1. Introduction

In this cluster, co-chaired by CEV Centre for European Volunteering and Volonteurope, our work and deliberations with the cluster members focused on rights and values in the European Union, European Identity, Freedom of Movement, Civic Space, Sport, Security, the EU’s role in the world, Migration Challenges and Opportunities. We took the European rights and values, and the importance of having a robust and unthreatened civic space in Europe, as a transversal frame and basis on which to reflect on the theme of “Our European Life”. We asked ourselves the following three questions: what is our European life? What should it be? And finally, how do we get there?

Framing the cluster discussions around a robustly functioning civic space and healthy democracy in the EU has been vital for us. Civic space is the political, legislative, social and economic environment, which enables citizens to come together, share their interests and concerns, and act individually, and collectively as volunteers, activists and/or employees, to influence and shape their societies. Civic space enables people to pursue multiple, at times competing, points of view. Both in its advocacy-oriented and its action or service-oriented function, civil society contributes to making effective the access to civil, political, economic, social, cultural and environmental rights for many.

A vibrant and independent civil society, in an open civic space, is vital for a healthy democracy, strong social justice, and to safeguard the Rule of Law. These are European priorities to create a Union of values beyond solely economic interests, which allow us to promote rights and values, migration, the EU’s role in the world, security and sport, amongst others.
An open, plural and dynamic civic space is a central feature of democratic societies because it allows citizens to engage politically beyond elections. It also encourages governments to be transparent and accountable, and listen to the voices, lived-experiences and knowledge of their citizens. Within the cluster, we facilitated a culture of active participation and citizenship, which we believe is vital to democratise the European project, especially in the context of the Conference of the Future of Europe, to ensure the European Union delivers for the good of the people and the planet.

As democracy and the rule of law in Europe are backsliding amidst weakening standards for human rights – including socio-economic rights – and with increasing restrictions on civic space in many European member states, the EU’s role is even more crucial in rebuilding trust and confidence in democracy and the Rule of Law as suitable tools for addressing the wide range of people’s needs, increasing cohesion in our societies, and protecting civic space. At the same time, civil society actors, such as those who were actively involved in the work of our cluster, are vital to acting and advocating for the common good, as well as for advocating for the implementation of, and improvements to, many European policies, including in areas tackled in this cluster. The ability of civil society and active citizens to come together, to bring forward recommendations that engage European policy-makers at local, national and European level is the basis for the following recommendations.

2. Recommendations

2.1 European identity and belonging based on inclusivity and solidarity for all

A sense of European belonging should emphasise the richness and diversity existing in Europe, the democratic traditions, shared values and a sense of solidarity among people. It should be inclusive for all people: youth and elderly, LGBTIQ, migrants, people of different ethnicities and faiths in line with the EU’s motto: 'United in Diversity'. It also needs to acknowledge the consequences of Europe’s colonial past and the structural racism that marginalises and discriminates against many today, making them feel excluded from the European community.

However, today this vision for a European community of values, democracy, inclusivity and solidarity is facing many challenges, some of which are global, while others result from...
tensions inside European societies. The consequences of four decades of neoliberal dominance have prioritised competition over cooperation and solidarity, which should be at the heart of public policies and international relations. The soaring of inequalities inside and between countries is putting to test claimed values and shared objectives. It opens avenues to regressive populism, racism, identities that build in opposing communities, use of media and social networking that split and not unite. Far-right groups are becoming more vocal and aggressive in the public space, and their narratives are mainstreamed by political parties. Trust in policy-making institutions, including those of the EU, is being challenged, also due to lack of meaningful democratic channels for participation of citizens and civic organisations representing them. Groups that are perceived as different are stigmatised instead of being included in a Europe vision for the future.

In such context, rights- and solidarity-driven policies are challenged, while exclusionary, nationalistic and regressive identities flourish. The sense of belonging and common ownership relies on democratic and participatory policy-making, which makes citizens feel empowered and listened, as well as policies that respond to their needs of security (in the broad human rights understanding of the cluster conclusions).

Furthermore, Europe is facing other threats from geo-political issues, COVID19, cyberattacks, and threats from/through multinationals (Facebook, Google, Twitter etc), that cannot be solved when the EU is weakening. The outcome of the UK’s EU membership referendum (51.89% voting for Leave versus 48.11% voting for Remain) might have been different if a stronger feeling of European belonging (‘Europeanness’) had been established in the hearts and minds of the British people. Due to increased nationalism and euroscepticism, there is a risk that more ‘Brexit’ could take place, which would further weaken the EU. When we could build a stronger European identity in the hearts and minds of the citizens of the 27 EU countries, the risk of more ‘Brexit’ would diminish, and an EU Constitution (voted down in 2005) could become a feasible proposal.

How can we build a stronger sense of European belonging in the hearts and minds of all living in Europe today?

Initiatives, funding programmes (for example, Erasmus+, European Solidarity Corps, EU research and health programmes, EU regional funding), mechanisms and other provisions, which strengthen the European identity, are already in place. Amongst others, they include: the common currency; the Schengen Area; core EU values; the European flag, anthem and motto; policies which foster equality, such as the EU Anti-racism action plan and LGBTIQ Equality strategy; long standing tradition of welfare states.

Further steps to take include:
First, foster a European civic space (see the civic space theme) and promote active and democratic participation at national and European level beyond elections, as a fourth pillar in the European Democracy Action Plan (EDAP), supporting the promotion of education and practice on democratic citizenship, Rule of Law and human rights. Particular emphasis should be given to the youth and their organisations because they are, historically speaking, the best change agents.

Second, develop an EU wide common history and civic education syllabus for all young people as part of compulsory education, with complementary resources (to be) developed and rolled out to all children and young people including in non-formal education settings. Such syllabus should focus on the historical advancements in rights and democracy, victories against dictatorship and authoritarian regimes, on struggles to overcome colonialism, patriarchy and racism. It should also address the global consequences of the colonial legacy.

Third, the economic and financial policies are long-term tools at the disposal of EU institutions to alleviate negative impacts on society, and, in this way, are strong drivers to contribute to limiting negative pressures on the rule of law. It needs to be ensured that they are rights-driven and environmentally sustainable, instead of driven by profit. Redistributive policies are needed to close down the social and economic gaps between countries and inside countries.

Fourth, make Europe Day (9th May) a public holiday in all 27 EU countries.

Fifth, stimulate and facilitate citizens, but especially young people, to organise massive street festivities on this day, to activate all citizens to celebrate the accomplishments of our European unity, for instance: 76 years of peace, freedom and growing prosperity; to enjoy each other’s culture and music and to to voice their concerns (climate change, youth rights etc.). Such annual festivities throughout the EU could add a meaningful dimension (when curated carefully) to the strengthening of a common European identity that will make us feel more European. The Europe Day celebrations can be institutionalised throughout the EU, next to the massive national celebrations in individual EU countries that are held annually, such as, for instance: ’Quatorze Juillet’ in France, St. Patrick’s Day in Ireland and ’Koningsdag’ in The Netherlands.

2.2 Freedom of Movement
Within this topic, cluster members deliberated on issues such as the lack of comprehensive data and information on the manner in which MS have implemented the freedom of movement directive across Europe and what impact has this implementation had on the rights of mobile EU citizens. The number of EU citizens making full use of their freedom of movement right whilst increasing, is significantly lower than the overall number of citizens and there is also an out-of-date assumption within EU institutional circles that mobile EU citizens simply leave their country of origin and move to another EU country, while intra EU migration can take various forms and have different durations.

This thinking ignores the fact that many mobile EU citizens, particularly among the younger generation, (millenials and Gen Z) may be highly mobile, moving to one or more EU countries to study, then perhaps completing internships and short-term jobs in a number of different EU countries. The framework under the Free Movement Directive¹ does not provide such young mobile citizens (millenials 1 and Gen Z) with effective protection of their rights, given its focus on building up rights through periods of continuous residence in one country.

Another aspect that this thinking ignores is the fact that mobile EU citizens are often pushed to destitution and left without protection in moments of hardship, when in the country other than that of their origin. This was very much evident in the time of the COVID-19 pandemic, particularly when the health crisis initially emerged, determining many to return to their country of origin with the hope for better social and health protection. Furthermore, not everyone enjoys the same privileges while exercising their free movement rights. Particular challenges appear when individuals are attempting to access their rights as job seekers in a host member state or when acquiring and maintaining the ‘worker status’ according to EU law. A restrictive and uncoordinated implementation of these concepts has been adopted by member states. Therefore, legislation regulating free movement in the EU needs to better consider situations of vulnerability and to develop support measures for individuals in need. The European Commission should coordinate better with member states to avoid a restrictive implementation of the EU legislation, and national governments need to improve the way the EU legislation is transposed and implemented at national level.

Under the topic of free movement, the following aspects are considered of central importance to be addressed by EU policies:

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1. It should be ensured that policies are fit for purpose for all, including groups of mobile EU citizens finding themselves in particularly vulnerable situations:

1.1. Low-skilled and low paid citizens, EU citizens in search of employment, citizens who have developed health problems, women and children in abusive partnerships, EU citizens belonging to marginalised groups including Roma, people experiencing homelessness, or former prisoners and those convicted of crimes that don’t necessarily carry a prison sentence.

1.2. Women are a particularly vulnerable group among mobile EU citizens and their presence in the homelessness populations has been on the increase, albeit women homelessness is oftentimes more hidden as they turn to diverse strategies to avoid sleeping rough as this can expose women to more dangers.

1.3. Being part of an ethnic minority also means higher risks of being vulnerable, as usually people belonging to ethnic minorities are more exposed to being discriminated against or might have a history of oppression and/or poverty that influences their chances to access equally the housing, employment or education market.

1.4. Persons with disabilities do not enjoy freedom of movement on an equal basis with others due to several barriers, including lack of accessibility in transport services. Besides, the fact that disability status is not mutually recognised among EU countries hinders the opportunities of persons with disabilities to move to other countries to study or to work, because if they do so they would lose their disability support services or they will need to go through the disability assessment in the country they move in, a process which usually takes a long time. This is a main reason why, in the last Erasmus programme, only 0.17% of the beneficiaries were young people with disabilities. The lack of recognition of disability status across the EU can also pose problems in accessing disability benefits and services in the country they move in (e.g. assistance in transport services, reduced pricing in culture and sports, reasonable accommodation to vote in EU and municipal elections, etc.). We call on the EU to adopt an EU Disability Card which guarantees the mutual recognition of disability across Member States to facilitate free movement, and to introduce stronger legal provisions as for the accessibility of transport services and the built environment.

1.5. Any form of ethnic profiling for the purposes of monitoring and/or preventing freedom of movement, for example at borders, should be eliminated.

2. The fact that COVID19 measures have had an impact EU mobile citizens’ rights in the following ways should be acknowledged and mitigating actions put in place to avoid these problems in the future:
2.1. COVID-19 has had a negative effect as it has resulted in Member States placing restrictions on free movement and has called the principle of free movement of people across the EU into question.

2.2. For those with less than five years’ residence in a country and who may have needed to return to their country of origin for more than six months in any one year. In this case, when they return to their host country, they may have to start building up to permanent residence again in that country.

2.3. A language barrier or lack of knowledge about the system in the host country was observed, causing further exclusion of those living in destitution.

2.4. For those who were forced to accept informal jobs or who relied on daily part-time jobs for income, it became even harder to earn money as these offers became increasingly scarce.

2.5. The Covid19 pandemic closed down many services and businesses, leaving many mobile EU citizens unemployed (a clear example is the hospitality sector where many mobile EU citizens are employed). In some cases where the accommodation was included in the work contract, EU citizens were at risk of becoming homeless when their contract was terminated.

2.6. Hate speech has been experienced by EU citizens returning to their countries of origin, especially in the beginning of the pandemic, when they were seen as a risk to public health.

The following recommendations are developed to respond to the challenges encountered by EU mobile citizens in their host countries or negative consequences in their country of origin due to moving to another Member State:

1. Ensure a consistent and rigorous implementation of the Citizenship Directive (Directive 2004/38) across MS rather than the poor, uneven and inconsistent situation in place.

2. Improve generally the portability of social rights across the EU, especially those falling under the European Pillar of Social Rights;

3. Ensure that all citizens are not denied direct national political representation in their host countries or lose political rights in their country of origin;

4. Ensure that mobile EU citizens can take all their personal possessions with them when exercising their right to mobility, such as cars and other vehicles, without financial penalties.
5. Ensure that professional qualifications equivalence and proper implementation of mutual recognition of qualifications across the EU is properly implemented, particularly for trades;

6. Ensure that access to primary healthcare, including for resource-poor mobile EU citizens who do not have health insurance in the country where they reside, is available to all, particularly regarding the treatment of chronic illnesses;

7. Ensure that access to social benefits and to services is not only conditional on having the right to reside. Residence rights for mobile EU citizens can be a very difficult matter; EU law should provide clear guidance for all categories of mobile EU citizens.

8. Ensure that the tendency to restrict residence rights for mobile EU citizens in some member states and unclarity in European laws does not allow Member States to establish criteria that de facto prevents mobile EU citizens without resources from accessing social assistance;

9. Ensure a clear definition of the notion of being a worker and its interpretation, reversing the general trend to interpret narrowly the genuine and effective nature of the work activity to exclude mobile EU citizens engaged in low-wage jobs or working only a few hours a week from residence rights, and consequently from access to social benefits;

10. Ensure that authorities are not able to limit the recognition of residence rights and restrict access to social welfare for first-time jobseekers for which during their first six months of residence, they should only need to prove they are looking for a job;

11. Prevent the wide interpretation of the notion of public policy that has been adopted in isolated cases with the aim of targeting people living in encampments and rough sleeping with anti-social behaviour measures that targeted people sleeping rough, serving them with letters and if failing to attend interviews within the deadline provided, they were served with a notice communicating the loss of their right of residence, followed by the obligation to leave the country;

12. Prevent the imposition of the thresholds determined by some member states and not by EU law for “sufficient resources” to mobile EU citizens;

13. Ensure that the issue of “Comprehensive sickness insurance” condition and access to healthcare in the host country is properly implemented. As this requirement is not clearly defined in the Directive, national authorities have a wide margin of interpretation, often resulting in hardship and harm for the citizens concerned;
14. Prevent the loss of right of residence if no private insurance policy is available on the market that can satisfy the “comprehensive sickness insurance” criterion. The EU should safeguard EU citizens’ rights against breaches by:
   1. Ensuring a coordinated response to emergency challenges in times of crises;
   2. Ongoing monitoring of the practical implementation of freedom of movement and related EU rights and take decisive actions in case of violations (e.g. infringement procedures);
   3. Making available resources for the training of public administrations on EU citizenship rights so that the uneven and irregular application of law in times of crises is brought to a minimum.

The EU should restore in full and safeguard freedom of movement in the EU by:
   1. Extending ‘a fully functioning Schengen area’ to all EU member states, including Bulgaria,
   2. Romania, Ireland and Croatia, which are now left behind;
   3. Ensuring equal access to all rights it entails of all mobile Europeans, including those in vulnerable and precarious situation;
   4. Making the fundamental principle of freedom of movement in the EU resilient to any and all
   5. future unforeseen shocks by strengthening EU competences in relevant areas, such as health.

The low political participation of mobile EU citizens in their host countries is also considered of high concern and steps should be taken by member states and the EU to address this. Without a vote in national or regional elections, mobile EU citizens simply do not have the same ability to participate in politics in their host country. For democracy to be fully implemented, societies need to ensure that all citizens have access to exercise their right to vote. Member States and the European Union are responsible to address the barriers that mobile EU citizens encounter in their political participation.

What is therefore needed is an improvement in legislation to facilitate access to voting. For example, eliminating the requirement of proof of address would be a necessary step for improving voting participation for people who do not have an address or are experiencing homelessness. To replace this requirement, the EU and the member states should allow people to register and vote by using only their national ID. Thinking of groups of people living in institutions and homelessness, awareness-raising campaigns about elections at both EU as well as national level should be organised in a manner and language that can be easily understood to EU citizens living in another member state.

Building from the above, outreach activities to inform homeless mobile EU citizens or those living in destitution about upcoming elections should be organised and support should be
offered in registration processes (for example, mobile registration, organising drives and accompanying people to help them with registration and during the voting day). Prior to outreach activities, training should be organised for those engaged in running electoral processes on how to approach people about elections. Organising debates involving representatives of authorities and, ideally, candidates should also be strongly encouraged.

**Recommendations on political participation of mobile EU citizens in their host countries**

1. Regular communication and outreach activities targeting mobile EU citizens by local authorities, the EU institutions and relevant civil society organisations (CSOs).
2. Availability of training for municipal authorities who work in direct contact with mobile EU citizens, so that the information they provide on political rights is reliable and accurate.
3. Regular education about the functioning of the EU and about the EU citizens’ rights at each level of education.
4. Automatic or quasi automatic registration on the electoral roll for local elections.
5. Introduction of online registration on the electoral roll in order to facilitate and speed-up the process.
6. Putting deadlines for registration closer to the elections in order to allow mobile EU citizens enough time to register.
7. Monitoring the implementation of political rights by the EU and national decision-makers to ensure that there are no EU mobile citizens precluded from exercising their political rights due to incompatible national and local rules or administrative hurdles.

**2.3 Civic Space**

Civic space is at the heart of healthy democracy, functioning rule of law institutions and just and fair societies. Fostering a European civic space and ensuring dialogue channels between citizens, civic organisations representing them and institutions is also fundamental for democratising the European project, strengthening a feeling of ownership and belonging among those that live in the European Union today.
However, across EU member states, civil society is experiencing restrictions and challenges to its actions that affect its ability to fully act in the rule of law ecosystem\(^2\). In particular, these challenges include:

1. an unfavourable political landscape characterised by, on one hand, (1) institutional disregard to the role of civil society as intermediary between the citizens and their governing authorities, and, on the other hand (2) the growing threat of far-right narratives and attacks in the public space, that creates fear and further marginalises communities experiencing racial inequality, migrants and LGBTQI+ people and those who defend them; 
2. complex bureaucratic legal environment and restrictive laws that negatively affect civic freedoms and weak implementation of civil dialogue infrastructures; 
3. insufficient availability of funding for the civic sector, especially core funding, and growing obstacles (including bureaucratic ones) to access them; 

At the European level, civil dialogue is also opaque and unstructured, as different institutions and bodies are not subject to standards in consultation with citizen's organisations, placing them at disadvantage compared to for-profit actors and their lobbies.

These challenges were deepened and intensified during the COVID-19 pandemic\(^3\). Public health and security have too often been invoked as justifications to limit civic space and freedoms, sometimes even when other areas of public life were unrestricted (for example, in some countries churches or malls stayed open during the pandemic, indoors and outdoors entertainment stayed available, but public protests were banned or severely restricted). In many cases the restrictions went beyond international human rights standards which foresee that In case of actual (or potential) security or public health threats, any restriction of fundamental rights should be based on the three-prong test of legality, necessity and proportionality. Any exceptional restriction should also have a time limit linked with the emergency. During the pandemic many choices were made regarding what is to be considered “essential” and “non-essential”, which are political in nature. However, in many cases the state of emergency procedures that were declared did not foresee or allow for consultations or proper implementation of civil dialogue.

While the implementation of the enabling environment for civil society is a national competence, the drivers and responsibilities of the current rule of law and democratic

\(^2\) https://civicspacewatch.eu
deterioration are both national and European⁴. The European Union’s role is crucial in rebuilding trust and confidence in democracy and the rule of law as tools for addressing the wide range of people’s needs, increasing cohesion in our societies, and protecting civic space.

Civic space should be protected and developed. To this end, the European Commission should launch a proactive European strategy towards open civic space, describing the issues at stake and proposing tools at the disposal of the EU institutions (particularly the Commission), as well as the duties of Member States’ institutions to tackle them. This strategy should be based on five fundamental principles⁵.

1. **Recognise and speak up for civil society**

1.1. Promote active and democratic participation beyond elections, as a fourth pillar in the European Democracy Action Plan (EDAP), supporting the promotion of education and practice on democratic citizenship, Rule of Law and human rights;

1.2. Recognise and support the crucial role of volunteers, not only as a source of people-power for essential and meaningful tasks in society, but for the role they play in social cohesion, interpersonal relationships, social transformation, and paving the way to making European values a reality;

1.3. Declare 2025 as the European Year of Volunteers as a way to celebrate and recognise the contribution of volunteers to health and well-being in Europe as a key feature of a healthy democracy characterised by an active and vibrant civic space thriving with engaged citizens.

2. **Secure an enabling environment for civil society at the European level**

2.1. Put in place an inter-institutional agreement to implement Article 11 of the Lisbon Treaty, to implement a meaningful, structural, inclusive and transparent civil dialogue and enable citizens and their organisations to be meaningfully engaged in all EU decision-making processes⁶;

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2.2. Carry out structured impact assessment of how EU laws could impact Rule of Law, and civic space, including through over implementation, and, where such instances are identified, provide remedy⁷;

2.3. Ensure more sustainable, flexible and accessible funding for CSOs, especially in structural form (more operating grants, not only projects), with particular emphasis on grassroots organisations.

3. Monitor, document and analyse challenges faced by civil society

3.1. Strengthen the Rule of Law Annual Report on "the enabling environment for civil society", by dedicating a new pillar to civic space, adopting a broad and structured approach, allowing for an in-depth analysis of the situations faced by civil society actors⁸

3.2. Address the deficiencies identified, by putting forward concrete country recommendations with targets and deadlines, as well as European policies.

4. Protect civil society from attacks

4.1. Speak up for civic actors under pressure – as foreseen by the mandate of European Commission Vice-President for Values and Transparency.

4.2. Build on the example of the existing external EU human rights defenders mechanism protectdefenders.eu and provide appropriate financial support for the creation and maintenance of a similar monitoring mechanism in the EU, including a helpline, emergency funding, legal assistance, protection of defenders, and, if needed, temporary relocation.

5. Take actions to uphold the role of CSOs

5.1. Create an alert mechanism constantly feeding into the European Commission’s European Rule of Law mechanism that allows fast reaction and action; such an alert mechanism should lead to a rapid (re)assessment of the situation allowing for timely and concrete reaction at the EU level, such as recommendations, dialogue, sanctions and emergency funding when needed.

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⁷https://dq4n3btxmr8c9.cloudfront.net/files/u0CCuy/A_New_Fundamental_Rights_Strategy_for_the_EU-Recommendations_from_Liberties.pdf
5.2. Continue to launch infringement proceedings, where there is a breach of EU law violating civic space and associated Charter rights. Consideration should be given to the use of expedited procedures and interim measures when there is a risk of irreparable harm.

5.3. Ensure a more active and predictable role for civil society in ongoing infringement proceedings and ensure funding to CSOs to conduct strategic litigation at national and regional level, including action before the Court of Justice of the EU.

2.4 Sport

Focusing on competitive and non-competitive sport and physical recreation activities, the objective of the work of the cluster members was to develop recommendations, to unlock its social potential, make it more inclusive, and connect people to European values through sport. Therefore, sports here is an integral part and even encompasses cultural life in Europe and beyond; as such, ‘sport’ here refers not only to competitive activities and health-related exercises, but also to leisure activity, learning activities, pastimes, and cultural activities involving physical and/or competitive dimensions. The discussions were also aimed at strengthening the direct link between sport and physical and mental health, and to promote the feeling of togetherness that can be increased by sport. These objectives can be met, if the following recommendations are followed:

1. Support, recognise and celebrate the role of CSOs and volunteers in grassroots sports.
2. Make European sport championships truly European, and take these opportunities to have more campaigns for inclusion;
3. Value sports as a true learning experience: informal learning environments such as those that inform sport activities are the best tool for social inclusion and should be valued (also) for this.
4. Use sports to advocate for mainstream gender equality; this should be done within and outside sport disciplines.
5. Build a “European Sports Exchange Program” along the lines of the highly successful “Erasmus Student Exchange Program”, in order to increase togetherness (“Europeanness”) amongst the EU populations, for amateurial athletes and coaches alike.
6. Support sport organisations in poorer EU countries, following “sports for development” guidelines;
7. Support the establishment of European sport organisations and teams and their sustainability and ensuring fairness in sports, especially in those disciplines that still rely heavily on amateurism;
8. Make efforts to ensure that volunteers are not exploited in sports contexts and replace jobs, especially in sporting tournaments and events, in particular, the for profit ones.
9. Promote active inclusion of LGBTQI+ community in all sport disciplines and actively fighting all kinds of homophobia and transphobia in sports;
10. Invest in sport infrastructures, to make sure that all EU countries are on an equal footing.
11. Support local movements and local communities for sports beyond physical health, but rather as a means to learning, social inclusion, etc. Sport can be a catalyst for inclusion, and European values can be upheld by promoting sports, especially through fair play initiatives.

Sports such as cycling contribute to broader policies such as to have a more carbon-free Europe.

There is an important role of sport for the future of Europe, and it can be facilitated by the introduction of more cross-border sport organisations, games, which would in turn provide the feeling of togetherness around the future of Europe. Finally, the EU needs more competence to tackle transnational sport issues, because there is a lack of sufficient answers to these issues at the national level, due to political atmosphere or corruption: to understand these challenges and be able to answer them, Europe shall rely on the contribution of local and grassroot organisations.

2.5 Security

There are misconceptions that security is only about militarisation and externalisation of policies and that civil liberties have to be increasingly limited to address security concerns. Social issues are core for addressing people’s security needs. Security ought to be viewed as a concept of human security that ensures what is needed for well-being, protects and respects personal and collective freedoms, in line with human rights and European values. There is a need to view human security as holistically incorporating the vital needs of people with a strong focus on threats and challenges that are addressed through social transformation. Climate change and energy security policies make part of the population worried, fearing for their jobs, increasing prices or other matters of personal concern. We – as civil society – look at people’s safety, their protection and their empowerment, in a broader sense through human security frameworks that take into account the complexity and interrelation of security threats, going beyond the “physical” security of people. This way of understanding security is crucial for the European project as it puts at the core the primacy of rights, inclusivity and the cohesion of our society.
Civil society organisations play a central role in this process and recognise and support the need to develop and implement the following steps:

1. Strategies to alleviate economic inequalities to deliver economic security;
2. Policies that lead to universal access to sufficient quality food that avoids waste, for food security;
3. Models of public health preservation and universal access to basic health care for health security;
4. Environmental security policies aimed at prevention of the plundering of natural resources and climate change.
5. Preventive strategies for personal security to be a reality for all including those experiencing gender violence, LGBTIQ phobia, racism, “ablelism” and other groups experiencing prejudice and discrimination.
6. Community security policies and strategies that seek to eliminate ethnic, religious or other identity tensions;
7. Control and accountability mechanisms concerning issues such as police repression and human rights abuses by institutions leading to political security.
8. Strategies that will increase indigenous renewable energy and reduce energy demand through energy efficiency so that the EU could decrease its vulnerability and advance diversification away from external energy sources vulnerable to supply threats will lead to energy security.

Organised civil society plays a key role in advocating for and making effective the fundamental rights of those in vulnerable situations ensuring that there are checks and balances for people’s access to security measures guaranteeing their fundamental rights.

Security is of course not limited to what we just described. Neither the role played by civil society organisations in addressing security issues:

1. Organised civil society, involving paid employees and volunteers, is often at the front line in civil protection issues at the local level in developing resilience and providing civil protection measures in the face of natural and “human-made” disasters that impact on people’s security. The EU Civil Protection Mechanism that aims to strengthen cooperation between the EU Member States and six Participating States on civil protection to improve prevention, preparedness and response to disasters should be strengthened. When an emergency overwhelms the response capabilities of a country in Europe and beyond, it can request assistance through the Mechanism. The engagement of civil society organisations in the response should be at the core of the EU policies in this field.

2. Cybersecurity and safe artificial intelligence (AI) capacity requires a multi-stakeholder approach involving responsibilities for institutions and providers of services as well as
educated users. EU and member states institutions should play a strong role balancing the need for achieving cyber security and rights, including that of privacy. Providers of cyber services should act with responsibility towards society along the values that are enshrined in the EU Treaties which should lead to inclusive, peaceful, democratic and healthy societies. Individual citizens are entitled to have access to the internet and navigate and express themselves free from fear. Policies should emphasise providing education to safely use the cyber space. The present situation where threats are coming from cybersecurity breaches, misuse of Artificial Intelligence (AI) and its use for criminal purposes, are to be addressed alongside all crimes in a rule of law framework.

3. **Violent radicalisation and hate speech, in our societies**, often linked to prejudice, … are developing as a major threat to the physical security and well-being of many across the European Union and the world. Any kind of violence, should be addressed as a crucial threat to security.

There is a need for preventive social intervention against hate speech and violence at all levels and areas of life. Whilst this is a primary responsibility of policymakers and political institutions we highlight that they alone cannot address these challenges.

Better research could open the paths for understanding, effective policies and lasting solutions to both the root causes and the results of violent radicalisation, extremism and hate speech, leading to greater empowerment of the current generations, and the ones to come, towards peacebuilding, peacekeeping and greater security for all.

A real and lasting solution to the situation also requires a strengthened active civil society, both organised and non-organised, working in a complementary manner with public institutions.

The specific role CSOs can play relies on funding, training and support for the promotion and realisation of opportunities for citizen participation and volunteering to act in a timely and appropriate manner at the local level in promoting inclusion and prevention of all kinds of violence⁹. The European Union institutions should recognise the role of CSOs in this field and increase support when elaborating security policies and ensure that they are founded in people’s fundamental rights. In this regard, civil society organisations engaged in counter radicalisation activities should be better supported and recognised for their efforts.

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Today, national and European security and counter-radicalisation policies have often been shaped by political discourse increasingly deeply rooted in prejudice against Muslim\textsuperscript{10} (and in some cases Roma people and other racialised groups) fostering a climate of suspicion and division instead of inclusion. They have often resulted in discrimination against racialised groups and contributing to shrinking civil society space. They have, in a number of cases, increased surveillance on the general population, with insufficient public and judicial oversight. EU security policies, especially counter-terrorism and counter-radicalisation strategies, should put civil society and volunteer engagement at the core. They should detail measures, actions and activities to support and promote the protection of human rights, equality and the rule of law as key principles to tackle the challenge of violent radicalisation and extremism.

It is to be noted that CSOs intervention for rebuilding the trust of individuals that have embraced radical and extremist views is of high value in institutional settings such as prisons where the radicalisation of accused, offenders and ex-offenders should be better addressed. The role of civil society and volunteer-based initiatives in prisons should be better valued and supported by the European Union as part of a community wide approach to countering violent radicalisation and hate narratives.