



European Economic  
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# Civil Society Organisations' Bulletin



**PROTECTING THE MOST  
VULNERABLE IN EUROPEAN SOCIETIES**

# FOREWORD

## Future thinking

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Séamus Boland © EESC

With a new European Parliament already elected and the process of appointing new European Commissioners well underway, there is a sense that the Union is entering into a new future. Much analysis is being done based on who the

new Commissioners are and even more importantly their various objectives. Already, subjects such as intergenerational solidarity and the United Nations' [Summit of the Future](#)<sup>1</sup> are raising questions that will form the basis of policy for the rest of this century.

Our recent conference on the topic of [Promoting intergenerational solidarity in the EU](#)<sup>2</sup> raised a number of issues that are very much linked to the topic of this bulletin. These issues will stay with us in the foreseeable future. They include the predicted huge growth of our older population and a potential decline in the younger population. The challenges are obvious in terms of healthcare, short- and long-term care and housing. There is also the challenge of ensuring that an older population can add social and economic value to our societies. For our youth – whose shoulders will have to carry the potential of rising taxation and the management of a society where labour shortages may become more prevalent – it also means that all our health, educational and social institutions require a complete overhaul of the way all governments manage their medium- to long-term planning.

In the recently adopted [opinion](#)<sup>3</sup> on the topic by rapporteur Krzysztof Balon, the EESC has called on the European Commission to publish a Green Paper on Intergenerational Solidarity. This is an absolute must, as well as the adoption of a [European Strategy for Older Persons](#)<sup>4</sup>. Here, the EU needs to show strong leadership, similar to that demonstrated during the COVID-19 crisis, when vaccines were distributed in equal measure to all parts of the European Union. While recognising that a Commissioner will have responsibility for this area in the future, participants of our conference expressed disappointment that the topic of intergenerational solidarity has not been a priority for the European Commission to date. Failing to prioritise it means that, in less than ten years, countries' ability to support meaningful pensions, comprehensive care packages and initiatives to involve all generations in growing the economy will decline to the point of a major economic and social crisis. We all need to act with urgency.

At the end of September, I had the pleasure of speaking at the [Science Summit 2024](#)<sup>5</sup>, which coincided with the 79th General Assembly of the United Nations and its Summit of the Future held in New York. The subject matter related to driving scientific leadership across the African continent. The clear message coming from this event was to call for much greater synergies between the EU and African leaders, enabling the creation of strong scientific partnerships, especially in the field of health, health technology, rare diseases and, of course, broader economic cooperation.

**Séamus Boland**

1. United Nations, Summit of the Future, <https://www.un.org/en/summit-of-the-future>

2. EESC, conference, <https://europa.eu/!QjvQp9>

3. EESC, opinion SOC/800, <https://europa.eu/!WYJDj>

4. EESC, opinion SOC/757, <https://europa.eu/!JBmbQw>

5. Science Summit 2024, <https://sciencesummitunga.com/>

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# PROTECTING THE MOST VULNERABLE IN EUROPEAN SOCIETIES

## Disability rights and inclusion: leaving no one behind



Sif Holst © EESC

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Dovilė Juodkaitė © EESC

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All of the EU Member States, and the EU itself, are signatories to the [Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities](#)<sup>1</sup>, and have therefore reaffirmed the need for persons with disabilities to be guaranteed the full enjoyment of their rights without discrimination.

And yet, this is still an issue at all levels, from protecting the parenthood of parents with disabilities so that they can raise their children with the support needed, to protecting children with disabilities and ensuring that they can be included in society, to protecting older people with disabilities. We see issues when it comes to getting equal access to education and getting quality education, accessing the labour market, accessing social services, and when it comes to healthcare.

Too often our infrastructure, our buildings, our transport systems, and our IT solutions exclude people with disabilities in everyday life, as well

as in emergency situations, despite the duty that governments, state authorities, private businesses and individuals have to respect the rights of everyone.

### Structural and systemic discrimination

Persons with disabilities may be left behind just because of the existing structural and systemic discrimination. For instance, failing to provide and/or make accessible general social support services, such as social housing, may make it difficult for persons with disabilities to be supported to live in the community; not providing specific social services, such as personal assistance, contributes to diverting people into existing segregated systems of social care institutions.

Taking away legal status and the possibility to act on one's own behalf is another systemic form of discrimination, hindering the social inclusion of persons with disabilities. Legal capacity is a fundamental human right, enabling individuals to make decisions and exercise control over their own lives. Many persons with disabilities continue to face

significant barriers in exercising their legal capacity.

### An intersectional approach

When we protect the rights of the most vulnerable in Europe, we do not only have to pay attention to individual groups, for example women, people with disabilities, the elderly, migrants, and so on, but rather, we need to take an intersectional approach.

A woman with a disability will face different challenges than a woman without a disability or a man with a disability. If, for example, she has migrant status, it will be an even more complex situation, with an even greater need of protection.

Yet, the President of the European Commission is stepping away from structurally safeguarding equality, including protecting persons with disabilities from unequal treatment and discrimination, while downgrading the equality portfolio compared to the previous mandate. Equality will not be the responsibility of one of the European Commission's Vice-Presidents anymore. As well as advancing

anti-discrimination legislation beyond the area of employment, a cross-cutting equal treatment directive needs to be adopted, which would prohibit disability-based, and multiple and intersectional forms of discrimination.



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1. United Nations, Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, <https://www.ohchr.org/en/instruments-mechanisms/instruments/convention-rights-persons-disabilities>

## Prefabricated housing for increasing societal resilience to forced migration



Baiba Miltoviča © EESC

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The number of migrants has been increasing in recent years. This trend will most likely be intensified in the future. Some predictions forecast a dramatic increase in migration in the upcoming decades. This is mostly due to the expected climate changes, wars and human conflicts that will affect the globe. Owing to climate change, it is anticipated that the number of forced migrants will considerably increase. Therefore, strategic planning is necessary in many aspects in order to increase resilience of European communities to migration.

Housing a large number of displaced people is a huge challenge regardless of whether they are displaced internally or across state borders. Over the last four years, the EESC [TEN Section](#)<sup>1</sup> has adopted a number of opinions related to housing: [Social Housing in the EU - decent, sustainable and affordable](#)<sup>2</sup>; the Swedish Presidency exploratory opinion [Wooden construction for CO<sub>2</sub> reduction in the building sector](#)<sup>3</sup>; [Revision of the Energy Performance of Buildings Directive](#)<sup>4</sup>; [A Renovation Wave for Europe](#)<sup>5</sup>; and [Universal access to housing that is decent, sustainable and affordable over the long term](#)<sup>6</sup>.



The recent 11th Baltic Housing Conference<sup>7</sup> organised by various stakeholders (Committee of the Regions, Housing Europe and the Estonian Union of Co-operative Housing Associations) highlighted the benefits of using prefabricated buildings for housing units intended for displaced persons.

In the Kharkiv region in Ukraine, almost 10 000 residential buildings have been damaged or completely destroyed as a result of Russian aggression. In 2024, city leaders confirmed that the issue of housing restoration is a priority for Kharkiv. There are plans to reconstruct about 160 buildings in total – to restore damaged structures, repair facades and roofs and modernise insulation, etc. In Mykolaiv, 1 100 residential buildings have been damaged

in the war, and the restoration of housing is a priority there as well.

Prefabricated buildings have a number of features that make them suited to Ukraine's needs; for example, its need to implement new technologies when reconstructing houses or building new houses. There is evidence that, in several significant ways, the characteristics of



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prefabricated buildings make them suitable for use in housing displaced persons.

1. EESC, Section for Transport, Energy, Infrastructure and the Information Society, <https://europa.eu/!kn94kX>
2. EESC opinion TEN/841, Social Housing in the EU - decent, sustainable and affordable, <https://europa.eu/!CQfRKK>
3. EESC opinion TEN/794, Wooden construction for CO2 reduction in the building sector, <https://europa.eu/!TBmjmi>
4. EESC opinion TEN/763, Revision of the Energy Performance of Buildings Directive, <https://europa.eu/!hPHhWk>
5. EESC opinion TEN/723, A Renovation Wave for Europe, <https://europa.eu/!Fp76qG>
6. EESC opinion TEN/707, Universal access to housing that is decent, sustainable and affordable over the long term, <https://europa.eu/!Wu96jQ>
7. Estonian Union of Co-operative Housing Associations (EKYL), 11th Baltic Housing Conference, <https://www.ekyl.ee/en/bhc2024>

## Fight poverty, not the poor



Carlos Susías © EAPN Spain

### Carlos SUSÍAS RODADO

President, EAPN EU  
and EAPN-ES

The protection of the most vulnerable has been at the core of the European Anti-Poverty Network's (EAPN<sup>1</sup>) existence and action since it was set up over 30 years ago.

In recent years, the EAPN network, its national and European members and allies, altogether with people experiencing poverty, have been calling for effective progress for adequate income (wages and minimum income), but also for European strategies for care, disability, gender equality, for children and young people. Moreover, initiatives to protect the most vulnerable from climate poverty have also been a core demand. These are just a few examples, among many other relevant initiatives, which enable the principles enshrined in the [European Pillar of Social Rights](#)<sup>2</sup>, because the Europe we want is a Europe of rights, a humanist Europe, where people are at the centre of all policies.

However, despite multiple strategies, initiatives, and actions at European, national and local levels, we are still far from the European targets: **in 2023, 94.6 million people** (including almost 20 million people under the age of 18) **were at risk of poverty or social exclusion in the EU**. Poverty and social exclusion shape the lives of one in five Europeans, which is not compatible with the vision of a Europe of rights, fairness and solidarity. In the Member States, the problems persist: high cost of living, poor-quality employment, affordable and adequate housing, and essential services which not everyone can access, just to name just a few barriers that trap many of us in poverty. For millions of people in Europe, it is still a struggle to have their rights respected, while a minority continues to accumulate wealth.

The multidimensional nature of poverty and the challenges of the demographic, green and digital transitions require that we do more, and with greater coordination. That is why we will continue to call for **all European and national policies to be poverty-proofed**. That is why we want to ensure coordinated and people-centred approach, which not only addresses the



Little girl in the Lamp Parade, International Day For the Eradication of Poverty, Brussels, 17 Oct 2010 © Rebecca Lee (EAPN)

fight against poverty and social exclusion but also tackles its structural issues. That is why we will continue to fight discrimination, especially aporophobia – “rejection of the poor” –: to raise awareness and to amplify the views and voices of the most vulnerable groups. We want to believe that the recently announced **EU anti-poverty strategy**<sup>3</sup> will provide the opportunity to align social and economic policies which is essential to guarantee inclusion, equality and equity, fiscal justice and the exercise of rights in an Europe which supports everyone.

Find out more about on the EAPN Roadmap towards an EU Anti-Poverty Strategy read here: [Out Now: EAPN Roadmap towards an EU Anti-Poverty Strategy - EAPN](#)<sup>4</sup>

1. European Anti-Poverty Network (EAPN), <https://www.eapn.eu/>
2. European Commission, European Pillar of Social Rights, <https://europa.eu/!MC96Vn>
3. European Commission, Political Guidelines for the next European Commission 2024-2029, page 18, <https://europa.eu/!wywq4P>
4. EAPN Roadmap towards an EU Anti-Poverty Strategy, <https://www.eapn.eu/out-now-eapn-roadmap-towards-an-eu-anti-poverty-strategy/>

# Exposing the magnitude of fundamental rights challenges facing children and older people in the EU



Sirpa Rautio © Vogus

## Sirpa RAUTIO

Director, European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights (FRA)

Questions of equal access, social inclusion and participation in public life of different population groups are at the heart of the work carried out by the EU Agency for Fundamental Rights (FRA<sup>1</sup>). The rights of some of the most vulnerable groups in the EU – children and older people – have been the subject of several FRA reports. Our research sheds light on the extent of the problems, and suggests concrete measures

and best practices that can help tackle the issues.

Poverty deprives 25 million children under 18 in the EU of adequate food, housing, education, access to healthcare and even protection from violence. One [FRA report](#)<sup>2</sup> illustrated the magnitude of the problem that child poverty causes, and our [mapping of child protection systems in the EU](#)<sup>3</sup> offers a much-needed overview of child protection systems across the region and discusses the key developments since 2015.

At the same time, Europe's ageing population is ever-increasing. With more public services going online, older people find themselves at

the risk of exclusion from society. The impact of digitalisation on the fundamental rights of older people was examined in [another FRA report](#)<sup>4</sup>. It looked at how Member States safeguard the rights of older people to access public services that are undergoing digitalisation. It also outlines how Member States can support digital literacy so that older people can fully participate in society.

Beyond children and older people, FRA's reports offer solid evidence on the status of fundamental rights of many other vulnerable population groups. To find out more and use the evidence to support your own work check out FRA's [online data explorer](#)<sup>5</sup> and [publications calendar](#)<sup>6</sup>.

1. European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights (FRA), <https://fra.europa.eu/en>

2. FRA, Combating child poverty: an issue of fundamental rights, <https://europa.eu/!9vXy6V>

3. FRA, Mapping Child Protection Systems in the EU – Update 2023, <https://europa.eu/!gcnBf6>

4. FRA Fundamental rights of older people: ensuring access to public services in digital societies, <https://europa.eu/!3RppN4>

5. FRA, Data and maps, <https://europa.eu/!WRKp4c>

6. FRA, Upcoming products in 2024, <https://europa.eu/!rrR8Wx>

## Europe has a role to play in guaranteeing children a life free from poverty



Kinga Joó © EESC

## Kinga JOÓ (HU)

International Advisor to the president, National Association of Large Families (NOE) President, Social Responsibility Board, National Cooperation Fund (NEA)

In 2023, 24.8% of children under 18 in the EU were at risk of poverty or social exclusion, compared with 20.6% of adults<sup>1</sup>. This unacceptable figure of one in four children across the EU (and even one in three in some Member States) facing some or most of the realities of, for example, not having two pairs of shoes that fit properly, not having regular leisure activities, living in a household with very low work intensity, living in a home that is not adequately heated, or not having an internet connection, requires a coordinated European response.

The **European Child Guarantee**<sup>2</sup>, established in 2021, aims to combat child poverty and social exclusion by guaranteeing access to basic rights and services, particularly on effective and **free access to early childhood education and care, schooling, a healthy daily school meal, and healthcare for children in need**. Children should also be guaranteed effective access to quality nutrition and adequate housing.

According to the [European Child Guarantee Monitor](#)<sup>3</sup>, there has been some improvement. The trends over the last decade can be described as an upward divergence: a decrease in the average share of children in the EU at risk of poverty, and a catching up by some countries that previously had high levels of child poverty; however, disparities between countries and certain social groups remain. The impact of the pandemic, combined with the ongoing cost-of-living crisis, has **worsened inequalities, driving many vulnerable children and families deeper**

**into poverty and social exclusion.**

Tackling child poverty must therefore be at the heart of EU social policy. In light of this, the new European Commission's limited ambition to expand the scope or funding of the European Child Guarantee is concerning.<sup>4</sup> To **break the cycle of intergenerational disadvantage**, comprehensive support for children and their parents must be a priority for all European stakeholders.



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1. European Commission, Eurostat, Children at risk of poverty or social exclusion, <https://europa.eu/!RcNkgj>

2. European Commission, European Child Guarantee, <https://europa.eu/!hK88MU>

3. Eurofund, European Child Guarantee Monitor, <https://europa.eu/!RmI67P>

4. As requested by child rights organisations, including Eurochild, <https://eurochild.org/news/eurochild-calls-for-stronger-commitment-to-childrens-rights-in-the-new-european-commission/>

# Two birds, one stone: let's fight gender inequality and the climate crisis at the same time



Marjolein Quist

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Climate change affects all Europeans, but it won't impact us all equally. Women and girls are disproportionately affected by the impact of the climate crisis. Marginalised women are particularly affected: poor women, women of ethnic minorities and women with disabilities.

So, what does this mean in practice? [Women are 14 times more likely to die](#)<sup>1</sup> in a climate disaster than men. According to United Nations Environment Programme, [80% of people displaced by climate change are women](#)<sup>2</sup>. In the aftermath of extreme weather events like

cyclones and floods, we see a [rise in gender-based and sexual violence](#)<sup>3</sup>. Women – and specifically single mothers – are [more prone to energy poverty](#)<sup>4</sup>. Pregnant women are [more sensitive to heat stress](#)<sup>5</sup>, and overheating may trigger labour. In short, **the same factors that contribute to social disadvantages also increase climate vulnerability.**

At the same time, women are at the forefront of climate action across Europe and across the globe. They mobilise climate movements, push for more ambition and deliver smart and innovative climate solutions. Female entrepreneurs more often prioritise sustainability in their business decisions.

Gender-related policies are increasingly recognising the impact of climate change, nonetheless, **gender issues are almost never referenced in our economic and environmental policies.** There is a lack of equal representation in decision-making, and only a fraction of the available climate



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finances reaches the vital work that women's organisations are doing for climate justice.

In Europe we must ensure that we leave no one behind. Our commitment to fighting climate change must prioritise the people most at risk. Therefore, it is essential to address existing gender inequalities, not only because it is just, but because **we simply cannot afford to dismiss the expertise and capacity of half our population when tackling the greatest challenge of our time.**

1. United Nations Women, Climate Justice: Why women must be included, <https://wrd.unwomen.org/explore/insights/climate-justice-why-women-must-be-included>
2. United Nations, Climate change exacerbates violence against women and girls, <https://www.ohchr.org/en/stories/2022/07/climate-change-exacerbates-violence-against-women-and-girls>
3. Nature briefing newsletter, How climate change could drive an increase in gender-based violence, <https://www.nature.com/articles/d41586-022-01903-9>
4. European Parliament, International Women's Day: the gender aspects of energy poverty, <https://europa.eu/!kpKn8K>
5. Journal of Midwifery and Women's Health, The Impact of Extreme Heat Exposure on Pregnant People and Neonates, <https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/full/10.1111/jmwh.13502>

## Migration and protecting human rights



João Nabais © EESC

**João NABAIS** (PT)

Member, Civil Society Organisations' Group  
Member, Portuguese Association for Consumer Protection (DECO)

According to United Nations figures<sup>1</sup>, there were **117 million displaced people across the globe** by December 2023.

Against this backdrop we must take into account the persistence of factors that force people to leave their countries of origin or habitual residences and seek new lives in geographical areas that are sometimes very far away. These factors include **persecution, armed conflict, generalised violence, organised crime, poverty and a lack of decent work opportunities.**

Unfortunately, many Member States have opted for responses that are essentially focused



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on containing migratory movements through deportation strategies and by militarising borders, which leads to increased migrant transits along dangerous routes and exposes people to multiple rights violations.

International and European legislation imposes an obligation on Member States to ensure the protection of human rights for all individuals under their jurisdiction – including migrants.

Member States have the right to control who enters and stays in their territory, but

they also have an **obligation to ensure that migrants, even those in irregular situations, have access to healthcare, education and justice.**

All migrants must be allowed access to the necessary healthcare in the same way as nationals, and must be subject to the same rules regarding fee exemptions and payments.

Basic education must also be available to all children, regardless of their nationality or situation.

In the field of justice, migrants who are physically abused or injured at work or do not receive their wages must be able to exercise their rights through national courts.

**Migrants currently face huge obstacles in exercising these basic rights.** Member States should therefore recognise and support the fundamental role of non-governmental organisations and trade unions in facilitating access to justice for all migrants, even those in irregular situations.

1. United Nations, Global Trends report, June 2024, <https://www.unhcr.org/global-trends>



# Protecting the most vulnerable in European societies – The fight against homelessness



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Homelessness represents one of the most extreme forms of poverty. Without a home, individuals are not just deprived of shelter; they are cut off from essential services, social support, and opportunities for a stable life. **Housing is a fundamental human right**, and when people are denied access to it, their vulnerability increases dramatically. This includes heightened risks of poor mental and physical health, social exclusion, and lifelong poverty cycles.

Across Europe, homelessness continues to rise at an alarming rate. In our [9th Overview of Housing Exclusion in Europe<sup>2</sup>](#), we estimate that **nearly 1.3 million people are homeless in Europe**. Among that number, **400 000 children are experiencing homelessness**, –living on the streets, in shelters, or in temporary accommodation.

Despite the current negative trend, the homelessness crisis can be reversed. **Homelessness in Europe can become a rare, brief, and non-recurring experience**, but strong political will and decisive action are essential for achieving this goal. The European Union has committed to key initiatives such as the European Platform on Combating Homelessness (EPOCH<sup>3</sup>), which brings together institutions, including the EESC, the Member States, and civil society, to work towards eradicating homelessness by 2030. However, much more is needed. The EU's Anti-Poverty Strategy must make homelessness a priority. We strongly urge the adoption of a Council recommendation on how to end homelessness in Europe as part of the next action plan to deliver on the European Pillar of Social Rights<sup>4</sup>. More and better use of the EU budget should be made to tackle homelessness effectively. Moreover, the EU's affordable housing plan must prioritise low-income households, ensure the production of social housing across Europe, and support tested methodologies to fight homelessness, such as [Housing First<sup>5</sup>](#). It is essential to invest a portion of the EU structural funds specifically in combatting homelessness.

The most vulnerable in our society are not inherently vulnerable; their situation is a result of systemic failures within our



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welfare systems and the deep-rooted social inequalities that persist across the continent. If the welfare state functioned as intended, individual vulnerabilities – such as poverty, disability, belonging to a minority group, unemployment, or family breakdown – would not lead to homelessness. Instead, homelessness must be understood as a failure of public policies. **The European Union has started to play its role in addressing this failure. It should continue and redouble these efforts in the new mandate. Europe can and should act in this field to coordinate and support national, local and regional authorities, as well as stakeholders, in line with subsidiarity. This is exactly what the EESC has called for in its own-initiative opinion on homelessness<sup>6</sup>. FEANTSA could not agree more.**

1. European Federation of National Organisations Working with the Homeless (FEANTSA), <https://www.feantsa.org/en>  
2. FEANTSA, Report: 9th Overview of Housing Exclusion in Europe 2024, <https://www.feantsa.org/en/report/2024/09/19/report-9th-overview-of-housing-exclusion-in-europe-2024?bcParent=27>  
3. European Commission, European platform to combat homelessness is launched, <https://europa.eu/!FF9cjm>  
4. European Commission, European Pillar of Social Rights, <https://europa.eu/!MC96Vn>  
5. Housing First, <https://housingfirsteurope.eu/>  
6. EESC, opinion SOC/768, <https://europa.eu/!GVv7xR>

## REFLECTIONS ON THE FUTURE OF CSOs IN THE EU

### Challenges and opportunities: civil society in a shrinking space



Rainer Hub

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Chairman of the  
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National Network for  
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Germany

The future of European democracy is crucially dependent on the vitality and independence of civil society. **The current situation is far from encouraging.** In several EU countries, the space for freedom of expression, assembly, and political participation has shrunk significantly in recent years.

While **Germany** is considered to be a country where, by international standards, civil society is relatively strong and well protected, there are also worrying trends here. The success of the AfD<sup>2</sup>, sometimes designated a far-right party, has a tangible impact on the lives and work of people involved in promoting democracy and countering right-wing extremism, be it professionally or in a voluntary capacity. This is demonstrated by, among other things, an **online survey** carried out in April/May 2024 as part of the '[BEWARE: Bedrohte Demokratieprojekte wappnen und resilient machen](#)' project ('[BEWARE: arming threatened democratic projects and making them resilient](#)')<sup>3</sup>.



Rainer Hub and Frank Heuberger, BBE Senior Advisor European Policy (from left to right). Democracy and Europe Festival, Berlin, May 2024. © Nino Kavelashvili

The **results**, which were presented on 3 September 2024, show an **alarming**

**picture:** 79 % of respondents report having already experienced threats, sometimes of a criminal nature, of which 57 % in the last year alone. Particularly concerning was the fact that 8 % of respondents had received death threats. Especially in eastern Germany, many respondents report feeling concerned that the growing influence of the AfD could significantly limit their work or even make it impossible. More than 14 % of those active in the East, 18 % in Berlin and 11 % in the West often think about changing jobs. Furthermore, 7 % of those in the East, 6 % in the West and 15 % in Berlin are considering abandoning their commitment to defending democracy and

countering right-wing extremism. However, despite these negative developments, there are also **encouraging trends:** for a large proportion of respondents (71 %), the threats serve to reaffirm their commitment, with 42 % even opting to step up their political activity.

At the National Network for Civil Society (BBE), we believe that **it is crucial that the state not only defend the civic space, but that it actively promote it**, in order to ensure that critical and independent voices are not silenced. We expect the European Parliament to: (1) make a clear public political commitment to dialogue with civil society, backed up by

the establishment of a parliamentary group for cooperation with European civil society networks, and (2) strengthen participatory democracy and civil society participation, in accordance with [Article 11 TEU](#)<sup>4</sup>, and in particular the long overdue ‘civil dialogue’.

The **future of civil society organisations** is shaped by the tensions between increasing challenges and new opportunities. How the EU and its Member States respond to these developments and whether or not they are ready to **vigorously protect and strengthen the civic space** will be decisive.

1. National Network for Civil Society in Germany, <https://www.b-b-e.de/>

2. AfD, Alternative for Germany is a political party in Germany.

3. Wi-rex, BEWARE project, short report, [https://wi-rex.de/wp-content/uploads/2024/09/BEWARE\\_Bedrohung\\_der\\_zivilgesellschaftlichen\\_Demokratiearbeit\\_Kurzbericht\\_20240903.pdf](https://wi-rex.de/wp-content/uploads/2024/09/BEWARE_Bedrohung_der_zivilgesellschaftlichen_Demokratiearbeit_Kurzbericht_20240903.pdf)

4. EUR-Lex, Treaty on European Union, Article 11, <https://europa.eu/!Df6CPn>

## NEWS FROM THE GROUP

### No more age silos, but dialogue with and between all generations

Across a wide range of issues, including employment, pension systems, climate change, health and care services, and political participation, both younger and older generations feel inadequately represented in the current policy responses. This is contributing to growing political disillusionment and jeopardising the cohesion of European societies.

At a conference on [Promoting intergenerational solidarity in the EU](#)<sup>1</sup>, hosted by the Civil Society Organisations’ Group of the European Economic and Social Committee (EESC), representatives from across civil society put forward proposals to counter these developments. They jointly called on the new European Commission – and in particular the Commissioner-designate for Intergenerational Fairness, Glenn Micallef – and on the new European Parliament to break down silos and take into account the interests, needs and rights of all generations equally. People in all age groups, and whether from rural or urban areas, must be equally valued, listened to and connected with, which should be ensured through genuine civil dialogue. Developing long-term strategies, which address the challenges linked to longevity, changing societal models and multiple crises, and which continue way beyond one term of office, is fundamental here.

**Séamus Boland**, President of the Civil Society Organisations’ Group, welcomed the intention of European Commission President Ursula von der Leyen to raise the profile of intergenerational fairness in policy-making through a dedicated portfolio. The European Commission urgently needed to publish a Green Paper on Intergenerational Solidarity, as the EESC recommends in an [opinion](#)<sup>2</sup> that was



Inaugural panel © EESC

adopted in September 2024.

‘Intergenerational solidarity is central to the health of our democracies and a sustainable future for all,’ said Mr Boland. ‘Civil society should represent all generations in decision-making. An open, transparent and regular dialogue with civil society organisations in all policy areas, as our Group also called for in an [open letter](#)<sup>3</sup> to the EU institutions, is key to effective policies and cohesive and resilient communities.’

The conference provided an opportunity not only to discuss the challenges, opportunities and best practices in intergenerational solidarity, but also for an exchange between institutional and civil society actors.

**Marzena Okła-Drewnowicz**, Poland’s Minister for Senior Policy and representative of the upcoming Polish Presidency of the Council of the EU, said in a video message that ‘intergenerational solidarity is not just an answer to the aging society challenge – it is a great opportunity to build a Europe where everyone, regardless of age, has a place’.

**Krzysztof Balon**, Vice-President of the Civil Society Organisations’ Group and

EESC rapporteur, presented the main recommendations of the EESC opinion on the subject. He explained that the EESC is calling on the European Commission to adopt a coordinated, cross-cutting EU approach to intergenerational solidarity that ensures the rights of both younger and older people, and to adopt a recommendation calling on the Member States to take into account the intergenerational aspects in the labour market. The opinion also advocates that intergenerational solidarity be established as one of the objectives of the European Social Fund in the 2027-2034 Multiannual Financial Framework and its implementing regulations. The EESC itself would consider hosting an Intergenerational Solidarity Forum.



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Such a forum could enable an exchange of information and experience in the field at European level, which was welcomed by the participants of the conference. From care farms to support for young caregivers, co-housing and intergenerational events, there are many positive examples of intergenerational solidarity that could inspire EU policy-making.

EU policy in this area must be driven forward by civil society stakeholders, according to **Katarina Ivanković Knežević**, Director for Social Rights and Inclusion at the European Commission. The adequacy of welfare systems, a subject linked to intergenerational solidarity, was crucial for the competitiveness of the EU's economies. The formal care sector and pension literacy needed to be promoted.

However, guest speakers and participants also highlighted the challenges faced by informal caregivers and people in rural areas, especially young farmers. They called for informal care to be recognised and supported. Young people must be given incentives to move to or return to rural areas and to start their own businesses. Access to finance and land were crucial here. The point was also made that volunteers should be given the necessary tools to play their role in the promotion of intergenerational solidarity. A [European Strategy for Older People](#)<sup>4</sup>, as proposed by the EESC, should be adopted. The youth dimension in national policies should be monitored in the European Semester process<sup>5</sup>.

This conference and the EESC opinion on

[Promoting European intergenerational solidarity – towards an EU horizontal approach](#) are the culmination of tireless work on this issue by the EESC's Civil Society Organisations' Group. Over the last few years, the Group has called for a European Strategy for older persons, championed the rights of young people and care workers, and focused attention on the need for sustainable long-term care services and health systems. Affordable and sustainable housing has also been the focus of a recent study commissioned by the Group. The study will be presented at the Group's next conference on *Protecting Europe's most vulnerable through sustainable and affordable housing*, taking place on 21 November at the EESC in Brussels.

1. EESC, conference, <https://europa.eu/IQjvQp9>

2. EESC, opinion SOC/800, <https://europa.eu/IWYJDJj>

3. EESC, Civil Society Organisations' Group, open letter, <https://europa.eu/!8bMbpK>

4. EESC, opinion SOC/757, <https://europa.eu/!JBmbQw>

5. The European Semester is the European Union's framework for the coordination and surveillance of economic and social policies.

## Social Economy Category discusses state aid and social dialogue

On 4 October, the Social Economy Category<sup>1</sup> held its second meeting of the year. It was chaired by co-spokespersons **Justyna Ochędzan** and **Giuseppe Guerini**. Two debates were held during the meeting, including several guest speakers.

First, the links between state aid and the social economy were discussed, in connection with the EESC opinion INT/1071 on [Social economy entities/State aid rules](#)<sup>2</sup>. **Bernhard von Wendland**, Policy Officer at European Commission's Directorate-General Competition, presented the subject, explaining the Commission's stance on state aid as well as the existing instruments available to Member States. **Hannah Adzakpa**, from Caritas Germany, as well as **Mathias Maucher**, from Social Services Europe, pointed out the issues

regarding the application of EU directives in the Member States. The need for clarification of existing regulations was brought up, as was the specific nature of social economy organisations with regard to competitiveness.

Then **Ms Ochędzan** listed the priorities of the upcoming Polish Presidency of the Council of the EU in the field of the social economy. **Małgorzata Saracyn**, from the Social Economy Department at the Ministry of Family, Employment and Social Affairs of Poland, took the floor. She stated that the Polish Presidency would focus on the social consequences of digitalisation in the labour market, a Europe of equality, and the prospects for the social economy.

Last but not least, there was a debate on the role of the social economy in the new

European Sectoral Social Dialogue Committee for Social Services<sup>3</sup>, in which **Sylvain Renouvel**, Director of the Federation of European Social Employers, and **Mathieu de Poorter**, President of the European Council of Associations of General Interest, took the floor. They stressed the importance of the dialogue committee for social services at European level, given the diversity of systems across Europe. Key points were profile and structure, as well as the framework for working conditions in the social services sector.



© EESC Social Economy Category

1. EESC, Social Economy Category, <https://europa.eu/!ht47UK>

2. Ongoing EESC opinion INT/1071, to be adopted in January 2025, <https://europa.eu/!4BkjQ9>

3. European Commission, European Sectoral Social Dialogue Committee for Social Services, <https://europa.eu/!NNvPd4>

## MEMBERS IN THE SPOTLIGHT

### Meet our new Member Marjolein Quist



Marjolein Quist © WO=MEN Dutch Gender Platform

#### **Marjolein QUIST** (NL)

Member, Civil Society Organisations' Group  
Programme manager for Gender and Sustainable Economy, WO=MEN Dutch Gender Platform

On 13 June 2024, the Council of the European Union appointed Marjolein Quist as Member of the EESC, for the remainder of the 2020-2025 term.

Ms Quist has an academic background in Conflict Studies and Human Rights. In 2016, Ms Quist worked for her master's degree as a researcher at Alef - Act for Human Rights in Lebanon. Then, from 2017-2021, Ms Quist was senior project leader international at the Dutch

National Youth Council, where she coordinated the youth advocacy programme aimed at meaningful youth participation at both the EU and various UN institutions. From 2021-2023, she served at the Dutch National Youth Council as programme manager for Participation and Democracy and Management Team member. Since 2023 to the present, Ms Quist has worked as programme manager Gender and Sustainable Economy at WO=MEN Dutch Gender Platform.

## Mission statement:

Gender equality is not only something that is just, it is also a prerequisite for safe, prosperous societies and robust economies. All around the world, women and girls are fighting for equal rights. They are standing up for their right to be educated and to vote, for equal pay and against violence. They often do this at great personal risk. Europe should ensure protection,

support and the participation of women's rights organisations and women human rights defenders. We need to systematically check the impact of all our European policies - both internal and foreign - on gender equality.

As programme manager at the *WO=MEN Dutch Gender Platform*, I coordinate efforts on Gender and the Sustainable Economy and head up our working group on the subject,

made up of experts from various development organisations, women's rights organisations and trade unions. The focus of the group's work lies at the intersection of gender equality, international economic and trade policy, climate policy and financing, and corporate social accountability. At the EESC, I aim to bring a gender perspective to its opinions, building on the expertise of this network.

## New study on Romanian NGOs published by the Civil Society Development Foundation



**Ionuț SIBIAN (RO)**  
Member, Civil Society Organisations' Group  
Executive Director, Civil Society Development Foundation (FDSC)

*Ionuț Sibian © EESC*

The Civil Society Development

Foundation<sup>1</sup>, which I currently direct, recently released the third edition of the comprehensive national research report "Romania 2024: The Non-Governmental Sector. Profile, Trends, Challenges"<sup>2</sup>.

Unique in its endeavour at national level, the report analyses the sector's dynamics, including its economic contribution and societal impact, the particular challenges of day-to-day operation (internal organisation, use of volunteers, staff recruitment and retention) and the relationship between Non-Governmental Organisations (NGOs) and society at large (civic-mindedness, involvement in public policy processes, impact considerations).

Snapshot view of key figures about Romanian NGOs:

- approximately **127,000 NGOs** are **registered**, averaging 6.7 entities per 1,000 inhabitants, compared to the EU average of 9.4
- the NGO sector's revenues reached **1.51% of Romania's GDP in 2022**, totalling around 21 billion lei (equiv. 4.2 billion Euro)
- the sector employs approximately **127,000 individuals**, whilst roughly 75% of the NGOs have no employees
- **Trust in NGOs remains stable at 50%**, with younger and more educated demographics showing higher levels of trust

The report confirms that the sector matured and professionalised over the years, with a relative constant number of NGOs registering every year, with increased support from citizens and companies and with people wanting to be part of an NGO (70% of the employees see themselves continuing their careers in the sector). However, serious challenges affect the sector in terms of inadequate funding, resource scarcity, and high burnout rates among employees and volunteers.

Methodologically, the analyses are built on official administrative data, complemented with information collected directly through three distinct surveys among the general



*FDSC 'The Non-Governmental Sector. Profile, Trends, Challenges' report*

population, NGOs leaders and respectively NGOs' members, employees and volunteers.

In addition to an in-depth analysis of the current state of the NGO sector in Romania, the report offers valuable insights for stakeholders interested in the development of civil society and may feed into the European comparative assessments as well as discussions related to the sector's value and the importance of its work being recognised.

1. Civil Society Development Foundation (FDSC), founded in 1994. This year FDSC celebrates 30 years of activity in support of the non-governmental sector in Romania, <https://www.fdsc.ro/>  
2. FDSC, 'The Non-Governmental Sector. Profile, Trends, Challenges' report, [https://www.fdsc.ro/wp-content/uploads/2024/06/Romania-2024\\_EN.pdf](https://www.fdsc.ro/wp-content/uploads/2024/06/Romania-2024_EN.pdf)

## Katrīna Leitāne at the Summit of the Future



**Katrīna LEITĀNE (LV)**  
Member, Civil Society Organisations' Group  
President, EESC Youth Group  
Advocacy expert,  
National Youth Council of Latvia

*Katrīna Leitāne © EESC*

The UN Summit of the Future<sup>1</sup> (22-23 September 2024) held the promise of reinvigorating the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development<sup>2</sup>, reaffirming commitments, and accelerating implementation efforts. One of the most anticipated outcomes was the adoption of 'The Pact for the Future'<sup>3</sup>.



*© United Nations*

In support of the summit, 'Action Days' were convened by the secretary-general of the United Nations<sup>4</sup> on 20 and 21 September 2024 at the UN Headquarters in New York, providing an opportunity for broader engagement and

inclusion by bringing together representatives from Member States, civil society, the private sector, academia, local and regional authorities, and youth organisations, among others.

During the Action Days, the [Sustainable Development Solutions Network](#)<sup>5</sup> hosted a high-level pre-Summit of the Future event at Columbia University to inform the outcomes of the summit as part of its annual International Conference on Sustainable Development. The event featured rich discussions and esteemed keynote speakers and panels on the five core topics of the Summit of the Future, namely: sustainable development and sustainable

development goal (SDG) financing; peace and security; governance of cutting-edge science, technology, and innovation; youth and future generations; and the future of multilateralism and global governance. I would like to emphasise the very interesting panel discussion on ‘Empowering Youth and Future Generations Through Transformative Education’, concluding that we cannot educate 21<sup>st</sup> century young people with last century’s

methods and expect them to be prepared for the next century. The question therefore remains how to make education equitable and multicultural.

The [Global People’s Assembly](#)<sup>6</sup> was held from 22-24 September 2024. It was co-organised by more than 40 civil society organisations and forms part of a bottom-up approach that seeks to address issues of global concern.

1. United Nations, Summit of the Future, New York, 2024; <https://www.un.org/en/summit-of-the-future>.
2. United Nations, 2030 Agenda, <https://sdgs.un.org/2030agenda>.
3. United Nations, The Pact for the Future, <https://www.un.org/en/summit-of-the-future/pact-for-the-future>
4. United Nations Secretary-General, António Guterres, <https://www.un.org/sg/en>.
5. United Nations, Sustainable Development Solutions Network, <https://www.unsdsn.org/>.
6. Global People’s Assembly 2024, <https://www.peoplesassembly.global/en/>

## HIGHLIGHTS FROM THE LAST PLENARY SESSION

### EESC advocates the enhanced inclusion of persons with disabilities in the labour market

During its September plenary session, the EESC debated on the need to strengthen the real integration of people with changed working capacity in the open labour market, linked to the adoption of the opinion [‘Promoting the social integration of persons with disabilities and persons with changed working capacity’](#).<sup>1</sup> Ádám Kósa, State Secretary for Disability Policy at the Hungary’s Ministry of the Interior, took part in the debate.



Pietro Vittorio Barbieri © EESC

Vice-President of the EESC Civil Society Organisations’ Group, rapporteur **Pietro Vittorio Barbieri**, emphasised the need to avoid solutions such as ‘sheltered’ employment when it comes to the professional integration of persons with disabilities. It is urgent to transcend this model of work and make a true paradigm shift in order to stop seeing people with disabilities as charity cases.

The EESC sees **sheltered employment**<sup>2</sup> as a form of segregation: **a status that denies disabled persons genuine entry into the open labour market**, making it impossible for them to directly and fully contribute to



Dovilė Juodkaitė © EESC

society as fully-fledged EU citizens.

President of the Lithuanian Disability Forum, board member of the European Disability Forum and member of the Civil Society

Organisations’ Group, **Dovilė Juodkaitė**, highlighted the importance of the term ‘social inclusion’ in this debate, since society should be adapted to better integrate persons with disabilities, rather than seeing them take sole responsibility for their integration into the open labour market. Ms Juodkaitė also spoke about some of the key topics and measures covered in the opinion, including the potential creation of a joint fund for reasonable accommodation.

Other Members from the Civil Society Organisations’ Group also spoke during the debate.

**Baiba Miltoviča** linked the problem of labour exclusion to other social exclusion problems such as energy poverty, as people with disabilities are among the ones who struggle the most when it comes to having enough income to spend on housing, heating and proper accommodation for their special needs.



Ágnes Cser © EESC

**Ágnes Cser** stressed that it is our common responsibility to help those with changed working capacity and include them in the open labour market.

Let’s not forget that not all persons with changed working capacity are disabled, but all disabled people are persons with changed working capacity. Immediate attention, coordinated regulation, public and private financing are needed to stop their exclusion from the labour market.



Dominique Gillot © EESC

**Dominique Gillot** reinforced the idea that people with disabilities are valuable in the work space and that they should be given the conditions to contribute to society as a full-capacity

persons. In the Paralympic Games, the athletes performed extremely well. This should also be possible for other persons with disabilities on a daily basis, by providing them the conditions to have dignified work and income.

1. EESC opinion, SOC/807, <https://europa.eu/RmjtnQ>.

2. Sheltered employment refers to segregated programmes designed to help individuals with disabilities who are not able to work in a competitive employment setting. Usually, sheltered employment programs are run by private, not-for-profit organizations that receive funding to run those programmes.



# EESC adopts post-elections resolution for EU legislative term 2024-2029

The European Economic and Social Committee (EESC) has adopted a resolution tracking democratic progress in the European Union and calling for a stronger EU with a new six-fold concept of security. This includes taking steps to ensure dialogue with and the participation of organised civil society, the social partners and the general public.

Given the current multi-crisis, the new European Parliament and Commission should harness the EESC's diversity of representation to strengthen the EU. The new legislative term should aim to reinforce the EU's international position, deal with the problems in its institutional architecture, provide a solid anchor for Europe's common values, and lead the economy into a sustainable future built around an advanced, inclusive social model – something that is vital for progress, unity and competitiveness.

These are – in a nutshell – the key requests put forward by the Committee in its resolution on [Charting the EU's democratic progress: a resolution for the next legislative mandate](#)<sup>1</sup>. The resolution was drafted by three rapporteurs and adopted during the Committee's plenary session on 18 September after a debate with representatives of civil society organisations.

**Brikena Xhomaqi** (Co-chair of the EESC Liaison Group and President of the Ad Hoc Group on the EESC resolution), **Véronique Willems** (SMEUnited), **Claes-Mikael Stahl** (European Trade Union Confederation), **Jessica Machacova** (European Anti-Poverty Network) and **Lotte Prins** (Dutch National Youth Council) took part in this debate.

Several members of the EESC's Civil Society Organisations' Group took the floor.



Ioannis Vardakastanis © EESC

**Ioannis Vardakastanis**, rapporteur for the Civil Society Organisations' Group and president of the EESC's ECO section<sup>2</sup>, highlighted the need to address key social issues in the new legislative term to safeguard the European social model. The resolution advocated for a European Health Union that guarantees affordable, high quality healthcare and coordinated efforts to address unequal access to healthcare. Calling for a structured and meaningful social and civic dialogue, Mr Vardakastanis said that 'We need greater protection for civic spaces and stronger support for civil society in order to deliver democratic processes that are transparent, participatory and inclusive.'



Séamus Boland © EESC

**Séamus Boland**, president of the Civil Society Organisations' Group, spoke about the extremely high levels of poverty in the EU and their impact on EU democracies. 'We will not be able to quieten the angry political disconnect in our societies unless we involve people more,' he stressed, before calling for efforts to completely eradicate poverty in the EU and include a European Strategy for Older Persons among the priorities for the legislative term.



Andris Gobiņš © EESC

**Andris Gobiņš** noted that each crisis in the EU had led to transformation, change and improvements and was certain that the current crisis, with its hallmarks of war and attacks on democracy and the rule of law, would also lead to positive improvements and change. The EESC resolution, created with civil society, would be a roadmap for this change.



Baiba Miltoviča © EESC

**Baiba Miltoviča**, president of the EESC's TEN section<sup>3</sup>, said that it was important to bolster civil defence. 'We need to promote a comprehensive understanding of civil defence and the EU should create a platform for a strategic dialogue between multiple segments of politics, administration, industry and civil society organisations.'

The EESC resolution is the outcome of the first ever [Civil Society Week](#)<sup>4</sup>, held by the EESC in March 2024 in order to assemble the views of Europeans of all ages, the social partners and civil society organisations. The resolution includes a comprehensive set of actionable steps to strengthen and safeguard democratic principles during the next EU mandate. For more information about the resolution, please check the EESC [website](#)<sup>5</sup> or [listen](#)<sup>6</sup> to the plenary debate.

1. EESC, resolution, <https://europa.eu/!HjYkH8>

2. Section for Economic and Monetary Union and Economic and Social Cohesion (ECO)

3. Section for Transport, Energy, Infrastructure and the Information Society (TEN)

4. EESC, Civil Society Week 2024, <https://www.eesc.europa.eu/en/CivSocWeek2024>

5. EESC, resolution, <https://europa.eu/!HjYkH8>

6. EESC, October plenary session, recording, <https://europa.eu/!4WdNpF>

## Stronger action on rule of law and fundamental rights is imperative

The first debate at the EESC plenary session on 19 September centred on safe-guarding the rule of law and fundamental rights in the EU. As European Commission President Ursula von der Leyen declared in July in her [statement to the European Parliament](#)<sup>1</sup>, this is a priority for the new Commission. Since 2014, the European Commission has been issuing an annual rule of law report to evaluate the state of the rule of law across the EU Member States. As of 2024, this report will also include four EU candidate countries, namely Serbia, Albania, North Macedonia, and Montenegro.

The debate featured several guest speakers: **Joachim Herrman**, deputy head of the cabinet of **Didier Reynders**, European Commissioner

for Justice, **Kevin Casas-Zamora**, secretary-general of the *International Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance*, **Jerzy Pomianowski**, executive director of *European Endowment for Democracy*, and **Alexandra Najmowicz**, secretary-general of the *European Civic Forum*.

According to the participants of the debate, Europe serves as a role model for democracy around the world, but its own democracy is experiencing a decline. The EU institutions thus have a responsibility to strengthen their capacity to defend democracy, be it through expanded reports or enhanced budgets. Moreover, the EU should support democracy beyond Europe, assisting civil society

organisations in countries that are oppressed by authoritarians.

Lastly, it was said that greater power would need to be given to civil society organisations, as they currently do not feature sufficiently in checks and balances across Europe.



Christian Moos © EESC

Members of the Civil Society Organisations' Group took the floor.

**Christian Moos** pointed out that civil society organisations should join in the fight to defend



Sif Holst © EESC

democracy. He stressed that this was a global struggle, and that it was necessary to be 'more than just defensive about the rule of law and fundamental rights'.

**Sif Holst**, Vice-President of the Civil Society Organisations' Group, drew attention to the backlash against gender rights and LGBTQ+ rights across Europe. She considered that vulnerable communities were suffering the most from the regression on fundamental rights: 'We need to increase our efforts, do more, to cooperate better, to speak louder for

those who are silenced right now'.

**Ágnes Cser** pointed out that, when talking about democracy, scrutiny and accountability needed to apply to the European Union in the same way as they do to the Member States.

1. European Commission, news article, <https://europa.eu/IHTxnwh>

## The EU needs an ambitious climate target for 2024

The second plenary debate on 19 September focused on the climate target recommended by the European Commission for 2040, namely that of reducing carbon emissions by 90% in order to achieve carbon neutrality by 2050. The EESC had already supported this proposal during its May plenary, when it adopted an [opinion](#)<sup>1</sup> on the Commission proposal, which was prepared by Civil Society Organisations' Group Member and rapporteur Arnaud Schwartz. With this plenary debate, the EESC endorsed its support for the suggested climate target, as it aligns with the scientific consensus on the need to limit global warming to 1.5°C. The EESC stresses that the transition to carbon neutrality needs to be fair and include all stakeholders. The EU needs to fundamentally transform its economy, and today is a defining moment for our collective future.

The following guest speakers participated in the debate: **Kurt Vandenberghe**, director-general of the European Commission's Directorate-General for Climate Action (DG CLIMA), **Professor Ottmar Edenhofer**, chair of the European Scientific Advisory Board on Climate Change (attending remotely), and **Teppo Säkkinen**, rapporteur of the opinion on the EU climate target 2040.

In their speeches, the participants stressed

that decarbonisation is not only crucial for the environment, but also for the economy and security of the EU. The [European Green Deal](#)<sup>2</sup> is therefore of existential importance when it comes to modernising European economies.

The EU is on the right path to be able to achieve the goal set for 2040. However, it needed to be more ambitious in its policies, and investment is also key. The focus should be on cutting fossil fuels and utilising all clean energy sources. Working hand in hand with industry and manufacturing technologies is key in order to implement change.

Members of the EESC's Civil Society Organisations' Group took the floor to comment on this issue.



Lutz Ribbe © EESC

'Generations with targets that lead to ecological and social catastrophe,' said **Lutz Ribbe**, with

'Politicians, followed by cameras, hurrying to the affected regions and saying how much they feel for people, and then where does it lead to? (...) We cannot have a situation where

reference to any climate target that would not align with the scientific consensus on the need to limit global warming to 1.5°C.



Corina Murafa Benga © EESC

may I remind you that this is the lowest in the scientific spectrum. Under no circumstance can we go lower than this.'

**Corina Murafa Benga** pointed out the consequences of the recent floods in her home country, Romania, stressing the need for action: 'We need a 90% carbon emissions reduction target, and



Arnaud Schwartz © EESC

economy, health protection, nature protection, and also climate action in general.'

**Arnaud Schwartz** argued that the goal set by the 2040 target was not ambitious enough: 'I was reading that, for our economy, a 95% reduction goal would have more positive results in terms of the

1. EESC, opinion NAT/931, <https://europa.eu/Rjyx8d>

2. European Commission, European Green Deal, <https://europa.eu/!8bB4bR>

## OVERVIEW OF RECENT WORK

The last EESC plenary session took place on 18 and 19 September 2024. The EESC plenary adopted 22 opinions and 1 resolution of which 12 were drafted by Members of the Civil Society Organisations' Group. A list of the recent work can be found below.

**Arnaud SCHWARTZ (FR)**, rapporteur, [NAT/926](#)<sup>1</sup> A comprehensive strategy for biodiversity at COP16: bringing all sectors together for a common goal

**Bernardo HERNÁNDEZ BATALLER (ES)**, rapporteur, [INT/1057](#)<sup>2</sup> Consumer information requirements in the EU

**Ioannis VARDKASTANIS (EL)**, rapporteur, [Resolution](#)<sup>3</sup> Charting the EU's democratic progress: a resolution for the next legislative mandate

**Ionuț SIBIAN (RO)**, co-rapporteur, [REX/591](#)<sup>4</sup> Paving the way to EU accession for the Western Balkans

**John COMER (IE)**, rapporteur, [REX/586](#)<sup>5</sup> Deforestation of the Amazon rainforest – impact on climate change and the global environment; consequences for companies, workers and population

**Katrīna LEITĀNE (LV)**, rapporteur, [SOC/795](#)<sup>6</sup> Strengthening the EU Youth Dialogue follow-up

**Kerli ATS (EE)**, rapporteur, [NAT/925](#)<sup>7</sup> A just transition to ensure a sustainable future for EU agri-food systems

**Kęstutis KUPŠYS (LT)**, co-rapporteur, [NAT/929](#)<sup>8</sup> Climate finance: a new roadmap to deliver on high climate ambition and the SDGs

**Krzysztof Stanislaw BALON (PL)**, rapporteur, [SOC/800](#)<sup>9</sup> Promoting European intergenerational solidarity

**Maurizio MENSI (IT)**, co-rapporteur, [TEN/839](#)<sup>10</sup> Connectivity package on digital networks and infrastructure

**Pietro Vittorio BARBIERI (IT)**, rapporteur, [SOC/799](#)<sup>11</sup> Mental health community services

**Pietro Vittorio BARBIERI (IT)**, rapporteur, [SOC/807](#)<sup>12</sup> Social integration of persons with disabilities and persons with changed working capacity

The **complete texts** of all EESC opinions are available in various language versions on the Committee's [website](#)<sup>13</sup>

The **next EESC plenary session** will take place on [4 and 5 December 2024](#). For more information on the upcoming plenary session please visit our [website](#)<sup>14</sup>.

A list including all **new work appointments** of Civil Society Organisations' Group Members is available on the Committee's [website](#)<sup>15</sup>.

1. EESC opinion NAT/926, <https://europa.eu/!pnhGFc>
2. EESC opinion INT/1057, <https://europa.eu/!FmCYGv>
3. EESC Resolution Charting the EU's democratic progress, <https://europa.eu/!HjYkh8>
4. EESC opinion REX/591, <https://europa.eu/!B49PwV>
5. EESC opinion REX/586, <https://europa.eu/!DQr3D9>
6. EESC opinion SOC/795, <https://europa.eu/!M6h7cH>
7. EESC opinion NAT/925, <https://europa.eu/!fPNX3F>
8. EESC opinion NAT/929, <https://europa.eu/!Bfv87g>
9. EESC opinion SOC/800, <https://europa.eu/!WYJDJj>
10. EESC opinion TEN/839, <https://europa.eu/!vbtBYy>
11. EESC opinion SOC/799, <https://europa.eu/!px4gPt>
12. EESC opinion SOC/807, <https://europa.eu/!RmjttNq>
13. EESC opinions, <https://europa.eu/!wF86wY>
14. EESC plenary sessions, <https://europa.eu/!Dg84qG>
15. EESC, New work appointments, <https://europa.eu/!MT3Vxr>

## WHAT IS EESC OPINION SOC/761 ALL ABOUT?

### An interview with Pietro Vittorio Barbieri, rapporteur for the European Economic and Social Committee's (EESC) opinion [SOC/761](#) on Caregivers<sup>1</sup>



Pietro Barbieri © EESC

The opinion was presented and adopted at the July plenary session in 2024.

#### **Pietro Vittorio BARBIERI (IT)**

*Vice-President, Civil Society Organisations' Group*

*Former Spokesperson, Forum Terzo Settore (Third Sector Forum)*

*President, Centro per l'Autonomia (Centre for Autonomy)*

#### **What is the opinion SOC/761 all about and what are its main findings?**

A cry for help has been raised in Europe, the Member States and the regions. It concerns the care work provided by **family caregivers** on a daily basis. These people sacrifice their working and professional lives, and their incomes. They are demanding that their work be recognised and for it to no longer be referred to as 'informal care'. They are **demanding that a solution be found to the total lack of measures in welfare systems to support their work.**

During the COVID-19 pandemic, the situation was exacerbated due to the restrictions adopted by more or less all countries. Since then, the problem has gained greater visibility, including in the social debate on traditional media. It is impossible to not be aware of it.

The EESC set out to listen to this cry for help through two of its opinions. A hearing<sup>2</sup> was organised where speakers of four Member

States representing different welfare systems – more developed situations as well as contexts where there was less support – were invited. Government representatives as well as local associations were heard. The picture that emerges is disastrous: even Germany, which has some of the highest spending for welfare in the world, has implemented secondary and ineffective policies.

The secondary nature of the problem is evidenced by the fact that **there are not even any adequate statistics on the topic.** This is because definitions are incomplete or, in most cases, non-existent. Clearly, without data, one cannot define the range of beneficiaries for any measure. This leads to the problem becoming truly invisible at all political and institutional levels.

However, we do have some data: **the vast**



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**majority of caregivers are women** – mothers, daughters and sisters. We have qualitative research carried out in various countries that highlights a complete loss of identity, as well as the decline in physical and mental health. We are aware of the fall in families' income. This problem therefore involves **gender-based discrimination, the physical and mental well-being of**



**many women and the risk of poverty.** These are all key themes related to the values set out in the European founding charters.

However, the problem is also related to the fact that the policies available for services providing support to persons with disabilities

and those experiencing mental suffering, as well as the elderly, are (objectively) secondary in nature. In a nutshell, **without the support of families, the European welfare model would not exist.**

The EESC wanted to highlight all these

considerations by adopting an opinion that provides a clear overview of the situation, and to make some proposals. Above all, it wanted to echo the request made by the associations for an ad hoc directive.

### **How could these issues be addressed? After the adoption of this opinion, what have you done/will you do to promote it?**

Well aware of the European Commission's competencies, as clearly described in the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union<sup>3</sup>, the EESC wanted to bring the matter before the Commission in order to begin to

describe the problem, to work on statistics and coordination between the countries. It is now a matter of advocating this initiative to the European Commission, the Parliament and the Council. The first goal is to bring visibility to the

problem.

**Read the EESC opinion on Caregivers at:**  
<https://europa.eu/!vy9B8j>

1. EESC opinion SOC/761, <https://europa.eu/!vy9B8j>

2. EESC, Hearing Towards a new care model for the elderly: learning from COVID-19, <https://europa.eu/!6VWQRW>

3. EUR-Lex, Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union, <https://europa.eu/!8jWFmf>

## UPCOMING EVENTS



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**08/11** - Meeting of the EESC's Associational Life Category

**15/11** - Meeting of the EESC's Farmers Category

**21/11** - Protecting Europe's most vulnerable through sustainable and affordable housing (Conference of the Civil Society Organisations' Group)

**27/11** - Meeting of the EESC's Liberal Professions Category

## 15th EESC civil society prize – Rewarding excellence in civil society initiatives

The 15<sup>th</sup> edition of the EESC civil society prize has officially been launched.

The specific theme of this edition is **“Combating harmful polarisation of European society”**. The prize will reward non-for-profit initiatives which implement preventive, early-warning and de-escalation measures which make sure that democratic values are respected, polarisation does not become harmful and thus a breeding ground for radicalisation, and that one-sided narratives are not translated into violence and hate.

The prize, which is open to non-for-profit activities carried out by civil society organisations, individuals and companies, has a total value of EUR 50 000 and can be shared among up to five winners. The deadline for entries is **7 November 2024**. The awards ceremony will take place during the EESC Civil Society Week in March 2025.



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Detailed information about the prize, as well as the contest rules and the on-line application form, are available on the [EESC website](#).<sup>1</sup>

The EESC warmly invites you to spread the word and looks forward to receiving your application if you are eligible.

1. EESC, 15th Civil Society Prize, <https://europa.eu/!n4ryb9>



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