



## Joint statement by the EESC Liaison Group Co-Chairs

### No sustainable recovery in Europe without civil society

Organised civil society is a key player in our democracies in Europe. We need to involve it in the current recovery and reconstruction process to make sure that no one is left behind on our way towards a sustainable Europe in 2030 and beyond.

Year 2020 has proved to be an endurance test for human and social rights, democratic values, the rule of law and economic resilience in the EU. Following the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic, organised civil society has been playing a key role in coping with the countless pandemic-related challenges at European, national, regional and local levels.

In these challenging times we are glad to see that the work of organised civil society has been at the heart of this year's Civil Society Days. Against this backdrop we would like to draw the attention on the following core recommendations put forward as main conclusions at the end of committed discussions with the objective of ensuring a **sustainable recovery** for Europe and its citizens:

- involve civil society organisations closely in the implementation of the national recovery plans, reversing the trend set in the preparation phase when they had limited involvement. The value of volunteering must be understood by policymakers to be not just the output of the hours invested, but an expression of European values and a change-making example to others about the society based on solidarity, inclusion and democratic principles that we want Europe to be;
- strengthen intermediary organisations (civil society organisations, political parties, trade unions, business organisations, etc.) in order to create positive synergies between the public and governments, boost civic and digital education to foster public participation, and create decision-making citizen assemblies to reinforce democracy;
- invest in culture and education as crucial assets in building a more resilient and sustainable future for Europe, with dedicated funds allocated in the national recovery and resilience plans.

Investing in hard infrastructure is not enough – people must be placed at the centre of the recovery;

- raise awareness of the social economy as a viable business model for a sustainable recovery that goes beyond profit and helps tackle inequalities and climate change. Specific funds need to be set aside in the Recovery Plan and NextGenerationEU for national investments in this sector;
- explore in more depth the option of universal basic income and job guarantee schemes as a feasible solution that benefits both people and the planet. The issue needs to be depoliticised and case studies should be carried out in different Member States;
- give young people the chance to meaningfully participate and stay engaged all around Europe, and have their voice heard not only on youth-specific issues, but in a variety of policy areas. Funding opportunities under the new EU plans should also be accessible to youth-led organisations;
- ensure that the European Green Deal contributes more strongly to eradicating poverty, injustice and gender inequality;
- accelerate building renovation in Europe by raising awareness about the challenges and opportunities of building renovation, and mobilise key civil society groups such as representatives of building owners and architects to achieve the goals of the Renovation Wave in Europe.

We look forward to see these recommendations being translated into good practice in the upcoming months while continuing our work to further build and strengthen Europe together with civil society.

Christa Schweng  
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Co-chair of the Liaison Group  
Director of the Life Long Learning  
Platform

## **BACKGROUND**

The EESC's annual Civil Society Days are a unique institutional conference bringing together citizens, organised civil society and the European institutions, and as such strengthening the role of the EESC as an institutional bridge to civil society organisations.

The fully virtual 2021 edition invited these three stakeholder groups for a debate about the essential components of **A Sustainable Recovery for the Future of Europe's citizens**.

Around 1 500 citizens from Europe and across the world attended this huge civil society conference to address, together with European organisations and institutions, the challenges of a sustainable recovery for Europe and to propose solutions that are very timely in the crucial political situation that the EU is experiencing.