

## The European Economic and Social Committee (UE)

The European Economic and Social Committee (EESC) is a EU consultative body that gives representatives of Europe's socio-occupational interest groups and others a formal platform to express their points of view on EU issues. Its opinions are addressed to the Council, the European Commission and the European Parliament. It thus has a key role to play in the Union's decision-making process.

The ESC was set up by the 1957 Rome Treaties to involve economic and social interest groups in the establishment of the common market and to provide an institutional structure for briefing the European Commission and the Council of Ministers on European Community issues.

The [Single European Act](#) (1986), the [Maastricht Treaty](#) (1992), the [Amsterdam Treaty](#) (1997) and the [Treaty of Nice](#) (2000) have reinforced the EESC's role.

The EESC has 350 members, who are drawn from economic and social interest groups in Europe.

Members are nominated by national governments and appointed by the Council of the European Union for a renewable 5-year term of office. The latest renewal was in October 2015, for the 2015-2020 term of office.

They belong to one of three groups:

- [Employers](#) (Group I)
- [Workers](#) (Group II)
- [Various Interests](#) (Group III)

The members' mandate

The members' task is to issue opinions on matters of European interest to the Council, the Commission and the European Parliament.

Advisory role

Consultation of the EESC by the Commission or the Council is mandatory in certain cases; in others it is optional. The EESC may, however, also adopt opinions on its own initiative. The Single European Act (17.2.1986) and the Maastricht Treaty (7.2.1992) extended the range of issues which must be referred to the Committee. The Amsterdam Treaty further broadened the areas for referral to the Committee, and allowed it to be consulted by the European Parliament. On average, the EESC delivers 170 advisory documents and opinions a year (of which about 15% are issued on its own initiative). All opinions are forwarded to the EU's decision-making bodies and then published in the EU's Official Journal.

## Information and integration role

Over the last few years the EESC has stepped up its role in the European Union and has transcended the basic role assigned to it in the Treaties. It acts as a forum for the single market and, with the support of other EU bodies, has hosted a series of events aimed at bringing the EU closer to the people.

Besides this work carried out in the different sectors and policy areas, the EESC carries out more horizontal activities meant to increase citizens' participation.

It should notably be recalled that the [European Citizens' Initiative](#) has been a political priority for the EESC since its conception, expressed through concrete actions (an annual conference "ECI DAY", invitation of ECI organisers to the EESC to debate their issues in plenary sessions, thematic Sections and ECI Group meetings and translation service to the ECI organisers for the description of their initiatives) and citizen-focused services (advice to organisers and researchers, formalised cooperation with civil society stakeholders for exchange of information and best practice, ECI publications explaining and promoting the tool).

It is also worth mentioning that the annual **Civil Society Days** that gather more than 200 CSOs – and through them a very large number of citizens – have also a very wide outreach directly among citizens thanks to a large use of social media. This conference is organized by the [Liaison Group](#), that the EESC manages, which is made of 30 large EU CSOs and networks. Through it the EESC allows these organisations to develop the vertical dialogue, making their voices heard in the other institutions and horizontal one, allowing them to discuss among them.

The EESC also **encourages other institutions to get more involved in participatory democracy**, both by carrying out a map of existing platforms of civil dialogue, done together with the EC, and by managing a network of practitioners of civil dialogue meant to improve this dialogue by exchanging best practices.

Besides that, the EESC has produced the "**European Passport to Active Citizenship**" (both PDF and [HTML versions](#) – in cooperation with OPOCE) which lists and explains to citizens how they can fully exploit their rights of European citizens but also how to be active citizens. The Passport has been widely disseminated among EU citizens through EU Representations and Europe Direct points.