

The European Economic and Social Committee

Founded in 1957 under the Treaty of Rome, the European Economic and Social Committee (EESC) is an advisory body representing employers, trade unions, farmers, consumers and the other interest groups that collectively make up ‘organised civil society’. It presents their views and defends their interests in policy discussions with the Commission, the Council and the European Parliament.

So the EESC is a bridge between the Union and its citizens, promoting a more participatory, more inclusive and therefore more democratic society in Europe.

The Committee is an integral part of the EU’s decision-making process: it must be consulted before decisions are taken on economic and social policy. On its own initiative, or at the request of another EU institution, it may also give its opinion on other matters.

The EESC has 317 members – the number from each EU country roughly reflecting the size of its population. The numbers per country are as follows:

Germany, France, Italy and the United Kingdom	24
Poland and Spain	21
Belgium, Czech Republic, Greece, Hungary, the Netherlands, Austria, Portugal and Sweden	12
Denmark, Ireland, Lithuania, Slovakia and Finland	9
Estonia, Latvia and Slovenia	7
Cyprus and Luxembourg	6
Malta	5
TOTAL	317

The members are nominated by the EU governments but they work in complete political independence. They are appointed for four years, and may be re-appointed.

The Committee meets in Plenary Assembly, and its discussions are prepared by six subcommittees known as 'sections', each dealing with particular policy areas. It elects its President and two Vice-Presidents for a two-year term. Anne-Marie Sigmund, from Austria, became President of the EESC in October 2004.

What does the EESC do?

The European Economic and Social Committee has three main roles:

- to advise the Council, Commission and European Parliament, either at their request or on the Committee's own initiative;
- to encourage civil society to become more involved in EU policymaking;
- to bolster the role of civil society in non-EU countries and to help set up advisory structures.

Who are the EESC's members?

Working mostly in their countries of origin, the members of the Committee form three groups that represent employers, workers and various economic and social interests.

The Employers' Group has members from private and public sectors of industry, small and medium-sized businesses, chambers of commerce, wholesale and retail trade, banking and insurance, transport and agriculture.

The Workers' Group represents all categories of employees, from manual to executive. Its members come from national trade union organisations.

The third group represents a wide range of interests: NGOs, farmers' organisations, small businesses, crafts and professions, cooperatives and non-profit associations, consumer and environmental organisations, the scientific and academic communities and associations that represent the family, women, persons with disabilities, etc.