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2024 WORK PROGRAMME OF THE CIVIL SOCIETY ORGANISATIONS' GROUP

(Subject to review according to developments during the year)



**European Economic
and Social Committee**

Civil Society Organisations' Group

INTRODUCTION

At the political level in the European Union (EU), 2024 will clearly constitute a **pivotal year** due to the **elections to the European Parliament** and the appointment of a **new college of European Commissioners**. As a **year of change**, for both the European legislature and executive, 2024 will also be a year where **citizens** and more precisely, the electorate, will yield considerable **influence** over **political outcomes**, merging national and European pre-occupations when determining their choices.

The strong unity displayed by the EU and its Member States in the ongoing Russian war of aggression against Ukraine, has been significantly undermined by the **absence of political leadership** and **agreement** on how the EU should contribute to **solving the conflict** between Israel and Hamas. This lack of unity risks continuing in 2024, due in part to the **multitude of minority and coalition governments** at the **national level**. Hence, it is crucial that in 2024, political leaders strive for greater **coherence on the EU's political goals, vision and policies**.

Moreover, according to the European Parliament's **Eurobarometer survey 'Democracy in Action: one year before the European elections'**¹, respondents from the 27 Member States identified the following four topics, that they consider should be addressed in priority by the incoming European Parliament:

- **Fight against poverty and social exclusion;**
- **Public health;**
- **Action against climate change;**
- **Support to the economy and the creation of new jobs.**

Some 79% of the citizens questioned replied that they **expect a decrease in their own standard of living** over the next year. In parallel, 61% **viewed**

1 Spring 2023, EB 99.1, Directorate-General for Communication, Public Opinion Monitoring Unit

positively their country's membership of the EU, 67% stated that they are **likely to vote in the European elections** and 47% affirmed that they **tend to trust the EU**.

In this context, in 2024 all European Institutions and bodies have both a **responsibility** and an **opportunity**, to **listen to and address the preoccupations and expectations of European citizens, mobilising the electorate** to actively participate in defining the future direction of the EU. **Voting** in the elections to the European Parliament is only **one dimension** of engaging in the EU's democratic processes. The European Economic and Social Committee (EESC), including the Civil Society Organisations' Group (Group III), have both the **mandate** and the **political ambition**, to continue to engage in 2024 with civil society organisations (CSOs) as well as with citizens, in order to **actively promote effective sustainable participatory democracy**.

2024 will also be a year when the Civil Society Organisations' Group will **begin preparing** for the forthcoming **Group III Presidency of the EESC**, scheduled to begin in October 2025.



PRIORITIES OF THE CIVIL SOCIETY ORGANISATIONS' GROUP (GROUP III)

In light of the above, in 2024 the Civil Society Organisations' Group will maintain as its **overriding priorities**: the **fight against poverty**, which constitutes the first objective of the **Sustainable development goals (SDGs)**, as well as **the role of CSOs in combating poverty**.

In addition and in order to contribute to these priorities and to respond to citizen's preoccupations², in 2024 Group III will focus its activities on the following **topics**:

- **Promoting inter-generational solidarity within the EU;**
- **Preparing European health systems for the future;**
- **Striving to protect the most vulnerable in European societies;**
- **Strengthening civil society, civic space and democracy in the EU;**
- **Preparing for the elections to the European Parliament: engaging with CSOs on the benefits of the EU.**



2 Spring 2023, EB 99.1, Directorate-General for Communication, Public Opinion Monitoring Unit

METHODOLOGY

Continuing the trends of 2023, the Civil Society Organisations' Group will continue its **coherent, structured and focussed approach**, weaving together all of the **policy instruments** at its disposal. In 2024, a strong emphasis will be placed on **continuity**, with the **topics** and **activities** building on previous **work by the Group**.

Concretely, the Group will take a **three-pronged approach to its work**:

Firstly, it will **comprehensively plan its work** along a **limited number of thematic areas**, which will feed into the overall objective of **poverty eradication**. **All of the policy instruments** available to the Civil Society Organisations' Group (studies, own-initiative opinions, events, thematic debates at ordinary Group meetings, etc.), will be employed to **simultaneously advance the policy contribution of the Group to this topic**.

Secondly, the Group will **strategically and proactively engage with the European Institutions**: the **European Commission, European Parliament** and forthcoming **presidencies of the Council of the EU**. In the case of the latter, the objective will be to establish contacts several months prior to the presidencies in order to **influence**, inter alia, the **priorities** of the forthcoming presidencies and/or the **exploratory opinions** requested from the EESC.

Thirdly, the Group will continue to promote effective civil dialogue and will **structure its outreach to and collaboration with external CSOs**. As in 2023, this will involve **feeding topics from the Group's work programme** into collaboration with CSOs and engaging in **partnerships** on events of **common interest**. According to the thematic area and the objectives to be attained, the Group will continue to seek collaboration with **umbrella and/or sectoral CSOs**.

ACTIVITIES (to be regularly reviewed during 2024)

Open letter on civil dialogue

- Sending the **open letter on civil dialogue**, drafted by the Group together with Civil Society Europe, to the **Presidents of the European Commission and the European Parliament and the Belgian presidency of the Council of the European Union** (24 January);
- Launching a **full communication strategy** (info pack, visuals, website, press release, social media, contacts with journalists, etc.), in order to promote the open letter;
- **Debating the proposals** of the open letter with representatives of the European Institutions and CSOs, at the **Group event** (25 March 2024).



Studies

- Requesting the EESC to commission a study on the topic **Mapping civil dialogue practices in the EU Institutions**;
- Presenting one or both of the **2023 Group III initiated studies**³ at the Group conference on **Striving to protect the most vulnerable in European societies** (21 November 2024);

3 'Affordable sustainable housing in the EU' and 'How to eradicate skills poverty among the most vulnerable'

- Presenting the 2023 **Group III initiated studies** at meetings of the **Categories**, which are managed by the Secretariat of the Civil Society Organisations' Group.

Group own-initiative Opinions

- **Requesting** up to **three Group own-initiative Opinions** on subjects relating to the priorities of the Group. The following two proposals have already been agreed upon by the Bureau of the Group:
 - *Forging a European Flagship Initiative for Health;*
 - *Promoting European inter-generational solidarity – towards a horizontal EU approach'.*
- **Presenting** one or more of those own-initiative Opinions **at Group events during the year.**



Events

- Group conference **Strengthening civil society and participatory democracy in the EU : the way forward**, in consultation with the Associational Life Category, Brussels, 25 March;
- Group conference **Preparing for the elections to the European Parliament: engaging with CSOs on the benefits of the EU** (approximate title), Brussels, 16 April;
- Group conference **The State of health in Europe**, Liège, Belgium, 4 June;
- Group conference **Promoting inter-generational solidarity in the EU** (approximate title), Brussels, 10 October;
- Group conference **Striving to protect the most vulnerable in European societies** (approximate title), Budapest, 21 November;
- One or two **thematic seminars** could be organised in Brussels during the year, in **partnership** with European civil society networks on topics of common interest;
- Regular meetings or events of the **five Categories** managed by the Secretariat of Group III, in line with the **streamlined approach** adopted at the end of 2023.



Thematic debates during ordinary meetings of the Group

- Presentation of the **EESC's outreach activities in Member States**, 16 January 2024;

- Debate on the **EU's Nature Restoration law**;
- Etc.

Strategic outreach to the European Institutions

- **Proactively engaging** with the forthcoming **presidencies of the Council of the EU** in anticipation of exploratory Opinions to the EESC and Group conferences in the countries holding the presidencies;
- Examples include **ex ante meetings** and/or **exploratory missions**⁴ and/or **ex post meetings** to present the results of the events;
- Continuing the follow-up on the **bilateral meetings** held in 2023 between the Group III President and **four European Commissioners**⁵;
- Taking steps to establish working relations with relevant **incoming European Commissioners**;
- Engaging in structured outreach to the **European Parliament (MEPs, relevant inter-groups, political groups and committees)** with regard to thematic Group III events, Group own-initiative opinions, Group studies, etc;
- Fully utilising the contacts of the **members** of the Civil Society Organisations' Group with the **European Institutions**, in order to **advance the priorities of the Group**;
- Strengthening working relations with relevant **institutional third parties**, e.g., the Scottish office, in the context of EU-UK civil society relations.



- 4 A meeting of President Séamus Boland with representatives of the incoming Hungarian Presidency of the Council of the EU took place on 9 January.
- 5 Commissioners Jourová, Schmit, Šefčovič and Šuica

Proactive outreach to European CSO networks

- Continuing to **actively reach out** to and cooperate with external **European level CSO networks, umbrella and/or sectoral CSOs**, e.g., on the **open letter** on civil dialogue, bilateral meetings with the Group President, speaking opportunities and partnerships on joint events;
- Building on the contacts of the **members** of the Civil Society Organisations' Group with **European and national CSOs**, in order to strengthen dialogue and advance the priorities of the Group;
- Working closely with CSOs from the **candidate countries**, in the context of the **EESC's Enlargement Candidate Members' initiative (ECM)**.

Enhanced cooperation within the EESC on common priorities

- Presenting, at the Group conference on **Strengthening civil society and participatory democracy in the EU : the way forward** (25 March 2024), the exploratory Opinion of the Belgian Presidency initiated by Group III: **Strengthening civil society and participatory democracy in the EU: a path forward**;
- Facilitating **more cooperation** between the **different sectors** represented within the **Civil Society Organisations' Group**. E.g. collaboration on the organisation of **joint meetings** among **Categories** managed by the Secretariat of Group III (e.g., on 31 January 2024, between the Farmers and the Consumers & Environment Categories);
- Encouraging more **synergies** between the **Group** and the **Categories**; **the Group** and **EESC sections**;
- Follow-up by Categories of key EESC priorities (e.g., 2024 Day of the Liberal Professions on the topic **Professional Support for the Blue Deal**).

Active promotion of the interests of the Group within the EESC at large

- Promoting the Group's positions in key EESC horizontal bodies, e.g., the **Liaison Group, CAF, COCOM**, the **Audit Committee** and the **Questors**;
- Promoting the Group's interests in key Ad hoc groups of the Committee, notably, the **Ad hoc Group on the European elections, Youth and Equality**;
- Promoting the Group's priorities in important flagship EESC initiatives such as the **EESC Civil Society Week** and the involvement of **CSOs from EU candidate countries** in the advisory work of the Committee;
- The Group will also continue to work towards ongoing **reform within the Committee**, with the aim of further recognising and strengthening its role as the house of European civil society.

Effective communication by the Group

- Overall **communication support** on the Group's outreach to **CSO networks** and the **European Institutions**;
- **Communication campaign** surrounding the **open letter** and **key Group events**;
- Continued publication of the **Civil Society Organisations' Bulletin**;
- **Communication support** to Group III Members on their participation in EESC flagship initiatives, e.g., **Member's outreach activities** in the context of the **upcoming elections** to the European Parliament, the **Civil Society Week**, etc;
- Regular **social media** coverage of the **EESC's plenaries, key events** by the EESC and the Group, **missions** and **speeches** by the Group President.



European Economic and Social Committee

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