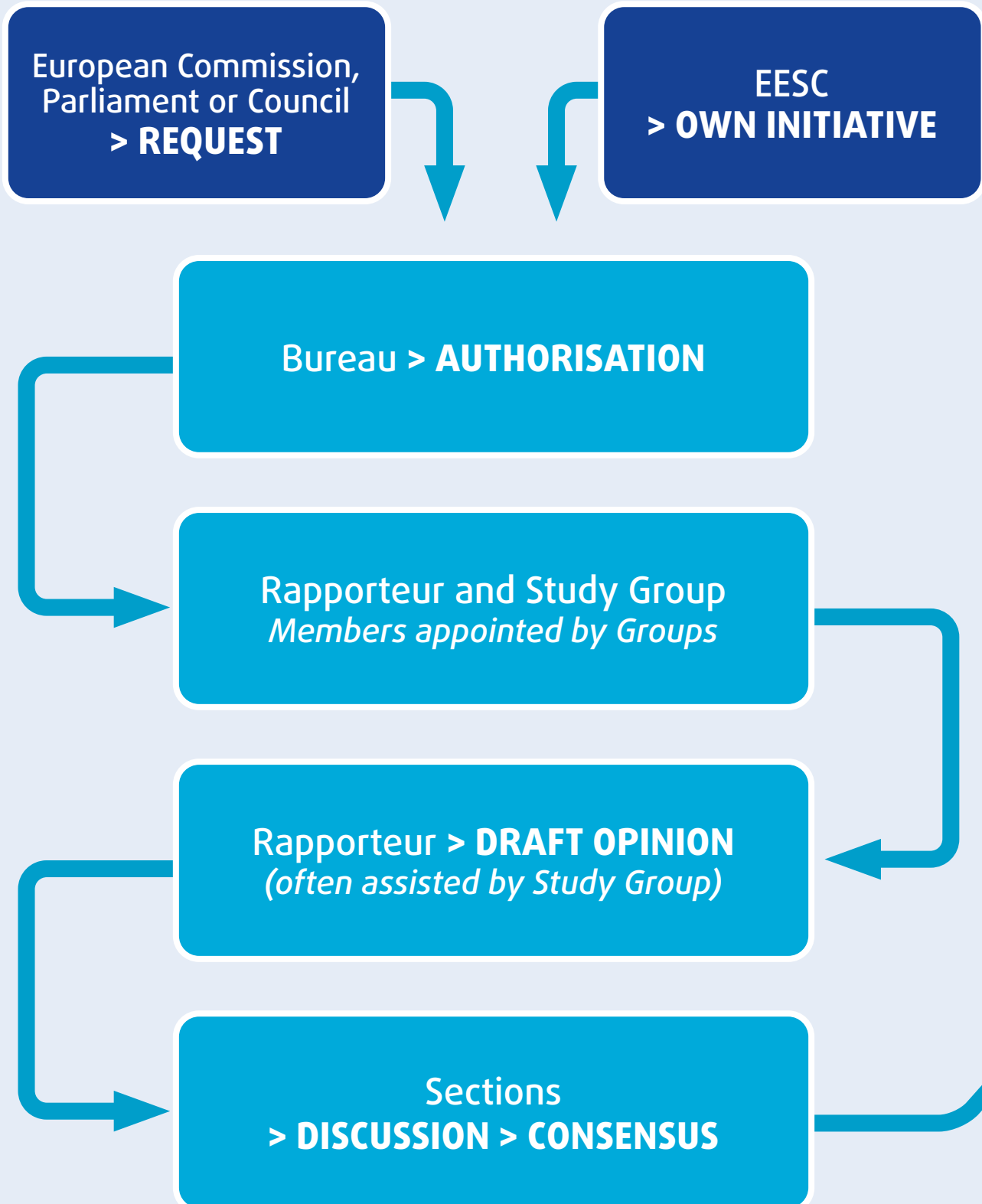
HOW DOES THE EESC TAKE ACTION?

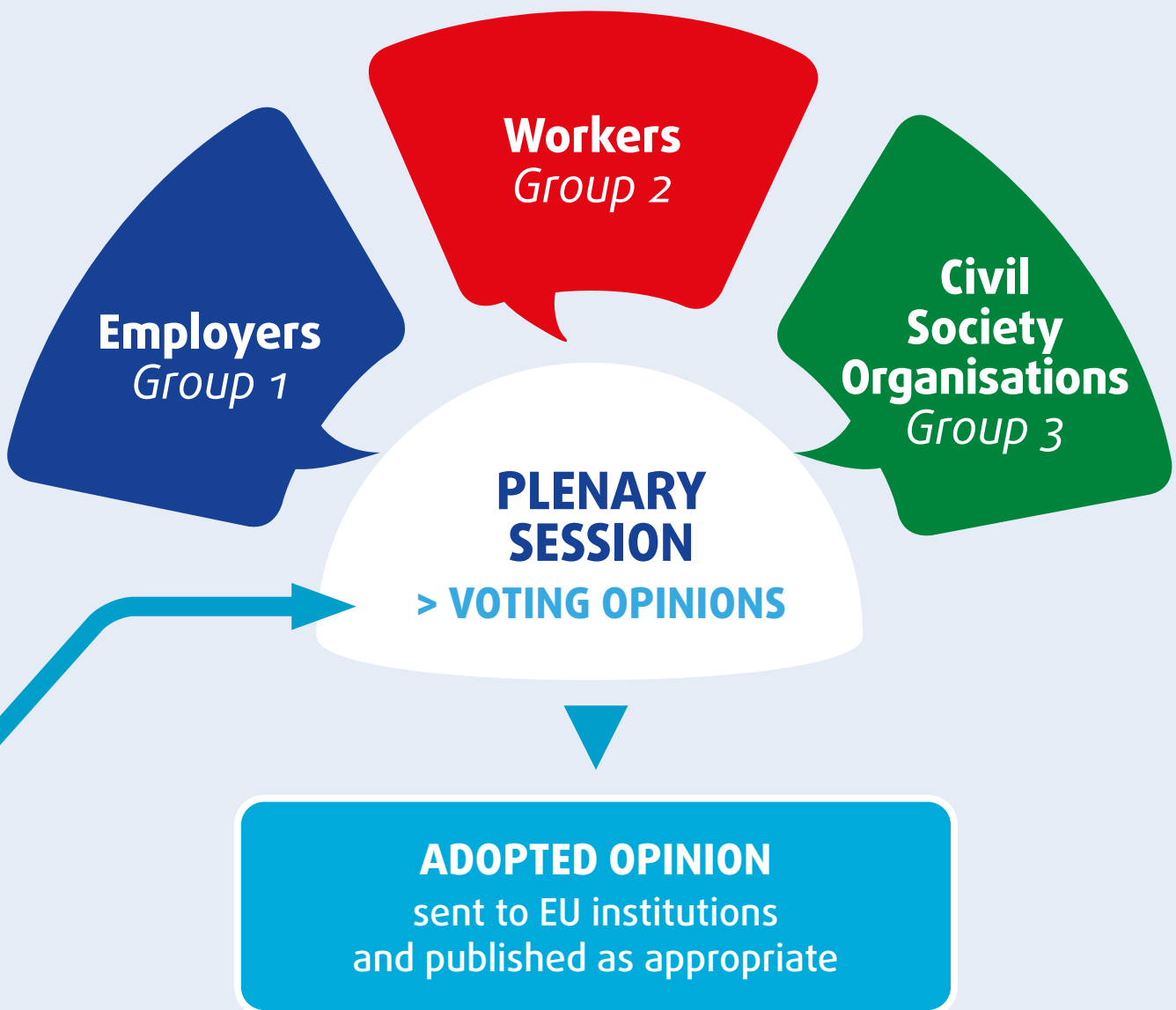
Under the EU Treaties, the European Parliament, the Council and the Commission are required to consult the EESC on a wide range of policy issues when passing new legislation. As well as being required to refer to the EESC on certain matters, these three institutions may consult the EESC on other matters whenever they consider it appropriate. The EESC draws up and adopts, at any of its **nine annual plenary sessions** held in Brussels, **opinions** normally based on a consensus reached between its members. Once adopted, its opinions are forwarded to the European Parliament, the Council and the Commission and published in the *Official Journal of the European Union*.

The EESC may also decide to draft **own-initiative opinions** on any question pertaining to the EU, its policies and potential policy development. It also issues **exploratory opinions** in response to requests from the presidencies of the Council, the Commission or the European Parliament in spheres where it is regarded as having the appropriate skills and expertise. Such requests are not necessarily related to a piece of draft legislation. The EESC can also express its views through other types of text, such as **information reports, resolutions and position papers**.



An opinion is born









2022 IN A NUTSHELL

EESC PLENARY SESSIONS

The EESC promotes the development of a participatory EU, one that is more in touch with the public's concerns and expectations. It acts as an institutional forum which represents, informs and expresses the views of civil society organisations and is in dialogue with those organisations. All 329 EESC members meet in a plenary session nine times a year in order to carry out their most important duty: **voting on opinions**. This is a formal moment in which compromise, **consensus-building** and internal democracy find their highest expression.

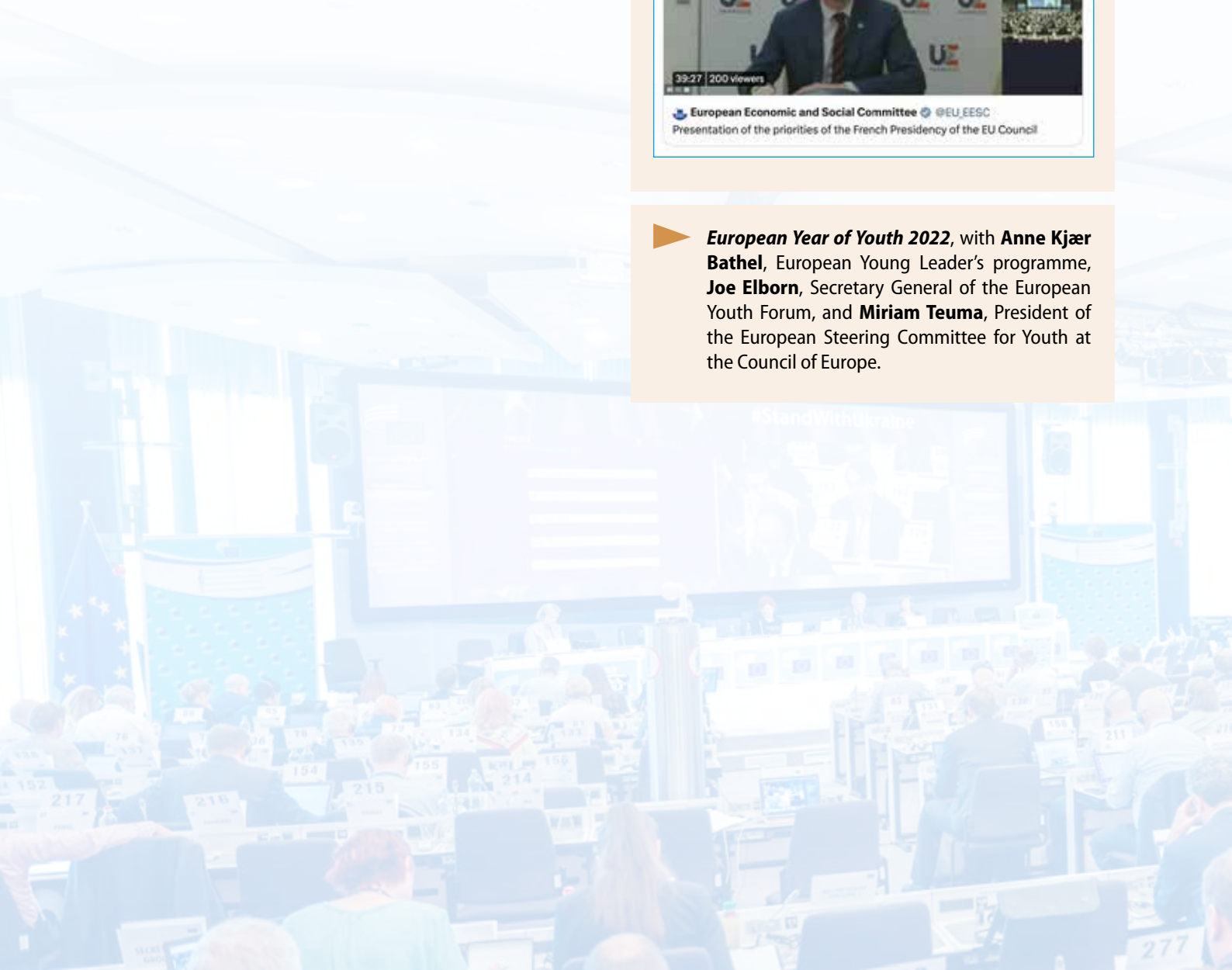
It is also an occasion when special guest speakers from all over Europe and beyond are invited to debates. In the pages that follow, we give you a flavour of plenary activities in 2022 and some of the special guests that we welcomed, what they talked about and what this means for the EESC and citizens around Europe.

19 - 20 JANUARY

- ▶ **Priorities of the French Presidency**, with **Clément Beaune**, Secretary of State for European Affairs in the French government.



- ▶ **European Year of Youth 2022**, with **Anne Kjær Bathel**, European Young Leader's programme, **Joe Elborn**, Secretary General of the European Youth Forum, and **Miriam Teuma**, President of the European Steering Committee for Youth at the Council of Europe.



23 - 24 FEBRUARY

- ▶ **Fit for 55: delivering the EU's 2030 climate target on the way to climate neutrality**, with **Frans Timmermans**, Executive Vice-President of the Commission in charge of the European Green Deal.

- ▶ **The impact of COVID-19 on fundamental rights and the rule of law across the EU and the future of democracy**, with **Věra Jourová**, European Commission Vice-President for Values and Transparency.



- ▶ **How can we create a more resilient, innovative and sustainable tourism?**, with **Martha Schultz**, Managing Director of the Schultz Group, Vice-President of EUROCHAMBRES and Vice-President of the Austrian Federal Economic Chamber; **Alberto Corti**, Head of the Tourism Sector of the Italian General Confederation of Enterprises, Professions and Self-Employment (Confcommercio-Imprese per l'Italia), **Kerstin Howald**, Political Secretary of the European Federation of Food, Agriculture and Tourism Trade Unions; and **Claudia Monteiro de Aguiar**, Member of the European Parliament and rapporteur on Establishing an EU strategy for sustainable tourism.

23 - 24 MARCH

- ▶ **New European Bauhaus initiative**, with **Mariya Gabriel**, Commissioner for Innovation, Research, Culture, Education and Youth.

- ▶ **Resolution on War in Ukraine and its economic, social and environmental impact**, with **Ylva Johansson**, Commissioner for Home Affairs; **Anatoliy Kinakh**, President of the National Tripartite Social and Economic Council in Ukraine; **Alexander Shubin**, Chair of the Ukrainian Civil Society Platform; **Gennadiy Chyzhykov**, President of the Ukrainian Chamber of Commerce and Industry and representative of the National Assembly of People with Disabilities of Ukraine; and **Mikhail Khodorkovsky**, Founder of the Open Russia Foundation.



- ▶ **European Citizens' Initiative Save bees and farmers! Towards a bee-friendly agriculture for a healthy environment**, with **Helmut Burtscher-Schaden**, PhD, representative of the ECI and biochemist at GLOBAL 2000 – Friends of the Earth Austria.

18 - 19 MAY

- ▶ **European responses to strengthen our economies and societies against the background of the current geo-political context**, with **Charles Michel**, President of the European Council.



- ▶ **Recovery & Resilience**, linked to the adoption of the resolution entitled Involvement of Organised Civil Society in the National Recovery and Resilience Plans – How can we improve it? with **Valdis Dombrovskis**, Executive Vice President of the European Commission for an Economy that Works for People.

15 - 16 JUNE

- ▶ **Results and the follow-up to the Conference on the Future of Europe**, with **Dubravka Šuica**, Vice-President of the European Commission for Democracy and Demography.

- ▶ **Adoption of the EESC resolution: Ukraine – from relief to reconstruction – proposals by European civil society**, with **H.E. Ambassador Vsevolod Chentsov**, Head of the Ukrainian Mission to the European Union; **Marta Barandiy**, representing Promote Ukraine; and **Mariya Korolchuk**, representing the Community Organised Relief Effort (CORE) and Funky Citizens.



- ▶ **Digital rights and principles**, with **Professor Andrea Renda**, Senior Research Fellow and Head of Global Governance, Regulation, Innovation and the Digital Economy at the Centre for European Policy Studies.

13 - 14 JULY

- ▶ **Priorities of the Czech Presidency of the Council**, with **Jan Lipavský**, Minister for Foreign Affairs of the Czech Republic.

- ▶ **Priorities of the European Committee of the Regions**, with **Vasco Alves Cordeiro**, President of the European Committee of the Regions.



- ▶ **Ensuring gender equality and tackling gender-based violence**, with **Cristina Fabre**, Team leader for gender-based violence, European Institute for Gender Equality (EIGE).

- ▶ **New EU-US Trade and Technology Council in Action: priorities for business, workers and consumers, and necessary safeguards**, with **Fredrik Erixon**, economist and writer.

- ▶ **Resolution on the European Economic and Social Committee's contribution to the 2023 European Commission's work programme.**

21 - 22 SEPTEMBER

- ▶ **Achieving efficient, accessible and fit-for future health and care policies in the EU**, with **Margaritis Schinas**, Vice-President of the European Commission in charge of Promoting our European Way of Life.

- ▶ **The role of organised civil society and cities in resilience and recovery in the context of asymmetric shocks and unforeseen crises**, with **Ivan Bartoš**, Deputy Prime Minister for Digitalisation, and Czech Minister for Regional Development.

- ▶ **SMEs in Europe – challenges and perspectives**, with **David Clarinval**, Deputy Prime Minister and Minister for the Middle-Classes, the Self-Employed, SMEs, Agriculture, Institutional Reforms and Democratic Renewal of Belgium; **Isabelle Schömann**, Confederal Secretary of the European Trade Union Confederation (ETUC); and **Véronique Willems**, Secretary-General of SMEunited.



- ▶ **Decent Work Worldwide**, with **Heinz Werner Koller**, Regional Director of the International Labour Organisation (ILO) Regional Office for Europe and Central Asia.

26 - 27 OCTOBER

- ▶ **Improving women's participation in jobs and entrepreneurship: gender and intersectionality issues**, with **Evelyn Regner**, Vice-President of the European Parliament.



- ▶ **Signing of the renewed protocol on cooperation between the European Commission and the European Economic and Social Committee, and the European Commission's 2023 work programme**, with **Maroš Šefčovič**, Vice-President of the European Commission responsible for Interinstitutional Relations and Foresight.

- ▶ **A strategic vision on energy transition to enable the EU's strategic autonomy**, with **Professor Leonardo Meeus**, European University Institute, Director of the Florence School of Regulation and Loyola de Palacio Chair in the Robert Schuman Centre.

- ▶ **Jointly tackling an existential threat: social partners and civil society for implementation of ambitious climate action**, with **Pegah Moulana**, Advocacy Coordinator at Youth and Environment Europe.

14 - 15 DECEMBER

- ▶ **Young people and the labour market in the context of the 2022 European Year of Youth and the 2023 European Year of Skills**, with **Nicolas Schmit**, European Commissioner responsible for Jobs and Social Rights.

- ▶ **The EU's relations with its Southern Neighbourhood**, with **Álvaro Albacete Perea**, Deputy Secretary-General of the Union for the Mediterranean, and **Josep Ferré**, Executive Director of the Anna Lindh Foundation.

- ▶ **Investments to promote gender equality: the role of finance and public recovery policies**, with **Ivailo Kalfin**, Executive Director of Eurofound; **Kinga Stanisławska**, Founder of European Women in Venture Capital; and **Xenia Kazoli**, Executive Vice Chairwoman of the Hellenic Corporate Governance Council.

- ▶ **The EESC Civil Society Prize.**



WORKING HAND IN HAND WITH THE OTHER INSTITUTIONS

The EESC is constantly maintaining and developing effective cooperation with the other EU institutions and bodies.

Its members regularly take part in various interinstitutional working groups, taskforces and platforms, reflecting the views of organised civil society. They also take the floor in forums and conferences, within and outside Europe, to present the results of the EESC's work.





European Parliament

European Parliament

The gradual return to “normality” following the COVID-19 pandemic continued throughout 2022, which resulted in an increase of in-person meetings between EESC members and members of the European Parliament (MEPs). MEPs participated in 68 EESC meetings or events, returning to the pre-pandemic level following the increase in online meetings in 2021. While meetings between EESC members and MEPs remained at the same level as in 2021, EESC members almost doubled their participation in European Parliament organised events.



During 2022, there were several high-level meetings between the Parliament and the EESC. In March, EESC President Christa Schweng met with Bernd Lange, the new chair of the Conference of Committee Chairs (CCC). Mr Lange also participated in an EESC Bureau meeting in July. Evelyn Regner, the European Parliament Vice-President responsible for relations with the EESC, attended the EESC’s 573rd plenary session in October, taking part in a debate on improving women’s participation in jobs and entrepreneurship, linked to Gender Equality Week at the European Parliament.

With regard to legislation, many good practices were established with the Parliament. The cooperation between the EESC’s External Relations section (REX) and the European Parliament’s Committee on International Trade (INTA) is one clear example, with INTA often participating in the work of the domestic advisory groups provided for by the EU trade agreements, for which the EESC provides the secretariat.

The two institutions continued the established practice of the results of the European Migration Forum being presented at a meeting of the Parliament’s Committee on Civil Liberties, Justice and Home Affairs (LIBE), with the LIBE chair taking part in the forum.

In 2022, the EESC focused on stepping up work with the European Parliament and on promoting the EESC’s added value, thus fostering even closer ties between EESC sections and Parliamentary committees. A meeting between the secretariats of both institutions in September 2022 presented the advisory services provided by the EESC, including exploratory opinions, and prepared the ground for the EESC president to take part in a meeting of the Conference of Committee Chairs in February 2023.





European Commission

High-level meetings were held throughout 2022, which saw nine Commissioners attend seven EESC plenary sessions. The EESC adopted its contribution to the 2023 Commission Work Programme on 14 July 2022. On 18 October 2022, the Commission adopted its work programme for 2023, setting out a bold and transformative agenda in the face of Russia's aggression against Ukraine, which had increased energy prices and had knock-on effects on the economy. The Vice-President of the European Commission for Interinstitutional Relations and Foresight, Maroš Šefčovič, participated in the EESC's October plenary session, where he debated the Commission work programme and the challenges ahead with the EESC members.

On 27 October 2022, the EESC and the Commission signed a revised protocol on cooperation, which further consolidates and steps up political and legislative cooperation between the two institutions and their joint efforts to communicate about Europe. It strengthens the EESC's strategic function vis-à-vis the EU institutions, as well as its role with regard to the implementation of the European Citizens' Initiative and within the Better Regulation agenda. Through this renewed partnership, both institutions also acknowledge the essential role that organised civil society plays in achieving an EU that is economically prosperous, socially inclusive and environmentally sustainable.

At legislative level, cooperation with the Commission was effective. Commission representatives cooperated closely with the secretariats of the EESC sections and the CCM, and regularly exchanged information. The revised protocol reinforces this already well-established practice and opens up further opportunities, such as to work closely with the Commission through knowledge pooling, joint participation in events, and one-off initiatives.





European Council and the Council of the European Union

France held the Council Presidency in the first half of 2022, followed by Czechia in the second half. Clément Beaune, Secretary of State for European Affairs, and Jan Lipavský, Czech Minister for Foreign Affairs, presented the priorities of their EU presidencies at EESC plenary sessions.

The French and Czech Presidencies formally requested a total of 15 exploratory opinions from the EESC.

Ministers and representatives of the EU Presidencies attended a variety of EESC-organised events on subjects ranging from the Role of nuclear energy in the stability of EU energy prices, to Social dialogue within the green transition.

Many Council conclusions and discussions in Council meetings made reference to EESC opinions and initiatives. For example, the French EU Presidency highlighted that the EESC's work on food security and sustainable food systems had been particularly useful, with a view to continuing the work of the ministers on this question. The opinion was widely disseminated to other European institutions and became very topical due to the consequences of the war in Ukraine.

The EESC also organised and co-organised eight events throughout France and abroad which were included in the calendar of activities of the French Presidency, with its political, logistical and financial support. Its representatives were invited to numerous presidency events. The rapporteurs for the opinion on the Benefits of the outermost regions for the European Union spoke at the Outermost Presidential Forum, held by the French presidency in May 2022 in Martinique.



European Committee
of the Regions

European Committee of the Regions

Administrative cooperation between the two Committees is enshrined in a renewed agreement, signed in October 2021 for a duration of five years and two months, with the purpose of reinforcing the existing administrative cooperation in numerous ways.



Vasco Alves Cordeiro, newly elected president of the European Committee of the Regions (CoR), presented his priorities to the EESC plenary session in July 2022, taking the opportunity to discuss new prospects for joint action and cooperation between the two Committees.

In the framework of this prospect for strengthened joint action, the two presidents liaised closely on various topics, such as the implementation of the cooperation agreement, the building strategy, and the EMAS environmental policy, which was signed in November 2022 by both presidents and both secretaries-general. With this policy, all expressed their strong commitment to reducing the Committees' carbon and greenhouse gas emissions in line with the European Green Deal and the Commission's main priorities for 2019-2024.

DIALOGUE WITH EUROPEAN CITIZENS

Economic and Social Councils of the EU Member States

The EESC continued to work closely with the national Economic and Social Councils (NESCs) of the EU, both on a bilateral basis and within the network of NESCs.

In order to further strengthen working relations between the EESC and the national councils, the EESC proposed launching new on-site or online pilot exchange programmes. These programmes aim to foster greater cooperation on working topics of common interest and on good practices, helping to find common solutions to shared problems. To upgrade the existing CESlink portal, the EESC launched a process to assess the feasibility of an additional online community tool for sharing information, opinions and documents. The EESC president had meetings with the presidents of the French and Maltese ESCs, and with a delegation from the Economic, Social and Environmental Regional Council (CESER) of Auvergne Rhône Alpes. The EESC was also invited to meet with colleagues from the Dutch ESC in The Hague. Collaboration with NESCs also included their contributions in the framework of the European Semester Group.



Additionally, on 9 and 10 November, the annual meeting of the presidents and secretaries-general of the EESC and ESCs was co-organised with the Romanian Economic and Social Council in Bucharest. Under the title Turning geopolitical challenges into a European Union success story: the contribution of organised civil society, three workshops took place. These illustrated how civil society helps to tackle today's EU challenges, be they the refugee crisis, participatory democracy or the EU's open strategic autonomy in the energy and food sectors.

The participants discussed the role of organised civil society across the EU in addressing a wide range of needs for people fleeing the war in Ukraine, such as humanitarian aid, housing, healthcare, education and jobs.



The Conference on the Future of Europe

The EESC actively helped to create a “full civic experience” for all Europeans, working extensively to promote the Conference on the Future of Europe (CoFoE) with an 18-member delegation. As the voice of organised civil society, the Committee recognised the utmost importance of the conference, and provided overarching support. The EESC endorsed the conference in the following ways.

SUPPORT FOR THE ROLL-OUT OF 75 EVENTS



- 33 at national level, and 42 at central level.
- 60% of these events, gathering more than 7300 participants, produced reports on the CoFoE Platform.

COMMUNICATION CAMPAIGN ON SOCIAL MEDIA



With a potential reach of **21.8 million people** on Twitter alone.

- 60 new ideas uploaded;
- national events promoted in English and in the local language; and
- the overarching endorsement of every CoFoE plenary and conference-related meeting.

MAJOR EESC EVENTS



June 2021
Online

“Bringing the European
project back to citizens”



November 2021
Lisbon

“Connecting EU”
seminar



February 2022
Online/Brussels

“Shaping Europe
together”

Notably, the *Report on the Final Outcome of the CoFoE*, published in May 2022, stressed the need to improve the overall EU decision-making process to better reflect the needs and expectations of EU citizens. It was proposed that the institutional role of the EESC be strengthened, considering its role as facilitator and guarantor of participatory democracy through engaging in structured dialogue with civil society organisations.



One of the main events in the context of the CoFoE was *Shaping Europe together, the future is in your hands*, held in February 2022. This event featured lively discussions in a room transformed into a TV studio, polls, and two videos prepared for the event, one on EESC consultations in the Member States and the other on the youth’s views on the CoFoE. Despite the appalling news of the Russian invasion of Ukraine on that day, the event proved to be very interactive and managed to attract numerous participants.

The EESC continued to contribute to the interinstitutional communication coordination group up until the end of the Conference. After the adoption of the final recommendations, communication efforts focused mainly on high-level internal communication channels with other EU institutions’ representatives to promote the EESC’s views and ideas on follow-up.

FLAGSHIP EVENTS

Each year, the EESC organises flagship events to increase structured dialogue with organised civil society. In the following section, some of the core events which took place in 2022 are presented.

Civil Society Days

The EESC Civil Society Days conference took place from 15 to 17 March 2022, with participants on site at the EESC and online. High-level speakers from EU institutions, national governments and some of the most prominent civil society networks in Europe joined the lively debates which were spread over nine sessions. The 88 speakers included two Commissioners, five MEPs, two representatives of national EU governments and 14 EESC members. The plenary discussions and seven workshops focused on how EU civil society can help to build a thriving economy that leaves no one behind, in the new context shaped by COVID-19 and the war in Ukraine and against the backdrop of the twin green and digital transitions.

Participation of civil society organisations at the workshops was very high, and their contributions were significant. With more than 200 participants at the opening and closing sessions and an average of 100 participants at each workshop, the conference was enthusiastically received. With a potential reach of 4.3 million people, the social media impact was also very positive.



Your Europe, Your Say!

Another major event of 2022 was *Your Europe, Your Say!* (YEYS!), the EESC's annual youth plenary session, launched in 2010 as a way to connect teenagers with the European Union. The 2022 event was linked to the European Year of Youth and took place online from 31 March to 1 April under the title *The Truth about Lies*. Youth

challenging Disinformation. It brought together 99 teenage students and 44 teachers from the 27 EU Member States and five candidate countries to reflect, engage in workshops and discuss how to tackle disinformation more effectively. The students presented their recommendations live to European Commission Executive Vice-President Věra Jourová. EESC members visited the participating schools in the run up to the Brussels summit and their conclusions were uploaded onto the CoFoE platform.



ECI Day

On 2 June, the EESC hosted the 2022 European Citizens' Initiative (ECI) Day, providing a platform for dialogue and information on the ECI tool, and on specific citizens' initiatives. Under the title *The European Citizens' Initiative 10 years on: ready for the future?*, the event marked the tenth anniversary of this unique cross-border instrument, thus providing a good opportunity to take stock and to look towards the future.

Speakers included Commission Vice-President Dubravka Šuica and MEP Helmut Scholz, who joined EESC president Christa Schweng for the opening debate. This was then followed by two parallel workshops and presentation of ongoing initiatives, and a plenary session focusing on the ECI's preparedness for the future. More specifically, as part of the European Year of Youth, the ECI Day drew particular attention to the involvement of young people in citizens' initiatives.

Held in a hybrid format, the event brought together more than 300 participants. With a potential reach of 1.2 million people, the social media impact of the event can also be classified as very positive. Preceded by the promotion campaign through a number of media channels, this year's conference received coverage in a number of online news articles and blogs.



Civil Society Prize

Finally, at the end of the year, on the 15 December, the EESC held the 13th the Civil Society Prize. The Committee awarded six civil society organisations for their outstanding projects in two categories: *Empowering Young People* (linked to the *European Year of Youth*), and *European civil society for Ukraine*, which aimed to help civilians suffering as a result of the war in Ukraine. Over 100 applications were received, making it "the most inspirational book written by European citizens", according to panel member Ms Leitane. EESC President Christa Schweng praised the projects and the participant's commitment in implementing them as a true example of active citizenship at this difficult time for Europe.







EESC OPINIONS

The EESC strives to keep in touch with situations on the ground by actively listening to the concerns of civil society. This was more important than ever in 2022, which was a challenging year for the EU. Despite being one of the EU bodies, the EESC's members operate across Europe, which means that it can monitor the interests of the people more closely and efficiently.

Very opinionated ... in a good way

202 opinions, position papers and reports were adopted by the EESC in 2022.

The EESC engages in areas that affect citizens most.

Where can you find the EESC's opinions?

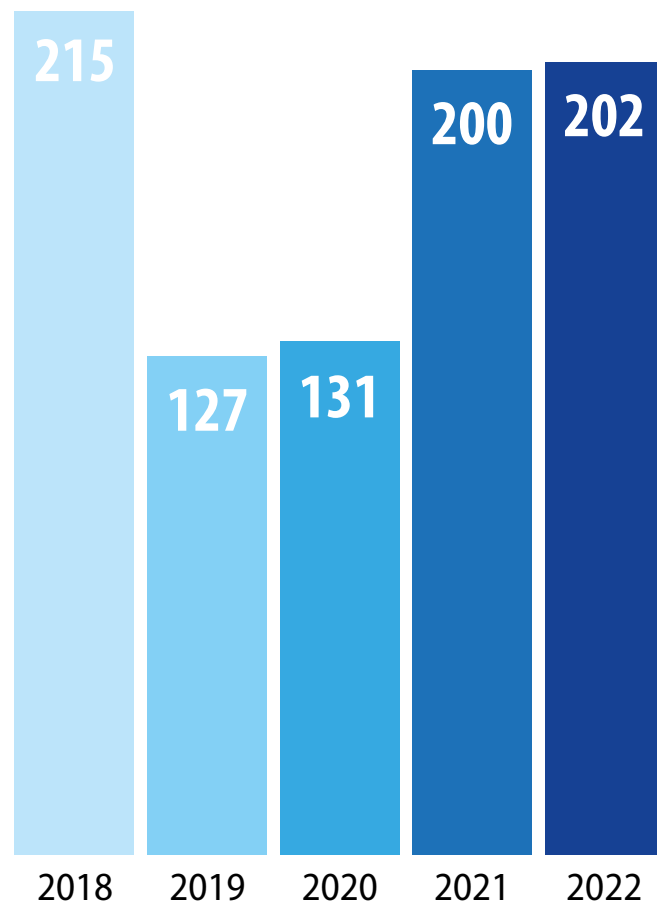
- On the Committee's website at eesc.europa.eu



- in the Official Journal of the EU at eur-lex.europa.eu



Total opinions and reports, five-year trend



FIVE HOT TOPICS IN 2022

Reviewing the most popular opinions tells us what drives civil society.
It also helps us develop and calibrate the way we represent organised civil society.

1. A European Single Access Point for the completion of the Capital Markets Union

The European Single Access Point (ESAP) is part of the 2021 Capital Markets Union Package. It will put together financial and non-financial information that is already being reported by companies but is spread over different databases. The tool will also allow for voluntary submission of information.

To exploit its full potential, the EESC envisages a more ambitious approach than the European Commission proposes. Essentially, the ESAP should be capable of processing data and delivering sector-specific and local authorities' reports, add new data categories, communicate with national registers and Eurostat, and be compatible with different types of technologies.

The tool will also gather information related to sustainability. This could make it easier to assess the contribution of EU entities to sustainability and climate targets, helping to redirect investments towards the green transition.



We are suggesting that ESAP is designed as a flexible tool capable of processing data, adding new data categories, communicating with national registers and Eurostat, and taking into account different types of technologies.

Florian Marin, rapporteur



A European Single Access Point for the completion of the Capital Markets Union

rapporteur: Florian Marin



Removing tax obstacles to cross-border teleworking should be prioritized. Indeed, even with 30-years of the Single Market, taxation creates significant obstacles. For cross-border teleworkers, countries need to agree on the division of taxing rights of the employee's wage income.

Krister Andersson, rapporteur

2. Taxation of cross-border teleworkers and their employers

The rise of teleworking during the pandemic challenged the current tax system. Member States followed the OECD guidance on temporary tax measures for cross-border teleworkers, but these were removed in July 2022. This caused obstacles especially for cross-border teleworkers, as some of them were subject to double income taxation. Furthermore, both the teleworkers and their employers were faced with greater compliance and administrative burdens.

Employers are in danger of being subject to taxation in more than one country as they operate through a permanent establishment in another country.

In fact, cross-border teleworking yields many benefits. For the employee, more jobs are available and work-life balance is improved, while it is easier for businesses to find the right skills. Furthermore, less commuting reduces greenhouse gas emissions.

Removing tax obstacles to cross-border teleworking should be prioritised in order to reinforce the Single Market for labour, which has existed for 30 years.



Taxation of cross-border teleworkers and their employers

rapporteur: Krister Andersson

3. REPowerEU: joint European action for more affordable, secure and sustainable energy

Breaking away from Russian energy is essential. However, Europe must be wary of resources replacing Russian gas, because of both their impact on the environment and dependence on third countries that do not share European values.

Member States' interventions, whether fiscal or regulatory, are necessary to secure affordable prices for end consumers and to prevent energy poverty. At the same time, care must be taken not to discourage investment by energy companies that develop low-carbon solutions.

It is therefore crucial to draw on a diverse energy palette. In particular, utilising the broad range of low-carbon energy sources that are compatible with an energy system's economics and ecology is essential. Furthermore, to accelerate the rollout of renewables, it is also important to remove unnecessary administrative barriers whilst continuing proper consultation of stakeholders.



REPowerEU: joint European action for more affordable, secure and sustainable energy

rapporteurs: Thomas Kattnig, Alena Mastantuono and Simo Tiainen



With fiscal and regulatory measures care must be taken not to discourage investment by energy companies confronted with additional costs because of the green transition and the current need to reduce dependence on Russian gas.

Alena Mastantuono, rapporteur



The European Commission's proposed FuelEU Maritime regulation is crucial in promoting the uptake of clean fuels in shipping. This regulatory framework should address the responsibilities of both shipping companies and fuel suppliers to ensure that low and zero carbon fuels become commercially available and used by ships calling at EU ports the soonest possible.

Constantine Catsambis, rapporteur

4. FuelEU Maritime

Shipping has an impact on the entire supply chain, as almost 90% of the world's goods are transported by sea. In addition, the global presence achieved through EU shipping is a strategic asset, enabling the EU to safeguard its geopolitical independence and increase its economic and industrial resilience, as well as its sovereignty.

The climate carbon neutrality objectives of the Green Deal and the ambitious "Fit for 55" legislative package are welcome in the context of efforts to green and eventually decarbonise the maritime and other sectors, while at the same time respecting the social dimension of this transition in the best interests of the general public. This can only be achieved through specific measures such as job creation, better public health and more effective mitigation measures for climate action and environmental protection.



FuelEU Maritime

rapporteur: Constantine Catsambis

5. Revision of the F-gas regulation

Fluorinated gases or F-gases are often used as substitutes for ozone-depleting substances, because they do not damage the atmospheric ozone layer. However, F-gases are powerful greenhouse gases, with a global warming effect up to 25 000 times greater than carbon dioxide (CO₂).

In this opinion, the EESC welcomes the Commission's new proposal on fluorinated gases as a step in the right direction but would like to see more ambition to maintain the global EU leadership in climate action. Indeed, the EESC strongly recommends combining REPowerEU ambition with the F-gas phase out, aiming for refrigerants with the lowest possible global warming potential (GWP), especially in the field of heat pumps. The EESC also stresses the need to promote a shift directly to the lowest GWP f-gas-free solution in order to avoid intermediate solutions.



Revision of the F-gas regulation
rapporteur: Kęstutis Kupšys



It is true that the lack of skilled workers is also an issue with the current and future growing demand. Therefore, our committee believes that addressing training needs on HFC alternatives is key. Training programmes, as well as qualification, certification and registration schemes are essential to train technicians skilled to deal with natural refrigerants.

Kęstutis Kupšys, rapporteur

PRIORITIES AND MAJOR THEMES IN 2022



The impact of the EESC's work was felt throughout civil society and the EU institutions as it brought closer connections with the EU's legislators through its opinions, conferences and events. It also structurally included civil society actors in these activities, bringing them closer to the decision makers. Listed below are some of the EESC's main activities in 2022 which helped achieve these goals.

1. **Integrating strategic foresight into EU policy**
2. **Civil society, youth and local communities implementing ambitious climate action**
3. **Civil society as a driving force for a transition to a fairer and more sustainable world**
4. **Financing the EU economy as a driver for long-term sustainable economic growth**
5. **The circular dimension of the circular economy and packaging industry**
6. **A strategic vision for the energy transition to secure EU strategic autonomy**
7. **Health and care challenges in the EU**
8. **Affordable housing policy and building renovation**
9. **Response to the Russian aggression in Ukraine**
10. **Gender equality**

1

INTEGRATING STRATEGIC FORESIGHT INTO EU POLICY

The European Economic and Social Committee has increasingly been mainstreaming foresight into its activities, including with its contribution to the European Commission's annual Strategic Foresight cycle, the *2021 Annual Foresight Report*. The purpose of the opinion was to contribute to the further development of foresight in EU policy-making so to increase the EU's capacity and freedom to act.

The EESC has also organised conferences and seminars on this topic. One was the Seminar on *A vision for the future of Europe*, an open debate focusing on the EU as a new global actor in the current multipolar world and on the role of civil society. Another event was a joint conference of the three EESC Observatories on *Accelerating transitions to build open strategic autonomy for Europe*. This conference explored what strategic autonomy should mean, how civil society could help to accelerate the transition to an open European strategic autonomy, and how to ensure coherence between EU policies in the short and medium term. The EESC also adopted opinions with a clear foresight approach.

Furthermore, it organised training courses on foresight to build a forward-looking mindset and provide tools and methodologies for its members and staff, as well as for networks of civil society organisations. It also contributed to the interinstitutional foresight work by being actively involved in ESPAS, the interinstitutional network on foresight, and taking part in the EU Foresight Days.



2

CIVIL SOCIETY, YOUTH AND LOCAL COMMUNITIES IMPLEMENTING AMBITIOUS CLIMATE ACTION

The EESC has repeatedly expressed its commitment to and support for the European Green Deal. In 2022, it adopted more than 25 opinions related to the Fit for 55 package, climate change and energy transition. It also organised a number of hearings, press conferences and public events, such as the Conference on *REPowering our EU: How to speed up the shift to renewable energy in Europe*.

The EESC urged the Commission and the Member States to ensure that climate policies address the social impact of the transition and provide adequate funding to face the socioeconomic effects of carbon pricing responsibly. Furthermore, it encouraged Member States (through chapeau opinion *Fit for 55: delivering the EU's 2030 climate target on the way to climate neutrality*) to create tripartite Just Transition Commissions to involve regional authorities, social partners and civil society organisations in implementing the national and regional just transition plans.



In 2022, the EESC also established an ad hoc group on the Conference of the Parties of the UNFCCC, in order to raise awareness and foster the cross-cutting nature of its process. This group produced the resolution *Jointly tackling an existential threat: social partners and civil society for the implementation of ambitious climate action*, calling on the EU institutions and governments to step up climate ambition, monitoring scientific developments, and placing a particular focus on the role of civil society organisations to accelerate climate action. The EESC also promoted better integration of the voice of young Europeans into its work and the EU decision-making process, including by appointing a youth delegate to its UNFCCC COP delegation. In addition, it continued its *Youth Climate and Sustainability Round Tables* in cooperation with the European Youth Forum and Generation Climate Europe.

Moreover, in 2022, the EESC, the European Commission, the European Committee of the Regions, COPA-COGECA and IFOAM Organics Europe launched the *EU Organic Awards* to recognise excellence throughout the organic value chain, and hosted a policy stakeholder event on *Community-led initiatives and the European Green Deal: towards transformational local development policies*. The event looked at the role of communities and EU policies in bringing about transformational systemic change.

The EESC also *committed* to helping to facilitate the *Rural Pact* process, a framework for cooperation among authorities and stakeholders dealing with rural territorial development.

3

CIVIL SOCIETY AS A DRIVING FORCE FOR A TRANSITION TO A FAIRER AND MORE SUSTAINABLE WORLD

The EESC worked with civil society in like-minded partner countries (the *UK*, the *US* and the *European Economic Area countries, ACP countries* and *Latin American countries*) to promote an open and sustainable economy, free and fair trade, the green transition and respect for democratic values, decent work and human rights.

EESC members went on a fact-finding mission to the UK to prepare an information report on bilateral relations, and the EESC expressed its opinion on The *new EU-US Trade and Technology Council*, emphasising that trade and technology are not just about regulatory issues but also essential tools for protecting and promoting universal values worldwide.

The EESC also analysed the *Geopolitical impact of energy transition*, welcoming the initiative to connect Ukraine and Moldova to the European energy grid and underlining the importance of energy diplomacy in particular in the *Euromed region*. The European perspective on the *Western Balkans*, the need for further reforms and the key role of youth for the future of the region were also important topics of the EESC's work this year. Furthermore, the *EU domestic advisory groups (DAGs)* continued their work to ensure that EU trade agreements benefit all. They supervised the implementation of the core ILO conventions, including in the new forms of work such as platform work, called for due diligence in global supply chains and promoted the role of trade agreements in helping to bring about a green and just energy transition which leaves no one behind. As the structured dialogue with civil society from Ukraine, Georgia and Moldova continued, the EU-Armenia civil society platform held its first meeting in Yerevan, on 1 September 2022. In addition, the EESC adopted an information report on *Supporting the independent media sector in Belarus* and organised an exhibition titled "Heroes of Dark Times", depicting the situation of Belarusian political prisoners in order to increase awareness of the dangers of the authoritarian and oppressive system in Belarus. The Committee also called for the release of Belarussian independent trade unions leaders.



4

FINANCING THE EU ECONOMY AS A DRIVER FOR LONG-TERM SUSTAINABLE ECONOMIC GROWTH



Investment in green and digital transformations is essential to overcome the COVID-19 pandemic and Russia's aggression. It is thus important to motivate all stakeholders to speed up the implementation and enforcement of national Recovery and Resilience Plans, make investments and carry out reforms.

The EESC also recommended adding new forms of revenue to the EU budget to cover the debt repayment resulting from borrowing under the NextGenerationEU initiative without jeopardising other EU programmes and instruments or substantially increasing the contributions from *Member States*.

Additionally, further progress is needed to complete the Capital Markets Union, which is essential for a well-functioning single market and for overcoming the consequences of the COVID-19 pandemic. In this respect, the EESC adopted a relevant resolution on the *Involvement of organised civil society in the national recovery and resilience plans – how can we improve it?*, two opinions on the *Annual Sustainable Growth Survey 2022* and three opinions on the *Capital Markets Union package*.

The EESC also organised several events on this subject, such as public hearings on the New own resources package: *The three engines for financing growth and recovery of the European economy*; on *A social taxonomy for sustainable investment – challenges and opportunities*; and on *Recapitalising EU businesses – an innovative way towards a sustained and inclusive recovery*. In addition, the EESC organised the annual European Semester Group conference on *Reforming the European Semester for a resilient, sustainable and inclusive Europe – tackling present and future challenges*; and a conference on *Prospects for the European economy in times of crisis*.



5

THE CIRCULAR DIMENSION OF THE CIRCULAR ECONOMY AND PACKAGING INDUSTRY

The transition towards circular economy requires strong and coordinated commitment from civil society organisations and public authorities. The *European Circular Economy Stakeholders Platform* (ECESP), a Commission and EESC joint initiative, supports such efforts through collaboration, events and webinars aimed at fostering dialogue, sharing knowledge and exchanging good practices.

In 2022, such activities included, inter alia, 12 #EUCircularTalks events (e.g. *Together for Circular Packaging*) with over 2000 participants registered, the *Circular Europe Days* during the Dubai Expo Global Goals Week and the *ECESP Annual Conference*. The EESC also adopted an opinion on *Making packaging a safe, affordable and eco-friendly industry*. For the sustainability of the packaging industry, the EESC emphasised the importance of eco-design, current and future recycling technologies, and strong measures to combat dispersion.

Finally, the EESC organised a *debate on the European Packaging Sector* with the Czech Chamber of Commerce to highlight the essential role of this sector for the EU economy's resilience, pointing out the exceptional challenges faced by this industry, including exposure to high price fluctuations, energy shortages and the unavailability of raw materials.



6

A STRATEGIC VISION FOR THE ENERGY TRANSITION TO SECURE EU STRATEGIC AUTONOMY

Achieving the energy transition is one of the EU's most pressing objectives for secure, competitive and sustainable energy. With the Russian invasion of Ukraine and the subsequent rise in energy prices, the need to design a new energy model and to make the EU energy-independent is now more pressing than ever. In this context, the EESC decided to work on a comprehensive approach for the energy transition by drawing up own-initiative opinions covering different aspects of this topic. The conclusions of these opinions fed into an umbrella opinion entitled *A strategic vision on the energy transition to enable the EU's strategic autonomy*.

The umbrella opinion, which gathered recommendations from civil society organisations, supported immediate measures to address the most pressing issues caused by the Russian invasion of Ukraine, such as ensuring security of supply at a cost that is as affordable as possible for both consumers and industry, and compensating for lost energy supplies from Russia. The EESC demanded that the social dimension be taken into account in any measures planned as part of the energy transition, so as to not jeopardise public approval for the necessary changes and to ensure a just transition. The EESC underlined that the "just transition" is not just a question of financing the transition, but also includes the objective of safeguarding workers' rights, creating decent work, quality jobs and social security, strengthening democratic participation (including at company level), and maintaining and further increasing the competitiveness of European businesses. It requires, therefore, specific action at all levels, particularly at regional level.



7

HEALTH AND CARE CHALLENGES IN THE EU

The EESC worked on the impact of the pandemic on its health systems by organising a conference on *Health Challenges in the EU in the pandemic context*. The aim was to discuss possible recommendations for finding a way out of the crisis, prevent future health threats from spiralling out of control and build stronger and more resilient health systems for the future.

The conference explored various dimensions of the health crisis, including the role of international cooperation in providing resilience at global level, and the importance of reinforcing the EU's strategic autonomy in the field of health and taking account of the interdependence between human health, animal health and environmental health according to the One Health approach.

The EESC also adopted *various own-initiative or optional opinions* ahead of the publication of the European care strategy, which presented a new vision for care for older people, drawing attention to the role of family caregivers and of the healthcare workforce. After the strategy was published, a conference was organised on *The European Care Strategy: challenges and the way forward* to focus on the role of the EU, Member States, regional and local authorities and organised civil society in implementing the strategy successfully.

**Conference on Health challenges
in the EU in the pandemic context****Conférence sur les défis
en matière de santé dans l'UE
dans le contexte pandémique****31/03/2022 | JDE 62 | 09:30-17:30**

EESC | Jacques Delors Building | Rue Belliard 99 | 1040 Brussels

European Economic
and Social CommitteeComité économique
et social européenFRANCE22
European Economic and Social Committee

Conference on

**The European Care Strategy:
challenges and the way forward****7 December 2022 | 14:30 - 17:30 | EESC JDE 62 | Hybrid event**#EUCareStrategy
#SocialRights
#LongTermCare
#Children

8

AFFORDABLE HOUSING POLICY AND BUILDING RENOVATION

Knowing that energy poverty rates are growing, the EESC has put forward recommendations for housing policy and building renovation to be treated as a priority for population groups suffering energy poverty, paying special attention to accessibility of the physical environment in construction and renovation rules. In particular, the EESC agrees that: municipalities must take local needs into

account when setting eligibility criteria for social housing; governments should invest in public buildings and funding to provide energy-efficient housing and to ensure access to decent, affordable housing for the lowest-income groups and improve national legal frameworks to build partnerships with associations and business organisations; civil society organisations are key to promoting an affordable housing policy that involves all stakeholders, people who have experienced homelessness and other relevant population groups and policymakers.

The EESC is also actively involved in the participatory approach in implementing a New European Bauhaus movement through debates with the European Commission and the European Parliament. This maintains the dialogue between citizens and civil society so as to provide solutions for their daily problems and improve their quality of life. Furthermore, to tackle this issue, the EESC organised three conferences. One was *Tackling energy poverty at the heart of the ecological and energy transition*, attended by key stakeholders including Kadri Simson, Commissioner responsible for energy, Laurent Michel, General Director at the French Directorate-General for Climate and Energy, and Aleksandra Tomczak, Member of the Cabinet of the Commission Executive Vice-President, Frans Timmermans. Another was on *Affordable and sustainable housing in the EU*, where the key stakeholders who attended included Ilze Indriksone, Latvian Minister for Economics and Marcos Ros Sempere, MEP, Group of the Progressive Alliance of Socialists and Democrats. Finally, the EESC organised a conference entitled *Towards an EU framework against homelessness based on the principle of 'Housing First'*, which was attended by Zdislava Odstrčilová, Czech Deputy Minister for Labour and Social Affairs (Czech Presidency representative), Yves Leterme, Chair of the European Platform on Combatting Homelessness, and Maria Jepsen, Deputy Director of Eurofound.



9

RESPONSE TO THE RUSSIAN AGGRESSION IN UKRAINE

Following the Russian aggression against Ukraine, the EESC took several measures to support Ukrainian civil society.

It adopted two resolutions on Ukraine¹, in which it suggested ways to alleviate citizens' suffering and to assist civil society in its humanitarian efforts.

As early as February 2022, the EESC launched a dedicated website named *EESC stands with Ukraine – organised civil society in solidarity and action*. It was set up in order to centralise the concrete actions carried out by the Committee and its members in support of Ukrainian civil society. Members were invited to engage individually, expressing their views and sharing their testimony through interviews, videos, articles and podcasts, as well as at conferences and on social media. The EESC also organised major events such as the *Connecting EU seminar*, which was made up of three panels, on EU enlargement to the Western Balkans, communication in times of crisis, and energy. In July 2022, a conference on *Relief and reconstruction of Ukraine and its European perspective was held in Kraków*, analysing the role of civil society in overcoming the consequences of the war.

In addition, the EESC put together a *Seminar for journalists* with two panel discussions on *The energy market reshuffled in the geopolitical context* and *Media propaganda as a tool to conduct war and resistance*. The presidents from each EESC group shared their views on the EESC's solidarity and support for Ukraine and answered questions during a press conference. The journalists also visited two exhibitions: *Through their eyes – Visions of Forced Labour*, organised at the initiative of Oliver Röpke in cooperation with the International Labour Organisation (ILO), and *Children in War*, organised by the NGO Promote Ukraine, depicting the tragic fate of Ukrainian children.

The April special edition of the newsletter *EESC INFO* also dedicated words to the invasion of Ukraine. Issues related to Ukraine have been present in every edition of EESC INFO thanks to the participation of special guests from academia, journalism and civic life in the Ukrainian community.

The EESC also opened its premises to Ukrainian civil society organisations active in Brussels. This provided them with a safe place to continue working and keeping Ukrainian civil society alive.



¹ War in Ukraine and its economic, social and environmental impact, in March 2022

Ukraine – from relief to reconstruction – proposals by the European civil society, in June 2022

10

GENDER EQUALITY



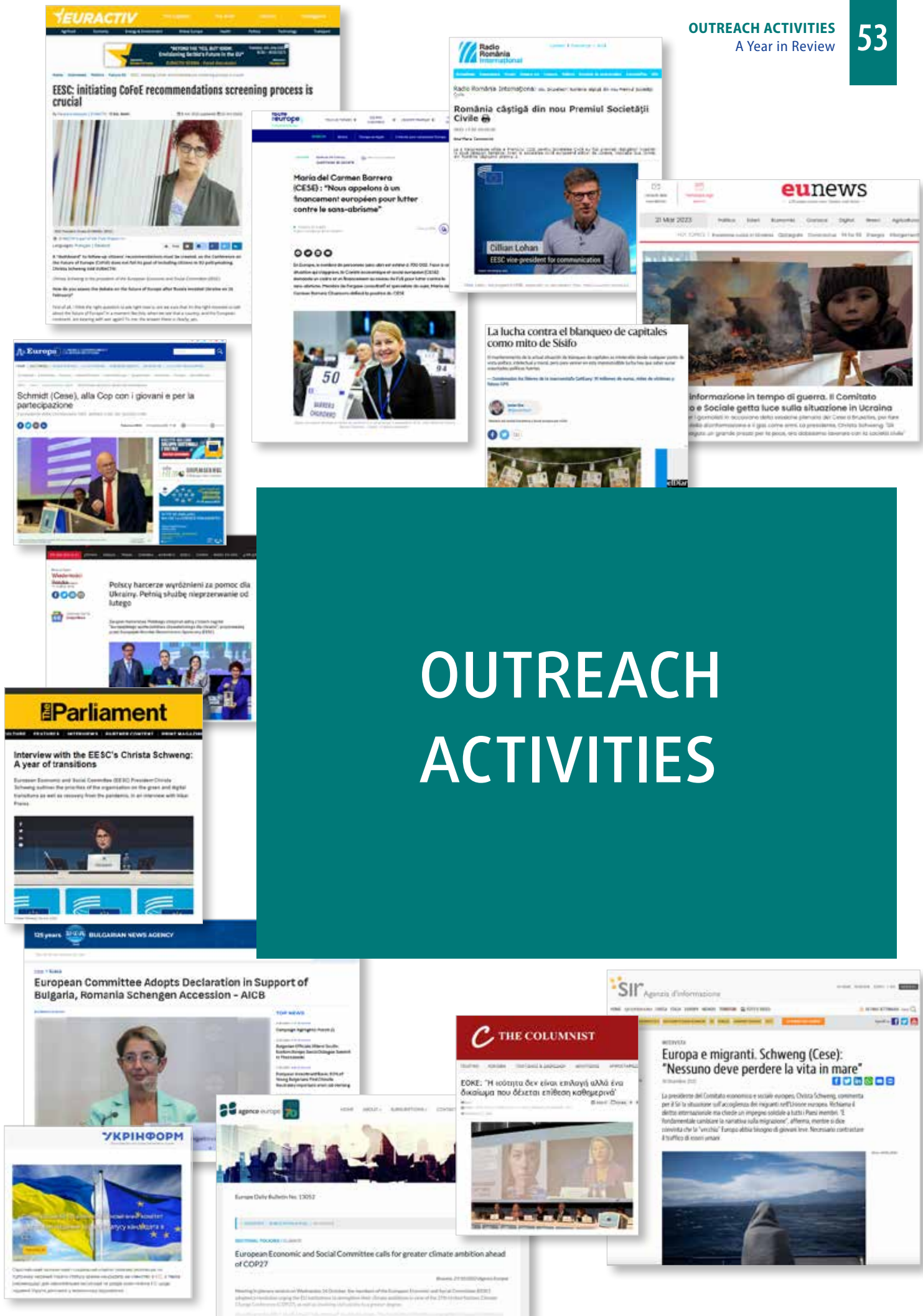
Promoting gender equality was high on the EESC's agenda for 2022. The exploratory opinion drafted at the request of the Czech Presidency of the Council, entitled *Gender equality*, touched upon the importance of nurturing a lifelong gender equality culture (LLGEC) by: launching wide-ranging awareness-raising and information campaigns; enhancing gender-neutral teaching; removing obstacles to women's participation in labour markets; launching training and mentoring programmes targeting female leaders; promoting equal access for women to both private and public financing; and paying proper attention to gender equality when addressing the issue of Ukrainian refugees.

The own-initiative opinion on *Gender lens investing as a way to improve gender equality in the European Union* argued that creating a fertile ground for women entrepreneurship and adopting adequate financial and legislative instruments will help create an inclusive financial ecosystem in the EU and thus speed up progress towards gender equality. The opinion on *Combating violence against women* applauded the regulatory innovation of a Directive on combating violence against women from an intersectional perspective, stressing, however, the need to cover all forms of violence against women. It underlined that special attention should be given to women with disabilities, women and girls from ethnic and/or cultural minorities and migrant women.



During the *European Gender Equality Week*, the European Parliament and the EESC also organised a series of debates on gender equality. Each section prepared a topic related to its specific area of expertise, such as: gender equality in the social economy and the EU; women in energy poverty; women's potential in entrepreneurship and access to finance; and the situation of women in geographical areas such as Latin America and Iran. Feedback from the debates was published on a dedicated page on the EESC website.

The EESC also hosted a virtual exhibition intitled *Voices of Violence* by the Danish Cultural Institute. It was composed of a series of ten short videos depicting the frightening, real-life stories of female survivors of violence. This unique project promoted reflection and dialogue about a prevailing and problematic culture of gender inequality and gender-based harassment. Its virtual launch coincided with the EESC's July plenary session and was linked to the adoption of the opinion on Combating violence against women and the opinion on Gender equality.



Particularly noteworthy for 2022 are the adoption of a new external communication strategy, the activities related to the Conference on the Future of Europe, the active communication of the EESC's support for Ukraine, greater outreach on social media – and in particular the rapid growth of followers on Instagram – and improving the EESC website to make it more multilingual and accessible, while visits to the EESC premises and partnership events resumed in the second part of the year.

AN UPGRADED COMMUNICATION STRATEGY

The EESC adopted a new communication strategy to equip itself with the most appropriate tools and procedures to better reach out to its target audiences and improve its image and impact. The strategy was drafted using an inclusive approach, with broad consultation of all relevant stakeholders. It addresses strategic issues such as the governance of communication, the EESC's target groups, channels and activities, and more practical aspects such as synergies and resources needed to implement it and performance measurement. The implementation of priority areas such as social media, web and consistent communication started immediately after the EESC Bureau adopted the strategy in October 2022. The EESC also updated the rules on partnerships to keep pace with the increasing requests by civil society organisations to partner with events on particular topics.

WIDER OUTREACH THANKS TO VIRTUAL TOOLS AND CHANNELS

The EESC is active on social media, engaging daily with its audience on topics related to its role, activities and priorities. Nine times a year, EESC plenary sessions are widely covered on our social media channels, with the hashtag #EESCplenary.



Facebook:

www.eesc.europa.eu/facebook



Twitter:

www.eesc.europa.eu/twitter



Instagram:

www.instagram.com/eu_civilsociety



You Tube:

www.eesc.europa.eu/youtube



LinkedIn:

www.linkedin.com/company/european-economic-and-social-committee

MORE FOLLOWERS

By the end of 2022, the EESC had 163 thousand followers across platforms, with almost 60 thousand followers on Twitter, 48 thousand on LinkedIn and 45 thousand on Facebook. Instagram doubled its followers in one year, reaching almost 12 150 followers. All accounts experienced a greater increase in followers in 2022 than in 2021.



Facebook followers



Twitter followers



LinkedIn followers



Instagram followers

| Year | Facebook followers | Twitter followers | LinkedIn followers | Instagram followers |
|------|--------------------|-------------------|--------------------|---------------------|
| 2022 | 44 486 | 58 529 | 47 910 | 12 139 |
| 2021 | 38 669 | 54 318 | 37 442 | 6 483 |
| 2020 | 36 664 | 50 351 | 31 345 | 3 712 |
| 2019 | 32 600 | 43 300 | 14 500 | 1 105 |

WIDER REACH

The overall reach of the content published across platforms was also on the rise in 2022 compared to 2021. This is mainly due to faster publication on the central channels and to the new content mix approach.

In addition to the extensive coverage of the plenaries and the opinions, the EESC's social media accounts focused on key corporate initiatives such as the *European Year of Youth* campaign, the EESC resolution on the war in Ukraine, and COP27 among others. Moreover, the Committee's social media activity helped raise awareness among EU citizens of activities such as the *European Citizens' Initiative* and *Your Europe, Your Say!*.

Top 5: Social media coverage across platforms in 2022

- EESC plenary sessions
- Ukraine
- Europe Day
- Thank YOUth
- EESC Civil Society Prize



Top 5: Social media support coverage across platforms in 2022¹

- Your Europe, Your Say!
- ECI Day 2022
- Conference on the Future of Europe
- EU Organic Awards
- COP27

¹ Support coverage refers to all the social media accounts existing within the EESC (sections, groups, etc), except the main EESC account



The EESC also continued its cooperation with the European media network Euractiv. In 2022, ten EESC members participated in debates organised by Euractiv on topics related to European issues. The EESC has taken part in 29 debates since the beginning of its cooperation with Euractiv in 2018.

PODCASTS AND VIDEOS



In 2022, the EESC published season 3 of the *Grassroots View* podcast, exploring the hot topics being debated in Brussels from a civil society perspective, with testimonies from EESC members and other civil society players acting on the ground. The ten episodes released in 2022 covered topics such as the green transition and European civil society's engagement in support of the Ukrainian people fighting the Russian invasion. All episodes were published on the EESC Twitter account, on Facebook and on Soundcloud as the most used podcast platform; they are also available on Spotify, Apple Podcasts and Google Podcasts.

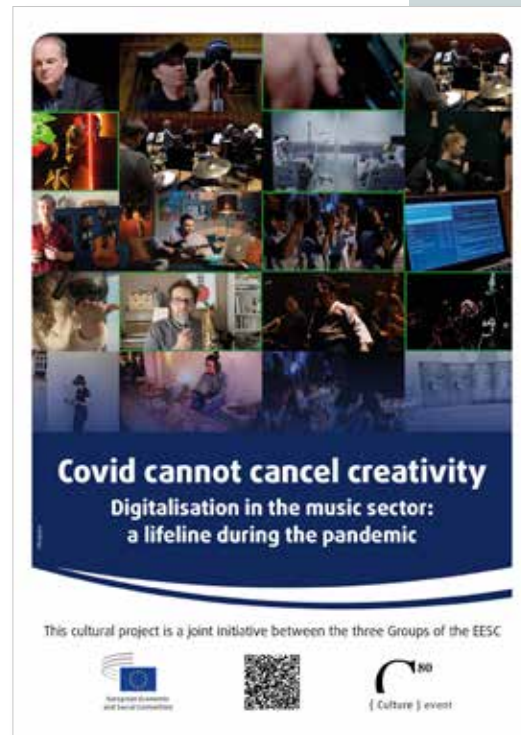
The EESC also produced 15 videos of the *EESC in a flash* series – all of them available on the EESC's corporate (@EU_EESC) and news (@EESC_PRESS) Twitter accounts, and on the EESC website – featuring EESC members from all three groups in two-minute interviews on key EESC opinions covering issues of great importance for Europe. The aim of the short videos was to attract journalists' attention to the work of EESC members.



VIRTUAL VISITS

“COVID cannot cancel creativity. Digitalisation in the music sector: a lifeline during the pandemic.”

This cultural project – a joint initiative between the three Groups of the EESC – featured interviews with people involved in the music sector, in order to explore how the sector adapted to the restrictive health measures through smart use of digitalisation and innovation. The project also focused on the challenges musicians and other workers in the music industry faced during the pandemic and demonstrated how crucial culture is for citizens, including in times of crisis. The initiative presented a series of 10 video-interviews and one Best Of short film, entirely online.



“The Journey of the Euro”

This cultural initiative was staged in October 2022 and featured a series of images charting the history of the euro. It was organised to mark the 20-year anniversary of the euro.

The exhibition focused on a combination of archive materials from the Historical Archives of the EU, information provided by European Commission (DG ECFIN) and materials from the Croatian National Bank. The exhibition also featured cartoons and posters about the 2002 launch of the euro, which quickly became the most widely used currency worldwide.



“Do you know these Sports Women?”

To mark the International day of Persons with Disabilities (3 December), this cultural initiative, linked to the SOC/690 own-initiative opinion on The EU action for Post COVID-19 period: recovering better through sport was organised entirely online.



The virtual exhibition is composed of a series of posters, displaying the stories of 24 female athletes from the eight Andalusian provinces. All these sportswomen are athletes with an intellectual disability, and their stories and experiences unveil the courage, progress and strength that characterise them. Against all the odds, they use sport as a force for change in their lives. The project aimed to raise awareness and increase visibility of sportswomen with intellectual disabilities, while highlighting the work of the EESC on issues that concern people with disabilities.



Opening the EESC (virtually) to external visitors

On 7 May 2022, the EESC celebrated Europe Day with a fully virtual event attended by more than 600 people. A dedicated webpage was set up in all 24 EU official languages, featuring several tabs, including a Youth engagement corner, an Events, Visits and Culture corner and the opportunity to send a real postcard to someone. On Europe Day, the EESC also promoted its webpage dedicated to the EESC stands with Ukraine, showing organised civil society in solidarity and action and presenting the initiatives launched by EU civil society to support Ukraine.











One of the main attractions of this year's Europe Day event was the EESC 360° visit experience: visitors could take a virtual tour of the premises and discover what the EESC as the house of European civil society stands for and what it does for them.



Following the pandemic and a long two-year period of online visits, the EESC fully reopened its doors to groups of visitors in July 2022. Approximately 5500 visitors, corresponding to around 230 groups, were welcomed on-site by the EESC Visitors' Service, while the virtual EESC Online Talks, which had replaced physical visits during the pandemic, continued to be organised as a supplementary service to publicise the EESC and its work.



KEY FIGURES FOR 2022

| | |
|--|---|
| <p>700</p>  | <p>The EESC had 700 active staff (officials, temporary agents, contract agents, SNEs and special advisers)</p> |
| <p>329</p>  | <p>The EESC has 329 Members from all EU Member States, who are appointed for a renewable five-year term of office. The current mandate runs from October 2020 to September 2025</p> |
| <p>52</p>  | <p>Number of trainees who completed a paid traineeship: 52 trainees (26 in spring 2022 and 26 in autumn 2022). Twice a year the EESC offers paid traineeships for a period of five months to give university graduates valuable work experience.</p> |
| <p>202</p>  | <p>Number of opinions, position papers and information reports approved by the EESC plenary sessions in 2022: 202</p> |
| <p>10</p>  | <p>In 2021, the EESC has organised 10 virtual cultural events</p> |
| <p>7.4K</p>  | <p>Hand in Hand virtual exhibition by Maria Reis Rocha (15.01.2021-5.02.2021) had the biggest reach with total engagement (likes, comments, shares) = 1.2 K and total reach = 7.4 K</p> |
| <p>€152 500 000</p>  | <p>The total budget of the EESC was exactly EUR 152 500 000. Accuracy, efficiency and accountability are key to a balanced budget, validated by the Commission and adopted by the European Council and Parliament</p> |
| <p>0.08%</p>  | <p>The EESC's budget corresponds to 0.08% of the 2022 EU budget in commitment appropriations (or 0.091% of the 2021 EU budget in payment appropriations)</p> |
| <p>€60 000</p>  | <p>The total value of the 13th edition of the Civil Society Prize was EUR 60 000</p> |
| <p>Zero</p>  | <p>The Committee's canteen has been plastic free since May 2019; since June 2020, all catering-related activities are plastic free</p> |

and much more...

USEFUL LINKS



EESC website:

www.eesc.europa.eu



Facebook:

www.eesc.europa.eu/facebook



Twitter:

www.eesc.europa.eu/twitter



Instagram:

www.instagram.com/eu_civilsociety



You Tube:

www.eesc.europa.eu/youtube



LinkedIn:

www.linkedin.com/company/european-economic-and-social-committee



EESC president's website:

www.eesc.europa.eu/en/about/political-organisation/eesc-president



EESC president on Twitter:

[@EESC_President](https://twitter.com/EESC_President)



Civil Society Prize:

www.eesc.europa.eu/en/agenda/our-events/events/eesc-civil-society-prize-2022



EESC stands with Ukraine – organised civil society in solidarity and action:

www.eesc.europa.eu/en/initiatives/eesc-stands-ukraine-organised-civil-society-solidarity-and-action



European Circular Economy Stakeholder Platform:

circulareconomy.europa.eu/platform/



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