Editorial

In the three months since mid-March, the European Union has seen a change of course that would have been unthinkable at the start of the year: the COVID-19 pandemic triggered a health, economic and social crisis – and even a democratic crisis in some Member States – the likes of which have not been seen since the end of World War Two.

But 2020 will also be remembered as the year in which the European Union was able to take exceptional decisions to do everything that was needed to remain united, competitive and rooted in solidarity.

Since the beginning of the pandemic, the European Union has put forward unprecedented measures. The Recovery Fund and the Multiannual Financial Framework presented by the European Commission on 27 May have the clear potential to turn the COVID-19 crisis into a unique opportunity, allowing the EU to invest in sustainable change for future generations. The Next Generation EU will not only support recovery but also pave the way for key investments in the European Green Deal and digitalisation to boost jobs, growth and prosperity.

Now, EU Member States must hold high the conviction that, indeed, the whole is stronger and more prosperous than the sum of its parts.

In order to make sure that we really seize 'Europe's moment', as President Ursula von der Leyen called it, we must call on our joint responsibility. This will also mean calling on the strength and insights of civil society organisations as equal partners in the post-COVID recovery journey for a sustainable future.

Civil society organisations have been at the forefront of the response to the global COVID-19 health crisis, supporting the most vulnerable and ensuring that people's basic needs are met in a challenging reality.

European institutions must thus make sure that civil society organisations are trusted partners in political processes and decision-making, in order to make sure that citizens have a real say in constructing a new Europe.
We must develop a people-centred future, turning our fears into hopes for a more sustainable and just society.

Let us not waste this historic moment for a rEUnaissance, for a #NextGenerationEU.

Luca Jahier
EESC President
Co-Chair of the Liaison Group

News from the CSO members of the Liaison Group

Joint statement by the LG co-chairs, EESC President Luca Jahier and LLLP director Brikena Xhomaqi
During this pandemic it has become clear that governments alone cannot overcome the many challenges citizens continue to face: Civil society is not only a key component of democratic systems, but also an indispensable player in ensuring social justice in partnership with stakeholders from other sectors. The coordinated response from the European Union institutions was welcome, and unprecedented, but implementation of the measures introduced still poses a challenge and positive effects are failing to reach grassroots level, leaving many CSOs increasingly fragile. As co-chairs of the Liaison Group, we wish to emphasise this critical role for civil society in our democracies in Europe, both in the current crisis and in the upcoming recovery, as clearly demonstrated in the experiences and ideas shared at the EESC Liaison Group's last meeting on 12 May 2020. The pandemic has been a magnifier of huge fractures in our systems, of existing social injustice and inequality. Read the whole statement here.

LLLP: Webinar series: Valuing competences in volunteering – 16 - 22 June 2020
The Lifelong Learning Platform invites you to join its Webinar series which will explore the topic of learning through volunteering as well as validation of non-formal and informal learning in this sector. Inviting volunteers, representatives of volunteer-based organisations, European experts as well as policy-makers to take part in discussions and debates, the Webinar series will take place over three sessions. More information and registrations here.
EFIL: 11th Forum on Intercultural Learning and Exchange, Colle di Val d'Elsa (IT), 12-14 November 2020

The Forum on Intercultural Learning and Exchange (FILE) is an annual invitational conference on international educational exchange, exploring a different specific topic each year. This year is dedicated to "The values of living together: how to assess their evolution within intercultural student exchanges", and will continue the discussion started at the 2019 Forum on the topic of "Values education in students' exchange". The aim is to take a more in-depth look at the topic and to assess the changes that might/should occur in exchange participants towards valuing human dignity and human rights, respect for differences, and active participation in the life of multicultural democratic societies.

FILE is an invitational conference, but there are also some places available for those interested in the subject. Details are included in the programme. Registration is open here, and more information can be found on the FILE web page here. For any further information, please email fondazione@intercultura.it.

Eurochild: MOOC on trauma-informed care extended

We are pleased to announce that our CarePath massively open online course (MOOC) on trauma-informed care has been extended – you can now sign up and learn about how a trauma-informed care approach can help assist children who have experienced trauma in their lives. The course is available in five EU languages: English, Italian, Greek, French and Hungarian. You can sign up here. For more information see here and/or email ciaran.odonnell@eurochild.org.
FEANI, the European Federation of National Engineering Associations, which represents 6 million engineers, published its 2018-2019 Annual Report in May. It can be opened and consulted as a flipbook [here](#).

Social Platform: Social NGOs' reactions to the COVID-19 crisis: health, solidarity, safety, income, housing, employment, services, equality
Social Platform's networks and their national members are working with and for people who are most affected by the COVID-19 crisis. On their [website](#) you can find an overview of responses, reactions, statements and policy recommendations from the members of Social Platform in the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Social Platform: New video about the European Pillar of Social Rights
While the COVID-19 crisis has altered our lives, it has not altered our determination and has instead reinforced the need for a stronger social Europe. This year, the European institutions are working towards an Action Plan on implementing the Pillar, and Social Platform has produced a new video as a helpful tool to support its advocacy work and communicate about the Pillar. The video is subtitled in all EU languages. You can watch it [here](#).
EDRi: Call to the EU – "Ban Biometric Mass Surveillance"

On 13 May, European Digital Rights (EDRi) – a coalition of 44 civil society organisations – launched their call to the EU to "Ban Biometric Mass Surveillance". This call to stop biometric mass surveillance is grounded in an analysis of the threats to people's right to privacy, data protection, non-discrimination and dignity, as well as to freedom of expression and assembly, posed by the intrusive and unlawful mass processing of people's sensitive data in public places that is currently happening across Europe.

More information about the call is available here.

European Foundation Centre: New ECNL handbook on "How to Use EU Law to Protect Civic Space"

The European Center for Not-for-Profit Law (ECNL) has released a handbook on "How to Use EU Law to Protect Civic Space". The handbook, created in partnership with DAFNE and the EFC, provides practical guidance for CSOs on how to advocate and litigate using EU law to protect their rights and civic space in the EU. It covers topics including: what EU law is and how it affects individuals and organisations; when and how CSOs can challenge national provisions or measures that impact their mission, activities and operations on the basis of EU law, including the Charter of Fundamental Rights; and what legal avenues and resources are available for CSOs to defend their civic space within the EU law framework.

Read the handbook. More information is available here.
**Front Line Defenders: 'Rights on the Line' podcast, and first Spanish-language podcast episode**

*Rights on the Line* is a podcast produced by FLD that presents the voices, perspectives and experiences of human rights defenders at risk and focusing on human rights issues across the globe. Season 2, episode 5, is on the COVID-19 crisis and prisons in Iran. Listen [here](https://frontlinedefenders.org/en/podcast).

FLD has also released its first Spanish language podcast episode, featuring women human rights defenders from El Salvador, Chile, Honduras and Colombia: Episodio SP 1 - COVID-19, [Respuestas de los Gobiernos & Las Defensoras de Derechos Humanos en América Latina](frontlinedefenders.org/en/podcast).

![Image of podcast cover](https://static.frontlinedefenders.org/images/2021/04/RightsOnTheLine-Season-2-Episode-5-Cover.jpg)

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**LLLP: The revised EU budget: is it enough to build a learning Europe?**

The Lifelong Learning Platform is happy to learn that even in times of crisis the budget allocated to education is on the rise, with this proposal allocating EUR 24.6 billion for the next Erasmus+ cycle. We hope that through synergies and cooperation with other programmes education will gain its place at the centre of the European recovery plans. [Read our info-article on the new EU Budget](https://lifelonglearningplatform.eu媌sions/2021/04/27/the-revised-eu-budget-is-it-enough-to-build-a-learning-europe/).
RED: definition of a "rural area"
At its board of directors meeting on 5 May 2020, the association Rurality-Environment-Development proposed a definition of "rural area". The definition is based on more than just geographical or statistical criteria, establishing that all areas have a role to play in the post-COVID-19 recovery. Rural areas are demonstrating their resilience, solidarity and ability to innovate. Read the full definition here.

ACE: surveys on the COVID-19 crisis
The Architects' Council of Europe (ACE) has been conducting two surveys among its member organisations to understand how they are dealing with the COVID-19 crisis, to try to evaluate its initial impact on the architectural profession and market, and to collect information about measures put in place to help SMEs and the self-employed to weather the crisis.

The findings of the second survey are now available on the ACE's website.

UEF: Conference on the Future of Europe
Over recent weeks, UEF has set up a specific page on its website entirely dedicated to the Conference on the Future of Europe. We wanted to create a hub for information and engagement on the Future of Europe, giving citizens access to all relevant official documents, the latest articles from our partners, think-tanks and other CSOs and, finally,
CEV: Call for European Volunteering Capital 2022 – extended deadline 22 June 2020
Local municipalities and volunteers have responded in creative, flexible and timely ways to meeting emerging needs during the COVID-19 crisis. Participation in the EV Capital Competition provides the opportunity to showcase good examples of healthy cross-sector partnerships and how they lead to impactful and quality volunteering. Being accepted as a Candidate Municipality will also reward and recognise the amazing efforts of volunteers in putting European values into practice and showing solidarity with one another. Find out more here.

ECAS Awards 2020 for the “Most EU Mobile Citizen-friendly Location”
Once the coronavirus outbreak, which has resulted in a temporary suspension of the freedom of movement in the European Union, subsides, citizens and Member States, EU institutions and civil society will have the task of restoring this, the greatest, achievement of European integration. With that goal in mind, the ECAS Awards scheme is being launched for the first time to promote practices and initiatives that aim at fostering inclusion and provision of information to mobile EU citizens. Such initiatives can be submitted under four categories, including: Practices aimed at alleviating the effects of the COVID-19 outbreak on mobile EU citizens. Find full details and application here.
LLLPlatform: Call for applications for the 2020 Lifelong Learning Awards now open!
The aim of the LLLAwards is to recognise outstanding and ground-breaking practices in the area of “Lifelong Learning For Sustainable Societies”. This broad theme is divided into three categories: 1) Learning that empowers – the future of learning; 2) Learning that matters – the future of skills; 3) Learning that lasts – sustainable learning. Submit your examples of practice now! 📩 Find more details here and apply here.

ECAS: Publication of recommendations by 12 European civil society organisations for setting up a conference on the future of Europe
In preparation for the start of the conference, ECAS has contributed to a set of civil society organisation recommendations which we believe will ensure an effective event with tangible outcomes. Drawing on its expertise in digital democracy, ECAS has recommended that the conference follow a divergent-convergent model, combining both online and offline methods for collecting input. As a first step, EU citizens should have the opportunity to express their concerns using online tools and platforms. Read the publication here.

LLL and ECAS: Campaign on Learning Democracy
The Lifelong Learning Platform (LLLP) and the European Citizen Action Service (ECAS) have been running a joint campaign entitled Learning Democracy, which stresses the need for people to keep on learning about our democratic systems and the possibilities that Europe offers us. The campaign consists of a series of videos (#myEUstory) that draw on real experiences. Check out our wrap-up video and keep on sharing your stories! Watch the video here.

Past events
COFACE: Webinar series: Digital Citizenship Breakfast Bytes – 11-20 May

In May, the Confederation of Family Organisations in the EU organised Breakfast Bytes of digital citizenship. Each “byte” was a short 90-minute online session aiming to increase critical thinking and understanding of the digital world. Read more here.

UEF: Final event of Schuman 2.0 project on Zoom, 9 May

On 9 May 2020, the Union of European Federalists (UEF) held the final event of the Schuman 2.0 Project on Zoom: “70 years from the Schuman Declaration: Time to reshape Europe beyond the unthinkable!”. This event was a chance to reflect with MEPs and YouTubers on the Schuman Declaration and how Europe should face its future challenges after the Coronacrisis. More information here.

News from the EESC

EESC proposals for post-COVID recovery and reconstruction: towards a new societal model

At its June plenary session, the European Economic and Social Committee adopted a resolution with its proposals for the post-COVID-19 crisis reconstruction and recovery. Under the slogan ‘the EU must be guided by the principle of being considered a community of common destiny’, the adopted text suggests taking the opportunity presented by the crisis to build a new societal model: “We cannot simply restore what existed in the past: we need to restructure and improve it.” Read the resolution.
Publication: Participatory Democracy – A success story written by the EESC
This compendium brings together all the opinions and reports which, over the last thirty years, have enabled the EESC and civil society organisations to strengthen participatory democracy and become an indispensable part of the European decision-making process. The EESC serves as an unrivalled permanent forum for civil dialogue and consultation. Therefore, civil society's involvement by means of the structure provided by the EESC is crucial in efforts to address the lack of public confidence in Europe. Download the compendium here.

Webinar: Towards structured youth engagement on climate and sustainability, 16 June 2020
This webinar will serve to reflect on the building blocks for a new structured approach to youth engagement in climate and sustainability policies at EU level. The discussion will feed into the EESC Own-initiative opinion on "Towards structured youth engagement on climate and sustainability". Read more.
Past EESC events

Webinar: Towards an EU strategy on sustainable consumption after COVID-19, 11 June 2020
This webinar was organised to provide input into the preparation of an EESC own-initiative opinion on "Towards an EU strategy on sustainable consumption". The opinion will contribute to the reflection on post-crisis recovery by providing concrete recommendations for a comprehensive strategy on sustainable consumption, as part of the European Green Deal. Read more.

Webinar: Shifting priorities in post-COVID recovery – 4 June 2020
This webinar served to bring the concept of wellbeing economy to the debate in the EU. By presenting several perspectives, it contributed to the debate on the post-COVID recovery and reconstruction at the level of the EESC. Read more.
The plenary session in June took place in a "hybrid" form. The following opinions were adopted:

- A single market for all (INT/892)
- European standardisation for 2020 (INT/893)
- Just Transition Fund and amendments to the Common Provisions Regulation (ECO/504)
- European Green Deal Investment Plan (ECO/505)
- COVID-19 crisis response – Adjustments in banking prudential rules (ECO/518)
- Postponement of taxation rules due to the COVID-19 crisis (ECO/519)
- Financing the transition to a low-carbon economy and the challenges in financing climate change adaptation (NAT/778)
- Support under EAFRD in response to the COVID-19 outbreak (NAT/795)
- The effects of campaigns on participation in political decision-making (SOC/630)

All the EESC opinions adopted can be consulted here.