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Brussels, 14 March 2025

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| **594th PLENARY SESSION****26 and 27 February 2025****SUMMARY OF ADOPTED OPINIONS, RESOLUTIONS AND INFORMATION / EVALUATION REPORTS** |
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# **ECONOMIC AND MONETARY UNION, ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL COHESION**

* [***2025 European Semester – Autumn package***](https://www.eesc.europa.eu/en/our-work/opinions-information-reports/opinions/2025-european-semester-autumn-package)

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| **Rapporteur** | Petru Sorin DANDEA (Workers' Group ***-*** RO) |
| **References** | COM(2024) 700 finalEESC-2024-04138-00-00-AC |

**Key points**

The EESC:

* finds it highly regrettable and incomprehensible that, in the turbulent political, social and economic global context, the European Commission has chosen not to publish the Annual Sustainable Growth Survey;
* takes the view that the serious and growing geopolitical risks and the deterioration of multilateral institutions may eventually have a serious impact on European economies, trade, inflation and growth;
* welcomes the Commission’s efforts to launch the implementation cycle of the new European governance framework and encourages the Commission to finalise this process as soon as possible;
* underlines the position of civil society that, while the Autumn Package emphasises the importance of stakeholder engagement, there is a perceived lack of concrete mechanisms to involve social partners and civil society organisations adequately and effectively at national level;
* agrees with the Commission’s proposal to launch the competitiveness compass;
* agrees with the conclusion of the Draghi report that the main factor behind the negative productivity and competitiveness differentials of the EU economy compared to the US and China is the large investment deficit accumulated over the last two decades;
* believes that investment must be financed by public and private, national and European capital;
* acknowledges the Commission’s proposal that country-specific recommendations (CSRs) should be geared towards better implementation of the reforms and investments included in the Recovery and Resilience Facility (RRF) and the MFF, as both are approaching their end, in 2026 and 2027 respectively;
* believes that, in the difficult political and economic context that the EU is experiencing, better cooperation between Member States is the key to overcoming these obstacles;
* considers the Commission’s analyses and findings in the Joint Employment Report to be correct and fit to be carefully converted into CSRs;
* encourages the Commission to continue the programme to reduce the burden that excessive regulation places on European companies, reducing their ability to compete globally;
* takes the view that, in the country-specific recommendations, investment and reform proposals should prioritise tackling the serious housing problem.

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* [***Administrative cooperation in the field of taxation (DAC9)***](https://www.eesc.europa.eu/en/our-work/opinions-information-reports/opinions/administrative-cooperation-field-taxation-dac9)

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| **Rapporteur** | Krister ANDERSSON (Employers' Group - SE) |
| **References** | COM(2024) 497 final  |
| EESC-2024-04551-00-00-AC |

**Key points**

The EESC:

* welcomes the proposal for a Council Directive amending Directive 2011/16/EU on administrative cooperation in the field of taxation (DAC9);
* notes that it is a transposition of the OECD/G20 Inclusive Framework, which has already been agreed;
* points out that legal certainty and clarity for multinational corporations and tax administrations can only be ensured by creating a single set of uniform rules applicable to all Member States;
* deems it crucial that information collected under DAC9 be used only and exclusively as intended by the Commission proposal and not for other purposes, which may allow companies in third countries to access sensitive information, thereby harming the competitive position of European companies;
* regrets that no impact assessment or competitiveness check were carried out for this proposal. It would have been interesting to be able to ascertain whether the proposal brings us closer to the Commission’s general objective of reducing the administrative burden by 25%;
* underlines the need to keep the rules fully in line with the OECD’s ongoing work.

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* [***Defence funding in the EU***](https://www.eesc.europa.eu/en/our-work/opinions-information-reports/opinions/defence-funding-eu)

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| **Rapporteur** | Marcin NOWACKI (Employers' Group – PL) |
| **Reference** | Exploratory opinion - EESC-2024-03643-00-01-AC |

**Key points**

The EESC:

* underscores the urgent need to address the evolving security landscape in Europe through robust and unified defence funding mechanisms. Geopolitical challenges, particularly the Russian aggression against Ukraine, necessitate immediate and strategic investment in defence capabilities, both military and civil preparedness, to safeguard the EU’s fundamental values, peace, security and economic interests;
* stresses that the EU must clearly define its defence policy objectives and strengthen the European pillar of defence, which must link its resources and operational capabilities with NATO. Defence policy is part of the EU’s foreign and security policy, which must promote peace, democracy and human rights on our continent and its geographical environment and in the world, and defend the multilateral institutions of the UN system;
* emphasises the need to find ways to step up EU defence capabilities in accordance with the Treaty;
* stresses the importance of deepening collaboration between the EU and NATO to ensure a unified approach to defence;
* underlines the importance of European NATO members committing to spending at least 2.5% of their GDP on defence;
* stresses that immediate funding priorities should include the development and production of modern defence systems. Strengthening investment in such technologies should commence without delay, even within the current MFF budgetary period;
* stresses that strengthening the European Defence Technological and Industrial Base (EDTIB) is vital for reducing reliance on external suppliers and fostering innovation within the EU;
* advocates the expansion of joint procurement mechanisms, including the European Peace Facility (EPF), to maximise resource efficiency and enhance strategic partnership. Initiatives such as the Act in Support of Ammunition Production (ASAP) and the European Defence Industry Reinforcement through Common Procurement Act (EDIRPA) should be scaled up to address production bottlenecks and operational readiness;
* stresses that partnerships with third countries should be pursued to advance joint efforts in security infrastructure and technological innovation;
* underscores the importance of public-private partnerships as a complementary tool to leverage expertise and resources, accelerating innovation and deployment in critical areas;
* stresses that defence funding should prioritise support for the EU countries on the external borders that are most directly impacted by regional conflicts on the condition that they strictly observe the collective EU and NATO goals and principles;
* highlights the importance of integrating defence funding into broader EU financial mechanisms, including the next Multiannual Financial Framework (MFF), without compromising other critical EU priorities such as cohesion policy, green transition and the European Pillar of Social Rights;
* stresses that public awareness campaigns should be implemented to highlight the vital role of defence funding in ensuring Europe’s peace and security, as well as Europe’s democratic way of life and social cohesion;
* feels that the EU is obliged to establish a common defence policy, in the framework of a common foreign and security policy, to build a strong European Defence Pillar and to take the necessary legislative and financial measures to that end;
* finds that the EU also needs to play an active diplomatic role to achieve a just peace in Ukraine.

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1. [***Strengthening the results orientation of post-2027 cohesion policy – challenges, risks and opportunities***](https://www.eesc.europa.eu/en/our-work/opinions-information-reports/opinions/strengthening-results-orientation-post-2027-cohesion-policy-challenges-risks-and-opportunities)

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| **Rapporteur****Co-rapporteur** | David SVENTEK (Employers' Group - CZ)Florian MARIN (Workers' Group ***-*** RO) |
| **Reference** | Exploratory opinion requested by the Polish Presidency of the Council of the EUEESC-2024-03481-00-00-AC |

**Key points**

The EESC:

* strongly supports the continuation of EU cohesion policy, deeming the reasons behind it to be clear, rational and legitimate. On the other hand, it recognises that cohesion policy has to be modernised and adjusted, reflecting development trends and needs;
* believes that the existing share of the EU budget for cohesion policy should not be reduced in the next MMF, but instead it should be increased;
* recommends managing cohesion policy in future according to the following principles: partnership (including the active contribution of organised civil society); shared management (balanced participation among EU, national and regional authorities); multi-level governance (including regions, cities, local authorities and stakeholders); place-based approach (implementing a bottom-up approach); thematic concentration (being interlinked via the process of the European Semester); territorial targeting (also based on the regional specificities); result orientation (that there are real and quantified benefits); simplification (of the rules and procedures) and social conditionalities for the investments financed;
* believes that in a future, result-oriented cohesion policy, geopolitical challenges should be clearly considered, investment in capacity building is needed and the partnership principle is consolidated;
* stresses that making a result-based approach a core principle will contribute to a more efficient allocation of limited cohesion policy resources and bring visible and transparent benefits;
* believes that the obligations arising from the introduction of a results-based approach should not be added to the existing control and audit processes for verifying the effectiveness, efficiency and economy of expenditure on projects financed by cohesion funds;
* is deeply convinced that, despite all the necessary changes to cohesion policy’s content and orientation, the core of the policy must remain regions and their specific development and resilience needs, while also seeking to reduce inequalities;
* believes that more attention should be paid to social investments, including housing, as structural ingredients for territorial development, to access to quality public services and to demographic challenges;
* recommends creating a transparent policy environment with a clearly defined position for specific stakeholders, including representatives of organised civil society;
* is aware of the system’s complexity, which needs to be greatly simplified and made more transparent;
* underlines that, especially in the current and upcoming period of economic and social development in the EU, convergence and sustainable competitiveness are not contradictory.

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# **EMPLOYMENT, SOCIAL AFFAIRS AND CITIZENSHIP**

* [***Addressing loneliness: cementing measures for demographic cohesion***](https://www.eesc.europa.eu/en/our-work/opinions-information-reports/opinions/addressing-loneliness-cementing-measures-demographic-cohesion)

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| **Rapporteur** | Miguel Ángel CABRA DE LUNA (Civil Society Organisations' Group - ES) |
| **Reference** | Own-initiative opinion |
| EESC-2024-03264-00-00-AC |

**Key points:**

The EESC

* calls on the Commission to adopt a European strategy addressing loneliness during its 2025-2029 term of office, which would consolidate knowledge on loneliness, analyse and assess existing measures, incorporate an intersectional approach, address the root causes of loneliness through a preventive approach, raise awareness and eliminate stigma, alleviate the pressure on health systems and mobilise financial support;
* highlights the fundamental role that civil society organisations play in the fight against loneliness, and recognises that the social partners can also contribute in this regard.
* calls for specific measures against loneliness to be developed at EU level as part of the European strategy for older persons (opinion SOC/757) and the future European strategy for intergenerational equity (opinion SOC/800), including national plans;
* believes that Strategies should address loneliness at all stages of life, focusing on key life transition periods. They also need, high-level leadership and to involve all stakeholders concerned, including public administrations (in particular local authorities), organised civil society, social partners, the social economy and the media;
* calls on the European Commission to continue the pilot project on loneliness, launched at the request of the European Parliament in 2022;
* calls for the loneliness dimension to be included in the future Youth Check initiative;
* encourages the European Committee of the Regions to become involved in the proposed strategy.

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1. [***Violence against women as a human rights issue***](https://www.eesc.europa.eu/mt/our-work/opinions-information-reports/opinions/violence-against-women-human-rights-issue-state-play-measures-across-eu) ***: state of play of measures across the EU***

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| **Rapporteur** | José Antonio MORENO DÍAZ (Workers' Group - ES) |
| **Co-rapporteur** | Dovilė JUODKAITĖ (Civil Society Organisations' Group - LT) |
| **Reference** | Own-initiative opinionEESC-2024-01831-00-00-AC |

**Key points**

The EESC:

* recalls that violence against women and girls is a human rights violation and one of the most persistent forms of gender discrimination. Calls for the ratification and implementation of the Council of Europe Convention on preventing and combating violence against women and domestic violence (the Istanbul Convention) and the International Labour Organization’s Convention 190 on violence and harassment (particularly its Recommendation 206) and for both to be promoted and implemented in all Member States and by the EU itself;
* believes Directive 2024/1385/EU on combating violence against women and domestic violence, should address all forms of violence against women, including institutional violence, prostitution, commercial or exploitative pornography, reproductive exploitation, vicarious violence, chemical submission and street harassment, as well as sexual and gender-based harassment and the forced sterilisation of women with disabilities, among others;
* calls for sexual violence and rape to be included in the Directive as a form of violence, and criminalised based on the absence of consent. A definition of ‘consent’ relating to sexual violence is needed. Gender-based violence, including rape, should be added to the list of ‘Eurocrimes’ referred to in Article 83(1) of the TFEU;
* is concerned that the physical, psychological and sexual violence that are constitutive elements of prostitution have not been included as a form of violence against women, as well as the restrictions on the free and safe voluntary termination of pregnancy
* while stressing that any kind of violence against women is a significant public and clinical health concern, underscores the multiple and intersectional discrimination suffered by women with disabilities, and in particular by women with mental health conditions and psychosocial and/or intellectual disabilities, calling for this type of violence to be considered a public health issue with long-term consequences. It also calls for disaggregated data collection by disability;
* it is deeply concerned about views that deny violence against women as a specific form of violence because of their status as women, thereby attacking the values and principles of Article 2 of the TFEU. Believes education, including sex education, is key in shaping gender roles and stereotypes, and calls for the inclusion of the educational community, civil society organizations and social partners, in institutional cooperation to prevent and combat gender-based violence;
* calls for specific measures in the fields of social dialogue, collective bargaining and necessary negotiations with social partners to be included to boost the employment and promote the employability of victims of gender-based violence (GBV).

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* [***EESC contribution to the EU's priorities at the UNCSW69***](https://www.eesc.europa.eu/en/our-work/opinions-information-reports/opinions/eesc-contribution-eus-priorities-uncsw69)

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| **Rapporteur:** | Maria NIKOLOPOULOU (Workers' Group - ES) |
| **Reference** | Own-initiative opinion |
| EESC-2024-03990-00-00-AC |

**Key points**

The EESC:

* urges the EU and the Member States to increase the pace of progress on gender equality, be more ambitious and vocal about the shrinking space for civil society and block any backlash against women’s rights, which are under attack, in particular by extreme-right political parties;
* suggests that the EU, Member States and political parties commit to attracting women to politics, including by considering measures to encourage the election and appointment of women to key positions, such as quotas, zipped lists, co-chairing, split terms of office and proposing male and female candidates;
* urges Member States to allocate sufficient resources to their national action plans to end violence against women and design them in consultation with civil society organisations; call for more actions to tackle online and economic violence, care for women’s physical and mental health, as well as ensuring the respect of women’s sexual and reproductive health and rights;
* believes the EU just transition framework should include a skills strategy to address pre-existing gender inequalities, while bearing in mind women and girls in the Global South and in rural areas, who are disproportionately affected by the triple planetary crisis;
* calls on bridging the digital gender gap and include women’s perspectives in the design, development and deployment of artificial intelligence (AI) and algorithms, to make AI socially sensitive and inclusive;
* calls for measures to close the gender gap in unpaid care responsibilities and help women stay in the labour market, including by providing affordable, accessible and quality healthcare and care services, as well as safety nets, according to national rules;
* calls for a strong and ambitious long-term EU strategy on inclusive foreign policy that puts gender equality, human rights, feminist diplomacy and social justice at its core;
* stresses the need for more gender-disaggregated intersectional data to shape and follow up on strategies, for the use of gender budgeting tools and a gender lens in fiscal policy.

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1. ***[Older people in employment – systemic factors in choosing to work for longer](https://www.eesc.europa.eu/en/our-work/opinions-information-reports/opinions/older-people-employment-systemic-factors-choosing-work-longer)***

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| **Rapporteur** | Krzysztof BALON (Civil Society Organisations' Group - PL) |
| **Reference** | Exploratory opinion requested by the Polish Presidency of the Council of the EUEESC-2024-03788-00-00-AC |

**Key points**

The EESC:

* shares the view of the Polish Presidency of the Council of the European Union that the **professional activation** of **older people** has become one of the **key challenges for public policy**. Since the average healthy life expectancy is increasing in the EU, the **professional activity of older people** has the potential to **positively influence** not only the **economic development**, but also **their well-being** through better **financial**, **social** and **health conditions**, as well as intergenerational solidarity in society;
* notes that the **15th principle of the European Pillar of Social Rights** (the right to a pension commensurate to their contributions and ensuring an adequate income to a dignified life in old age) **should be fully implemented**;
* points out that the **creation of quality jobs** with a **working environme**nt that encourages all age groups to **enter and stay on the labour market** is an important aspect.
* notes that another factor in increasing the employment of older people is the **creation of multi-generational work teams** and **repeats** its request to the **European Commission** to adopt a **recommendation** calling on the Member States **to ensure the presence of workers from different generations and their cooperation in the workplace**;
* points out that instruments that support the employment of older people include: (a) **creating an enabling working environment** that encourages seniors to stay longer on the labour market where they wish to do so, (b) **maintaining and increasing qualifications** through **lifelong learning policies**, (c) measures which allow the **combination of work and care responsibilities** for elderly relatives (d) **promoting longer working lives**, and (e) **combatting age related discrimination** and other factors that prevent older workers from remaining in the labour market. Social economy entities, civil society organisations and social partners have a key role to play in all of these areas;
* suggests that the **European Commission**, in cooperation with the EESC, social partners and other civil society organisations, **creates a forum for the exchange of good practices** between Member States and thereafter, taking into account the results of the forum’s discussions, a "toolbox" of best practices may be published by the European Commission.

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# **TRANSPORT, ENERGY, INFRASTRUCTURE AND INFORMATION SOCIETY**

1. [***The physical completion of EU’s internal market in the new geopolitical situation***](https://www.eesc.europa.eu/en/our-work/opinions-information-reports/opinions/physical-completion-eus-internal-market-new-geopolitical-situation)

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| **Rapporteur** | Päivi Elina WOOD (Employers' Group - FI) |
| **Reference** | Own-initiative opinionEESC-2024-03902-00-00-AC |

**Key points**

The EESC:

* finds it crucial to focus more efforts on improving the resilience and reliability of transport systems; highlights the need for a proper analysis conducted on the consequences of crisis for all transport modes and possible new handicaps in the connectivity of different areas within the EU;
* finds it imperative that in the next MFF an appropriate level of funding is allocated to investment in the development and maintenance of transport infrastructure in a well-targeted manner, starting with the objective of completing the TEN-T Core Network by 2030;
* calls for more emphasis to be placed on the dual use of infrastructure and military mobility, while also working together with NATO;
* stresses that from the comprehensive security point of view, it is important to improve the vitality and single market connections of the EU’s border regions;
* calls for steps to facilitate labour mobility, enhance competences and skills, and make the transport sector more attractive.

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# **SINGLE MARKET, PRODUCTION AND CONSUMPTION**

1. [***Consumer protection and the impact of the digital and green transitions on consumers***](https://www.eesc.europa.eu/en/our-work/opinions-information-reports/opinions/consumer-protection-and-impact-digital-and-green-transitions-consumers)

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| **Rapporteur** | Ileana IZVERNICEANU DE LA IGLESIA (Civil Society Organisations' Group - ES) |
| **Reference** | Exploratory opinion requested by the Polish Presidency of the Council of the EU |
| EESC-2024-03566-00-00-AC |

**Key points**

*The* [*EU Youth Test at the EESC*](https://www.eesc.europa.eu/en/initiatives/eu-youth-test-eesc) *is being applied to this opinion. The European Youth Energy Network was chosen by a group of interested youth organisations to represent all of them during the opinion-making process.*

The EESC:

* believes that mandatory and voluntary product information requirements should be harmonised across the EU, information overload avoided and the accuracy of labels ensured, so that consumers can adopt more sustainable consumption patterns;
* points out that products should be labelled in a way that makes it easier to make informed purchases, providing information on life cycle costs, energy efficiency, durability and reparability of products;
* calls on the Commission and national authorities to come up with an appropriate framework to ensure access to sustainable products through tax incentives and, in some cases, direct subsidies to reduce the price differential;
* calls for effective policies to be put in place to ensure access to the digital market, especially in rural and less populated areas, and to integrate consumers with fewer digital skills;
* reiterates the importance of educating consumers on how to make informed choices;
* underlines consumer organisations’ important role in the digital and green transitions, stressing their need for secure funding;
* calls for ensuring access to affordable and sustainable products also for vulnerable consumers bearing in mind that vulnerability can be of different nature and changing over time;
* is of the view that the EU should address the negative effects of non-EU platforms offering products at low prices and put in place stricter regulation with effective customs duties.

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1. [***Assessment of the Letta and Draghi reports on the functioning and competitiveness of the EU's Single Market***](https://www.eesc.europa.eu/en/our-work/opinions-information-reports/opinions/assessment-letta-and-draghi-reports-functioning-and-competitiveness-eus-single-market)

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| **Rapporteurs** | Matteo Carlo BORSANI (Employers' Group - IT)Stefano PALMIERI (Workers' Group - IT)Giuseppe GUERINI (Civil Society Organisations' Group - IT) |
| **Reference** | Own-initiative opinion |
| EESC-2024-03441-00-00-AC |

**Key points**

The EESC:

* emphasizes the urgent need to **boost European competitiveness while ensuring sustainability and social cohesion**. The EU faces increasing global competition and must take decisive action to strengthen its economic position. However, this should not come at the expense of environmental sustainability, workers' rights, or regional balance. The EESC calls for an approach that integrates economic growth with the principles of social and territorial cohesion.
* calls for **increased investments in key areas such as social infrastructure, digital transformation, and energy transition**. Recognizing that competitiveness relies on strong foundations, the EESC stresses the need for substantial investments in modern infrastructure, including education, research, digitalization, and renewable energy. These investments are essential to maintaining Europe's economic strength while addressing demographic shifts, technological advancements, and climate challenges.
* stresses that the EU must actively shape global economic transformation rather than merely preserving past achievements. The EESC underlines that Europe is at a crossroads: it can either take a proactive role in global economic transformation or risk falling behind. This means **adapting the single market to new geopolitical realities**, reducing strategic dependences on non-EU supply chains, and enhancing Europe's role in strategic industries.

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1. [***The competitiveness of the EU's small and medium-sized enterprises in light of new administrative burdens***](https://www.eesc.europa.eu/en/our-work/opinions-information-reports/opinions/competitiveness-eus-small-and-medium-sized-enterprises-light-new-administrative-burdensobligations-eg-relating-non)***/obligations***

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| **Rapporteur** | Paul RÜBIG (Employers' Group - AT) |
| **Reference** | Exploratory opinion requested by the Polish Presidency of the Council of the EUEESC-2024-03549-00-00-AC |

**Key points**

The EESC:

* considers that, despite the launch of different EU initiatives in the past, further improvements on the reduction of the regulatory burden are still required, given that SMEs are facing double and triple legislative requirements as a result of the additional wave of regulation and existing requirements, also in relation to the Green Deal;
* takes the view, at the same time, that reducing the regulatory burden must not jeopardise compliance with social, environmental and consumer safety rights and standards established at international and EU levels, as well as with the principle of transparency and the rule of law in the EU;
* recommends that the Regulatory Scrutiny Board (RSB) is significantly strengthened and made more independent, by carrying out a ‘consistency and subsidiarity check’ at the beginning of each legislative process and being empowered with appropriate revision and advisory rights;
* recommends that the SME test and the competitiveness check should be merged into one procedure;
* recommends making use of artificial intelligence and machine learning tools to create an easy-to-use ‘single reporting tool’ that can provide SMEs, mid-caps and other companies with all EU-relevant reporting obligations, deadlines and sanctions;
* points out the need for the European Parliament and the Council of the EU to develop an expedited procedure for impact and risk assessments carried out by their own policy departments in the case of amendments that would substantially reshape the proposals adopted by the European Commission;
* believes that the Council of the EU and national authorities should also make greater use of the opportunities for reviewing responsibilities (subsidiarity), particularly with regard to the impact on SMEs, consumers, administration and justice.

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1. [***The services sector in the European Union***](https://www.eesc.europa.eu/en/our-work/opinions-information-reports/opinions/services-sector-european-union)

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| **Rapporteur** | Marcin NOWACKI (Employers' Group - PL) |
| **Reference** | Exploratory opinion requested by the Polish Presidency of the Council of the EU |
| EESC-2024-03619-00-00-AC |

**Key points**

The EESC:

* highlights the need to harmonise the Services Directive and the Professional Qualifications Directive to address fragmentation in the EU services sector;
* considers that a ‘100 Professions Package’ should be introduced to tackle the most significant regulatory barriers across the Member States;
* considers that digitalisation should play a central role in modernising administrative processes. A single digital declaration portal and the digitisation of A1 forms would not only reduce administrative burdens for SMEs but also streamline cross-border services, ensuring faster, more accessible services for businesses and consumers alike;
* considers that targeted, sector-specific reforms are necessary to address barriers in industries such as construction, retail and financial services;
* underlines that labour protection, collective bargaining and collective agreements must not be seen as undue burdens;
* stresses the need for data collection on the services sector, particularly in relation to SMEs, to support policy-making and remove single market barriers;
* considers that a comprehensive sector-specific action plan for the integration of the services market should be included in the updated Single Market Strategy.

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1. [***The future of EU industry in the face of high energy prices and transition costs***](https://www.eesc.europa.eu/en/our-work/opinions-information-reports/opinions/future-eu-industry-face-high-energy-prices-and-transition-costs)

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| **Rapporteur** | Andrea MONE (Workers' Group - IT) |
| **Reference** | Exploratory opinion requested by the Polish Presidency of the Council of the EU |
| EESC-2024-03583-00-00-AC |

**Key points**

The EESC:

* calls for urgent action to establish a **comprehensive EU industrial strategy** that ensures **competitive industries and quality jobs**, aligning with Green Deal objectives through **close** monitoring and targeted adjustments;
* urges improvements to the **economic and regulatory environment** to address **Europe’s structural competitiveness challenges**, including high energy and raw material costs, upfront investment and compliance burdens of the green transition, inadequate infrastructure, persistent skills shortages, limited financing and internal demand, and an incomplete single market;
* advocates for **a competitiveness policy** that prioritizes **investment and innovation**, while promoting **social and territorial inclusiveness** and ensuring that **social dialogue and collective bargaining** guide structural changes in a fair and equitable manner;
* calls for a **sector-inclusive industrial strategy** that enhances **policy coherence, optimizes resource allocation, establishes a dedicated European investment fund** for strategic priorities, and considers the **transnational dimension** of key areas such as **energy, R&I, and skills**;
* **emphasizes the need for a resilient EU trade policy** that mitigates the risks of **asymmetric decarbonization, global overcapacity, and intensifying trade tensions**, while **strengthening autonomy in critical raw materials** to safeguard Europe’s industrial future.

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1. [***Tourism in the EU: sustainability***](https://www.eesc.europa.eu/en/our-work/opinions-information-reports/opinions/tourism-eu-social-sustainability-driver-long-term-competitiveness-sector) ***as a driver for long-term competitiveness***

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| **Rapporteur** | Isabel YGLESIAS (Employers' Group - Spain) |
| **Reference** | Own-initiative opinionEESC-2024-00656-00-00-AC |

**Key points**

The EESC:

* emphasises that the **transition to sustainable tourism** should be accelerated and **regenerative tourism strategies must be implemented** to ensure that regions highly specialised in tourism can fully contribute to boosting the EU’s competitiveness through tourism. Regenerative tourism goes further than sustainable tourism: it uses practices designed to restore and strengthen natural, social and economic capital, with a positive and lasting impact on destinations and communities;
* recommends that **the new EU legislative cycle should promote tourism policies that include active regeneration objectives** and take into account how all the components of a tourist destination are interconnected: ecosystems, communities, the local economy and visitors;
* proposes developing **clear guidelines and concrete measures to accelerate the transition** to a tourism model centred around active regeneration and social value in the framework of the sustainable tourism strategy. This strategy should be accompanied by appropriate **funding and research programmes**, as well as **social and training policies** to ensure that it is implemented effectively;
* stresses that **training and upskilling employees in sustainability and the circular economy** is key to increasing job quality and attracting and retaining the talent needed to make the transition to regenerative tourism possible and viable. To achieve these objectives, efforts should be made to involve consumers more. The combination of economic incentives, accessible models and strategies to encourage **year-round tourism** is key to involving them more widely and more effectively.

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# **AGRICULTURE, RURAL DEVELOPMENT AND THE ENVIRONMENT**

* [***Ensuring sustainable food production and a fair income for European farmers***](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) ***in the face of market, environmental and climate challenges***

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| **Rapporteur** | Arnold PUECH d'ALISSAC (Employers' Group - FR)Piroska KÁLLAY (Workers' Group - HU)Joe HEALY (Civil Society Organisations' Group - IE) |
| **Reference** | Exploratory opinion requested by the Polish Presidency of the Council of the EUEESC-2024-03974-00-00-AC |

**Key points**

The EESC:

* suggests developing and implementing short and long-term tools to support farmers’ incomes in times of crisis, within the framework of the CAP and beyond such as:
	+ **insurance schemes against climatic and environmental disaster:** work on public-private partnership assurances model and review the calculation of yield references;
	+ **insurance schemes against market tensions:** examine the development of innovative levers, such as a parametric insurance, and include counter-cyclical elements in the CAP instruments after 2027 to react to pressure from the markets;
	+ **risk and crisis management tools:** restore the CAP budget to a level of 0.5% of EU GDP in the next multiannual financial framework (MFF); improve and promote at Member State (MS) level the utilisation of the 3% from direct payments as farmer's contributions to the risk management instrument; recast and increase significatively the agricultural crisis reserve at EU level; develop mutual funds at MS level for health and environmental risks;
	+ **financial tools provided by CAP and banks:** support farmers’ investment capacity, in particular for young farmers, with simple, non‑bureaucratic financial instruments, such as financial products offered by banks (pilot loans, zero-interest loans, agricultural installation loans) but also others;
	+ **tools for securing farmers’ income and improving their bargaining power:** consider extending the Directive on Unfair Trade Practices (UTP) to ban below-cost selling by purchasers, after carefully studying the effects on all food chain operators;provide a new EU policy to enable farmers to collectively negotiate prices and increase the support for cooperatives and producer organisations; protect, enhance and better target direct payments at active farmers in the next CAP; a sustainability contribution for the transition; . ensure carbon-efficient food production systems; ensure equivalence of standards in all trade deals;
* recommends to further promote sector-specific participatory governance and strengthen social dialogue in the agri-food sector;
* points out the need for high-quality agricultural research and investments in education;
* highlights the importance to maintain vibrant agricultural production across Europe and points out that it is important that rural development remains a strong objective in the Common Agricultural Policy and that sufficient funding is allocated to it.

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# **CONSULTATIVE COMMISSION ON INDUSTRIAL CHANGE**

1. [***The contribution of the robotics metaverse in the medical sector***](https://www.eesc.europa.eu/en/our-work/opinions-information-reports/opinions/contribution-robotics-metaverse-medical-sector)

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| **Rapporteur** | Martin BÖHME (Civil Society Organisations’ Group - DE) |
| **Co-rapporteur** | Hervé JEANNIN (Category 2 - FR) |
| **Reference** | Own-initiative opinionEESC-2024-02859-00-00-AC-TRA |

**Key points**

The EESC:

* recommends **developing a comprehensive regulatory framework** for robotics and the metaverse in healthcare;
* stresses the importance of **promoting ethical standards and patient consent protocols**;
* calls for **investment in digital infrastructure** to **ensure equal access** and highlights the importance of investing in digital infrastructure, particularly in **rural and underserved areas**, to prevent a digital divide. The EU should prioritise the deployment of 5G and 6G networks to support the secure and reliable operation of robotics and metaverse technologies. Equitable access to these healthcare advancements across all Member States is a key priority;
* advocates **increasing educational and training support for healthcare professionals**. It believes that the EU must fund and promote education and training programmes to prepare medical professionals for the integration of robotics and metaverse technologies;
* encourages **fostering innovation through a targeted EU investment strategy**. It strongly recommends that the EU develop a targeted investment strategy, particularly aimed at supporting small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) working on robotics and metaverse solutions for healthcare, and
* emphasises the need for **strong data privacy and cybersecurity protections**. It urges the EU to implement stringent data privacy and cybersecurity regulations to safeguard sensitive health data and protect against cyberattacks. This includes securing the connections between robotics, the metaverse, and human interface devices. The EESC also points out that data sovereignty and compliance must be addressed across different jurisdictions to protect patients’ rights and ensure trust in cross-border healthcare services.

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