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Civil Society Organisations' Bulletin



**DANISH PRESIDENCY OF THE
COUNCIL OF THE EU**

FOREWORD

A Union of Sustainability

Séamus BOLAND (IE)

President, Civil Society Organisations' Group



Séamus Boland © EESC

This issue of the **Civil Society Organisations' Bulletin** is very special, not only because it is the last before the summer break, but also because it will be the last in its current format and layout. But don't worry: the Civil Society Organisations' Group is not thinking of discontinuing its bulletin, we are simply modernising it. In the interests of our readership, the **next issue will be fully digital** and more user-friendly.

The new Civil Society Organisations' Bulletin will be published for the first time on **17 September**. It should reflect current user habits and needs, as well as the interests of our readers, which we asked about earlier this year with the help of a survey. The new bulletin will include both tried-and-tested thematic blocks and **exciting new content**. It will continue to inform you about the activities and initiatives of the Civil Society Organisations' Group, as well as flagship initiatives of the European Economic and Social Committee (EESC). And, of course, we also want to continue giving civil society partners a voice. I hope you will enjoy the new bulletin and are now eagerly awaiting it.

This **July issue** of the Civil Society Organisations' Bulletin focuses primarily on the Danish Presidency of the Council of the European Union¹, which began on 1 July. The presidency is fully committed to a **strong Europe in a changing world**. Its overarching priorities are 'A secure Europe and a competitive and green Europe'.

For us in the Civil Society Organisations' Group, but also in the EESC as a whole, **the question of a secure Europe** is not only linked to military defence, but also to the defence of our **European values and civil preparedness**. Civil society organisations play a crucial role when it comes to responding to crisis situations, as has been demonstrated both during the COVID-19 crisis and the unjustified and unprovoked war against Ukraine, to name just two more recent examples. This is why we call for full integration of civil society into preparedness efforts, increased investment in its capacities, clear role definitions, stronger democratic safeguards, and easier cross-border cooperation. Preparedness initiatives must aim to secure a just and sustainable peace, addressing the root causes of conflict and fostering equality and social progress.

When it comes to a **competitive and green Europe**,

sustainability is key. Measures for a more competitive Europe must contribute to the **economic and social cohesion** of our communities. This is fundamental if we are to protect our European values. The transition to a green economy must be **just and inclusive**. This is why we call for measures to support the most vulnerable in our communities and why we welcome the objective of preparing a new Action Plan for implementing the European Pillar of Social Rights² and the first ever European Anti-Poverty Strategy. Swift agreement and implementation are important here.

As the Danish Presidency strives for a green Europe, our group organised a **conference on 'Building green and inclusive – Making our communities future-proof'**³ just after the start of the presidency in Copenhagen. We had the enormous pleasure to welcome the Danish Minister for Social Affairs and Housing **Sophie Hæstorp Andersen**. We also organised an **exhibition**⁴ on sustainability in construction at the conference venue. Both the conference and the exhibition were a great opportunity to learn about best practices and experiences in this sector. These debates and conversations will certainly inspire our work on sustainable and affordable housing at the EESC.

Sustainability has also been at the centre of many of my **recent encounters**, for instance in preparing the upcoming **Cypriot EU Presidency**. With Maria Panayiotou, the Cypriot Minister for Agriculture, we discussed drought not only in Cyprus but in many European Member States, and the need to prioritise water resilience in line with the demands of the EESC for a European Blue Deal⁵.

When being invited to speak at the **75th anniversary of the International Association of Mutual Benefit Societies (AIM)**, I called for the recognition of the pivotal role of civil society organisations in ensuring more just and equal societies. Without proper planning, financing, upskilling and reskilling of the health workforce, there is a risk of increasing poverty and inequality levels.

Finally, our group hosted a debate on the **future of agriculture in the EU with COPA-COGECA**, which highlighted various sustainability issues that need to be addressed in the next Common Agricultural Policy⁶. Food security concerns us all, so it should be in the interests of all of us to ensure an equitable farmers income.

Séamus Boland

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2. European Commission, current action plan, <https://europa.eu/YYGyFq>

3. EESC, conference, <https://europa.eu/IX3hwdJ>

4. EESC, photo exhibition 'Giving form to the future', <https://europa.eu/lybfnH>

5. EESC, EU Blue Deal, <https://europa.eu/lydD7VT>

6. European Commission, Common Agricultural Policy (CAP), <https://europa.eu/IKJ7BNR>

DANISH PRESIDENCY OF THE COUNCIL OF THE EU

Denmark will hold the presidency of the Council of the European Union during the second half of 2025, from 1 July to 31 December. This is the eighth time Denmark will hold the presidency.

The Danish Presidency has two overarching priorities: a secure Europe and a competitive and green Europe, under the slogan **'A strong Europe in a changing world'**.

It will focus on key areas such as security and defence, enlargement, and economic competitiveness. It will also address issues related to transatlantic relations, the EU's relationship with China, and trade diversification. Denmark is part of a trio presidency with Poland and Cyprus,



working together to set long-term goals and a common agenda.

For more info, please consult the programme of the Danish Presidency here: <https://danish-presidency.consilium.europa.eu/en/programme-for-the-danish-eu-presidency/priorities/>

Preparedness: the foundation of civil rights and liberties



Krzysztof Balon © EESC

Krzysztof Stanisław BALON (PL)
Vice-President, Civil Society Organisations' Group Secretary, Programming Committee, Working Community of Associations of Social Organisations (WRZOS)

'Security, Europe!' – This guiding principle of the Polish Presidency of the Council of the EU in the first half of 2025¹ has also been taken up by the current Danish Presidency which, under the slogan **'A strong Europe in a changing world'**, will work towards a Europe that is secure as well as competitive and green².

However, in the face of external threats such as Russian aggression, it would be misleading to expect action by national or EU institutions

to be sufficient to defend basic rights and civil liberties, **to protect our European way of life**. Only rational and critical cooperation between civil society and state institutions can ensure adequate protection in crisis situations.

This means, above all, that the public must be well, and honestly, informed about potential risks and how to overcome them. **Civic organisations need stable space to act** and their activities should be funded by Member States and the European Union. This support should be provided not only to organisations such as volunteer fire brigades, scouting organisations and other defence and aid organisations, but also to all those that **help strengthen civic preparedness**, especially in local communities.

Joint commitment from governments and civic organisations **to build preparedness** is needed in all EU Member States. It is needed

in the east as well as the west, in the north and south of our European community. It would therefore be worthwhile to organise knowledge-sharing in this field between the organisations represented in the EESC Civil Society Organisations' Group and other civil society organisations.

The starting point could be a **conference dedicated to preparedness as the foundation of civil rights and liberties**, presenting the work of civic organisations for preparedness, resilience and defence in the Member States bordering Ukraine and Russia – Estonia, Finland, Hungary, Latvia, Lithuania, Poland, Romania and Slovakia – summarising the experience of civic organisations in this field linked to the Polish and Danish Presidencies of the Council of the EU, and **establishing a permanent mechanism for the exchange of information and experience** in this field within the Civil Society Organisations' Group.

1. Council of the EU, Polish Presidency priorities, <https://europa.eu/!JgTYD>

2. Council of the EU, Danish Presidency programme, <https://europa.eu/!Yv7CN9>

The digital transition and cybersecurity – A Danish Presidency perspective on women's inclusion and innovation



Juliane Marie Neiiendam © EESC

Juliane Marie NEIENDAM (DK)
Member, Civil Society Organisations' Group Member of the Board, Women's Council in Denmark

The digital transition and cybersecurity are central to Denmark's presidency of the Council of the EU. Key priorities¹ include **online protection for minors, bolstering digital infrastructure, and advancing gender-inclusive innovation**.

Denmark is spearheading a push for an EU-wide bill against child sexual abuse material (CSAM) on encrypted messaging platforms. As *Politico* reported, Denmark is 'very vocal' in urging services like WhatsApp and Signal to

scan for CSAM and remove it – a contentious but urgent initiative². **Caroline Stage Olsen**, Denmark's Minister for Digital Affairs, confirmed this would be 'a key priority'³.

Simultaneously, the European Commission has earmarked EUR 1.3 billion from the Digital Europe Programme (2025–27)⁴ for AI, cybersecurity, and digital skills, emphasising that 'securing European tech sovereignty starts with investing (...) in people's digital competences'⁵.

Yet achieving **digital competitiveness** requires gender gaps to be closed. Women make up only 25% of the cybersecurity workforce globally, up from 20% in 2019, and are still underrepresented in tech⁶. The EU Digital Education Action Plan specifically calls for the digital gender divide to be bridged through targeted training and gender impact assessments⁷.

Initiatives like **'Girls in ICT Day'** highlight the challenge: unconscious stereotypes and a lack of role models impede women's entry into fields such as coding and cybersecurity⁸.

Denmark's EU presidency will champion a holistic digital agenda:

- Safe digital environments for minors, through regulatory reforms and age verification tools, supported by the upcoming EU child protection bill.
- Robust investment in European digital infrastructure to enhance innovation and reduce external dependency.
- Gender-inclusive policies that embed women's participation in all digital domains, from cybersecurity workforce development to leadership in AI and digital start-ups.

By integrating cybersecurity, innovation, and gender inclusion, Denmark can shape an EU

digital strategy that is not only cutting-edge, but also **resilient, equitable, and socially**

responsible. Only by empowering women – as developers, users, and policymakers – can

Europe ensure its digital future thrives on diversity and trust.

1. Council of the European Union, Programme of the Danish EU Presidency, <https://europa.eu/!Yv7CN9>
2. Politico, news, <https://www.politico.eu/article/denmark-online-protections-minors-child-sexual-abuse-whatsapp-signal/>
3. Politico, news, <https://www.politico.eu/article/eu-children-social-media-regulation-platforms-big-tech/>
4. European Commission, The Digital Europe Programme, <https://europa.eu/!Py3m4t>
5. Reuters, news, <https://www.reuters.com/technology/artificial-intelligence/eu-invest-14-billion-artificial-intelligence-cybersecurity-digital-skills-2025-03-28/>
6. Cobalt, blog, <https://www.cobalt.io/blog/closing-the-gender-gap-in-cybersecurity>
7. European Commission, Women in Digital, <https://europa.eu/!rGkR8m>
8. European Commission, Inspiring the next generation: Girls in ICT Day 2025, <https://europa.eu/!XpnQvh>

Unlocking Europe's future: the role of youth and civil society



Simon PRAHM
Co-founder & CEO, GAME¹

How can we work towards a secure, prosperous, competitive, free and democratic Europe? Answering this question is arguably more important today than it has been for a long time. In GAME – an international NGO with activities in 10 countries across Europe, the Middle East, and Africa – we believe that civil society and youth are strong candidates for delivering this, if we give them the right conditions.

Sport and culture as a catalyst

Civil society organisations, and in particular the sport and cultural activities they organise, provide unique opportunities for boosting youth's participation and engagement. In view of the demographic challenges Europe will be facing in the coming years, it is even more important that everyone feels included and inspired to contribute. Unfortunately, however, the views and perspectives of youth are often overlooked in favour of the older generations who will be leaving the job market in large numbers in the coming years.

In GAME we believe that giving youth ownership of their own future is a 'must'. By creating a supportive environment for youth and involving them as equal partners, our

organisation can harness their potential as agents for change in joint efforts for a more secure and democratic Europe.

Involving youth can be tricky, however, and not everyone gets it right. That's why a differentiated approach that addresses two overarching issues is necessary.

Marginalised and disadvantaged

Firstly, traditional initiatives in youth matters often focus on youth who are already active in civil society or have had the courage and drive to take the initiative to change their local communities and lives. However, there are large groups of marginalised youth who grow up in under-served communities where participation in civil society organisations may seem very remote. If these groups are overlooked, it can reinforce existing exclusion and divisions, and a great deal of potential for creating collective action among youth can be lost. To provide a genuine catalyst, an extra effort must be made to ensure everyone is included in these initiatives.

Make it for and by youth

Secondly, too many initiatives focus on creating change *for* youth rather than *creating change with and by* them. This is unfortunate, as it often compromises both the relevance and sustainability of efforts undertaken. In GAME, our experience is that projects that define in advance what youth need do not align well

with a focus on local leadership and equality in partnerships.

A successful youth initiative in Greenland

We don't always get it right in GAME, but when we do, we are immensely proud of it. Like last year, where GAME Greenland's volunteer Playmakers won the "Jonathan Award", named after Greenland's first and longest serving Prime Minister, Jonathan Motzfeldt. They received the award for "creating an inspiring community where young people in Greenland get support in their development and tools for creating positive progress in their lives".

That's why I am convinced that civil society and youth should play a key role in making our European aspirations a reality. I hope that the Danish Presidency of the Council of the EU² will help to advance youth's engagement, which includes strengthening and empowering civil society organisations that work with youth.



Volunteer GAME Playmakers in Greenland © GAME

1. GAME, the NGO works with a mission to create lasting social change through youth-led street sports and culture, <https://game.ngo/>
2. Danish Presidency of the Council of the EU, <https://danish-presidency.consilium.europa.eu/>

Advancing Europe's digital transformation through security and innovation



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Digital transformation is not just a technical upgrade – it must be built on **trust, security**

and inclusion. The Europe's Digital Decade strategy² sets ambitious targets for 2030 – including basic digital skills for most citizens and 90% of SMEs employing a basic level of digital technology (digital intensity) – which demands a strong focus on cybersecurity and resilience.

Securing the digital transition

Trust in online services – from patient records to legal databases – is non-negotiable, making **cybersecurity the bedrock of Europe's**

digital future. The EU's NIS2 Network and Information Systems Directive³ underscores this by expanding requirements across more sectors and strengthening defences for essential services. The EESC calls for cyber-resilience to be bolstered through 'security by design' and for people to be given greater control over their data. Europe's pursuit of digital sovereignty – supporting homegrown tech and reducing reliance on foreign providers – helps **keep infrastructure resilient and aligned with EU values.**

Empowering innovators and professionals

Innovation thrives when everyone – from start-ups to liberal professions⁴ – can participate. The EESC has emphasised that businesses, especially SMEs, need support to digitalise. **Liberal professionals can leverage new technologies to deliver better services** – but only if they have the skills and secure infrastructure. Many lack the resources to upgrade or train, so they need public support.

The EESC urges policymakers to consider:

- **targeted investments** in digital infrastructure, ensuring every region and sector has secure connectivity;
- **public-private partnerships** bringing together tech companies, universities and professional bodies to co-develop cybersecurity solutions and digital tools tailored to independent professionals;
- **education and training** initiatives that build digital skills among liberal professionals, enabling them to use new technologies securely.

Europe's digital transition will succeed if it combines innovation with security and inclusion. Liberal professions are both beneficiaries and guardians of the transition: they innovate in their services and uphold the ethics of use of technology. By investing in people and infrastructure and shaping policies that empower every sector, the EU can ensure that its Digital Decade yields a future that is secure and fair for all Europeans – a vision which the EESC fully supports. I hope that the Danish Presidency will actively support this vision.

1. EESC, Liberal Professions' Category, <https://europa.eu/!ffvWHQ>

2. European Commission, Europe's Digital Decade: digital targets for 2030, <https://europa.eu/!yNTXnF>

3. European Commission, NIS2 Directive, <https://europa.eu/!qp4vmN>

4. EESC, definition liberal professions, <https://europa.eu/!WBVNQP>

Security and defence: no peace without a social, responsible, solidarity-based approach



Rachel Brishoual © EESC

Rachel BRISHOUAL
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*Member, Civil Society
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National Committee
of ICOM (International
Council of Museums)¹*

In a context of growing geopolitical tension, and in particular with the war of aggression against Ukraine, the European Union can no longer confine itself to symbolic posturing. It must take responsibility for safety. **Protecting European states and citizens demands a clear strategy**, both preemptive and in the area of defence, **based on democratic sovereignty, solidarity and respect for fundamental rights**.

We need **coordinated reinforcement** of

European defence capabilities. It is a question of our strategic autonomy, our resilience to geopolitical shocks and our responsibility to the people of Europe. However, **that process cannot be separated from the social, environmental and democratic challenges** at the heart of the European project.

An approach centred on military build-up at the expense of investment in social progress cannot meet the expectations of the peoples of Europe sustainably. Europe cannot invest heavily in armaments without at the same time providing **equivalent funding for public services, the green transition and social inclusion**. Sustainable peace is based primarily on justice, cohesion and democracy.

It is therefore essential that any European defence policy be subject to **strict conditionalities**: transparent public procurement, respect for labour law,

involvement of social partners, giving responsible European companies priority. Industrial and financial considerations must never take precedence over the general interest and European cohesion.

Finally, it is essential to closely **coordinate defence and diplomacy**. Europe needs a comprehensive security and peace strategy that promotes conflict prevention and international cooperation. The [White Paper for European Defence](#)² **should also include civil approaches, cooperation with NGOs and progressive disarmament measures**.

Building a secure Europe is not just about strengthening our common defence capabilities – it is also about building a fairer, more cohesive society that is more open to dialogue. **Defence, yes, but not without peace or justice**.

1. 'Union Nationale des Syndicats Autonomes' (UNSA), founded on 12 February 1993, <https://www.unsa.org/>

2. European Union External Action (EEAS), White Paper for European Defence, <https://europa.eu/!NMV6vJ>

Where is the social economy in the Danish EU Presidency?



Per Bach

Per BACH

*Chairperson, Social
Entrepreneurs in Denmark¹*

The **Danish Presidency** of the Council of the European Union² has just kicked off. It will last from 1 July to 31

December 2025 and is expected to focus mainly on security and competitiveness. Yet, despite growing **international recognition of the social economy's potential**, this topic is **absent from** all the official

programmes and activities.

This is surprising, considering that over 4 million social economy enterprises operate across Europe, employing more than 11 million people and generating nearly EUR 1 trillion in annual turnover. The UN, OECD, ILO and EU have all highlighted the sector's ability to drive inclusive growth, social cohesion and sustainable development.

In **Denmark**, however, political interest in the social economy and social enterprises has been minimal for the past decade. The only recent national initiative has been

a programme to support democratically owned companies (cooperatives), with DKK 22 million (about EUR 3 million) earmarked for the sector between 2023 and 2026, and a 2024 proposal for legislation aiming to establish a framework for business transfers to employee ownership. Despite Denmark's signature on the EU Council Recommendation on developing social economy framework conditions³ from 2023 onwards, no national strategy has yet been proposed.

To address this shortcoming, [Social Entrepreneurs in Denmark](#) and the **Danish**

Cooperative Employers' Organisation (Kooperationen), together with eight other organisations in the Danish social economy field, are organising a conference entitled *Social Economy – An Unlocked Potential* at the Danish Parliament on 20 November 2025 – the global Social Enterprise Day⁴.

The conference will explore how social enterprises can help solve some of Denmark's and the EU's most pressing challenges. It will highlight the sector's role in delivering specialised welfare services

without excessive private profits, its capacity to foster sustainable local development – including in rural areas – and its ability to support holistic employment initiatives for vulnerable groups.

With contributions from politicians, researchers, social enterprises and the private sector, the aim is to **start a national conversation and push for political recognition of the sector**. The organisers hope the event will encourage the Danish authorities to follow through on the EU

Council Recommendation by **developing a concerted national strategy** for the social economy – something every Member State has committed to within two years of signing.

Since the recent disbanding of the European Commission's Social Economy Unit has made political advocacy even more difficult, Danish civil society sees the **EU Presidency** as a timely **opportunity to emphasise the social economy sector's full potential** – which deserves a central position in both national and European policy-making.

1. Sociale Entreprenører i Danmark, <https://socialeentreprenorer.dk/>

2. Danish Presidency of the Council of the EU, <https://danish-presidency.consilium.europa.eu/>

3. European Commission, Council recommendation on developing social economy framework conditions, <https://europa.eu/!pFBCyp>

4. Sociale Entreprenører i Danmark, Social Enterprise Day, <https://socialeentreprenorer.dk/vare/social-enterprise-day-20-11-2025/>

Economic growth and competitiveness



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Juraj Šipko © EESC

After the Second World War, the **European, American and Japanese economies were among the most competitive in the world**. The European economy retained this position until the first decade of the current century. Following external systemic shocks (COVID-19, climate change and geoeconomic fragmentation) and the recent failure to fully exploit the advantages of the single market, economic growth in the EU Member States shrank noticeably compared to its current major competitors, chiefly the US and China.

In 2023, economic growth in the EU countries was a mere 0.6%, while it reached 2.5% in the US. In 2023, the EU countries' economies together made up only 7.1% of global GDP – less than the combined economies of three Asian countries: Indonesia (4%), Vietnam (1.7%) and the Philippines (1.6%). **In 2025,**

forecasts revised to factor in the impact of the ongoing trade war suggest that **economic growth in the eurozone will be only 0.8%**, compared to 1.8% in the US.

This begs a fundamental question: **what is the reason for this relatively low rate of economic growth in the EU countries over the last two decades?** The main driver of economic growth is private and public investment geared towards **science, research, innovation and education**. These investments result in higher productivity and so greater competitiveness. Foreign demand for goods and services results in a positive trade balance and a current account surplus and ultimately to an increase in real GDP.

In terms of **private, public and foreign direct investment, the EU Member States are lagging far behind their main competitors** in the global economy. The relatively low volume of investment does not provide the conditions necessary to close the innovation gap with its main global competitors. The current **innovation, technological and even educational gap** between the EU countries and their main global competitors hinders efforts to boost labour productivity and competitiveness, resulting in lower economic growth in the EU countries.

One **prerequisite** for securing sufficient investment is **completing financial union within the European monetary union**, i.e. Banking Union and Capital Markets Union¹. Another is creating the conditions for an **influx of foreign and venture capital** into startups. There is also an urgent need to invest in all forms of education. This includes support for technology-oriented education (STEM: Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics), which is crucial for cutting edge innovation and increased labour productivity driving competitiveness and real economic growth.

The European Commission is at the start of its new historic mandate, and aims to boost competitiveness, sustainability, inclusiveness and resilience. We must look at the whole range of **measures which do not support innovation potential or an increase in labour productivity** which is the main factor in raising competitiveness when it comes to exporting finished goods and services. Immediate action is needed to do away with the unreasonably large number of inconsistent administrative and regulatory measures which are standing in the way of both big companies and SMEs². I hope the Danish Presidency will work in this direction.

1. European Central Bank, Press Release, <https://europa.eu/!MbnByQ>

2. European Commission, Single Market and Industry news, <https://europa.eu/!kDdvTq>

COMMENTS ON CURRENT AFFAIRS

EU Green Week 2025: advancing circularity for resilient communities

Cillian LOHAN (IE)
Member, Civil Society Organisations' Group
Chief Executive Officer, Green Economy Foundation

Green Week¹ allowed us to focus on the circular

economy. The work done by the innovative [European Circular Economy Stakeholder Platform \(ECESP\)](#)², a joint initiative of the European Economic and Social Committee (EESC) and European Commission's Directorate-

General for the Environment (DG ENV), was in the spotlight yet again. This followed on from the World Circular Economy Forum 2025³ in São Paulo, Brazil on 13-16 May and built on that momentum.

Bridging perspectives is a key part of working in a circular way. The panel on this topic ([Bridging Perspectives: Policymakers, Business Innovators, Civil Society and Youth Advancing the Circular Economy](#))⁴ discussed how we could all consider **circularity as the lens through which we push for a fairer and more equitable society**. The discussion asked us to consider not just an **economy that is circular** but also a **society that is circular**. This helps us put people at the centre of the different initiatives coming from the circular policymakers and innovators.

A competitive EU was, of course, part of the conversation. The different perspectives could all agree on some common ground – that **a transition to a circular economy in the EU will continue to have multiple benefits**. These range from social improvements to fundamental economic efficiencies.

The principles of circularity require a shift towards **repair, reuse and remanufacturing opportunities**. It was clear from the session that when these opportunities are maximised there can be employment and entrepreneurial opportunities in parts of Member States that have struggled to attract investment and people. For **rural and remote regions** there are possibilities to centre vibrant living communities around a model of decentralised remanufacturing and repair while delivering a service- and sharing-based economy.



Cillian Lohan at the EU Green Week 2025 (on the left) ©ECESP

We need **communities that are resilient and that are connected**. There are many ways to promote and achieve this. The circular economy is one of the opportunities to deliver. Green Week highlighted the strong appetite to take the progress made so far and continue to be ambitious in this area as **the EU is already a global leader and innovator in circularity**.

1. European Union, EU Green Week, <https://europa.eu/!khRPKB>
2. European Union, EU Circular Economy Stakeholder Platform, <https://europa.eu/!6M9nxX>
3. World Circular Economic Forum 2025, <https://wcef2025.com/>
4. European Union, EU Green Week, panel discussion, <https://europa.eu/!cbVGKr>

Reduce energy poverty



Jan Dirx © EESC

Jan DIRX (NL)
Vice-President, Civil Society Organisations' Group
Liaison officer, Groene11 (Green11), Dutch nature and environmental organisations

'Just 10% of people in the EU suffer from a form of energy poverty.' This was one of the recurring statements heard at the joint conference on [Delivering affordable energy in Europe](#)¹ held by the European Economic and Social Committee (EESC) and the European Commission on 11 June. The topic of the conference's second panel, led by **Thomas Kattinig** from the EESC's Workers' Group, was *Delivering reductions on energy poverty*. The first

speaker, **Véronique Marx** from the European Commission's Directorate-General for Energy, stressed that there is no uniform **definition of energy poverty** in the EU. It is usually used to mean that people cannot adequately heat their homes when it is cold due to their financial situation. However, Ms Marx wondered whether we could also speak of energy poverty when people cannot afford to cool their homes during (increasingly frequent) heatwaves.

The accurate statement would therefore be, as some studies suggest: that **between 8% and 16% of the EU population** is energy poor, depending on the indicators used.²

This opening contribution immediately highlighted the **close link between energy poverty and housing**.

All the contributions made it clear how crucial the local level is because local authorities and civil society organisations know the local people and know where it is possible and advisable to provide help. However, measures are also needed at national and EU level because only these levels can truly influence the price of energy.

At the end of the panel, **Colin Lustenhouwer** from the EESC Employers' Group summed up the discussion as follows: if you want to combat energy poverty effectively, you have two options, namely **energy saving and price reduction**. He added that the price of energy is determined by the raw material price, the grid price and taxes. Governments must therefore abolish taxes on energy, which, after all, is a basic necessity in life, just like water.

1. EESC conference, <https://europa.eu/!XfC6cd>
2. European Commission, EU Science Hub, <https://europa.eu/!cTVbRy>

REFLECTIONS

Safeguarding civic space to ensure a sustainable fisheries

Daniel VOCES DE ONAÍNDI
Managing Director, *Europêche*¹

Across the EU, **civil society organisations** (CSOs) play an essential role in upholding democratic values, sustainability and social equity. In the **fisheries sector**, this role is particularly critical. Our industry is deeply

intertwined with environmental, economic and social challenges – from ocean conservation to food security and the livelihoods of coastal communities.

At *Europêche*, we strongly believe in **structured, institutionalised dialogue** between civil society, industry stakeholders and policy-makers. We are active participants in

EU-level consultations, the EU Social Dialogue Committee for sea fisheries², expert groups and advisory councils where fisheries professionals collaboratively shape management strategies with trade union and NGO representatives.

However, we are increasingly concerned about **growing constraints on public participation in policy-making**. One notable issue lies in

The Future of CSOs in the EU



Daniel Voces de Onaíndi

the overreliance on online public consultations and external consultants to address complex issues such as fisheries management. These consultations often assess support based on the quantity rather than the quality or representativeness of responses, placing individual submissions on equal footing with those of national and EU-level associations. This approach risks diluting sector expertise and widening the gap between policy and practice.

Additionally, in some **Member States**, civil

society and industry actors in primary sectors face structural barriers to organising effectively. These barriers include limited access to institutional support, insufficient legal recognition of the role of social partners, and fragmented or under-resourced organisational structures.

CSOs invest considerable effort, expertise and resources to provide essential input to policy-makers. However, their contributions are too often overlooked or dismissed without adequate justification. This can hinder mutual understanding and stakeholder engagement. Europêche advocates greater transparency, science-based governance and inclusive policies that reflect the realities of people on the ground.

To strengthen civil society's voice, **we propose** the following:

- **Empowering civil society organisations:** This means ensuring their input is not only

heard but meaningfully considered within democratic processes. Greater qualitative assessment of stakeholder contributions is needed so that policies reflect a balanced and informed perspective rooted in practical experience.

- **Strengthening the role of social dialogue at both EU and national level:** Recognising social partners within EU governance will reinforce democratic legitimacy and drive responsible ocean stewardship.
- **Investing in capacity and representation:** Support mechanisms are needed to empower underrepresented groups, particularly in coastal and outermost regions, to take part in shaping their future.

Ultimately, **civil society is the democratic heartbeat of the EU**. Its protection is not just a legal obligation – it is a prerequisite for fair, resilient and sustainable policy outcomes, including in the blue economy³.

1. Europêche, <https://europêche.chil.me/>

2. European Commission, Sea fisheries - Sectoral social dialogue, <https://europa.eu/14DtYnW>

3. European Commission, Blue economy, <https://europa.eu/16yjp7f>

NEWS FROM THE GROUP

The future of housing in the EU must be greener and more inclusive

Reimagining the design of cities, communities and housing is essential to face the current challenges. Civil society organisations (CSOs) have a key role to play in steering this transformation. **Sustainability and the right to housing** must be at the heart of future strategies. The EU could contribute to this by increasing European funding for affordable housing and supporting the social economy.

Making housing, public spaces and communities in the EU future-proof was the focus of a [conference](#)¹ organised by the Civil Society Organisations' Group of the European Economic and Social Committee (EESC) on 2 July. The event was one of the first high-level conferences to be held under the Danish Presidency of the Council of the EU², which began on 1 July. It took place at the Danish Society of Engineers (IDA)³ in Copenhagen.



Séamus Boland © Danish Ministry of Social Affairs and Housing

Séamus Boland, President of the Civil Society Organisations' Group, said: 'In the face of climate change, increasing inequalities and the housing crisis, there is no choice but to embrace change in the way that we design, build and develop urban housing and public spaces. There is much that

other countries could learn from Denmark, whose equitable housing policy, accessible to everyone irrespective of income, goes back over 100 years. Today, the Danish nonprofit housing sector accounts for a fifth of the market and is characterised by high energy standards and mixed, inclusive communities'.

Mr Boland emphasised the need to create spaces that serve both **environmental objectives and social cohesion**. Sustainability and the right to housing should be at the centre of future housing strategies. **Cocreation and coownership** must go hand in hand to build greener and more inclusive housing and public spaces. The president of the group, representing civil society from the 27 EU Member States, added that the EU could help by 'increasing **European affordable housing funds**, strengthening EU renovation programmes and **supporting the social economy**, notably cooperative ownership models'.



Juliane Neijendam (EESC Member), Sophie Hæstorp Andersen (Danish Minister for Social Affairs and Housing) and Sif Holst (EESC Member) © Danish Ministry of Social Affairs and Housing



Conference room, IDA, Copenhagen, 2 July 2025 © EESC

Sophie Hæstorp Andersen, Danish Minister for Social Affairs and Housing, said: 'Affordable and sustainable housing is a top priority for me – also during our EU Presidency. By building **greener and more inclusive communities** today, we're not only addressing today's challenges, but laying the **foundation for stronger, more resilient societies tomorrow**. It's part of building a safer, more competitive, and greener Europe. I look forward to continuing this important conversation at the conference I'll be hosting in September on affordable and sustainable housing'.

Policymakers and CSO representatives, urban planners, architects and individuals discussed building more sustainable and inclusive communities. Participants used the opportunity to exchange experiences and showcase best practices. The debates addressed climatefriendly construction and urban spaces, innovative solutions for reducing emissions and how the EU can bring added value.

Participants believed that housing, public spaces and communities need to be reimaged and emphasised the need for measures to **support poor and vulnerable individuals and families**. They also called for:

- renovations to be prioritised over new constructions;
- circular and energy-efficient construction methods to be prioritised;

- public procurement also to reward energy-efficient designs;
- a gender dimension to housing strategies;
- community-driven planning.

A further conclusion of the conference was that substantial engagement by individuals and CSOs and inclusive, crosssectoral dialogue are crucial if the just transition to greener and

more inclusive housing in the EU is to succeed. Communities can only meet the challenges if all stakeholders – public, private, civil society and individuals – unite and act together.

The conference **conclusions and recommendations** are available here: <https://europa.eu/!X3hwDj>

1. EESC conference, <https://europa.eu/!X3hwDj>

2. Danish Presidency of the Council of the EU, <https://danish-presidency.consilium.europa.eu/>

3. Danish Society of Engineers, IDA, <https://english.ida.dk/>

Photo exhibition on sustainability in construction inspires visitors



Opening of the exhibition © EESC

On 2 July, the Civil Society Organisations' Group of the European Economic and Social Committee (EESC) opened the **photo exhibition Giving form to the future**¹ at the Danish Society of Engineers (IDA)² as part of its conference *'Building green and inclusive – Making our communities future-proof'*³.

The Civil Society Organisations' Group organised this exhibition together with the Danish architecture firm **BIG – Bjarke Ingels Group**⁴ and IDA. The exhibition focuses on sustainability in construction and presents nine projects coordinated by BIG - in Copenhagen, Sevilla, Gelephu and beyond, ranging

from a container terminal and an industrial building, to a museum and affordable housing. The exhibition consists of a series of panels and animations and was on display at IDA from 2 July to 8 July.

With its annual cultural event, the Civil Society Organisations' Group aims to raise awareness for future-relevant issues. This year's initiative complemented and supported its work on promoting inclusive and equitable societies, decent, sustainable and affordable housing and the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)⁵.

Séamus Boland, President of the Civil Society Organisations' Group, opened the exhibition together with representatives of the two partner organisations, **Juliane Marie Neeindam**, Member of the Civil Society Organisations' Group, Chair of IDA Copenhagen

and Chair of IDA's Self-Employed Members, and **Kai-Uwe Bergmann**, partner at BIG. The more than 100 participants at the opening event expressed their enthusiasm for the initiative and were impressed by the projects presented.

Séamus Boland said: 'The works on display demonstrate that the Golden Ratio is no longer the benchmark for architects. Architects and construction professionals are already incorporating the United Nations' 17 Sustainable Development Goals'. The Group organised this exhibition to highlight the need for sustainable construction and to showcase good practices. Mr Boland said: 'Sustainable construction is an efficient tool for building inclusive, climate-resilient communities and advancing the SDGs'.



Exhibition at IDA © EESC

1. EESC, photo exhibition, <https://europa.eu/!xybfnH>

2. The Danish Society of Engineers (IDA) is a trade union with over 170,000 members with a background in STEM. IDA aims at realising the potential of technology and knowledge and contributing to the fulfilment of the UN's 17 sustainable development goals, <https://english.ida.dk/>

3. EESC, conference, <https://europa.eu/!X3hwDj>

4. BIG – Bjarke Ingels Group has grown organically over the last two decades from a founder, to a family, to a force of 700. It has offices on Copenhagen, London, Barcelona, New York, Shanghai, Los Angeles, Zurich and Oslo., <https://big.dk/>

5. United Nations, Sustainable Development Goals, <https://sdgs.un.org/goals>

Out now: new EESC study on 'Mapping civil dialogue practices in the EU institutions'

Interview with **Berta Mizsei** and **Timothy Yeung**, **CEPS**¹ authors of the new EESC study that was requested by the EESC's Civil Society Organisations' Group



Berta Mizsei



Timothy Yeung

What is this study about and why is it relevant?

This study is about how the EU institutions engage with civil society in a recurring, reciprocal manner. It is relevant because it provides empirical support to ongoing discussions about how European civil society is involved in EU-level policymaking. Many people do not realise this, but civil dialogue is a requirement in the Treaty on European

Union (TEU). Article 11(2) of the TEU says "The institutions shall maintain an open, transparent and regular dialogue with representative associations and civil society."²

What are the study's main findings?

Civil society is mainly involved via the European Commission; the Commission's expert groups create multiple opportunities for civil society organisations to participate alongside



Mapping civil dialogue practices in the EU institutions

STUDY



other experts. However, opportunities for engagement set up for civil society alone remain rare and/or under-resourced. This is not helped by a lack of harmonisation across and within institutions on what civil dialogue means. And even when there is dialogue, it may occur late in the policy process, be understaffed (think e.g. involving teams made up of only one or two people), or not entail any formal feedback mechanisms. One thing that surprised us was how rare it was for civil society to know how their input actually had an impact on EU decision-making.

On the basis of the findings, what are your main recommendations for action and further research?

We agree with existing requests that the EU, including the EESC, settle on a definition for

civil dialogue and provide guidelines on how to implement it, and that this should lead to an inter-institutional agreement on civil dialogue. The guidelines could be integrated into the Better Regulation Toolbox – the principles that the European Commission follows when preparing new initiatives and proposals and when managing and evaluating existing legislation³ – to reflect the unique nature of civil dialogue. The study also suggests having institutional contact points, periodic reporting, celebrating success, and providing facilitation training. For future research, we recommend looking into the financial resources available for EU-level civil dialogue and tracking the path that civil society inputs follow after discussions are completed. We hope you enjoy reading it!

The study and an executive summary are available at: <https://europa.eu/!th9Mc6>

1. CEPS is a leading think tank and forum for debate on EU affairs, with a strong in-house research capacity and an extensive network of partner institutes throughout the world. It was founded in Brussels in 1983, <https://www.ceps.eu/>

2. EUR-Lex, Treaty on European Union, Article 11, https://eur-lex.europa.eu/eli/treaty/teu_2016/art_11/oj/eng

3. European Commission, Better Regulation, <https://europa.eu/!Pwk8Mf>

When artificial intelligence and authentic intelligence join forces – Day of the Liberal Professions 2025

On 11 June, the EESC's Liberal Professions Category¹ held its ninth Day of the Liberal Professions. Entitled *When artificial intelligence and authentic intelligence join forces*², this year's event focused on one of the most pressing questions of our time: how to integrate AI technologies into liberal professions services in a way that preserves trust, ethics, and human responsibility.

In his opening address, Category spokesperson **Rudolf Kolbe** underlined that **liberal professions are not in competition with AI** — they stand for the right way to handle it. The liberal professions, from medicine to law, engineering to architecture, are built on a foundation of public trust and personal responsibility. They thrive on authentic intelligence: expertise, ethics, empathy and judgement. AI is a powerful tool, but it is not neutral, and it must not replace the core values that define the liberal professions. Critical thinking, transparency and accountability remain indispensable.

The keynote speech by Professor **Ulrich Bodenhofer** painted a clear and realistic picture of what AI is — and what it is not. His core message: AI is a useful assistant, not autonomous intelligence. Liberal professionals must stay vigilant and always apply their authentic intelligence when using such tools.

Over three panel discussions, 11 speakers from across the EU addressed the many challenges and opportunities that AI brings. Several key messages were delivered throughout the day. **Miriam D'Arrigo** from Directorate-General for Communications Networks, Content and Technology (DG Connect) said it is essential that professions actively shape the governance of AI tools. **Anna Maria Bardone**, President of the Italian Industrial Property Consultants Institute, reminded participants that liberal professions, with their strong ethical values, should serve as role models for responsible AI deployment — both within their fields and across society.

During the second panel, **Stephan Hofmeister**, President of the German Federal Association of the Liberal Professions, warned that responsibility and liability must always remain with the professional. **Gordon Micallef** of the Malta Institute of Accountants underlined the need for robust oversight and continuous human involvement when using AI in financial and accounting services. **Margherita Pagani**, Director of the Skema Centre for Artificial Intelligence in Paris, advocated for human-centred AI that serves ethical and societal goals and warned of the environmental costs of large-scale use of AI.

In the final panel, **Daniel Alge**, President of

the Austrian Federal Association of the Liberal Professions, delivered a **powerful message**: 'We must train AI to work with us, not for us — and we remain fully responsible and accountable for all services provided, with or without AI support.'

The event showed that AI and authentic intelligence can complement each other — if guided by strong ethical frameworks, sound regulation and professional responsibility. Europe needs liberal professions as ethical anchors and trust builders in an AI-powered society. If all stakeholders work together, they can **ensure that digital innovation remains human-centred and serves the common good**.



EESC Day of the Liberal Professions 2025 © EESC

1. EESC, Liberal Professions Category, <https://europa.eu/!ffvWHQ>

2. EESC conference, <https://europa.eu/!jhrP9t>

MEMBERS IN THE SPOTLIGHT

Europe's civil society is under siege—especially its environmental defenders



Corina Murafa Benga © EESC

Corina Andrea MURAFU BENGHA (RO)

*Member, Civil Society Organisations' Group
Affiliated expert,
Centre for the Study of Democracy (CSD)
Co-founder, Romanian Energy Poverty Observatory (ORSE)*

Across Europe, civil society is being pushed to the margins. Legal restrictions, smear campaigns and economic pressure are converging into a hostile environment for civil society organisations (CSOs)—especially those working on environmental issues.

On 4 June, **Corina Murafa** was honoured to **welcome to the EESC more than 25 activists and researchers** from Central and Eastern Europe, as part of a study trip organised by the European Environmental Bureau (EEB) and the European Climate Initiative (EUKI)¹. Their

message was clear: **civic space in Europe is shrinking fast**.

Strategic lawsuits against public participation (SLAPPs)² **are multiplying**. Disinformation campaigns—often led by mainstream political forces—undermine CSOs' legitimacy, while persistent underfunding threatens their survival. As highlighted during the discussion, even the LIFE programme³, which provides essential operating grants to environmental NGOs and represents just 0.0006% of the EU budget, has come under attack. Despite being fully compliant with EU law and backed by the EU Treaties, it became the target of orchestrated misinformation—a stark reminder that **environmental advocacy is now politically risky**. Why single out environmental NGOs—which receive only a fraction of the EU budget—for scrutiny, when stakeholders across all sectors and interest groups benefit from a broad range of EU funding?

This is not an isolated trend. Annual reports from the European Civic Forum and Civil

Society Europe show a steady decline in civic freedoms across the continent. Environmental CSOs, who dare to challenge vested interests, face disproportionate scrutiny and retaliation.

"As a Member of the EESC—the EU's only institutional body representing organised civil society—I believe we must urgently defend structured civil dialogue. **Civic participation** cannot be reduced to symbolic consultation. It **must be safeguarded with proper funding, legal protection, and strong political backing**. Europe's democracy depends on it," stated Ms Murafa.



The State of Civil Society in European Democracies meeting © EESC

1. EUKI, <https://www.euki.de/en/>

2. European Parliament, Think Tank, <https://europa.eu/IM8QYMJ>

3. European Commission, Life Programme, <https://europa.eu/PDyNng>

HIGHLIGHTS FROM THE LAST PLENARY SESSION

Watch a recording of all the debates here: <https://www.eesc.europa.eu/en/agenda/our-events/events/597th-plenary-session-18-19-june-2025/recording-debates>

The new European Pillar of Social Rights action plan must ensure the implementation of the pillar and help eradicate poverty in the EU

Following a debate at EESC plenary on 18 June, with European Executive Vice-President Roxana Minzatu, the European Economic and Social Committee (EESC) adopted an [own-initiative opinion](#)¹ urging the European Commission to deliver a more ambitious and fairer action plan for the implementation of the [European Pillar of Social Rights](#)².



Debate New Action Plan for the European Pillar of Social Rights, Roxana Minzatu and Oliver Röpke © EESC

Oliver Röpke, President of the EESC, opened the panel by stressing that the Committee has been a strong supporter of the European Pillar

of Social Rights and of the first action plan on the topic. The Eurobarometer has shown that EU citizens also strongly support these policies that increase fairness and safeguard their rights³. Progress on the implementation of the pillar, however, has been uneven and stagnant. He stressed that the social dimension must be strengthened, not sidelined.

Roxana Minzatu, European Commission Executive Vice-President for Social Rights and Skills, Quality Jobs and Preparedness, stated that the consultation phase for the new action plan had been launched, and that it would be reflected in the European Commission's work. The pillar, as the EU's social guidebook, must be implemented with civil society's perspectives in mind. She pointed out that social rights have been the trademark of the European Union's social market economy, and that it is these rights that ensure the EU's resilience and democratic foundations. Gaps,

however, remain. This new action plan, she stressed, must be implemented together with civil society and other stakeholders, such as local authorities. The Commission is looking for honest feedback to shape a strong action plan for the future, which includes the goal to lift 55 million European out of poverty. The Commission's various targets are continuously monitored, with the latest statistics currently showing that the employment target has almost been reached, but that the EU is behind on the poverty and training targets. New targets will be incorporated, for instance on preparedness and the green transition, but it is crucial that a citizen perspective be included in the plan.

Korinna Schumann, Austrian Federal Minister for Labour, Social Affairs, Health, Care and Consumer Protection, emphasised through a video message that the implementation of the updated action plan is crucial for reducing

socio economic disparities and harmonising the levels of wealth across the population. A strong anti-poverty focus is also crucial for social cohesion and for eradicating child poverty. The pillar needs to reach the common employment target by 2030 while also maintaining very high social standards and putting health and safety at work at its core. Ms Schumann advocated the need to improve the health literacy of disadvantaged groups, emphasising that 'we need the inclusion of everyone for a strong solidarity-based Europe'.

Katarzyna Nowakowska, Polish Deputy Minister for Family, Labour and Social Policy, said that the pillar is a crucial tool for addressing European challenges and for focusing efforts in the right direction. The action plan must be implemented in full – despite war, despite US policies and despite energy issues. Resources must be mobilised and all Europeans must work together to rethink the EU model to face new challenges such as climate change adaptation and the threat posed by both Russia and China. The EU is on the right path, although poverty has not yet been eradicated. With the energy crisis, families in rural areas are struggling to pay their energy bills. These issues need to be tackled. She added that 'the European Economic and Social Committee's opinion will be crucial, as [the Committee] represent[s] the interests of all Europeans'.



Séamus Boland © EESC

Séamus Boland, President of the Civil Society Organisations' Group, pointed out that 94 million Europeans are still at daily risks of poverty⁴. He was strong on the need to implement the

planned EU Anti-Poverty Strategy quickly, noting that 'avoiding poverty is a right, not a privilege'. Poverty is more than material deprivation; it also affects dignity and opportunities. The strategy is an opportunity to change attitudes and poverty management. 'Poverty is not irreversible – it is a trap,' he stressed. The strategy must address the root causes of poverty, with binding targets in the new action plan and poverty checks. Defending democracy and human rights and eradicating poverty must be pursued as one objective.



Pietro Barbieri © EESC

resources and competencies present barriers to overcoming inequalities, including access to services'. The [Stability and Growth Pact](#)⁵ limits Member States' possibilities. Civil society organisations are also not always properly supported or legally protected. More courage needs to be shown here.



Neža Repanšek © EESC

She stressed the importance of fighting inequalities with civil society and social partner involvement, hence the need for social dialogue, adding that 'our effectiveness will be measured by our capacity

to implement the pillar – the European Pillar of Social Rights must be more than a statement'. Reproductive rights remain crucial and need to be ensured in the EU.



Krzysztof Balon © EESC

Krzysztof Balon, Vice-President of the Civil Society Organisations' Group, emphasised that the foundation of the action plan should be to eradicate poverty, with a new rights-based approach.

'Poverty is not just a side effect of economic growth, but a violation of fundamental rights and a systemic injustice,' he said.

Ioannis Vardakastanis, President of the EESC's Section for Economic and Monetary Union and



Ioannis Vardakastanis © EESC

Economic and Social Cohesion ([ECO](#)), pointed out that the implementation of principle 17⁷ of the pillar requires targeted initiatives that provide access to the labour market,

develop skills for work and independent living and invest in community-based services for people with disabilities. It requires a Disability, Employment and Skills Guarantee that supports people with disabilities through training and employment, and helps them transition into the labour market. The EU must invest in accessible housing and services so people with disabilities are not cut off from the community. He concluded by saying that 'for the legitimacy of the pillar, now is the time to act'.

1. EESC opinion SOC/822, <https://europa.eu/IQG4GMc>
2. European Commission, European Pillar of Social Rights, <https://europa.eu/IcyXX4y>
3. European Union, Eurobarometer, 2023: <https://europa.eu/IpXTRbM>
4. European Union, Eurostat, 2025: <https://europa.eu/IjNDpjdC>
5. European Commission, Stability and Growth Pact (SGP), <https://europa.eu/Ij4MFw3>
6. EESC, ECO section, <https://europa.eu/IwCbKGl>
7. European Commission, European Pillar of Social Rights, principle 17: Inclusion of people with disabilities

The EESC has reaffirmed its commitment to supporting the democratic future of Belarus through a memorandum with the Belarusian democratic forces

At its June plenary session, the European Economic and Social Committee (EESC) hosted a debate on the *Democratic future of Belarus*, with **Sviatlana Tsikhanouskaya**, the leader of the Belarusian democratic movement, **Maksim Pazniakou**, acting chair of the Belarusian Congress of Democratic Trade Unions, and **Andrey Gnyot**, Belarusian journalist and filmmaker. The signing of the [Memorandum of Understanding](#)¹ (MoU), which took place in the context of the plenary debate, formalises the cooperation between the EESC and Belarusian civil society.

Oliver Röpke, President of the EESC, reaffirmed



Debate on the Democratic Future of Belarus, Sviatlana Tsikhanouskaya and Oliver Röpke © EESC

the EESC's strong commitment to structured collaboration with the Belarusian Democratic Forces, and the EESC's support for imprisoned

trade unionists and independent media. The memorandum was signed to support civil society organisations and shed light on the situation.

Sviatlana Tsikhanouskaya, leader of the Belarusian Democratic Forces, commended the EESC for its initiatives, stating that 'Europe is the only alternative to the Russian war; we need more EU in Belarus and more Belarus in the EU'. The memorandum is a promise of solidarity and a message to Belarusians that they are not alone. She stressed the importance for Belarus to start preparing for the transition now, by promoting EU values at every level of society,

supporting vulnerable groups and integrating the Commission's financial recommendations for the Belarusian economy. 'Let's support Belarusian workers and defend their rights together. Let's support Belarusian businesses by connecting them to European networks and investments,' she said. 'EU sanctions are important for creating leverage to help release those unjustly detained'. She also called for the repression to stop, stating that 'Belarus must be seen as a partner by the EU, not a problem. We demand a fair, inclusive society in which everyone can live, create and walk without fear'.

Maksim Pazniakou, acting chairman of the Belarusian Congress of Democratic Trade Unions, said that it is important that the voices of trade unions are heard in the house of civil society. Trade unionists face violence, persecution and imprisonment, but have always advocated peaceful dialogue and pleaded for decent working conditions for workers. The ILO conventions² must be implemented. He ended by affirming that 'a democratic future is only possible with independent trade unions'.

Andrey Gnyot, Belarusian activist and film director, talked about his liberation and his

exile from Belarus. 'In Belarus,' he said, 'people are afraid to speak and are afraid to think'. He underlined that the EU does not have a special programme to welcome Belarusian refugees who are in danger if they return to Belarus.



Simo Tiainen © EESC

Simo Tiainen, Vice-President of the EESC's Civil Society Organisations Group, praised the courage and perseverance of Sviatlana Tsikhanouskaya and underlined the Committee's support for the Belarusian democratic forces: 'You are the legitimate winner of the 2020 Belarusian presidential election. The European Union and the EESC have a clear responsibility in this matter. It is essential that the EU takes strong, targeted sanctions against the repressive Belarusian regime. We must actively support Belarusian civil society, the opposition and the independent media.'

Michael McLoughlin, Member of the EESC's Civil Society Organisations Group, welcomed the memorandum and said that it is important to prioritise sanctions on the Belarusian



Michael McLoughlin © EESC

government and support for prisoners. 'The EU needs to give Belarus more interest and be in closer contact with Belarusian civil society. We need to do more for the democratic forces in Belarus, they cannot become an afterthought in our external relations' he said. 'The memorandum signed should serve as a model for others, and should be sent to the heads of all EU delegations around the world.'



Andris Gobiņš © EESC

Andris Gobiņš, Member of the EESC's Civil Society Organisations Group, stated that '9 million Belarusians are kept in darkness by the regime'³, but that 'the regime cannot imprison their minds'. He suggested that the EU fill in the gap left by USAID⁴ to support civic networks, adding that Belarusians trade unions, civic networks and businesses must be included in EU networks.

1. Sviatlana Tsikhanouskaya webpage, news, <https://tsikhanouskaya.org/en/news/memorandum-of-understanding-between-european-economic-and-social-committee-eesc-and-belarusian-democratic-forces.html>

2. International Labour Organization, 11 fundamental instruments, <https://www.ilo.org/international-labour-standards/conventions-protocols-and-recommendations>

3. Kyiv Independent, news, <https://kyivindependent.com/after-lukashenkos-latest-sham-election-win-exiled-belarusians-reflect-on-lessons-learned-from-2020s-lost-revolution/>

4. USAID, US agency for international development, <https://www.doi.gov/invasivespecies/usaid>

Organised civil society sets out vision for 2026 Commission work programme

In June, the Economic and Social Committee's (EESC) plenary adopted a [resolution](#)¹ on the EESC's contribution to the 2026 European Commission work programme². The resolution sets out a roadmap for a more resilient, inclusive and sustainable Europe. It was drafted by three rapporteurs, including Krzysztof Stanislaw Balon, Vice-President of the EESC's Civil Society Organisations' Group.



Debate on the Resolution on the EESC's contribution to the 2026 European Commission's work programme © EESC

The resolution calls for a **civil society strategy**, stronger tools to counter disinformation, and greater **youth participation** in policymaking. The resolution also calls for action on poverty reduction, gender equality and care policies, including a **European Care Guarantee**. The EESC is proposing an integrated approach to competitiveness that aligns industrial policy with climate ambition and social progress. Further proposals include a **Just Transition Observatory**, greater investment in lifelong

learning and safeguards for workers in the AI-driven economy. The EESC highlights in its resolution the importance of **food security**, **nature restoration** and clean water for long-term sustainability.

To deliver what it is proposing, the EESC suggests strengthening the EU's financial framework and creating a European Fund for Strategic Investments. It urges the European Commission to turn these proposals into action in its 2026 work programme. Prior to the resolution's adoption, Members engaged in a debate on the priorities for the work programme:

EESC President **Oliver Röpke** said: 'The resolution outlines our shared vision for a more inclusive, sustainable and resilient Europe and urges the European Commission to act on what truly matters to EU citizens. It is also a testament to the strength of participatory democracy in shaping the future of our Union.'

Rapporteur **Krzysztof Stanislaw Balon**, Vice-President of the Civil Society Organisations' Group, underlined the need for swift implementation of the upcoming **European Anti-Poverty Strategy**: 'The EU should implement a real anti-poverty strategy for eradicating extreme poverty, and addressing housing, energy and mobility poverty'. This

strategy needs to recognise the link between persistent poverty and democratic exclusion, by linking poverty eradication with steps to strengthen democracy. With a view to the ongoing enlargement processes, Mr Balon said that these needed to continue in the direction of peace, prosperity and democracy: 'It should prominently involve Ukraine, whose democratic resilience under aggression exemplifies the defence of our common European values.'

Corina Murafa Benga, Member of the Civil Society Organisations' Group, said the Commission should recognise climate ambition as a strategic advantage: 'Europe's global **competitiveness** depends on accelerating the **green transition**, not diluting it'. The work programme should accelerate key programmes such as the Net Zero Industry Act³, Horizon Europe⁴ and the European Competitiveness Fund⁵. With a view to alleviating energy poverty and securing a sustainable and just energy transition: 'A European Just Transition Observatory could shed light on regions where the transition is ineffective or not working, or where the national monitoring frameworks for the just transition either do not exist or are completely ineffective.'

Elena-Alexandra Calistru, Member of

1. European Commission, Roadmap for Women's Rights, <https://europa.eu/!FgwFK3>
2. World Economic Forum, Global Gender Gap Report 2025, <https://www.weforum.org/publications/global-gender-gap-report-2025/digest/>
3. United Nations Women, Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action, <https://www.unwomen.org/en/digital-library/publications/2015/01/beijing-declaration>
4. EESC opinion SOC/839, <https://europa.eu/!BgWxKP>
5. EESC, Ad hoc Group on Equality, <https://europa.eu/!FbFKG4>

WHAT IS EESC OPINION NAT/989 ALL ABOUT?

An interview with Joe Healy, one of the rapporteurs for the European Economic and Social Committee's (EESC) opinion [NAT/939](#) on *Ensuring sustainable food production and a fair income for European farmers in the face of market, environmental and climate challenges*¹

The opinion was prepared at the request of the Polish Presidency of the Council of the EU and adopted at the EESC February plenary session in 2025.



Joe Healy © EESC

Joe HEALY (IE)
Member, Civil Society
Organisations' Group
Former President, Irish
Farmers' Association
(IFA)
Chairman, Agri-Food
Regulator²

What are the three main findings of this opinion?

Within the framework of the Common Agricultural Policy (CAP)³, there is a need to develop and strengthen instruments and tools that insure farmers against market and climate-related volatility. These include private and public insurance schemes, income stabilisation measures, and risk management tools.

Securing farmers' incomes must involve strengthening their bargaining position in the food chain and guarding against unfair trading practices. It is critical that farmers receive a fair share of the final consumer price, with selling below the cost of production being an ongoing issue.

Ensuring sustainable food production and a fair income for farmers requires a **well-funded CAP – 0.5% of EU GDP** – that is both flexible and robust enough to address ongoing market and climate challenges. Without this, the EU's goal of strategic autonomy in food will be unattainable.

What are the main recommendations of the opinion?

The opinion calls for a mix of short- and long-term tools to support farmers' incomes in times of crisis. These include insurance schemes against climate-related and environmental

risks using both public and private models, insurance against market tensions, improved risk and crisis management tools in the CAP, and an enhanced crisis reserve.

It is recommended to boost farmers' investment capacity – particularly for young farmers – by developing **non-bureaucratic financial instruments**, such as zero-interest loans and set-up loans.

The opinion proposes that the **Directive on Unfair Trading Practices (UTPs)**⁴ be extended to prohibit below-cost selling by purchasers. It also calls for a **new policy framework** to allow farmers to collectively negotiate prices, along with greater support for cooperatives and producer organisations.

In addition, it recommends that the CAP be refined to better **target direct payments** to active farmers. It should also ensure that **carbon-efficient food production systems and regions are promoted and supported**, and that these are properly incentivised through CAP measures.

Finally, it **strongly recommends equivalence of standards in all trade agreements**. The EU must not accept food imports produced to lower standards than those required of EU farmers, so as to avoid environmental and carbon leakage and protect the competitiveness of EU agriculture.

Following the adoption of this opinion, what have you done to promote it?

At **EESC level**, the opinion received considerable attention, particularly given its alignment with NAT/935 (Fostering sustainable and resilient food systems at times of growing crises)⁵. It was debated across the three groupings, within the EESC's NAT section⁶ and

at plenary. The three rapporteurs engaged in multiple meetings with Members on amendments.

At the **June Civil Society Organisations' Group meeting**, I was put forward to act as rapporteur for an upcoming opinion on the **CAP post-2027**. We have advanced the recommendations in internal discussions and hope to influence the future direction of CAP reform in line with NAT/939⁷.

At a **broader EU level**, the three rapporteurs have promoted the opinion's recommendations with MEPs, members of the EP's Agricultural Committee, COPA-COGECA, and a number of farmers associations. We continue to press for stronger farmer protections in future CAP proposals and trade negotiations.

At a **national level in Ireland**, through my work as Chair of the Board of the Agri-Food Regulator, I have consistently advocated for enhanced transparency and fairness in the food chain, especially to strengthen the bargaining power of farmers. I have also raised awareness of the opinion in relevant domestic forums, highlighting its relevance for Ireland's agri-food sector. I have also spoken to senior people in the Irish Farmers' Association, the Minister for Agriculture and the Marine and his junior ministers, and Department of Agriculture officials about the main recommendations of the opinion.

Read the EESC opinion on *Ensuring sustainable food production and a fair income for European farmers in the face of market, environmental and climate challenges* at: <https://www.eesc.europa.eu/en/our-work/opinions-information-reports/opinions/ensuring-sustainable-food-production-and-fair-income-european-farmers-face-market-environmental-and-climate-challenges>

1. EESC, opinion NAT/939, <https://europa.eu/!xx8JJK>
2. Irish Agri-Food Regulator, independent statutory body established under the Agricultural and Food Supply Chain Act 2023, <https://www.agrifoodregulator.ie/>
3. European Commission, Common Agricultural Policy, <https://europa.eu/!DbMVq9>
4. European Commission, Directive on unfair trading practices, <https://europa.eu/!mfDwFM>
5. EESC, opinion NAT/935, <https://europa.eu/!DbMVq9>
6. EESC, Section for Agriculture, Rural Development and the Environment, <https://europa.eu/!ckKd8R>
7. EESC, NAT/939 Ensuring sustainable food production and a fair income for European farmers in the face of market, environmental and climate challenges, <https://europa.eu/!xx8JJK>

OVERVIEW OF RECENT WORK

The last EESC plenary session took place on 18 and 19 June 2025. The EESC plenary adopted 17 opinions and two resolutions of which 10 were drafted by Members of the Civil Society Organisations' Group. A list of the recent work can be found below:

Krzysztof BALON (PL), rapporteur, [Resolution¹](#) on European Economic and Social Committee's contribution to the 2026 European Commission's work programme

Alain COHEUR (BE), rapporteur, [CCMI/244²](#), Cybersecurity of hospitals action plan.

Joël DESTOM (FR), rapporteur, [ECO/680³](#), Additional assistance to outermost regions.

Sif HOLST (DK), rapporteur, [SOC/839⁴](#), A Roadmap for Women's Rights, EESC resolution Supporting the Declaration of Principles for a Gender-Equal Society.

Zsolt KÜKEDI (HU), rapporteur, [TEN/847⁵](#), Towards a balanced European energy system (own-initiative opinion).

Lidija PAVIĆ-ROGOŠIĆ (HR), rapporteur, [TEN/849⁶](#), Planning sustainable urban mobility in the EU (own-initiative opinion).

Krzysztof PATER (PL), co-rapporteur, [REX/589⁷](#), The situation of the civil society organisations in the ASEAN countries (information report).

Stoyan TCHOUKANOV (BG), rapporteur, [NAT/948⁸](#), Regenerative agriculture as a target towards sustainable agriculture and food production, supporting climate and biodiversity objectives (own-initiative opinion).

Ioannis VARDAKASTANIS (EL), rapporteur, [SOC/830⁹](#), The future of the EU Strategy on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities post-2025 (own-initiative opinion).

Anastasis YIAPANIS (CY), co-rapporteur, [REX/596¹⁰](#), Fragmentation of supply chains and impact on the cost of living (own-initiative opinion).

The **complete texts** of all EESC opinions are available in various language versions on the Committee's [website¹¹](#)

The **next EESC plenary session** will take place on **17 and 18 September 2025**. For more information on the upcoming plenary session please visit our [website¹²](#).

A list including all **new work appointments** of Civil Society Organisations' Group Members is available on the Committee's [website¹³](#).

1. EESC, resolution, <https://europa.eu/ICrkcVH>

2. EESC, CCMI/244, <https://europa.eu/Ig9fCP7>

3. EESC, ECO/680, <https://europa.eu/IYvfjRR>

4. EESC, SOC/839, <https://europa.eu/I8gWxKP>

5. EESC, TEN/847, <https://europa.eu/I7QrFk3>

6. EESC, TEN/849, <https://europa.eu/IQ7dYJM>

7. EESC, REX/589, <https://europa.eu/IgFvKNv>

8. EESC, NAT/948, <https://europa.eu/I8CpvGc>

9. EESC, SOC/830, <https://europa.eu/I6KQ8Tn>

10. EESC, REX/596, <https://europa.eu/I4H4vDm>

11. EESC opinions, <https://europa.eu/IwF86wY>

12. EESC plenary sessions, <https://europa.eu/I0g84qG>

13. EESC, New work appointments, <https://europa.eu/Irxt6F9>

UPCOMING EVENTS

04/09/2025 – European Round Table - The role of EU policy in shaping inclusive labour markets co-hosted by PATHS2INCLUDE research project and the EESC's Civil Society Organisations' Group

10/09/2025 – Extraordinary meeting of the Civil Society Organisations' Group

11-12/09/2025 – Meeting of the EESC Farmers' Category



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