



European Economic
and Social Committee

Ideas and proposals
for the Working Group on Digital transformation
of the Conference on the Future of Europe

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The EESC, as an active partner on the Conference on the Future of Europe representing the organised civil society, has identified concrete proposals regarding seven topics on Digital transformation, as listed below.

1. Opportunities and innovation linked to digital transformation

Digital Transformation creates more opportunities than threats and requires openness to new technologies, including AI. Predictive maintenance, digital platforms and quantum computing are just three examples of how digital technologies will have a significant impact on the digitalisation of the European economy.

Technological excellence rests on a strong industrial basis, intensive innovation and investment. The EESC highlights the importance of investment in digital infrastructure and the development of the single market in data as essential enablers of proper digital development in all regions of the EU, among both citizens and businesses.

European companies need favourable conditions for innovation, investment and operation, compared to foreign competitors. While promoting innovative businesses, it must be ensured that all businesses, including micro-, small- and medium-sized enterprises and social economy enterprises, are encouraged and so they are able to become involved in and benefit from progress.

Related EESC opinions: [INT/942](#) - Exploiting the economic and social opportunities of digitalisation and improving the digital transformation of the economy, especially SMEs, focusing on human-centred artificial intelligence and data; [INT/961](#) - Path to the Digital Decade

2. Developing Europe's digital sovereignty

The European Economic and Social Committee (EESC) urges the EU to develop its digital sovereignty, which over the coming years is expected to be a crucial pillar of Europe's path to economic, social and environmental development.

The EESC highlights the fact that digital sovereignty must be based on global competitiveness, relying on solid cooperation between Member States, which is a necessary prerequisite for the EU to be a global standard-setter, including in the trustworthiness of technologies.

Related EESC opinion: [INT/961](#) - Path to the Digital Decade

3. AI and "Human-in-command" approach

- European organized civil society has shared responsibility for actively participating in the development and regulation of this digital transformation, with the aim of ensuring an approach where people are in command, based on broad dialogue with stakeholders. This to ensure that development benefits both people and the planet with the principle that people retain command of machines. The key concept of "human-in-command" approach should underline all the process of digitalisation. The digital transformation, made by humans, should benefit everyone. Only with human centred design will digitalisation be successful in the long term.
- EESC calls for a ban on the use of AI for automated biometric recognition in publicly accessible spaces, both in public and private settings, except for identification purposes in specific circumstances.
- In line with its long advocated "human-in-command" approach to AI, the EESC strongly recommends that the AIA provide for certain decisions to remain the prerogative of humans, particularly in domains where these decisions have a moral component and legal implications or a societal impact such as in the judiciary, law enforcement, social services, healthcare, housing, financial services, labour relations and education.
- The EESC is also calling for complaints and redress mechanism for organisations and citizens that have suffered harm from any AI system - the right of every citizen to challenge decisions taken solely by an algorithm.

Related EESC opinions: [TEN/679](#) - The digital revolution in view of the needs and rights of citizens; [INT/933](#) - 2030 Digital Compass: the European way for the Digital Decade; [INT/896](#) - Shaping Europe's Digital Future; [INT/940](#) - Regulation on artificial intelligence

4. Access to AI for SMEs and MSMEs

Self-employed and micro, small and medium-sized enterprises across all sectors account for 99% of EU businesses, two-thirds of private sector jobs and more than half of the added value created by EU enterprises. Exposed to a form of competition radically altered by the digitalisation of the economy, they nevertheless have a key role to play in the EU's digital and green transition in order to meet the challenges ahead. They must therefore be given equal access to AI, as otherwise Europe will be deprived of its most valuable economic, social and human resources.

- The EESC calls for MSMEs to be provided with simple tools and accessible funding to help them integrate this technology which, though expensive, is essential to maintain and even strengthen their competitiveness. Access to data of sufficient quality and quantity, as well as full-scale trials, is a priority.
- The EESC considers that effective support for MSMEs in adopting AI requires strong political will at all levels, close cooperation with all stakeholders in organised civil society and high-quality social dialogue in the Member States.

Related EESC opinion: [INT/945](#) – AI in micro, small and medium-sized enterprises

5. Inclusiveness of digitalisation

- It is essential to support those who cannot benefit immediately from the digitalisation process. There is still a significant group of citizens that lack the knowledge and skills and even the necessary hardware and software to benefit from these facilities. The EESC calls on the Commission to support those who are in a transition process.

- Digital business models will increasingly shape our world of work and need to be designed in a people- and values-oriented way with digital inclusion of particularly vulnerable groups.
- The advancing technical development and digital transformation of the economy also entails certain risks that must be kept in mind in order to fully exploit their potential. Therefore, it is necessary to ensure that, along with technological progress and digitalisation, mechanisms are ensured to counteract the digital exclusion of particularly vulnerable groups.
- The EU must guarantee access to social protection for all workers, employees and self-employed or bogus self-employed persons, in line with the European Pillar of Social Rights.
- Digitalisation represents substantive societal transformation and requires constant dialogue between all parties involved. It is important to ensure an approach where people are in command, that is based on broad dialogue with stakeholders. Equity and social dialogue should always be the guiding principles for implementing digital technologies.
- The EESC recognises that digitalisation and the greening of EU economies and the EU's carbon neutrality targets in particular, go hand in hand. Going "digital and green" is of vital importance, but again the EESC emphasises that equity and social dialogue should always be the guiding principles for implementing digital and green technologies.

Related EESC opinions: [INT/845](#) - Artificial intelligence: anticipating its impact on jobs to ensure a fair transition; [INT/933](#) - 2030 Digital Compass: the European way for the Digital Decade; [INT/942](#) - Exploiting the economic and social opportunities of digitalisation and improving the digital transformation of the economy, especially SMEs, focusing on human-centred artificial intelligence and data; [INT/943](#) - Upgrading inclusive, secure and trustworthy digitalisation for all.

6. Infrastructure

Success factor for a Digital Single Market is a robust digital infrastructure, particularly in rural and remote geographical regions. SME's and Micro-Enterprises need a tailor-made enabling framework.

Related EESC opinion: [INT/942](#) - Exploiting the economic and social opportunities of digitalisation and improving the digital transformation of the economy, especially SMEs, focusing on human-centred artificial intelligence and data.

7. Social dialogue

Anticipation of digital change requires involvement of employees through information, consultation and participation. Digitalisation necessitates new forms of dialogue, provision of information and consultation as well as worker contribution to the management methods. Social dialogue and collective bargaining should be used to steer the digital transformation to reap the full range of benefits it can bring for growth, whilst ensuring that people can still assert the fundamental rights.

Related EESC opinions: [INT/961](#) - Path to the Digital Decade (ongoing); [INT/943](#) - Upgrading inclusive, secure and trustworthy digitalisation for all; [INT/896](#) - Shaping Europe's Digital Future; [SOC/577](#) - Social dialogue for innovation in digital economy.