



Civil Society Convention for the  
Conference on the Future of Europe

#CSOCofE

# The Future of Europe is Ours: A View from Civil Society

*Recommendations from civil society organisations  
for the Conference on the Future of Europe*

A flagship initiative of





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# The Future of Europe is Ours: A View from Civil Society

## Executive Summary

The Conference on the Future of Europe provided a timely deliberation space to connect politics with citizens, coming at a crucial moment for the European Union (EU) and its people. The **interconnected social, economic and environmental challenges** exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic and the outbreak of war at the EU's borders demand coordinated policies, trust, legitimacy, transparency, and a stronger involvement by citizens and their representative associations.

The **Civil Society Convention for the Conference on the Future of Europe** gathered together more than 82 EU networks with hundreds of thousands of citizens' associations across Europe. Throughout this process, we engaged in bringing the voice and the vision of citizens' associations for **equality, justice and solidarity**, as well as the protection (and practice) of **human rights and environment**, which we believe should be the core principles guiding all EU policies, both internally and externally.

The intersection of discrimination based on gender, age, race or economic status is a major challenge for societies today as many are prevented from enjoying the rights and possibilities for self- and collective emancipation. Through our internal work and participation in the Conference on the Future of Europe's plenary and working groups, we strove to **voice the concerns and amplify the voices of those who struggle to access their rights**, and who are most often at the periphery of participatory processes, invisible and disillusioned with societies based on unequal relationships and competition between people.

This document, comprising our **vision and proposals for the Future of Europe**, is the result of intense, bottom-up, collaborative work over the last two years. It builds on the involvement of representatives from very diverse civil society organisations. It gathers people from many countries, people who have different cultural, social and economic backgrounds and origins but are united by both a shared understanding of the societal challenges we face today and the willingness to act and advocate together towards the EU and Member State institutions, and to make this vision come true.

We believe that a **socially and environmentally just EU** is the precondition for achieving an inclusive, sustainable and just future for the Union. Achieving this vision requires **transformative measures in multiple policy areas to tackle inequalities, social and racial injustices**: a sustainable economic model, the promotion of equal opportunities and the implementation of fair working conditions, as well as the provision of social protection for all. Civil society organisations cater for the needs of diverse communities across the EU on a daily basis, filling the gaps left by the lack of social investment, and promoting access to equal opportunities, inclusion, participation and justice for all, notably the most marginalised communities and individuals.

We know that healthy food, decent housing and work, and benefiting from human rights and safety, education, culture and leisure, and human well-being can be a reality for all. Humanity can live a decent life in harmony with the rest of nature by stopping the overexploitation of natural resources, respecting ecological boundaries and ensuring those resources are shared fairly. **The EU has the knowledge and the financial means to take the global lead in the transition to long-term sustainability and to champion global climate and environmental justice.** But **deep and transformative change** is needed in the overall **economic system** and various sectors to overcome vested interests that slow down the green transition. More ambitious and rapid environmental and climate action is required to ensure that all people can enjoy their right to a healthy environment, regardless of their income, social class, age, gender, ethnicity, location or other factors, and can benefit from a green and just transition.

Climate change is not the only factor that can trigger disruptive transformations in our societies. As technology continues to create turning points in modern history, affecting the way we live, work and evolve, the main and most important challenge is to achieve a digital transformation that works for all, without further deepening the existing digital divide or creating new inequalities. **Digitalisation will only advance European societies if we can safeguard and strengthen our democracies in the process.** There is great potential for the EU to be an ambitious, rights-driven leader in tech policy but this will only be possible if it puts human rights and democratic principles at the centre of these legislative processes.

**European democracy must also deliver a better life for European citizens.** It must be able to tackle the challenges of social and economic inequalities, critical moments for the environment and the representation of the most marginalised people in society through an inclusive approach. European democracy should be strengthened through a **greater role for the European Parliament** (right of initiative), the accountability of the European Commission to the European Parliament, and the transparency of Council decisions. Democracy should be exercised at all levels using **participative mechanisms**. The practice of democracy (including at the EU level) should focus constantly on inclusion and participation. European civil society should be empowered to represent the voices, concerns and expectations of citizens through the **full implementation of civil dialogue**, as stipulated in Article 11 of the Lisbon Treaty. Civic space is a core element of European democracy which should be protected by both EU and Member State institutions.

Civic space is the political, legislative, social and economic environment which enables citi-



zens to come together, share their interests and concerns, and act either individually or collectively as volunteers, activists and/or employees to influence and shape their societies. **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.** A culture of active participation and citizenship is vital to democratise the EU and ensure that it delivers for the good of both people and the planet.

As democracy and the rule of law are backsliding in the EU amidst weakening standards and increasing restrictions on rights and freedoms, the **Union's role is even more crucial in rebuilding trust in the capacity of our democracy to build and sustain peace, to ensure a decent living and a sustainable and inclusive future for all.**

**Civil society organisations** must be **key players and partners** in this endeavour. The policy recommendations contained in this document reflect our shared vision for a more democratic, socially and environmentally just EU. Some of these proposals, just like some recommendations stemming from the Conference's Citizens' Panels and WGs, will require changes in the current Treaties and the setting up of a Constitutional Convention. Civil society and social partners should participate closely in this process.



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# Introduction

The [Conference on the Future of Europe \(CoFoE\)](#) was an unprecedented democratic exercise led by three European institutions: the European Parliament, the Council of the European Union and the European Commission. Launched on 9 May 2021, the year-long Conference sought to discuss and determine the EU's challenges and priorities through debates among European citizens, authorities at the European, national, regional and local level, social partners and civil society organisations. Participants were brought together through the Conference's multilingual digital platform, decentralised events, European Citizens' Panels and the Conference Plenary. Ultimately, Conference participants worked to develop recommendations by 9 May 2022, covering a diverse spectrum of issues, including climate change and the environment, socio-economic questions, European democracy, and digital transformation. The tripartite leadership of the Conference (European Commission, Parliament and Council) is now responsible for acting on these recommendations.

In February 2021, the [Civil Society Convention for the Conference on the Future of Europe \(CSOCoFoE\)](#) was established on the initiative of Civil Society Europe. We have been actively engaged as a Convention for more than a year within the Conference on the Future of Europe and in our own self-organised, bottom-up process to ensure the involvement of citizens' representative associations.

More than 82 European networks and platforms with constituencies all over Europe make up the Civil Society Convention, connecting hundreds of thousands of European organisations and millions of individuals engaged in many aspects of life, from education to culture, social inclusion, environment protection, fundamental rights, democracy and transparency. We represent the civil society component in the Conference Plenary, alongside the [European Movement International](#).

We came together as a Convention in the belief that our commitment to the Conference on the Future of Europe would be both useful and recognised. In our daily efforts, we worked to ensure appropriate links between what was discussed and decided inside the European institutional frameworks and citizens' expectations. We performed this role both within the Conference (in plenary sessions and working groups) and in our own, internal participation processes. Internally, we organised ourselves into **thematic clusters** and discussed with our **constituencies** (and beyond) what direction the EU as a whole should take in the future. We then developed proposals on what concrete changes are needed to achieve our vision for the future of the EU.



Our **200+ recommendations** were prepared in a bottom-up way through the work of our different thematic clusters, in which over **100 experts and practitioners from 40 different organisations** were directly involved, and through surveys and crowdsourcing processes involving **over 2,000 national civil society organisations**. Through our recommendations, we express strong and legitimate expectations aimed at the EU institutions. We also jointly undertake a critical **analysis of the shortcomings of current EU policies** and make collective and **constructive proposals for a better future for all**.

Our thematic clusters, led by the steering committee members who were elected by the Civil Society Convention, were the following:

1. The fight against climate change and environmental challenges, coordinated by Patrizia Heidegger from [EEB – European Environmental Bureau](#);
2. An economy that works for people, social fairness, equality and intergenerational solidarity (including health union), coordinated by Elisa Gambardella from the [SOLIDAR Foundation](#);
3. Europe's digital transformation, coordinated by Assya Kavrakova from [ECAS – European Citizen Action Service](#);
4. European rights and values, migration, security, the EU's role in the world, coordinated by Gabriella Civico from [CEV – Centre for European Volunteering](#) and Piotr Sadowski from [Volonteurope](#);
5. The Union's democratic foundations, and how to strengthen democratic processes governing the EU (including the rule of law), coordinated by Antonella Valmorbida from [ALDA – The European Association for Local Democracy](#).

As part of our contribution to the CoFoE, we advocated for our recommendations in every Conference working group and plenary session. For example, in the working group dedicated to European democracy, we successfully introduced and negotiated in favour of recommendations which, for instance, include organised civil society in the citizens' participation process, provide enhanced structural support (financial or otherwise) for civil society via a specific pillar in the European Democracy Action Plan and a dedicated civil society strategy, and strengthen cooperation between EU legislators and civil society organisations to use the link between decision-makers and citizens that civil society organisations constitute. In the working group dedicated to digital transformation, we successfully introduced and negotiated in favour of recommendations which, among other things, highlight the need for affordable internet access across the EU (in addition to ensuring fast, secure and stable access), prioritise vulnerable groups when it comes to access to the internet and hardware, and develop training

initiatives to retrain and upskill workers so that they can remain competitive in the job market.

We have gathered together all the Civil Society Convention thematic clusters' recommendations in this comprehensive document and organised them into the following sections:

- I.** The European Democracy We Need
- II.** Our European Life: European Identity, Civic Space, Freedom of Movement and Security
- III.** A Socially and Environmentally Just European Union
- IV.** Green Transition Fast Forward – Ten Actions for Systemic Change
- V.** A Digital Transformation Leaving No One Behind
- VI.** Human Mobility and Migration: Promoting Equality, Decent Work and Well-being for All
- VII.** The EU in the World: Peace, Justice, Human Rights and Environmental Security.

It is also possible to access individual thematic cluster contributions on the [Civil Society Europe website](#).

## Acknowledgments

We are very grateful for the participation and active involvement of our member organisations and their constituencies, the members of our five thematic clusters, the volunteers and the trainees who, under the leadership of the steering committee and our co-chairs, Alexandrina Najmowicz (European Civic Forum) and Milosh Ristovski (Young European Federalists), have contributed to the success of this unprecedented collective initiative.

# I. The European Democracy We Need

## Introduction

Through their engagement and their work on the ground, civil society organisations witness how people connect democracy to the delivery of policies, if and when public policies respond to societal needs, and if public concerns can be voiced, heard and met through democratic processes. For European democracy to survive and European values to be met, the EU must deliver on people's needs and ensure effective access to economic, social and fundamental rights for all, as well as ensuring everyone's well-being.

The Conference on the Future of Europe must give a comprehensive response to the crucial democratic issues at stake in coherence with the values enshrined in the European Treaties, both in terms of policies for truly inclusive societies and people's participation in decision-making (participatory democracy, representative democracy). European civil society calls on EU institutions to increase the participation of civil society organisations in EU policies on fundamental rights, climate action, disinformation and the rule of law.

## Recommendations

### **1. A strong European democratic space based on values**

European action is urgently needed to make our communities fully inclusive, to ensure equal access to fundamental rights and to build solidarity both inside and among EU countries.

An open, plural and dynamic civic space is a central feature of democrat-

ic societies because it enables citizens to engage politically beyond elections. It also encourages governments to be transparent and accountable, and to listen to their citizens' voices, lived experiences and knowledge.

As democracy and the rule of law in the EU are backsliding amidst weakening standards for human rights, including socio-economic rights, and increasing restrictions on civic space in many Member States, the EU institutions' 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 are vital for acting and advocating for the common good, as well as the implementation of, and improvements to, many European policies.

Conditions for citizen participation through voting, in decision-making processes, and through dialogue with civil society organisations, should be enhanced. This is crucial even if not sufficient for a **democracy that works for all**.

Action must be taken to reverse the negative trends we are witnessing (disengagement from voting, mistrust and disappointment in the functioning of democracy and in its capacity to deliver effective access to fundamental rights, and shrinking space for civil society organisations) and put EU democracy on the right track.

European civil society is unequivocal about its calls for EU action to strengthen civic space, including through monitoring such space, developing a civic space policy, and taking action against Member States infringing on fundamental freedoms and rights.

- EU institutions and Member States should consolidate a clear democratic space and policy framework that include a **monitoring and enforcement mechanism to protect EU values and rights** as defined in the Treaties.
- **Civic space impact assessments** should be part of all impact assessments for EU legislative proposals, and part of the European Commission's continued monitoring of existing EU and national legislation.
- **Reform the [Article 7 TEU procedure](#)** to make it an effective guarantor of democracy and human rights in all EU Member States. Reform should include rules and procedures (e.g. qualified majority vote and co-decision between the European Parliament and Council) that ensure the procedure's effective functioning and prevent the exercising of vetoes to block decisions. Rules must allow EU institutions to effectively act as guarantors of citizens' rights in areas within the Union where democracy and the rule of law are seriously and systematically disregarded. EU institutions and Member States must intervene when we witness a regressive path with increasing restrictions on civic space.

## 2. Strengthening European civic participation

All Europeans must be able to participate in European decision-making, holding European leaders accountable.

The EU's democratic goal, both inside and outside its borders, must be strengthened by extending its reach to the public sphere, investing in evidence-based information, a vibrant and diversified European media and enlarging the space for civic action.

- ▶ Enable **participatory mechanisms**, including easy-to-understand and accessible consultations for citizens, as well as more space and resources for civil dialogue.
- ▶ From the local to national and European levels, citizens should be able to participate in **inclusive deliberative assemblies and other forms of inclusive actions**, which must be part of the decision-making processes.
- ▶ **Civic participation** should be embedded in the follow-up and implementation of EU decision-making.
- ▶ The **provisions mentioned in [Article 11 TEU](#)** should be fully implemented, including an interinstitutional agreement on civil dialogue with organised civil society alongside the implementation of the European Citizens Initiative.

## 3. More Europe in the electoral processes

**European elections must be accessible and inclusive of all European citizens and permanent residents**, including citizens living in other Member States, as well as persons with disabilities. The Conference provides an excellent opportunity to strengthen the inclusiveness of the European elections.

- ▶ Ensure that all permanent residents and citizens can, without exception, participate in elections **as voters and candidates**, and that elections are accessible to citizens with disabilities.



- There should be an **EU electoral authority and transnational lists**; the latter would enable citizens to vote for MEPs from electoral lists that include candidates from all EU countries.
- **Gender equality** must be ensured.
- Citizens should be informed of who the **candidates for President of the Commission** are when they vote.
- European citizens should have **the right to vote in the Member State where they reside** and pay taxes, and not only for local and European elections.

## 4. Relying on the European population's full diversity

**Full recognition and consideration of the diversity of our societies** is fundamental to a democratic system and the rule of law.

It is key to achieve social and economic inclusion and gender equality, to fight against all forms of discrimination, leaving no one excluded or neglected from effective access to rights and civic freedom, and political decisions. Mainstreaming these elements into decision-making on the EU's future is essential.

## 5. Increasing the role of the European Parliament

The Commission must be fully accountable to the European Parliament. To this end, it should consider the following proposals:

- The European Commission **President must have a majority in the European Parliament to hold office.**
- The European Parliament must have the **right to dismiss individual Commissioners.**

- The European Parliament must have the **right to initiate legislative proposals**.

## 6. A transparent and accountable Council

To this end, the Commission should consider the following proposals:

- **Extend qualified majority voting (QMV) in the Council to democracy/ human rights issues and to EU Common Foreign and Security Policy (CFSP).** The power of the European Council to make decisions on issues of key concern to democracy and human rights in European external action requires the extension of QMV to these areas. The extension of QMV or a similar mechanism removing the restrictive unanimity requirement would give the EU and its institutions the ability to act in a meaningful and timely manner and revitalise the European mandate to protect fundamental values. Civil society organisations surveyed confirm that this is essential to the EU's future.
- **The veto in the European Council and EU Council of Ministers must be abolished.**
- **Member State governments must inform and consult the public about their positions and aims**, with deliberations and votes in the open.
- **European citizens must be entitled to access European courts in cases of violation of their fundamental rights.** Disregard for human rights and the rule of law is unacceptable and governments which undermine them should not receive European funding. Human and civil rights should be recognised and accessible for all residents in the EU, irrespective of their nationalities.

## 7. An accountable EU

For the EU to be wholly transparent and accountable, the EU and Member State institutions must be held accountable to public scrutiny and institutional oversight.

We urge the Commission to consider the following proposal:

- The **EU Transparency Register** should become a **norm** for national and regional governments.
- The position of national governments in the preparatory works of the Council on legislative files should be made public.
- Transparency should be included in all phases of the co-decision procedure, including trilogues.

Civil Society Convention closing event | 21-22 March 2022



## II. Our European Life: European Identity, Civic Space, Freedom of Movement and Security

### Introduction

We took European rights and values, and the importance of having a robust and unthreatened civic space in the EU, as a transversal framework 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?

Our European life must be framed around a robustly functioning civic space and healthy democracy. Civic space is the political, legislative, social and economic environment which enables citizens to come together, share their interests and concerns, and act either individually or 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. One of the EU's priorities is to create a Union of values that goes beyond solely economic interests governing both its internal and external actions.

# Recommendations

## 8. European identity and belonging

A sense of European belonging should emphasise the richness and diversity in the EU, the democratic traditions, shared values and a sense of solidarity among people. It should be inclusive for all people: youth and elderly, LGBTQIA+, migrants, and people of different ethnicities and faiths, in line with the EU motto 'United in Diversity'. It must also acknowledge the consequences of the EU'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, inclusiveness 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 led to a prioritisation of competition over cooperation and solidarity, the latter of which should be at the heart of public policies and international relations. The soaring inequalities both inside and among EU countries are putting claimed values and shared objectives to the test. They open avenues for regressive populism and racism, identities centred around opposing communities, and the use of media and social networking that split people, rather than uniting them. Far-right groups are becoming more vocal and aggressive in the public space and their narratives are being mainstreamed by political parties. Trust in policymaking institutions, including those of the EU, is being challenged, also due to the lack of meaningful democratic channels for the participation of citizens and civic organisations representing them. Groups that are perceived as different are stigmatised instead of being included in a European vision for the future.

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

Furthermore, the EU is facing other threats, namely geopolitical issues, COVID-19, cyberattacks, and threats from/through multinationals (including Facebook, Google and Twitter), none of which can 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 greater nationalism and Euroscepticism, there is a risk that more 'Brexit's could take place which would further weaken the EU. By building a stronger European identity in the hearts and minds of the citizens of the 27 EU countries,



the risk of more 'Brexit's' would diminish and an EU Constitution (voted down in 2005) could become a feasible proposition.

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

Initiatives, funding programmes (including Erasmus+, European Solidarity Corps, EU research and health programmes, EU regional funding), mechanisms and other provisions that strengthen the European identity are already in place. They include: the common currency; the Schengen Area; core EU values; the European flag, anthem and motto; policies that foster equality, such as the EU Anti-racism Action Plan and LGBTIQ Equality Strategy; and the long-standing tradition of welfare states.

However, these initiatives are not sufficient and further steps to be taken include:

- **Fostering a European civic space** and promoting active and democratic participation at the national and European level beyond elections, as a fourth pillar in the European Democracy Action Plan, supporting the promotion of education and practice of democratic citizenship, rule of law and human rights. Particular emphasis should be given to the youth and their organisations because, historically speaking, they are the best agents of change.
- Developing 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 distributed to all children and young people, including in non-formal education settings. Such a syllabus should focus on historical advancements in rights and democracy, victories against dictatorships and authoritarian regimes, and struggles to overcome colonialism, patriarchy and racism. It should also address the global consequences of the colonial legacy.
- Ensuring that **economic and financial policies are rights-driven and environmentally sustainable**, rather than driven by profit. These policies are long-term tools at the disposal of EU institutions to alleviate negative impacts on society and, as such, they are strong drivers to contribute to limiting negative pressures on the rule of law. Redistributive policies are needed to close down the social and economic gaps both between countries and within them.
- **Making Europe Day (9 May) a public holiday** in all 27 EU Member States.
- **Stimulating and facilitating citizens, especially young people, to: organise massive street festivities on Europe Day**, to encourage all citizens to

celebrate the accomplishments of our European unity, which include 76 years of peace, freedom and growing prosperity; **to enjoy each other's culture and music**; and **to voice their concerns**, such as on climate change and youth rights. Such annual festivities across the EU could add a meaningful dimension (if 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**, alongside the huge 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.

## 9. Civic space

Civic space is at the heart of a healthy democracy, the functioning rule of law institutions and just and fair societies. Fostering a European civic space and ensuring dialogue channels between citizens, the civic organisations representing them and institutions is fundamental to democratise the European project and to strengthen the feeling of ownership and belonging among those who live in the EU 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<sup>1</sup>. In particular, these challenges include:

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

- The prosecution of human rights defenders and criminalisation of human rights actions.

At the EU level, civil dialogue is also opaque and unstructured as different EU institutions and bodies are not subject to standards regarding consultation with citizens' organisations, placing the latter at a disadvantage compared to for-profit actors and their lobbies.

These challenges deepened and intensified during the COVID-19 pandemic<sup>2</sup>. Public health and security have too often been invoked as justifications for limiting civic space and freedoms, sometimes even when other areas of public life were unrestricted. In many cases, the restrictions went beyond international human rights standards that, in the case of actual (or potential) security or public health threats, foresee that 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 to the emergency. During the pandemic, many choices were made regarding what is to be considered 'essential' and 'non-essential'; these choices are political in nature. However, in many cases, the state of emergency procedures that were declared did not foresee or allow for consultations or the proper implementation of civil dialogue.

While implementation of the enabling environment for civil society is a national competence, the drivers and responsibilities of the current rule of law and democratic deterioration are both national and European<sup>3</sup>. The EU's role is crucial in rebuilding trust and confidence in democracy and the rule of law as tools to address the wide range of people's needs, increase cohesion in our societies, and protect civic space, including civil society 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 to be placed at the disposal of EU institutions (particularly the Commission), as well as the duties of Member State institutions to tackle the issues. This **strategy** should be **based on five fundamental principles**<sup>4</sup>:

## 1. Recognise and speak up for civil society

- **Promote active and democratic participation beyond elections** as a fourth pillar in the European Democracy Action Plan, supporting the promotion of education and practice of democratic citizenship, rule of law and human rights.
- **Recognise and support the crucial role of volunteers**, not only as a source of people power for essential and meaningful tasks in society, but also for the role they play in social cohesion, interpersonal relationships, social transformation, and paving the way to making European values a reality.

- **Declare 2025 as the European Year of Volunteers** as a way to celebrate and recognise the contribution by volunteers to health and well-being in the EU 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

- **Put in place an interinstitutional agreement to implement Article 11 of the Lisbon Treaty**, to instigate a meaningful, structural, inclusive and transparent civil dialogue and enable citizens and their organisations to be meaningfully engaged in all EU decision-making processes<sup>5</sup>.
- **Carry out a structured impact assessment of how EU laws could impact the rule of law, and civic space**, including through over implementation and, where such instances are identified, provide a remedy<sup>6</sup>.
- **Address barriers to cross-border actions by civil society organisations and overcome barriers to cross-border philanthropy**.
- Ensure **more sustainable, flexible and accessible funding for civil society organisations**, especially in structural form (more operating grants, not only projects), with a particular emphasis on grassroots organisations, and work towards an enabling environment for philanthropy.

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

- 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, enabling an in-depth analysis of the situations faced by civil society actors<sup>7</sup>.
- 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

- **Speak up for civic actors under pressure** – as foreseen by the mandate of the European Commission Vice-President for Values and Transparency.
- Build on the example of the existing external EU **human rights defenders mechanism** ([protectdefenders.eu](https://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 civil society organisations

- **Create an alert mechanism** constantly feeding into the European Commission's European Rule of Law Mechanism that allows for fast reaction and action; such an alert mechanism should lead to a rapid (re)assessment of the situation enabling timely and concrete reaction at the EU level, such as recommendations, dialogue, sanctions and emergency funding when needed.
- 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.
- **Ensure a more active and predictable role for civil society** in ongoing infringement proceedings and ensure funding to civil society organisations to conduct strategic litigation at the national and regional level, including action before the EU Court of Justice.



## 10. Freedom of movement

Although the number of EU citizens making full use of their freedom of movement right is increasing, it remains significantly lower than the overall number of citizens. There is also an outdated assumption within EU institutional circles that mobile EU citizens simply leave their country of origin and move to another EU country whereas, in reality, intra-EU migration can take various forms for different durations.

This kind of thinking ignores the fact that many mobile EU citizens, particularly among the younger generation (millennials and Gen Z), may be highly mobile, i.e. 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 Directive<sup>8</sup> does not provide such young mobile citizens (millennials and Gen Z) with an effective protection of their rights, given its focus on building up rights over 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 periods of hardship while living in a country other than their country of origin. This was very much evident during the COVID-19 pandemic, particularly when the health crisis initially emerged, causing many to return to their country of origin with the hope of 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 'worker status' according to EU law. Member States have adopted a restrictive and uncoordinated implementation of these concepts. Therefore, legislation regulating free movement in the EU needs to take better consideration of vulnerable situations and develop support measures for individuals in need. The European Commission should coordinate better with Member States to avoid the restrictive implementation of EU legislation, while national governments must improve the way EU legislation is transposed and implemented at the national level.

Within the issue of free movement, the following aspects are considered of crucial importance and should be addressed by EU policies:

- 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.**

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

Women are also a particularly vulnerable group among mobile EU citizens and their presence in the homeless population has been on the increase, albeit women's homelessness is often more hidden as they turn to diverse strategies to avoid sleeping rough because the latter can expose them to greater dangers.

Being part of an ethnic minority also brings a higher risk of vulnerability as people belonging to ethnic minorities are usually more exposed to being discriminated against or may have a history of oppression and/or poverty which influences their chances of equally accessing the housing, employment or education markets.

Persons with disabilities do not enjoy freedom of movement on an equal basis with other EU citizens due to several barriers, including the lack of accessibility in transport services. Furthermore, the fact that disability status is not mutually recognised among EU countries hinders those with disabilities' opportunities to move to other countries to study or work because moving would mean that they lose their disability support services or would need to go through the disability assessment in the country they are moving to, a process that usually takes a long time. This is one of the main reasons why only 0.17% of the beneficiaries in the last EU Erasmus programme were young persons 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 persons with disabilities move to (including assistance in transport services, reduced pricing in culture and sports, and reasonable accommodation to vote in EU and municipal elections). We call on EU institutions and Member States to adopt an EU Disability Card that guarantees the mutual recognition of disability across Member States to facilitate free movement, and to introduce stronger legal provisions for the accessibility of transport services and the built environment.

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 COVID-19 measures have had an impact on EU mobile citizens' rights in the following ways should be acknowledged and mitigating actions should be put in place to avoid these problems in the future:**

COVID-19 has had a negative effect as it has resulted in Member States placing restrictions on free movement. It has called into question the principle of free movement of people across the EU.

The pandemic impacted 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 citizens return to their host country, they may have to start anew building up to permanent residence in that country.

A language barrier or lack of knowledge about the system in the host country has been ob-

served, causing further exclusion of those living in destitution.

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.

The COVID-19 pandemic closed down many services and businesses, leaving many mobile EU citizens unemployed (a clear example is the hospitality sector in which many mobile EU citizens work). In some cases where accommodation was included in the work contract, EU citizens were at risk of becoming homeless when their contract was terminated.

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

**The following recommendations have been 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 the consistent and rigorous implementation of the Citizenship Directive (Directive 2004/38) across Member States, rather than the inadequate, uneven and inconsistent situation that is currently in place.
2. Improve in general the portability of social rights for mobile and migrant workers across the EU, especially those rights falling under the European Pillar of Social Rights, in order to ensure universal social protection across the Union. Workers of migrant origin should also have the portability of social rights (e.g. pension) if and when they return to their country of origin or move to another non-EU country.
3. Ensure that no citizens are denied direct national political representation in their host countries nor 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 the equivalence between professional qualifications and the mutual recognition of qualifications across the EU are 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 the lack of clarity in EU laws do not allow Member States to establish criteria that de facto prevent 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 of narrowly interpreting 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 unable to limit the recognition of residence rights and restrict access to social welfare for first-time jobseekers. During their first six months of residence, such jobseekers 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 sleeping rough with anti-social behaviour measures and serving them with letters. If people failed 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 on “sufficient resources” for mobile EU citizens.
13. Ensure that the issue of the ‘Comprehensive Sickness Insurance’ condition and access to healthcare in the host country is properly implemented. As this requirement is not clearly defined in the Free Movement Directive, national authorities can apply a wide margin of interpretation, often resulting in hardship and harm for the citizens concerned.
14. Prevent the loss of right of residence if there is no private insurance policy available on the market that can satisfy the comprehensive sickness insurance criterion. EU institutions should safeguard EU citizens’ rights against breaches by:

- Ensuring a coordinated response to emergency challenges in times of crises;
- Continuously monitoring the practical implementation of freedom of movement and related EU rights and taking decisive actions in case of violations (e.g. infringement procedures);
- 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 kept to a minimum.

**15.** EU institutions and Member States should restore in full and safeguard freedom of movement in the EU by:

- Extending ‘a fully functioning Schengen area’ to all EU Member States, including Bulgaria, Romania, Ireland and Croatia, which currently have been left behind;
- Ensuring equal access to all the rights that freedom of movement entails for all mobile Europeans, including those in vulnerable and precarious situations;
- Making the fundamental principle of freedom of movement in the EU resilient to any and all future unforeseen shocks by strengthening EU competences in relevant areas, such as health.

The poor political participation of mobile EU citizens in their host countries is also considered to be an issue of high concern and steps should be taken by Member States and EU institutions 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 exercising their right to vote. Member States and EU institutions are responsible for addressing the barriers that mobile EU citizens encounter in their political participation.

Thus, an improvement in the legislation is needed to facilitate access to voting. For example, eliminating the requirement of proof of address would be a necessary step for improving participation in voting by those who do not have an address or are experiencing homelessness. To replace this requirement, EU institutions and Member States should allow people to register and vote by using only their national ID. Keeping in mind those who live in institutions and homeless people, awareness-raising campaigns about elections at both the EU and national levels should be organised in a manner and language that can be easily understood by EU



citizens living in a Member State that is not their country of origin.

Building on the above, outreach activities should be organised to inform homeless mobile EU citizens or those living in destitution about upcoming elections and support should be offered for registration processes (for example, mobile registration, organising drivers and accompanying people to help them with registration and during voting day). Prior to outreach activities, those engaged in running electoral processes should be trained on how to approach people about elections. Organising debates involving representatives from 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, EU institutions and relevant civil society organisations.
2. Availability of training for municipal authorities which 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 EU citizens' rights at each level of education.
4. Automatic or quasi-automatic registration on the electoral roll for local elections.
5. Making deadlines for registration closer to the elections to give mobile EU citizens enough time to register.
6. Introduction of online registration on the electoral roll to facilitate and speed up the process.
7. Monitoring the implementation of political rights by EU institutions and national decision-makers to ensure that no EU mobile citizens are precluded from exercising their political rights due to incompatible national and local rules or administrative hurdles.

## 11. Security

There is a misconception that security is only about militarisation and the externalisation of policies, and that civil liberties have to be increasingly limited to address security concerns. Social issues are essential to address people's security needs. **Security ought to be considered as a concept of human security that ensures what is required for people's well-being, and protects and respects personal and collective freedoms**, in line with human rights and European values. Human security should be seen as holistically incorporating people's vital needs with a strong focus on threats and challenges that are addressed through social transformation. Climate change and energy security policies create concern among certain parts of the population, 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 has at its core the primacy of rights, inclusiveness 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 healthcare for health security.
4. Environmental security policies aimed at preventing 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, LGBTQIA+ phobia, racism, ableism, 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 reduce its vulnerability and advance diversification away from external energy sources vulnerable to supply threats which 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 have just described. Neither is the role played by civil society organisations in addressing security issues:

1. Organised civil society, involving paid employees and volunteers, is often on the front line in civil protection issues at the local level, developing resilience and providing civil protection measures in the face of natural and 'human-made' disasters that impact people's security. The [EU Civil Protection Mechanism](#) which aims to reinforce cooperation on civil protection between EU Member States and six Participating States to improve prevention, preparedness and response to disasters should be strengthened. When an emergency overwhelms the response capabilities of a country in the EU 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 including responsibilities for institutions and service providers, as well as educated users. EU and Member State institutions should play a strong role in balancing the need to achieve cybersecurity and rights, including that of privacy. Providers of cyber services should act responsibly towards society along the values that are enshrined in the EU Treaties and which should lead to inclusive, peaceful, democratic and healthy societies. Individual citizens are entitled to access to the internet and to navigate and express themselves free from anxiety. Policies should emphasise providing education on the safe use of cyberspace. The present situation, whereby threats are coming from cybersecurity breaches and the misuse of 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**, which are often linked to prejudice, are becoming a major threat to the physical security and well-being of many across the EU 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 across all areas of everyday life. Whilst this is primarily the responsibility of policymakers and political institutions, we highlight that they alone cannot address these challenges.

Better research could open the way 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 both current and future generations towards peacebuilding, peacekeeping and greater security for all.

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

The specific role civil society organisations 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 violence<sup>9</sup>. **EU institutions should recognise the role of civil society organisations in this field, boost their support when elaborating security policies and ensure that they are founded on people's fundamental rights.** In this regard, civil society organisations engaged in counter-radicalisation activities should be better supported and recognised for their efforts.

Today, national and European security and counter-radicalisation policies are often shaped by political discourse which is increasingly deeply rooted in prejudice against Muslims<sup>10</sup> (and in some cases, Roma people and other racialised groups), fostering a climate of suspicion and division instead of inclusion. Such policies have often resulted in discrimination against racialised groups and contributed 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 their core. EU and national anti-money laundering and counter-terrorism financing policies must be risk-based, proportional and must not unduly restrict civil society space. EU security policies 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 should be noted that the intervention of civil society organisations in rebuilding the trust of individuals who have embraced radical and extremist views is of significant 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 EU institutions and Member States as part of a community-wide approach to countering violent radicalisation and hate narratives.

# III. A Socially and Environmentally Just European Union

## Introduction

As civil society organisations, we share a vision for a socially and environmentally just European Union as a precondition for achieving an inclusive, sustainable and just future for the EU.

Achieving this vision requires transformative measures in multiple policy areas: a sustainable economic model, the promotion of equal opportunities and the implementation of fair working conditions, as well as the provision of social protection for all.

Civil society organisations cater to the needs of diverse communities across the EU on a daily basis, filling the gap left by the lack of social investment, and promoting access to equal opportunities, inclusion, participation and justice for all, in particular the most marginalised communities and individuals.

The EU is undergoing multiple and intertwined societal and environmental crises that must lead to transformative policies to tackle inequalities, environmental challenges, social and racial injustice and the intersection of discriminations that are currently preventing many from enjoying their rights and opportunities for self and collective emancipation.

## 12. A sustainable economic model

As one of the largest economies, the EU is consuming more and more while we are experiencing an era of mass extinction and rapid climate change acceleration. In the EU as a whole, we live as though there were 2.8 Earths, significantly overshooting planetary boundaries while not meeting our own social aims, as indicated by the EU's Social Scoreboard, for

example, in terms of unmet healthcare needs or the gender gap in employment. Moreover, the EU is currently far from achieving its environmental objectives for both 2030 and 2050.

Growth at all costs drags us into a situation where non-profitable (from a market perspective) resources, such as care or ecosystem services, are regarded as infinite and stretchable resources that are readily available. In this context, there is constant downward pressure on labour rights and wages, and increasingly precarious living conditions for all, both inside and outside of the labour market.

A new economic model in the EU that is sustainable because it is environmentally and socially just is called for. The economy is much more than a narrow gross domestic product (GDP) figure; it is the entire 'realm in which people produce, distribute and consume products and services that meet their wants and needs'<sup>11</sup>, regardless of whether or not this is done via specific market mechanisms. A socially and ecologically just economy allows for a good life for all, leaving no one behind, enhancing gender, environmental, social and global justice, and fostering peace rather than conflict. It overcomes past injustices and structural discrimination. It ensures that economic and political decision-making power is dispersed in democratic ways, and that human economic activity is embedded in nature.

## Recommendations

### ► EU institutions and Member States should introduce post-growth strategies by:

1. Adopting indicators fit to measure the well-being of people beyond the limits of GDP and taking into account planetary boundaries.
2. Decoupling employment and social security systems from economic growth, and designing the subsequent welfare policies in a way that considers socio-ecological needs.
3. Building a carbon-neutral, circular, non-toxic and inclusive economy by promoting solidarity economic practices, fostering social entrepreneurship and increasing consumers' agency.
4. Redefining international trade as a tool that is relied upon only if it contributes significantly to everyone's well-being, while respecting the limits of our ecosystems.
5. Ensuring that decent labour migration and human mobility form part of



broader efforts to reform sectors to make them economically, environmentally and socially sustainable.

6. Adopting the policy recommendations described in the following sections.

► **EU institutions and Member States should promote equality and a feminist economy by:**

1. Introducing gender budgeting for public finance and economic policies to achieve women's rights and gender equality at all levels and in all public policy areas.
2. Recognising paid and unpaid care work as essential components of the economy and for the well-being of both people and planet, and enshrining care work within a human rights framework.
3. Investing in the provision of public services and supporting individuals and families' access to affordable and qualitative domestic and care services.
4. Implementing progressive tax schemes benefitting women and the well-being of all.

► **EU institutions and Member States should foster multi-stakeholder partnerships by developing measures and incentives** to support cooperation among all economic actors, including civil society and philanthropic organisations.

## 13. Equal opportunities

A gender-based approach and measurable targets should underpin all the following recommendations to ensure equal opportunities and thorough monitoring and follow-up processes.

All recommendations promote an intersectional approach to addressing social and economic inequalities.

### 13.1 Gender equality

For a sustainable and inclusive EU, gender equality must be at the heart of the ongoing environmental, economic and social transformation. The economy must shift to an inclusive and intersectional feminist approach based on equality, well-being, social justice, and care as a universal collective need and responsibility of all genders.

Recent years have witnessed a strong backlash on women's rights. Women's most fundamental rights have been threatened and even restricted amid growing political and social hostility. A backward trend has been observed, resulting in women being deprived of rights they were previously able to enjoy, such as sexual and reproductive health and rights. The EU is no exception to this backlash.

### *Recommendations*

1. Create the conditions for an 'equal-earner-equal-carer model' to move away from the 'male-breadwinner-model': promote a work-life balance, eliminate gender-based discriminations in access to and within the labour market, combat the pay and pension gap, and increase the presence of women in leadership positions across all sectors.
2. Prevent and address all forms of gender-based violence, online and offline, through strong EU legal, policy and financial actions.
3. Enable a sustainable women's movement by securing sustainable funding for those associations which are essential services providers deeply impacted by the pandemic.

## 13.2 Education, training and lifelong learning

A sustainable future for the EU at a time of fast-paced societal changes can only be achieved by ensuring universal access to quality education for all, including excluded or discriminated groups and persons with disabilities. This includes making strong investments, recognising non-formal, informal, life-wide and lifelong learning alongside formal education, and creating more complementarity and continuity between learning opportunities to promote fundamental EU values, equity, social cohesion and active citizenship.

The [European Pillar of Social Rights](#) established the right and equality of access to quality and inclusive education, training and lifelong learning. In light of the emerging [European Education Area](#), specific measures must be taken to ensure the realisation of this principle, including through implementation of the [EU Pact for Skills](#).

### *Recommendations*

1. Expand the right to education to the **right to lifelong learning for all**.
2. Promote the **whole-community approach to facilitate avenues for cooperation between formal, non-formal and informal education providers** in policymaking and implementation.
3. **Establish quality assurance systems for all types of learning** (formal, non-formal and informal), and facilitate the recognition of certifications, skills and prior learning. Pay particular attention to challenges facing specific groups of people (e.g. migrants).
4. **Close the digital educational gap by investing in skills and infrastructure.**
5. Defend and promote fundamental EU values by including academic freedom in the annual [EU Rule of law report](#).
6. Include **value-driven education in all types of learning**.
7. Establish a European Agency for Citizenship Education.
8. Ensure that the right to quality and inclusive education includes the right for everyone to access comprehensive sexual and reproductive health and rights education based on the values of equality, mutuality, respect, autonomy, critical thinking, non-dominance and non-violence, as well as personal and social responsibility.

9. Tackle social and labour market transformations, including the green and digital transitions, by investing in transversal and soft skills and creating more complementarity and continuity between learning opportunities through an individual's life.

### 13.3 Sport

Focusing on both competitive and non-competitive sport and physical recreation activities, our objective was to unlock sport's social potential, make it more inclusive and connect people to European values through sport. Therefore, here sports is an integral part and even encompasses cultural life in the EU and beyond; as such, 'sport' here refers not only to competitive activities and health-related exercises but also to leisure activities, learning activities, pastimes, and cultural activities involving physical and/or competitive dimensions. Our discussions were also aimed at strengthening the direct link between sport and physical and mental health, and promoting the feeling of togetherness that can be enhanced by sport.

#### *Recommendations*

These objectives can be met if the following recommendations are followed:

1. Support, recognise and celebrate the role of civil society organisations and volunteers in grassroots sports.
2. Make European sport championships truly European and take such opportunities to carry out more campaigns on inclusion.
3. Value sports as a true learning experience: informal learning environments, such as those that inform sports activities, are the best tool for social inclusion and should (also) be valued for this.
4. Use sports to advocate for mainstream gender equality, both within and outside sports disciplines.
5. Build a 'European Sports Exchange Programme' along the lines of the highly successful 'Erasmus Student Exchange Programme', in order to increase togetherness ('Europeanness') among EU populations, for amateur athletes and coaches alike.
6. Support sports organisations in poorer EU countries, following 'sports for development' guidelines.

7. Support the establishment of European sports 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 sporting contexts and replace jobs, especially in sporting tournaments and events, in particular, the for-profit ones.
9. Promote the active inclusion of the LGBTQIA+ community in all sports disciplines and actively fight against all kinds of homophobia and transphobia in sports.
10. Invest in sport infrastructures to ensure 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 for 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 like cycling contribute to broader policies such as having a more carbon-free EU.

There is an important role for sport in the future of the EU that can be facilitated by the introduction of more cross-border sports organisations and games which, in turn, would engender the feeling of togetherness around the future of the EU. Finally, EU institutions need greater competence to tackle transnational sport issues. There is a lack of sufficient responses to such issues at the national level, due either to the political atmosphere or corruption. To understand these challenges and to be able to respond to them, EU institutions must rely on the contribution by local and grassroot organisations.

### **13.4 Youth rights and intergenerational solidarity**

Young people should be recognised as a particular demographic group with specific needs. A rights-based approach to developing policies for youth should strive to actively promote the autonomy of young people as well as their full participation in society. Young people have the right to a positive journey from education to further education, employment and training, and equality of access in both urban and rural areas. They need the same access to quality jobs and social protection mechanisms as other age groups.

The European Year of Youth offers an opportunity to tackle comprehensively the existing age-based discriminations that currently undermine access to basic rights, including social ones, particularly for young people from disadvantaged backgrounds, and further unequal access to opportunities in later life.

## Recommendations

1. Establish an intergenerational pact in the EU: social protection systems at the national level to balance spending across both older and younger generations.
2. End the sub-minimum rates for youth minimum wages: young people should, at the very least, be entitled to the same minimum wage as other workers.
3. Make social protection systems, such as minimum income schemes, more accessible to young people who are often ineligible to apply.
4. Support young people's access to housing.
5. Ensure access to quality jobs for young people – who are over-represented in precarious forms of work, undermining their right to quality employment and a life free from poverty – and regulate at the EU level new forms of precarious employment such as platform work.
6. Ensure equal access to pension rights for current and younger generations alike, paying special attention to the gender pension gap.
7. Ensure the access of undocumented young people to basic services and rights (including after the age of 18), and define clear and accessible pathways to regularise their status, to ensure they are not subjected to poverty, and that they have access to equal opportunities.
8. Reinforce the [EU Youth Guarantee](#) through adequate investment to ensure better access to further education, training, apprenticeships or work.
9. Ban unpaid internships across the EU by means of a legal instrument and adopt a minimum standard for quality internships and constantly monitor them at the EU level.
10. Establish a European framework for financial support for young parents to ensure equal opportunities for building families to current and future generations alike across European territories.



## 14. Fair working conditions for all

The first headline target of the European Pillar of Social Rights (EPSR) Action Plan aims to increase the EU employment rate to 78% by 2030, as a way of recovering from the pandemic and fostering a stronger Social Europe<sup>12</sup>. However, for many people, employment is no longer a viable protection against poverty and the COVID-19 pandemic has deepened pre-existing inequalities in the labour markets. In-work poverty increased from 8.2% in 2005 to 9% just before the pandemic in 2019<sup>13</sup> and was exacerbated by the COVID-19 crisis. In-work poverty mainly affects workers who face discrimination and exclusion from key rights and social safety nets, such as low-qualified and atypical workers, the self-employed, women, young and older people, ethnic minorities, migrants and those with disabilities, as the precariousness of working conditions is one of the main factors that facilitate the spread of in-work poverty<sup>14</sup>.

Chapter II of the Social Pillar on fair working conditions should be concretely and ambitiously implemented across the EU, notably in view of the epochal changes implied by both the digital and green transitions. The recommendations listed below aim to support this and should be underpinned by fair and redistributive fiscal policies and a sustainable feminist economic model. With this objective, the [EU Care Strategy](#) is a crucial initiative which should include investment in care services and provisions, decent pay, work-life balance policies for all genders, and should better value the care sector in the EU.

### 14.1 Adequate minimum wages for all<sup>15</sup>

#### *Recommendations*

1. Never below 60% of the national median wage and 50% of the national average wage – a benchmark to be tested regularly for its adequacy in each Member State and kept updated.
2. To be supplemented by government transfers (e.g. child allowances, disability or housing benefits) until it reaches an adequate level in all Member States.
3. To be applied to all sectors of the economy and to all workers.
4. It should complement and support collective bargaining in every EU Member State to reduce the risk of in-work poverty<sup>16</sup>.

5. The fight for adequate wages should be a fight against undeclared work and exploitation, too.

## 14.2 Quality jobs

### *Recommendations*

Job creation alone is not enough to tackle poverty and improve people's living conditions in the EU. **Quality and inclusive jobs are pivotal for the well-being of society and a truly Social Europe.** They must be based on the following criteria:

1. Secure working conditions, equal pay, and access to social protection and pensions, regardless of a person's employment or residence status.
2. Adequate work-life balance for all workers.
3. The promotion of democracy at work.
4. A safe and healthy working environment for all workers. Workers' mental health and well-being is a crucial dimension of such conditions.
5. Anti-discrimination and racism policies.
6. Effective labour monitoring, complaints and redress mechanisms<sup>17</sup> and accessible for all workers, regardless of their employment status.
7. Increase and improve labour inspections.

## 15. Social protection

Social protection is the safety net that each individual should be able to count on for a life free from poverty and in dignity. Civil society organisations have identified five key components for social protection that the CoFoE should address: adequate minimum income; social services; housing; childcare; long-term care; and health.

### 15.1 An adequate minimum income

A minimum income is one of the last defences against poverty and inequalities. A minimum income that meets the standards of a decent life is an investment rather than a cost – and for many it is the lifeline needed to avoid slipping into poverty. Even though the harsh realities and consequences of poverty are well known, almost no EU country provides adequate levels of minimum income, and gaps in coverage persist. This political choice leads to devastating consequences for individuals and their families, forcing them to choose between heating their homes or providing a cooked meal for the family, for example.

Giving the responsibility of setting an adequate minimum income to EU Member States has not brought about the drastic change people living in poverty need to see, which is why we are calling for EU action and a Directive on Minimum Income to set legally binding standards on how to ensure an adequate minimum income for those in need.

### *Recommendations*

**An EU framework Directive on Minimum Income** should set legally binding standards for national minimum income systems to ensure they are:

1. **Adequate:** national at-risk-of poverty thresholds are good starting points to calculate the adequacy of a minimum income. However, these need to be cross-checked with the actual costs of goods and services in a country to ensure that people will really be able to afford a decent life.
2. **Accessible:** the minimum income must be accessible to everyone in need and be available as long as necessary.
3. **Enabling:** the minimum income needs to be linked to access to quality and affordable services, labour market integration and quality employment for those able to work.

## 15.2 Affordable and accessible social services

Social services are central to the European Social Model and key to ensuring that the rights and principles enshrined in the EPSR become a reality for all.

With the economic and social crisis likely to continue in the months and years to come, the need for quality social services to mitigate the effects of the pandemic, rising inflation, and to support a sustainable recovery continues to increase. It is therefore crucial to set out the right ecosystem for building up the continuity, sustainability and resilience of social service provision for all in the EU.

### *Recommendations*

1. Develop common EU quality standards for social services, rooted in a human-rights-based approach and with a strong focus on social justice and equality regarding their accessibility.
2. Create the right public funding and investment conditions for social services to thrive.
3. Unlock the job-creation potential of the social services care sector across the EU by improving the attractiveness of jobs, labour rights, working conditions, collective bargaining, career paths, decent labour migration pathways, equally when care is provided at home.
4. Improve the recognition of formal and informal care work.
5. Develop and implement policies fostering an equal sharing of care work between women and men.
6. Support the digitalisation of social services.

## 15.3 Access to quality and affordable housing

While housing is a fundamental right, staying safe at home is not an option for the approximately 700,000 people sleeping rough in the EU every night. The EU's housing situation is alarming: in 2018, for example, around 10% of the population lived in households that spent 40% or more of their equivalised disposable income on housing.

## **Recommendations**

1. Set clear targets and actions for eliminating homelessness.
2. Invest in and facilitate access to public housing.
3. Decriminalise landlords, organisations and individuals providing shelter and assistance to undocumented migrants.
4. Facilitate the transition to energy efficiency for low-income households.
5. Ensure equal access to the housing market and housing costs that are proportionate to household incomes.
6. Strengthen the rights of tenants.

### **15.4 Childcare and support to children**

The availability, accessibility, and affordability of childcare services are important factors for both the children and for the parents who have care responsibilities. Despite the Barcelona targets set by the European Council in 2002, children suffering from social exclusion still do not benefit from equal access to these services due, among other issues, to high costs, lack of places and discriminatory access in law and/or practice.

Provoking the closing of formal care facilities, the COVID-19 pandemic strengthened inequalities among children, creating a potentially long-term impact on their development and well-being.

## **Recommendations**

1. Promote the access to affordable childcare services for all children and families.
2. Encourage the development of formal childcare services responding to families' needs.
3. Foster the professionalisation of childminders to guarantee the quality of the education and care provided for children.

4. Identify and eliminate legal barriers obstructing access to formal childcare services.

## 15.5 Long-term care

Whilst the fragmentation of health and social care services already makes a strong impact on our welfare systems, the growing share of people aged 65 years or older in the EU population, from 20.3% in 2019 to 30.3% in 2070, questions both their sustainability and efficiency<sup>18</sup>. In many cases, ageing threatens the equal enjoyment of human rights by older people who do not have the ability to decide between home and residential care. The lack of coordination between health and social-care services has a tremendous impact on the financial effectiveness of our social protection systems since residential care is often more expensive than homecare<sup>19</sup>.

Accessing affordable and quality long-term care (LTC) is a right for all people across the life cycle and a significant component in ensuring a socially just, equal and inclusive society that leaves no one behind.

### *Recommendations*

1. Adopt a rights-based approach and place autonomy at the centre of LTC policies<sup>20</sup>.
2. Develop coordinated care approaches between social and healthcare.
3. Ensure EU action on LTC aligns with the principles of the Social Pillar, is based on the principle of non-discrimination, and is informed by ongoing dialogue with social partners, civil society organisations and users of LTC services.
4. Establish strong links between LTC services and the EU budget, including the Union's recovery funds.
5. Ensure EU action on LTC not only recognises the contribution of mobile and migrant care workers but takes concrete action to link quality of care with quality work.



## 15.6 Health

Health belongs to the EU's supporting competences, which can only support, coordinate or complement the action of the Member States to ensure the accessibility, effectiveness, and resilience of their health systems.

### *Recommendations*

1. Boost funds and resources for health in the EU:
  - ▶ Re-establish an independent, sizeable and integrated health programme within the EU budget;
  - ▶ Increase financial resources allocated to the health portfolio within the Multiannual Financial Framework.
2. Prioritise common health challenges and health system strengthening for the EU research and innovation agenda.
3. Establish health-in-all-policies as the new normal in policymaking; prioritise and ensure the systematic health impact assessment of EU policies.
4. Provide EU citizens with equal and comprehensive access to sexual and reproductive health and rights services, including abortion healthcare.
5. Implement the right to health enshrined in the EU Charter by defining its basic elements that every European shall enjoy without prejudice and with equal conditions.

## 16. A new macroeconomic governance for Europe

The previously illustrated recommendations imply a reform of the macroeconomic governance of the EU, including the European Semester process. Such a reform should include:

- The design and implementation of new flexibility rules and guidelines within a Sustainability and Well-being Pact to replace the Stability and Growth Pact to lay the foundation for a well-being economy that tackles inequalities and environmental protection.
- The adoption of indicators fit to measure the well-being of people beyond the limits of GDP, considering planetary boundaries, and coherently adapting the country-specific recommendations to prioritise environmental, social, racial and gender justice goals.
- The enhancement of the role of education in the European Semester, notably within the Social Scoreboard, encouraging greater public investment in education, in particular to enhance inclusiveness, and recognising its multiple purposes.
- The promotion of the social and economic rights set out in the European Charter of Fundamental Rights.

Elisa Gambardella, Milosh Ristovski and Patrizia Heidegger at the CoFoE plenary | 25-26 March 2022



## IV. Green Transition Fast Forward – Ten actions for systemic change

We human beings are part of the wider living nature on earth. We cannot survive without clean air, water, fertile soils, a stable climate and intact ecosystems. Global warming, loss of biodiversity and pollution are causing great harm to all societies around the globe, often hitting first and hardest those who contribute little to these crises. The exploitation of natural resources is linked to extreme inequalities between those benefiting and those unable to fulfil even their basic needs. The COVID-19 pandemic has exacerbated existing injustices. Although we fully understand our exploitative trajectory, the current pace of change towards sustainability is far too slow to avoid severe damage to the living nature we all depend on. We need bold decisions to accelerate the green and just transition now.

### Where we stand

Since 1990, the EU's efforts to reduce greenhouse gas emissions have resulted in some domestic reductions but also in a shift towards emissions outside the EU as we import more materials and products. Decision-makers are **not doing enough to reduce energy consumption and to rapidly phase out fossil fuels**. We need to accelerate emission cuts beyond currently planned levels, in line with science, to at least minus 65% by 2030 compared to 1990 and consistent with reaching climate neutrality by 2040. The acceleration towards reduced resource use, more energy savings and a fully renewable energy system requires a massive mobilisation to protect consumers from price surges and achieve energy independence from unstable regions and autocratic regimes.

Across the EU and beyond, human activities are causing the **destruction of ecosystems and unprecedented levels of species loss**. We are facing an extinction crisis. To protect the region's most precious nature, the EU has created the largest network of protected natural areas in the world, Natura 2000. However, we must expand areas where nature can thrive, and governments must use these vital protections to their full po-

tential to restore large and interconnected natural areas. Beyond our borders, we must ensure our activities do not further contribute to ecosystem and biodiversity loss in other parts of the world.

**Water** is one of our most precious natural resources, vital for our survival and livelihood. Sixty percent of the EU's rivers, lakes and wetlands are not in good ecological health. Governments must make the implementation of European water protection rules a top priority. **Air pollution** is the EU's invisible killer. Each year in the EU, over 400,000 people die prematurely because of breathing toxic air, a problem which disproportionately affects low-income households. **Industrial pollution** still occurs on a massive scale. While EU laws seek to prevent pollution from factories and power plants, we must ensure the use of the best-available techniques and stop highly polluting processes in order to end pollution at the source.

Despite the introduction of EU chemicals legislation, tens of thousands of **chemicals** go unchecked for their potential effects on human health and the environment. Chemical production is growing even faster than worldwide GDP. Levels of toxicity are increasing, too. Phaseouts and substitution are too slow while exports of highly hazardous chemicals banned inside the Union continue. **Waste** from plastic to electronic scrap is on the rise and the EU cannot deal with the increasing amounts. Too much still ends up in dumpsites and incinerators or is leaked to poorer countries. **Plastic** has become the symbol of our throw-away society and contributes to major problems, including ocean pollution. There is only one way out: we must avoid waste.

Our economic system is based on the increasing extraction of finite resources from the natural environment. The EU is heavily dependent on raw materials from other parts of the world. We need to set and achieve an **absolute reduction of resources and raw-material use**, comparable to reduction targets for greenhouse gas emissions, aiming at **sufficiency**, curbing overconsumption and ensuring **global resource justice**. We need to avoid a paradoxical situation whereby the green transition further increases our need for rare materials and resources. Currently, companies are allowed to sell products with a built-in life span which we throw away to then buy new ones. We need to move to a **circular economy** to the highest degree possible where waste is prevented and products are reused or recycled.

The EU's **food system** is broken. Intensive agriculture is an important driver of nature loss and climate change, harming our health and polluting water and air while enormous amounts of food are wasted. Retailers have been pushing down prices for food to levels not sustainable for producers while taxpayers' money from the Common Agricultural Policy (CAP) funds intensive agriculture. We need to support farmers to produce healthy and sustainable food for fair prices. Without soil, humans would cease to exist. Farmers are caught in a vicious circle in which they are forced to buy more and more chemicals to keep up with production rates. Every day, hectare after hectare is being sealed under concrete.

All these challenges are linked to **social and environmental justice, both in the EU and globally**. In the EU, people with low incomes (often working in crucial sectors such as care) and those whose jobs are likely to be lost in the transition risk paying a high price. Taking a global perspective, the EU has contributed more than 20% of historic emissions (not even

counting those embedded in all the goods imported for consumption). The EU is one of the most resource-dependent regions in the world, importing more than 90% of its oil and gas, large shares of its mineral and metal resources or feedstock for farm animals. All these create severe environmental and social impacts in other parts of the world. Thus, we must ensure social, environmental and climate justice in and beyond the EU's borders.

## Change is possible – a vision for a sustainable Europe

**The good news is that humanity can live a decent life in harmony with the rest of nature** by stopping the overexploitation of natural resources, respecting ecological boundaries and ensuring a fair share of those resources. Healthy food, decent housing and work, enjoying human rights and safety, education, culture and leisure – human well-being – remain within everyone's reach. The EU can and must take the global lead in the transition to long-term sustainability and champion global climate and environmental justice.

**The bad news is that we are not changing fast enough and we need to speed up urgently.** Change generates uncertainty. It triggers fears as we do not know what will come next. In high-consumption societies and economies and in wealthy social groups, we must cut back on material extravagances and wasteful activities, such as excessive mobility, fast fashion, oversized living spaces, short-lived electronic appliances, and unsustainable diets. At the same time, low-income groups already struggle with higher prices for energy, mobility and food. Political, social, economic, cultural and individual fear of and resistance to change is the decisive bottleneck that we need to address.

**Not changing the current unsustainable track leads to greater risks and uncertainties,** and we can only close our eyes to these for a short while. Our very existence is under threat if we do not reduce our exploitation of nature. The transition will change how we live and use our resources. These changes are often exaggerated or portrayed as restrictions. However, what the transition holds for us is **living well within the ecological limits of the planet**. We envisage a European society and economy that, by 2030, will have ambitiously achieved the 2030 Agenda and the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), leaving no one behind.

This **vision** entails the EU reducing its emissions by at least 65% in 2030, compared to 1990 levels, and becoming **climate neutral by 2040** by lowering energy needs and shifting to 100% renewables. It ensures that the transition is based on energy democracy and an equal sharing of ecological burdens. We live in well-insulated homes using renewable electricity and fuels. We have good accessibility with less mobility, use electric transport and fly less.

Nobody is exposed to hazardous chemicals and pesticides. Our food, water, clothes, toys and other products contain zero hazardous chemicals. Limiting the use of fossil fuels increases the price of virgin materials, resulting in a more **circular flow of materials**. The EU is significantly less dependent on imported raw materials and has minimised mining activities both in

the region and globally. We buy less but more long-lasting, repairable products, keeping materials alive through upcycling and recycling. We produce no waste that cannot be composted, reused or recycled. We do not need landfills or incinerators and export no waste. A **toxic-free circular economy** has become a reality.

Across the region, people breathe **fresh air**. Our rivers, lakes and wetlands benefit from clean water. Our free-flowing rivers and wetlands are strictly protected and habitats across the region have been restored. Endangered species are stable and increasing. Our soil is protected from overuse, erosion, pesticides and fertilisers. European agriculture is the source of **sustainable livelihoods for farmers** with fair minimum prices. We follow more plant-based and local diets. All people have access to **healthy food**.

We stay within a **fair share of resource use**, ensuring that other parts of the world can enjoy their right to sustainable development. We reverse neocolonial patterns of global trade and focus on fair, equitable and sustainable trading practices and true cooperation. Across our societies, all people enjoy their right to a healthy environment, regardless of their income, social class, age, gender, ethnicity, location or other factors, and benefit from the transition. We invest in better healthcare, education, cultural and social life and nature-friendly experiences.

This is not a decline in our living standards, as sceptics sometimes suggest, but rather the promise of a **society and economy focused on the well-being of people and the planet**.

To achieve this vision, **radical change is needed in the overall economic system and different industrial sectors**. Producing electricity, fuels, cement, steel, fertilisers, chemicals, food and consumer goods without emitting greenhouse gases and depleting natural resources, making cars, trucks, ships and planes that run on renewable energy, and shifting to sustainable agriculture are major turnarounds. We must address overconsumption to attain a level that allows us to live well. Sustainable technologies and products must be rooted in an economic system based on new business models oriented towards cooperation and the common good, overcoming the logic of infinite economic growth and based on the principle of sufficiency: we only take, produce and consume what is necessary to live well.

**Today, vested interests are slowing down the green transition.** It comes as no surprise that too many companies, such as in the oil and mining, transport, food, and finance industries, are protecting their business interests. Since the 1980s, multinational corporations have gained significant power relative to national governments. They choose where to extract and produce, where to pollute, how much to pay their workers and where to pay taxes. They do not have to be accountable for human rights violations, environmental degradation or a lack of consultation with local communities. Both the position and interests of large and polluting industries strongly influence public opinion and policies. They will not accelerate the transition but rather will hamper it.

National governments are in competition with each other for the favours of transnational companies; a regional block like the EU is better situated to speed up the green transition. **The EU has the knowledge and the financial means to take the global lead in the transition.** As the largest consumer market in the world, the EU is in a position to set environmental and



social standards for other countries to follow if they want to sell their products on the European market. Taking leadership in the green and just transition creates the opportunity for European companies to become global leaders in developing sustainable products and services. Europeans will be proud to work for companies that are part of a well-being economy.

As a major historic and current emitter of climate-change-fuelling emissions, the EU has both a **legal and a moral responsibility to support more vulnerable societies and weaker economies** on a much larger financial scale in better adapting to the climate crisis and in managing its related loss and damage.

## Ten actions for systemic change

### 17. Taking back control from corporate capture and power to the people

During the last half-century, the balance of power has tilted in favour of transnational industries. A small number of large companies dominate global markets, reducing competition and generating immense profits. National governments are supporting 'their' domestic champions, thereby becoming competitors instead of regulators in the public interest. Tax favours and tax havens, lax environmental and social protections and massive subsidies are common tools used by most countries in their struggle for competitiveness. Transnational companies locate in countries most friendly to their interests. This bargaining power combined with their vast resources has given large industries the opportunity to acquire a disproportionate impact on public opinion and policy.

- We need **governments to take back control from multinationals and international markets to ensure public and democratic control over the economy.**
- A **balance of power must be established between different interests** in our societies. **Stakeholders acting for the common interest**, organisations and grassroots movements dedicated to environmental protection and climate action, workers and trade unions, wider civil society and science must not only have a seat at the table but must also be able to shape the green and just transition.

- **Transparency in decision-making, extensive consultation and the participation of a wide range of stakeholders and experts** are critical to the development of climate and environmental policies. Decision-makers must openly communicate around drafting processes and who influences them; they must solicit inputs from all stakeholders and be accountable towards them. In practice, neither the European Commission, the European Parliament, the Council nor the European Investment Bank publish sufficient information during decision-making procedures. Civil society actors must be involved at all stages of the decision-making process, including implementation and monitoring, and in particular, opaque processes such as the 'comitology procedure' must be reformed.
- European institutions and governments also need to make available **more public funds for independent research, think tanks and advocacy organisations** aimed at protecting the climate and environment, consumer safety, labour conditions, healthcare, education and culture to create the desperately needed level playing field between different interests.

## 18. Protecting environmental rights, guaranteeing environmental justice

In the EU, we enjoy environmental rights under the Aarhus Convention: the **right to information, to public participation and access to justice in environmental matters**. However, too often, environmental rights are not granted in full. Access to information requests are declined. Public participation in environmental decision-making is limited by non-transparent decision-making structures. Currently, the right to legally challenge EU institutions' acts adopted in environmental matters is limited and only provides for indirect access to the Court of Justice of the EU. The rules do not allow members of the public, including individuals and non-governmental organisations, to challenge environmental wrongdoing. European laws and decisions have a tremendous impact on millions of Europeans and their environment.

- **To ensure that individuals and civil society organisations can defend the environment effectively, the institutions must grant environmental rights.**

Rather than giving more power to the people, many governments, including national governments in the EU, have imposed **unnecessary and disproportionate restrictions on the right to protest, to free speech and freedom of association or access to information**.

These are fundamental rights that enable all civil society actors to participate in decision-making in environmental matters to defend our climate and biodiversity.

- **All European institutions must protect environmental rights and civic space, including freedom of association, right to protest, freedom of expression and information and the right to privacy.**

Another aspect of guaranteeing environmental justice is to address the fact that certain groups in society are **disproportionately affected by environmental burdens**. Low-income groups, often racialised communities, more often suffer from negative health impacts from air pollution. Roma communities in many Member States lack access to clean water, sanitation, waste collection and other basic environmental services. Many environmental and climate policies remain blind to gender equality considerations, such as those addressing energy poverty, mobility needs or health impacts from chemicals.

- **All European environmental and climate policies need to be based on a robust analysis of existing inequalities to ensure they deliver on both their environmental objectives and contribute to more equitable societies.**

## 19. Repurposing the economy and supporting green bottom-up initiatives

If we do not change the basic rules of the game on which our current economic system operates, we will not achieve either our environmental or our social objectives. The objective of our current economic system is to infinitely increase profits (measured as GDP growth).

- We need to shift to a **new economic model that prioritises human well-being within the ecological limits of the planet**. Building such an economy requires us to address injustices and imbalances in geopolitical power and global trade patterns and how these shape current levels of wealth. And it requires defining a new purpose for the economy.
- Repurposing the economy requires an EU regulatory framework on company law and corporate governance that **obliges companies to focus on long-**

**term sustainable value creation** rather than short-term financial benefits. **The EU must introduce mandatory due diligence for companies** to address their adverse impacts on climate change, the environment and human rights throughout their operations and value chains. Directors must be under a duty of care to consider all stakeholders' interests relevant to long-term sustainability.

- ▶ Redistributing wealth and power involves creating alternative **forms of ownership and operation** for companies as well as types of exchange outside the market. EU institutions and Member States must support small and medium-sized and **locally rooted organisations and cooperatives operating on just and sustainable business** models, such as sharing decision-making power with all stakeholders and following a public purpose rather than maximising private profit. These benefit, for instance, energy cooperatives, urban and community-supported agriculture, sharing economy practices and neighbourhood facilities.

## 20. Directly regulating harmful practices and boosting sustainable ones

**Direct regulation of pollution has proven to be highly effective.** Past successes include the international ban on the production of chlorofluorocarbons (CFCs) which has resulted in the partial restoration of the ozone layer, setting progressive limits on emissions from industry and vehicles to improve air quality, or bans on the use of the most environmentally harmful pesticides that have saved many animal species from extinction and improved human health. While such regulations are under political consideration, affected companies regularly emphasise negative effects on jobs, economy and prices. However, after implementation, these concerns have evaporated, and often even create new opportunities.

Direct regulation either takes the form of a **full ban on harmful products or processes** after a transition period – as with CFCs – or of **periodically tightened emission limits** – such as the Euro standards for vehicles. Direct regulation is an appropriate way to end the current environmental externalities. Some attractive applications include:

- ▶ A moratorium on the exploration of new fossil fuel reserves;
- ▶ The phasing out of the nuclear energy generation;

- The phasing out of production processes emitting greenhouse gases for electricity, fuels, steel, chemicals, and cement;
- A ban on the registration of cars and vans with a combustion engine;
- A ban or strict limitation on the use of certain crops for purposes other than food production;
- The phasing out of all unsustainable packaging and full financial producer responsibility for waste management.

Although economic instruments, such as taxes and tradable emission permits, can be efficient for specific purposes, they are regularly less effective than direct regulation which phases out the most harmful activities. The urgency of environmental degradation is now so great that we need to add more direct regulation to the policy mix, which achieves results without delay.

- A no-pollution fence should set the borders for the market economy.

Another major advantage of direct regulation is that in many cases it does not require government subsidies. Governments will be short of money once the COVID-19 debts have been repaid. Subsidising green alternatives to polluting technologies and activities, instead of making them the norm, can be ineffective and inefficient.

- Banning fossil energy rather than subsidising renewable energy sources, for instance, is likely to be more efficient.

## 21. No compensation for stranded assets

Industries using fossil-based technologies are confronted with capital loss. The declining value of stocks and early write-off from factories, infrastructures and intellectual property are unavoidable. This prospect of capital loss is a major driver for industries to lobby for less strict regulation and to postpone the date of implementation. Companies also frequently ask for financial compensation in exchange for giving up their resistance to tighter environmental policies. However, this is not where taxpayers' money should be spent. For decades, different sectors have been aware that global warming must be stopped and pollution reduced. They decided knowingly about their investments.

- Compensating industries for capital loss would send the wrong signal for the future as companies and banks would continue to invest in fossil-based assets with government money for stranded assets slowing down the change.

## 22. Putting in place policies with impact before cost parity

Many environmental studies and policies focus too much on cost parity for clean technologies – that is, **sustainable alternatives are only deployed at scale where they are not more costly than polluting ones**. Estimates are made of the years it will take until green becomes cheaper than dirt, and the implicit assumption is that thereafter the market will oversee fast deployment. This argument has several critical flaws. First, it slows down the transition because we must wait until cost parity is achieved and the expected date can even move backwards timewise. Second, there is no guarantee that the market will take up the clean technologies immediately after cost parity is achieved. Third, accepting cost parity implies that we do not accept cost increases for polluting activities. Fourth, the economics underpinning these cost comparisons mainly neglect externalised costs such as damages from climate impacts attributed to fossil fuels and therefore start from an unequal playing field. This reduces the value of nature to close to zero and is at odds with the polluter-pays principle.

- The new policy framework must **prioritise effectiveness**. We need policy measures that deliver quickly and with great certainty the required reductions in emissions and pollution and the protection of our biodiversity.
- Numerous pilot projects have demonstrated what works so it is now time to apply them on a large scale. We need results and we need them now.

## 23. Putting a price on pollution

Replacing cost parity with effectiveness implies that we accept that **polluting activities are becoming more expensive**. The polluter-pays principle, although enshrined in the EU Treaties, is not fully applied in the EU and needs strengthening to make harmful activities more costly. This will be temporary in part because the new technologies and processes will become cheaper over time, once they are applied on a large scale. However, some products will remain more expensive than their polluting predecessors: aviation, chemicals or metals,

for example. If making these products sustainable comes at a higher cost, we accept this consequence.

Part of the initial cost increases will be avoided by becoming more efficient and using less: better insulation of buildings, energy-efficient appliances and operations, recycling of materials and efficient logistics. The remaining cost increase for consumers will lead to a change in consumption patterns. Fewer purchases with a large environmental footprint and more spending on clean products and services, such as fewer holidays by plane or lower meat consumption.

## 24. Empowering low-income households

Households are already and will continue to be confronted with higher prices for energy, food and mobility. This is only acceptable when low-income households are financially compensated and supported in their efforts to reduce their ecological footprint. They should not pay the price for the green transition. The 50% of Europeans with the lowest incomes are close to achieving their maximum carbon budget for 2030, in line with the Paris Agreement, while the top 10% still need to reduce their carbon footprint by two-thirds. Wealthier people must pay a higher share of the costs of the transition, also to support poorer communities.

- ▶ We need to ensure that **everyone can cope with the unavoidable changes and social costs incurred by the green transition.**
- ▶ All measures must be developed and adopted, implemented and monitored in **participation with all relevant stakeholders**, including workers and low-income groups, women, youth, minorities and other affected groups. Not doing so would be both unfair and would adversely affect public support for the necessary changes.

Support to low-income groups has to be financial – through lower taxes on small incomes and better social security – and not by sparing them from environmental regulations. The **Social Climate Fund** proposed by the European Commission in its Fit for 55 Package is recognition of the need to compensate low-income households. However, it only aims at temporary support and does not tackle the root cause of inequalities.

To make sure that all people can play their role in the green transition without being left behind, we need:



- **Adequate minimum wages** across the region;
- **The end of social dumping and precarious working conditions;**
- Combined with **strong social protections** across the EU.

**The government revenues required for the compensation and empowerment of low-income households can come from stopping all subsidies on fossil industries, increasing taxes such as on aviation and luxuries, pricing pollution, ending the tax deduction for lobbying and advertising or international agreements to reduce tax avoidance.** These desirable fiscal changes will generate revenue to support low-income households and lower the tax burden on labour to make schools, care, repair and other labour-intensive activities more affordable.

## 25. Shaping the future of work

With the green transition accelerating, **new jobs will be created**. The full implementation of the Paris Agreement can create more than 1 million additional jobs in the EU alone by 2030. While there will be job losses in the fossil, automotive and other carbon-intensive industries, these will be more than compensated for by the creation of new jobs in sectors including construction and renovation, waste management, energy, transport and sustainable finance. **Currently, twice as many people work in renewable energy than in the fossil energy industries.**

Although the green transition will increase total employment, there will be a **mismatch between old and new jobs both in location and skills**. This will affect, for instance, most of the 0.4 million Europeans directly employed in the fossil industries or some of the 2.9 million workers at suppliers in the automotive sector. Many employees in the car industry will shift to producing and maintaining electric vehicles. The total number of jobs in the EU is around 190 million, indicating that only a few percent of European employment will be directly affected by the green transition. Workers who lose their jobs must be supported by government programmes to assist them to relocate and reskill, and to avoid shortages of employees in the renewable energy industries. Emergency mechanisms and social protection will be key to deal with future crises and increase the resilience of our societies.

The **EU's labour market is still highly gender-segregated**. For example, only 32% of those employed in the renewable energy sector are women. The numbers in other high-carbon sectors, such as transport, construction or fossil fuels, are even worse. At the same time, around 76% of care and health sector staff are female. We must broaden our understanding of the

sustainable jobs of the future beyond transport, energy and construction and include sectors that contribute to the overall well-being and resilience of our societies.

At the same time, a **green transition also means rethinking work altogether**. Our current economic system and labour market is structurally dependent on infinite economic growth. An alternative economic system focuses on ensuring meaningful and decent jobs that are necessary for the functioning and flourishing of our societies.

## 26. Education for sustainability

Education and lifelong learning are key enablers for the achievement of environmental and social justice goals. The education and environment sectors need to work together to deliver quality climate change education through formal, non-formal and informal learning.

- **Mainstreaming education for sustainability across education systems in the EU** requires changes in the curricula, pedagogies, learning environments, teacher training and professional development. The aim should be to acquire skills and knowledge to live in tune with our planet and to exercise critical thinking.
- Education and training programmes must include **climate and environmental literacy, sustainable lifestyles, understanding of human-nature interdependencies, and collective action for change**.
- In professional training and higher education, sustainability education, environmental and climate literacy need to be mainstreamed across all disciplines, including in business school and economics departments, law schools and public administration courses to ensure the economic and political leadership is well prepared to guide society through the transition.

# V. A Digital Transformation Leaving No One Behind

## Introduction

Our proposals aim to feed into the European Commission's priority of 'A Europe fit for the digital age'. The ambition of this priority is to strengthen the EU's digital sovereignty and set standards on data, technology, and infrastructure – with a clear focus on education, ethics, accessibility, fundamental rights and European values. To ensure a **digital transformation in the EU that leaves no one behind**, our cluster focused its work on five main topics: digital democracy, digital education, digital safeguards, digital rights and freedoms, and the digital economy.

Digitalisation is becoming ever more ubiquitous and indeed is now a necessity in everyday life. On the one hand, EU citizens are constantly part of **digital democracy** by using online public services, receiving important information through the internet and often having the opportunity to engage in democratic life through e-participation channels. Over the last decade, the EU has focused its e-government and e-transparency efforts on technological solutions for public administrations, businesses and people (e.g. electronic identity). For e-participation, a few channels currently play an important role in citizen engagement, such as the European Citizens' Initiative. However, these channels are not sufficient for the meaningful involvement of EU citizens and **e-participation tools need to be more inclusive, used in a structured way, accessible for everyone and, in particular, more impactful**.

On the other hand, citizens are also now part of a society focused more and more on the digital **economy**, which refers to the development of an economy that is based on digital computing technologies. The economy is changing, and digital business models are among the most profitable having impacted the entire EU, bringing both opportunities and challenges. A successful digital strategy is one that **takes advantage of opportunities by creating benefits for the entire society** whilst appropriately addressing the challenges.

As technology continues to create turning points in modern history, affecting the way we live, work and evolve, the EU has important decisions to take in shaping its digital future and strengthening its capacities in new

technologies. Digital policies have been one of the cornerstones of EU legislation since 2019, with the European Commission proposing several new regulatory frameworks – Artificial Intelligence, ePrivacy Directive, Digital Services Act (DSA), the Digital Markets Act (DMA) and the Data Governance Act (DGA). In 2021, the European Commission presented a vision and avenues for the EU's digital transformation by 2030 in its Digital Compass for the EU's digital decade which evolves around four cardinal points: government, skills, infrastructures, and businesses. Although the EU has set ambitious targets, frameworks and projects to ensure its digital development, civil society organisations have raised concerns about the impact of current and future European policies and measures on citizens and the environment.

The main and most important challenge is to achieve a digital transformation that works for all, without further deepening the existing digital divide or creating new inequalities. For the EU to be a front runner in the digital domain, EU institutions and Member States must ensure that all citizens have **access to basic digital technologies** and are **provided with the right skills** to navigate the digital world. A digital transformation that is **truly inclusive** means tackling the inequalities that exist across the Union by enabling and facilitating online access, especially to parts of our society at risk of marginalisation – persons with disabilities, seniors, migrants, homeless people, people at risk of poverty and social exclusion, women and many more. For this reason, EU institutions and Member States should make the access to **affordable, high-speed internet a fundamental right** for their citizens. If internet access is both guaranteed and accessible, **digital education will become a priority and evenly implemented across all Member States to equip people with the right skills and competencies**, resulting in greater citizen involvement, especially in the EU's digital democracy and digital economy.

Digitalisation will only advance European societies if we **can safeguard and strengthen our democracies in the process**. To this end, several digital policies are still needed at the EU level to ensure that the digital technologies developed and used respect human rights and democratic principles. Various EU legislative processes are currently attempting to put in place safeguards to human rights while stimulating innovation and market integration (including the AI Act, the DSA, the DMA, etc.). There is great potential for the EU to be an ambitious rights-driven leader in tech policy, but this will **only be possible if it places human rights and democratic principles at the centre of these legislative processes, alongside innovation and competition concerns**. For example, AI respecting fundamental rights must be allowed to develop in the EU or it will be developed in other parts of the world with far fewer safeguards.

In conclusion, European digital policies are a mixed bag of good policies and policies that need to enhance the protection of citizens' rights and online freedom. Platform regulations are going in the right direction and could start bringing power to the people rather than to 'big tech'. However, the EU's effort is simply not enough. Civil society organisations are raising concerns regarding privacy issues, the surveillance of people, such as asylum seekers, racism in AI and biometric mass surveillance technologies, as well as the lack of access to new technologies. It is crucial to **put human rights first and enable a digital transformation in the EU that is shaped by the people for the people**.

Below we present our recommendations on digital democracy, digital education and digital safeguards, defending rights and freedom online, and the digital economy.

## 27. Digital democracy

### 27.1 E-government

- E-government solutions should be developed in **consultation with the end-users and civil society organisations** to ensure solutions are **accessible and inclusive** for everyone, efficient, trustworthy, safe, subject to privacy and controlled by humans.
- Alternatives to e-government services must be provided to ensure that those who do not have the possibility to use digital tools, and persons with disabilities or with low digital literacy can still be adequately engaged and served appropriately.
- E-government public data and documents at the national, regional and local level should be accessible, according **to the Web Accessibility Directive, and usable in open formats**, and the content should be user-friendly, both in terms of the language used and its location.
- Access to **free, equal and affordable internet as a fundamental right** of every EU citizen: given the importance today of having access to the internet for a significant number of vital tasks, access to the internet should be guaranteed for everyone. In this respect, specific EU- and nationally funded programmes could be allocated for vulnerable groups and people at risk of poverty or social exclusion to ensure they can afford to use the internet.
- **Provide public services that are fully accessible** for hard-to-reach segments of the population, by: a) **funding and collaborating with civil society organisations** which currently support those who are excluded from the digital transition; b) expanding initiatives that support and guide citizens in the digital transition (such as France's 'conseillers numériques') adapting them if needed and learning from both their failures and successes.

- Ensure that publicly financed software developed for public sector e-government solutions is made available under a **free and open-source software licence**.

## 27.2 E-transparency

- To ensure **e-transparency that leaves no citizen behind, information must be easy to understand, easy to find, and accessible for everyone**. This includes providing information in national sign languages and an easy-to-read format. The platforms, tools and technologies required to access this information should also be accessible. Furthermore, citizens must always be given the option of non-digital access to information.

## 27.3 E-participation

- EU institutions and national governments should actively promote and clearly communicate **e-participation** in decision-making and provide citizens with a realistic opportunity to influence policy and legislation.
- European citizens' capacity to engage in e-participation should be strengthened, as well as the impact their contributions make in policymaking. They should always receive feedback to what extent their inputs to decision-making are taken into account and why (or why not).
- E-participation mechanisms and channels should be extended by **testing and combining new methods of citizen engagement** at the EU level, e.g. crowdsourcing legislation and participatory budgeting.

## 27.4 E-voting/e-elections

- EU Member States and the European Parliament should proactively explore opportunities as well as address the legal, technical and societal challenges of **e-voting/e-elections** by promoting voting pilots and test beds on the internet.
- **Pilot e-voting** at the next European elections, provided it is technically secure, efficient and can guarantee transparency in the process.

## 28. Digital education

### 28.1 Digital skills and competencies

- **Resources for fostering digital skills** should be targeted at those who are more strongly affected by the digital transition (such as students and persons with disabilities, NEETs, refugees, low-skilled adults, ex-prisoners, single women, low-income households and people facing social exclusion) and should also address existing barriers (e.g. lack of accessibility). EU institutions and Member States must ensure that the digital transition does not exclude anyone and strive to further reduce the biases that go into the design of digital technologies by expanding perspectives.
- Although digital competencies and skills can be a valuable route into employment (including for vulnerable groups), their scope should not be limited to technical skills only, but should also include **soft skills, netiquette, empathy, sustainability, ethics and skills related to content accessibility**.

### 28.2 Media literacy and digital learning

- **Media literacy should be for all parts of society** (e.g. it should foster social inclusion) and the public communication and discussion thereof.
- **Privacy and data-protection knowledge** should also be developed through dedicated programmes – with a specific focus on **adults and elderly people**.
- Digital knowledge, skills and competency building should be **incorporated into formal education curricula** as well as part of the large-scale objective of bringing education into the 21st century (including **lifelong learning and informal education**).
- Although digital technologies may be instrumental in improving education, they should not become an end in themselves, nor should they replace non-digital ways of accessing education.
- **Training and EU programmes on a wide range of digital skills** (e.g. tech-



nical, ethics and soft skills) should be developed ensuring that they are tailored to the needs of those citizens in a vulnerable position, including persons with disabilities, elderly people, NEETs, refugees, low-skilled adults, single women, low-income households and people facing social exclusion, and ensure adequate and continuous funding for such actions.

- ▶ **Teachers and public administrations should also be trained** in the essentials of digital technologies, software and algorithms to foster a greater understanding, better discussion and handling thereof and the transmission of knowledge.
- ▶ **Informal education trainers** should be consulted when developing digital education plans at both the European and national level.
- ▶ We need more **EU-funded programmes for civil society organisations** to support the development of digital education strategies (especially with regard to digital skills and competencies beyond formal education).

### 28.3 Awareness raising

- ▶ Public programmes concerning the development of digital skills and competencies should **rely on civil society organisations and local initiatives** as mediators and entry points.
- ▶ The cross-sectoral collaboration between scientists, civil society, governments, companies and media on issues concerning digitalisation needs to be improved and supported financially.

## 29. Digital safeguards

### 29.1 Cybersecurity

- ▶ There should be publicly funded, easily accessible and free-of-charge public **education about cybersecurity** available to all European citizens, to help protect them from harm.

## 29.2 Artificial intelligence

- ▶ **AI** – automated decision-making must be transparent and subject to human review when operating in the public sphere with a potential impact on society and subjected to public scrutiny. Proactive regulatory actions and funding opportunities should promote public AI that will bring tangible benefits to citizens – for example, promoting the development of AI-based assistive technologies for persons with disabilities or ensuring diversity is part of the AI design. Communities affected by the impact of AI should be involved in its development as part of their human rights due diligence.
- ▶ **The EU's AI Act** must be adopted to ensure the following: 1) include sufficient safeguards to protect citizens from any negative impact of AI technologies on their fundamental rights, particularly ensuring privacy, accessibility, and non-discrimination; 2) uphold an effective right to redress for those affected by an AI application and raising awareness and accessibility to redress mechanisms; 3) make human rights impact assessment mandatory for the design, development and deployment of AI.
- ▶ The EU needs to **develop a framework that determines the extent, type, form and moment of human intervention in AI automated decision-making**. Within this framework, one of the determining criteria should be the impact of AI on rights, duties and liberties.
- ▶ Furthermore, the EU should **regulate AI systems, including in those areas that fall under the remit of the Common Foreign and Security Policy** (e.g. for military purposes), and provide a harmonised horizontal legal framework with common rules and safeguards to ensure that all systems are accurate, robust, secure, and function according to their strict specifications.

### 29.3 Online disinformation, integrity of elections, terrorist content, online hate speech, illegal content online

- **Online content moderation** should ultimately always require a form of human review and intervention. The appropriate type, form and moment of this human intervention should be considered on a case-by-case basis, taking into account the impact of AI automated decision-making on individual rights, duties and liberties. To counter disinformation, illegal content and hate speech online, EU institutions and Member States must combine their financial instruments in support of civil society and the media with legislative instruments holding online platforms to account while safeguarding fundamental freedoms. Social media platforms must be encouraged to take measures to prevent smear campaigns spreading disinformation, online harassment and abuse against civil society, journalists, women, non-binary people, racialised people, LGBTQIA+ people, persons with disabilities, children and all others at risk of cyberbullying. Yet such measures must always serve to defend people's freedom of expression and association, as well as media pluralism and editorial independence.
- EU institutions and Member States should **provide support – technical, policy and financial – for those civil society organisations** countering online hate speech, protecting survivors and conducting independent media and fact-checking; and those providing digital literacy education for citizens, including education on cybersecurity and AI.
- Moreover, EU institutions and Member States need to **defend fundamental freedoms and deter illegal hate speech** by including an online content moderation regime that requires a form of human review and accessible and clear criteria – agreed amongst diverse stakeholders – for the removal of restrictions on content (in the Digital Services Act).
- In addition to the above recommendation, **more specific safeguards must be included in the Digital Services Act (DSA)**<sup>21</sup>: preventive measures, content-moderation clauses, and sanctions to ensure that vulnerable and minority groups do not face discrimination online, on the basis of race/ethnic origin, sexual orientation, socio-economic status or disabilities.

### 29.4 Audiovisual media services

- **The EU Audiovisual Media Services Directive** should require providers of

audiovisual media services to ensure access to audiovisual content for persons with disabilities.

- EU institutions need to ensure that Member States **transpose and efficiently implement the Audiovisual Media Services Directive<sup>22</sup>** with legal quantitative and qualitative obligations for access services.

## 29.5 EU's Data Act

- **The EU's Data Act** should be further improved, since it currently sets a controversial precedent by allowing public authorities to access private data during emergencies. Moreover, as public officials often move from the public to private sector, there is a risk of potential conflict of interest, which needs to be adequately addressed by the legislator.

## 29.6 Algorithms

- **Transparency of algorithms** – all public and private users of automated decision-making should also be required to provide detailed information on when they use automated processes (whether algorithmic or otherwise) to moderate third-party content and how such mechanisms operate. This information should be made available in public registers. In addition, redress mechanisms for those affected by algorithm-based automated decision-making should be a requirement while awareness raising of the redress mechanisms is a must.

# 30. Defending rights and freedom online

## 30.1 Online privacy and data (protection and retention)

- EU institutions should ensure enforcement of the **General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR)** and update the ePrivacy Directive with a strong ePrivacy Regulation.

- **A strong ePrivacy Regulation<sup>23</sup>** should be adopted swiftly by the Member States whilst, at the same time, better enforcing GDPR nationally.
- **Ensuring the privacy of disability and health-related sensitive data** is vital. Many websites can detect if a person is using assistive technology (e.g. screen reader) to access them. This means a person's disability can be revealed against their will, which can lead to algorithmic discrimination (e.g. targeted ads about vacancies, services, avoiding persons with disabilities) or discrimination and harassment by entities and individuals possessing that data.

## 30.2 Net neutrality and digital services

- **Net neutrality<sup>24</sup>** should be protected by law to guarantee the free and fair sharing of content online.
- EU institutions and Member States should address the rising internet centralisation and focus on how to prevent a few giant global companies from running most of the services (end-user applications, application stores, device neutrality, infrastructure) and holding most of the data. It is important to restore competition through regulation (e.g. the European Digital Service Act and Digital Markets Act) and through open source, open standards and interoperability.
- The EU needs to monitor any attempts to introduce practices such as zero-rating<sup>25</sup> that **undermine net neutrality**, and take regulatory action where needed.
- Moreover, the EU needs to encourage innovation at the EU level to support the **creation of EU platforms and service providers**, which are appealing to users, competitive, and conform to EU standards and values.
- To ensure online freedom, the EU should consider **eliminating geo-blocking and enabling multilingual/national broadcasting** with access to subtitles and different language audio tracks.
- The EU needs to adopt an **ambitious Digital Service Act and Digital Markets Act<sup>26</sup>**, which should include a ban on surveillance advertising<sup>27</sup>.

### 30.3 Protecting fundamental rights, secure and sustainable digital infrastructures, digital citizenship, online safety of journalists and ensuring plurality of voices in digital media

- The **EU's digital policy** should undergo an overarching reform in order to strengthen its accountability and transparency in digital technology markets and protect fundamental freedoms and human rights. Strong regulation should be implemented by well-resourced and independent enforcement agencies, while encouraging and supporting authentic innovative EU alternative solutions.
- Protecting **encryption** as a means of self-protection is a fundamental aspect of private communicators' rights (especially for human rights defenders and marginalised groups) and must not be unduly restricted. This includes the right not to supply any authority with passwords or encryption keys.
- The EU needs to **ensure that encryption is protected** in the upcoming chat control legislation and in any other attempts to undermine it.
- The EU needs to **protect highly sensitive information**, such as migration status, sexual orientation, race or any information on vulnerable economic conditions by: a) restricting access to this information as much as possible; b) limiting the requirement of this information for very exceptional cases; c) ensuring public decisions are not based on big data and biased algorithms.
- **Build public digital infrastructure** (such as public charging stations and WiFi) and **ensure its financial sustainability**, especially with regard to access to equipment for people facing material deprivation (e.g. low-income households, the homeless).
- **Ban mass surveillance and facial recognition technologies** as they fundamentally undermine an enabling environment for democratic societies, threatening political pluralism and civil and political rights.

### 30.4 Copyright

The EU should **reform the Copyright Directive** to allow exemptions for persons with disabilities to access e-books, films and music.

## 31. Digital economy

### 31.1 Digital economy, digital finance and data

- For a thriving digital economy, digitalisation should be **inclusive and participatory** so that nobody is left behind due to inaccessibility, unavailability, unaffordability of technologies for citizens, or due to their lack of connectivity or digital skills.
- Since more and more services are available online and data is stored and processed by private companies and public institutions, **strong safeguards for very sensitive data** (such as migration status, health records, or receipt of welfare benefits) must be put in place for the European Single Digital Market for Data.
- The EU should ensure **fair taxation of the digital economy across all Member States**.
- Moreover, it should **introduce corporate tax rules** so that profits are registered and taxed based on where geographically businesses have significant interaction with users through digital channels.
- The EU needs to **improve the Market in crypto-assets (MiCA) Regulation<sup>28</sup>** – it must adequately differentiate between all crypto-asset types to establish a single taxonomy, while also remaining open to new developments; it must be clear which assets fall under its regulation, especially since the lack of regulation of these assets is very problematic, enabling fraud, market manipulation and money laundering, e.g. situations in which authoritarian regimes try to circumvent global sanctions via crypto-assets.

### 31.2 Social welfare in the digital age

- **Working conditions for online platform workers** must be better regulated to address new forms of precariousness, insufficient social protection and the issue of algorithmic management.



- EU institutions and Member States need to **support digitally and socially excluded groups** with funds, resources and digital transition programmes. These should be specifically targeted at people left behind due to inaccessibility, unavailability, or unaffordability of technologies, or due to their lack of connectivity or digital skills.

### 31.3 Supporting green digital solutions

- **Sustainability and energy efficiency** have to be ensured at the level of the production provisioning of digital services, as well as in internet governance (resources needed are still mined under socially and environmentally disastrous conditions; products should come with information on energy consumption in their production process; there must be a focus on durability and possibilities for repair and reuse).

### 31.4 Digital Industry 4.0 (e.g. Internet of Things and cloud computing) and digital business/companies

- **Regulations have to be informative and precise** to provide a predictable and stable legal framework that enables innovation to take place.
- **Regulations should aim at enabling European digital innovation** in order to be competitive on the global digital market, whilst also providing safeguards and enforcing penalties on companies which unlawfully distort competition or are in breach of the norms.
- Dedicated funding opportunities for **open-source technology** and educational platforms must be ensured.
- Alliances under the Important Projects of Common European Interest (IP-CEI)<sup>29</sup> and Digital Innovation Hubs for the sharing of knowledge and best practices should be diversified to include more small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) from peripheral regions of the EU, and their outreach and communication need to be improved.
- The EU should **establish a central pool of advisors** who can be requested by smaller companies to advise them on what can be improved (advocating open source, enabling knowledge sharing, sustainable practices, etc.).

# VI. Human Mobility and Migration: Promoting Equality, Decent Work and Well-Being for All

## Introduction

A sustainable and inclusive European future as regards the topic of migration is fundamentally achieved through an intersectional approach that addresses historical, structural, institutional, and individual drivers of discrimination, exclusion, and unequal access to resources based on, among others, racism, ethnicity, nationality, class, gender, age, religion, sexual orientation, locality, migration or residence status, or disability. Nonetheless, inequity, discrimination, in-work poverty, social exclusion and other forms of harm continue to persist and are exacerbated by restrictive migration and residence policies, as well as the continuous emphasis on policing migrants and marginalised communities.

Thus, our report advocates for an EU in which the human rights and social inclusion of all people are guaranteed, regardless of their migration or residence status, and whereby human mobility is recognised as a positive reality and governed in a way that promotes equality, decent work, social inclusion and well-being for all.

## Recommendations

To accomplish the above, we believe it is critical for the EU to **de-link migration from security issues** and put the focus on migrants, refugees and asylum seekers as rights holders. In addition, the **contribution of migrants to prosperity in the EU, including in the context of recovery from the COVID-19 pandemic, should be made more visible and correctly understood** by society at large. Migrants fill important jobs in most sectors, including on the frontline during the pandemic. They help counterbalance the low birth rate and ageing demographic trends, there-

by supporting the sustainability of the welfare system. Their taxes support the sustainability of public budgets that we all benefit from.

EU institutions and Member States should also contribute to dismantling misconceptions about migrants unduly getting **resources that should go primarily to EU nationals: resources allocated for integrating migrants and refugees are a social investment and, as such, the return on investment is a safer, fairer society for all**. In this context, the EU should **take action to fight the spread of hate speech** by some sections of the media and political parties at the local, regional, national and European political level. Finally, the EU should **promote full learning opportunities, including volunteering, in local communities**. Research shows that non-formal and informal education environments are best-placed to foster inclusion and a sense of belonging to local communities.

The EU should also **facilitate good-quality migration routes and processes that respect human rights and reflect EU rights and values**, primarily by expanding regular pathways for migration, essential to guarantee the safe passage and respect of migrants' human rights, and ensuring that access to existing residence permits is preserved. Despite the EU's promise to work on increasing regular pathways, there is still much room for improvement as that aspect is practically absent from the 2020 Pact on Migration and Asylum and other frameworks, such as the EU-OACPS<sup>30</sup> Agreement and the new Africa-Europe Alliance. **It is essential that the EU and its Member States agree on a common and humane response to migration**, which can be done by:

1. Dropping all aspects of the New Pact on Migration and Asylum which attempt to erase the right to asylum, increase deportations and criminalise immigration, by increasing the detention of migrants (including children, which is against international law), reducing safeguards, reducing access to different types of residence permits, and externalising borders and the right to asylum.
2. Decriminalising immigration in the EU rules, starting with the prohibition of any form of administrative detention (including de facto detention) and combating any form of 'crime of solidarity' with migrants.
3. Amending the Dublin Regulation by deleting the 'country of first arrival principle' and prioritising the interest and dignity of asylum seekers.
4. Providing entry visas for job-seekers, allowing the issuance of humanitarian visas for those from countries affected by serious human rights violations and armed conflicts, and recognising international protection for climate and environmental reasons.
5. Adopting a comprehensive migration and asylum framework that specifically ad-

dresses the experiences of women and girls throughout their migration journey, in particular by preventing and combating all forms of gender-based violence, including sexual exploitation; protecting and supporting victims; prosecuting the perpetrators; and addressing all the structural issues that fuel this violence.

6. Granting independent legal status to all women entering the EU, including victims of domestic violence, rather than considering them as dependants of their spouses or male family members, to ensure their safe access to asylum procedures, and mitigate any barriers to seeking international protection, support services and/or access to justice and redress.
7. Developing and implementing, in partnership with civil society, a range of accessible pathways for people with irregular residence status to regularise their status.
8. Adopting European policies that encourage and value migration and promote decent work, social inclusion and mobility.
9. Providing suitable financial support, from European funds, for civil society activities that promote and support the inclusion of refugees and migrants in the EU.
10. Strengthening and harmonising the Common European Asylum System, particularly by improving the reception conditions for asylum seekers across Member States.

**EU migration policies should be based on human rights and solidarity, and should safeguard the fundamental rights and well-being of all people.** This principle should be applied and closely monitored in all screening procedures, and all migrant reception practices (e.g. detention) that lead to inhumane living conditions for the people concerned should be abolished. **We call for a meaningful solidarity system:** solidarity toward migrants, ensuring that the right to asylum and other forms of protection is respected, but also for solidarity among Member States, setting up a real mechanism of relocation and shared responsibility to protect people.

1. Ensure fair, transparent and quality immigration and asylum procedures and decision-making that uphold human rights and promote social inclusion and well-being.
2. Reform public policies and implement migration and residence policies so that all people can meaningfully access services and decent housing, and those who experience harm can access accountability measures and remedy.

3. End harmful, punitive enforcement practices, including deprivation of liberty, discriminatory profiling and policing, surveillance and monitoring (including through new technologies), pushbacks and deportations.
4. Ensure the meaningful participation and consultation of migrants, refugees and asylum seekers as well as their representative organisations in the design, implementation, monitoring and evaluation of the policies affecting them.

**A comprehensive EU migration policy must put integration and social and employment inclusion at its core.** Policy efforts should focus on developing safe and regular pathways for family, study, protection and labour migration across all jobs and sectors, and providing residence and work permits that promote decent work and social inclusion. Selectively facilitating labour migration only of highly paid and highly skilled workers does not reflect the realities and needs of economies and communities in either the country of destination or the country of origin.

**Our policies should recognise the crucial role that all types of migration have in both our societies and economies.** They should aim at organising migrations rather than restricting them. **The inclusion of all people living in the EU, regardless of their residence or migration status, is crucial to meet the EU's social objectives**, including those set out in the [European Pillar of Social Rights](#). This requires measures to ensure full inclusion through public policies and services, as well as specific measures in migration and residence policies.

It is important that civil society remains able to freely support people who are refugees, asylum seekers and migrants, independent of their residence or migration status. There should be a **full decriminalisation of humanitarian assistance** and the conflation of so-called 'smugglers', who are very often migrants themselves, and actual human traffickers or abusers should be ended. There must be **full recognition of the fundamental role that humanitarian civil society organisations have in search-and-rescue operations**, where they are often filling in for the failures of public authorities in the Member States in meeting their responsibilities.

**Civil society organisations should be enabled and recognised as experts in monitoring border conditions, and funding should be made widely available for them** to address the needs of refugees, asylum seekers and migrants, including undocumented migrants. The cluster calls for enforcing firewall principles (prohibition of information sharing about undocumented migrants between social services providers or labour inspection authorities and immigration authorities), as well as the **elimination of the duty to report undocumented migrants to immigration authorities**, incumbent upon public administrations in some Member States. Eventually, pathways should be implemented for the regularisation of people with an irregular status, in partnership with civil society.

1. Enable the full labour-market participation of migrants, refugees and asylum seekers.



2. Take comprehensive action to ensure validation and recognition of migrants' prior learning and skills, including non-formal and informal learning.
3. Implement labour migration and work-permit policies that have streamlined and efficient procedures, provide renewable permits of reasonable initial duration, to work in any occupation, and enable autonomy, mobility in the labour market and social inclusion, including family and social rights.
4. Ensure labour rights, including effective mechanisms for complaint and remedy, for all workers (see section on fair working conditions).
5. Ensure that all migrants, refugees and asylum seekers are fully included in health and social protection systems and other services, regardless of their migration or residence status, with policies grounded in social rights and equality.
6. Ensure universal access to legal, medical, psychological, and sexual and reproductive health services that are fully accessible and tailored to women with disabilities, older women, and women and girls from diverse cultural and linguistic backgrounds.

Civil Society March for Europe during the Strasbourg Summit | 7 May 2022



# VII. The EU in the World: Peace, Justice, Human Rights and Environmental Security

## Introduction

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. One of the EU's priorities is to create a Union of values that goes beyond solely economic interests and allows us to promote rights and values, migration, the EU's role in the world, security and sport, among others. Therefore, there is a need for coherent internal and external policies with regard to human rights and civil society space.

## Recommendations

The COVID-19 pandemic has once again shown that everyone's safety depends on how safe others are. **Common security must therefore be the cornerstone of the EU's relationship with the world.** Today's interconnected global challenges, namely the rise in extreme poverty and inequality, the climate emergency and the biodiversity crisis, violent conflicts, the trend in autocratisation and shrinking civic space, and ongoing pandemics, call for a new impetus to multilateralism and solidarity. **Peace, justice, the protection and practice of human rights and environmental security should be the core principles and values guiding the actions of EU institutions and Member States in the world.**

The area of foreign affairs and security remains the domain of EU Member States, with EU institutions playing a marginal role. As a result, neither the Union as a whole nor its individual members are able to achieve their full potential on the international stage, resulting in them losing their importance compared to other, often undemocratic, powers. Speaking with one voice is often impossible due to the principle of unanimity, which means



that each Member State can block any EU position or action in the area of foreign affairs and security, including sanctions for grave human rights violations, common defence initiatives and the accession of new members.

**EU institutions and Member States should develop a genuine Common Foreign and Security Policy, allowing them to ensure the safety of Europeans while promoting democracy, human rights, the rule of law and environmental protection in their neighbourhood and globally.** Coupled with a genuine Defence Union, this policy should include an EU army overseen by the European Parliament and capable of conducting peacekeeping, humanitarian, and peacebuilding operations globally. This should be complemented by a common approach to development cooperation, supporting the sustainable growth and democratic integration of other countries and regions.

**All actions in the area of foreign affairs and security should be co-decided by the European Parliament and the Council, based on qualified majority,** with no possibility of a single Member State blocking them.

The **EU must be a driver for upholding democracy and human rights, and an actor of good governance**, focusing on communitarian approaches and the empowerment of civil society and local governments. The principles and values that should guide the EU's role and responsibility in the world are:

1. Commitment to prevention and active diplomacy to end armed conflicts.
2. Redirection of funding allocated to military actors to better support stronger political, diplomatic and developmental action to drive human security, climate transition and climate justice across the globe.
3. Commitment to the principle of policy coherence for development.
4. Enhancement of migrants' reception and rights in the EU.

There is a **need to acknowledge the historic and current social responsibilities of corporations and countries that benefit, or have benefited, from exploiting ecosystems and communities, as well as an emancipation from colonial legacy.**

Furthermore, **EU development policies should serve European citizens, people living in Europe, and those outside the EU,** by:

1. Advocating for better and more effective climate policies with international agreement, which would be a win-win for everyone.

2. Prioritising a process of regional integration based on the principles of common security, human rights and the rule of law.
3. Overcoming the misconception of neighbourhood policy serving primarily as a defence against terrorism and a measure to reduce migration in favour of a policy aimed at the democratic, human and ecological development of neighbouring regions, as this is also the only way to guarantee European security.
4. Reducing climate change, conflict and poverty, both for the well-being of people and communities living in third countries and because they are deep-rooted causes of forced migration.
5. Enhancing safe and regular routes and procedures for access to the EU for migrants and forcibly displaced people from other world regions, extending those already tested, and improving rescue operations across European land and waters.

We also believe that **EU institutions and Member States should play a role in promoting democracy and human rights globally**, by:

1. Investing in education, health, climate, and other policies that strengthen democracy.
2. Robustly supporting civil society which plays a crucial role in delivering on all these policies in a socially just manner.

Furthermore, **EU institutions and Member States should implement and engage in international cooperation** by:

1. Providing the greatest support for implementation of the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons, with the aim of making the EU a nuclear-weapons-free zone.
2. Establishing common European rules on the control of the production and sale of conventional arms, to prevent arms exports to countries at war, or which violate human rights, or in which dissenting voices (whether from political opposition or civil society) are not allowed to freely operate.

EU institutions and Member States should properly practise the **defence of human rights and human rights defenders in all aspects of their foreign and trade policies**, including avoiding funding countries that do not respect them. In addition, by **establishing a European day for the victims of colonialism**, the EU would make a symbolic but very important gesture of reparation for the crimes committed by EU Member States in other parts of the world.

On the question of the EU concluding trade deals with partner countries, bearing in mind the COVID-19 pandemic, our cluster's recommendation is that **there should be a concrete commitment to suspending patents on vaccines to enable mass vaccination in all countries worldwide**. There should be a **suspension and renegotiation of trade treaties whenever they serve corporate interests** at the expense of planetary boundaries and animal well-being, driving untenable social inequalities or propping up undemocratic and violent regimes (for example, Mercosur). It would also be **vital for the EU to engage in reviewing the role and functioning of the World Trade Organization** and to bring most of the latter's competences and functions under the aegis of the United Nations.

Alexandrina Najmowicz speaking at CoFoE plenary | 8-9 April 2022



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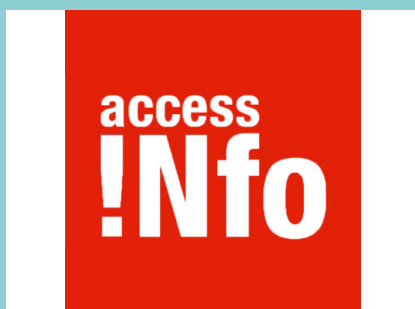
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These organisations contributed to parts of the final report's analysis. This does not necessarily represent a full endorsement of all of the content of the report.







EUROPEAN ANTI POVERTY NETWORK



EUROPEAN ASSOCIATION FOR  
THE EDUCATION OF ADULTS



IMPROVING SERVICES  
IMPROVING LIVES



EUROPEAN  
ALTERNATIVES



European Citizen Action Service

ecsite



EUROPEAN NETWORK  
SCIENCE CENTRES & MUSEUMS



European Center for Human Rights



European Center for  
Not-for-Profit Law



ECOLISE

EUROPEAN NETWORK  
FOR COMMUNITY-LED  
INITIATIVES ON CLIMATE  
CHANGE AND SUSTAINABILITY



EUROPEAN  
DISABILITY  
FORUM



Eurodiaconia











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Mental Health and Social Exclusion



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 **BRITISH**  
**IN EUROPE**

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UK CITIZENS IN EUROPE

