



European
Citizens' rights,
Involvement and
Trust



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REPORT

“ALL ON BOARD” CONFERENCE

(CLEVER – ECIT JOINT CONFERENCE)

On 3 February 2026, the European Citizens' rights, Involvement and Trust (ECIT) Foundation held its “**All on Board**” Conference at the **European Economic and Social Committee** in Brussels. The programme of the event can be found [here](#). This event brought together more than 25 students from the CLEVER project¹, as well as over 25 representatives from civil society organisations in Brussels and beyond.

“*Democracy is not upheld by institutions alone, it is shaped by people who actively engage*”: the conference was opened by **EESC Member Christa Schweng**, who highlighted the European Economic and Social Committee's continued support for citizens' engagement and its firm belief in the vital role citizens play in promoting democracy across the Member States.

This was followed by an opening panel, composed by **Michael McLoughlin**, Rapporteur for the European Year of Youth and for the Youth Mobility Scheme; **Brikena Xhomaqi**, Director at the Lifelong Learning Platform and **Suzana Carp**, ECIT Foundation co-founder.

Michael McLoughlin began by emphasizing that, despite being one of the EU's flagship education programs, Erasmus+ is not yet fully inclusive or equally accessible. He highlighted structural challenges within the European education system and noted that addressing these inequalities requires sustained, long-term effort. He concluded by underlining the importance of creating meaningful opportunities that empower all EU citizens.

Brikena Xhomaqi then affirmed that education should not stop at school and should provide opportunities for lifelong learning. She highlighted the initiative led by European Commission Vice President Minzatu (Social Rights and Jobs, Skills, and Education portfolio), which aims at making mobility programs more accessible to everyone. This plan focuses on developing basic skills, with citizenship education recognized as a foundational competence. While acknowledging that these initiatives currently exist primarily as political commitments, Xhomaqi stressed that establishing the necessary legal frameworks is essential for the success of programs such as Erasmus+. She concluded by pointing out that inclusivity will be the program's guiding principle, especially in the context of ongoing negotiations on the Erasmus+ 2028 budget.

As the panel drew to a close, **Suzana Carp** explained the *rationale* behind the conference title and outlined the goals of the ECI “All On Board”, currently being proposed by ECIT. Using the metaphor of a bus, she described the ideal scenario in which all citizens are “on board”, sharing a clear understanding of where they are coming from, where they are going, and enjoying equal rights to participate in the journey. This “equal right”, Carp emphasized, is precisely what the initiative aims to address. She continued by highlighting three core challenges that Europe currently faces in this field. First, a significant information gap, as most citizens remain unaware of their EU rights and how to exercise them. Second, while Erasmus is an excellent program, its reach remains limited: fewer than a quarter of students from general schools, and only about 1/8 of students from vocational schools, have the opportunity to travel and gain European experiences. Third, she noted that EU-related education differs widely not only across countries but also within them, increasing educational inequality levels. Finally, Carp stressed the multiplier effect of citizen participation: when everyone shares ideas and experiences, the impact spreads further. For the initiative to succeed, she concluded, it is crucial that everyone is truly “on board”, actively engaging and sharing knowledge about ECIT and its work².

The panel was followed by a presentation on the CLEVER project by **Cettina Callea**, Erasmus+ Coordinator from IIS E. Fermi (Licata, Italy). The CLEVER project is a Jean Monnet Network coordinated by Lycée Martin Nadaud, bringing together European vocational secondary schools from France, Italy, Lithuania, Spain, Bulgaria, as well as the University of

¹ An Erasmus+ initiative designed to introduce vocational high schoolers to European Citizens' Initiatives (ECIs) and to strengthen their civic participation at EU level. For further details, please see the report.

² If you wish to know more about our proposal, please follow the link [here](#)



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Nantes and the Public School of Journalism in Tours. While the EU plays a significant role in shaping education and mobility, many young people remain poorly informed, often receiving incomplete or misleading information. Consequently, the CLEVER project was developed to address these challenges.

The floor was then given to **Kirsti-Matleena Siitonen**, intern at the ECIT Foundation and responsible for the ECI strategy. Firstly, she highlighted a significant gap in EU citizenship participation: many young people study or work abroad from an early age and develop a strong sense of being European, while others miss these opportunities - not due to lack of motivation, but because the system does not reach them equally. Initiatives like this are therefore essential, not only for their content but also because young people are at the heart of the campaign itself. Their energy and engagement are what make this ECI possible. Following this introduction, the ECI strategy was presented. The campaign timeline begins with the finalisation and registration of the ECI proposal in February-March 2026, followed by a six-month preparatory phase for building partnerships, forming teams, and planning outreach. The official signature collection will be launched in September 2026 and run for a full year. The campaign will operate on three levels: European, national, and local. At the European level, ECIT will provide direction, tools, action kits, materials, and advocacy support, ensuring consistency while allowing flexibility. The European Coalition of umbrella organisations – youth networks, civic groups, and academic networks – will amplify the initiative, open doors, and connect local partners. National Coordinators will then act as the bridge between Europe and local communities, adapting materials to local contexts, supporting Task Forces, maintaining continuity, and fostering partnerships. Task Forces will be the campaign's driving force. Student-led and flexible, they will bring together young people with diverse skills to engage locally through events, social media, outreach, and partnerships. Each Task Force will adapt its approach to national realities, while participating in coordinated European-wide actions, sharing experiences across borders. The campaign aims to establish at least 14 National Coordinators, 100+ Youth Task Forces, strong partnerships with schools, universities, and civil society, and to collect over one million signatures in at least seven countries. Beyond these targets, the initiative seeks to create a lasting youth-led European network, showing what active European citizenship can look like in practice.

To find more information about our strategy, please find the complete document [here](#). If you would like to take part in this campaign, please complete this [form](#) or contact us at: info@ecit-foundation.eu.

After these useful exchanges, we were delighted to welcome **MEP Leoluca Orlando** (Group of the Greens/European Free Alliance). He emphasised the symbolic value of the Erasmus programme, which reinforces the interdependence that lies at the heart of the European project. According to Orlando, spreading the Erasmus spirit beyond universities and students, making it accessible to everyone, can foster mutual understanding, solidarity and a shared European identity across all generations.

The afternoon session was structured around two interactive workshops: one concentrating on advocacy and task forces for the “All On Board” ECI, and the other on the communication campaign. In addition, a small third group was formed to explore the legal framework of the ECI, with the help of **Venus Behzadnia**, Legal Team Assistant at Paul Weiss.

The **Task Force & Advocacy workshop** focused on strategies to build and lead youth-led Task Forces (TFs) supporting the “All on Board” ECI. Participants explored how TFs can engage young people locally, connect outreach with advocacy and potential funding strategies. Key engagement spaces identified during the workshop included high schools, vocational schools, universities, sports clubs, cultural centres and student associations. The workshop co-designed an ECIT Action Kit to support TFs, comprising core materials (handouts, legal guidance, guidebooks), visual/outreach tools (logos, hashtags, templates), event kits (posters, flyers, checklists), and support measures (certificates, recognition, checklists, awards, or university credits). Overall, the workshop emphasized that Task Forces must be flexible, considering them as youth-led initiatives that should adapt locally, while staying aligned with European-level strategy. Success depends on clear initiatives, accessible channels, strong partnerships, and preparation for the September signature launch.

During the **Creative Communication workshop**, the participants, which mainly included students and teachers from the CLEVER project, participated in a highly interactive session focused on the relevance of creating engaging social media



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content and the importance of having a cohesive and coherent visual identity. During the first part of the session, participants got to share about their use of social media, such as their most used platforms and favourite formats (e.g. short videos). Following this, **Marietta Barth**, a volunteer at Lycée Martin Nadaud (France), delivered a presentation on “What Makes a Good Social Media Post.” She emphasized the importance of storytelling, crafting a clear message, targeting the right audience, and applying appropriate pacing and structure for a successful communication campaign. The aim of this presentation was to encourage attendees to create content on social media related to the ECI during the coming months. Then, participants got to share their ideas on visual identity of previous ECIs, as well as on proposals for colour palettes, fonts, and visual elements for the All on Board visual identity. This part of the session allowed ECIT to know the preferences of the target audience of our ECI, a key aspect that will ensure that the social media, web and printed content will resonate with the demands of the younger generation, and thus, will be more appealing to them.

Finally, after discussing the draft proposal for new legislation currently being prepared by Paul Weiss, the small legal group suggested that, regarding the “All On Board” ECI, the Commission should first issue a communication, then organise public consultations, citizens’ panels, and pilot projects, before presenting any related legislation.

Overall, the conference held at the European Economic and Social Committee marked a key step in building momentum for the “All on Board” ECI, by clarifying its objectives and presenting its strategy. By bringing together students, teachers, and organisations working on citizens’ rights and youth engagement, the event created a shared space for dialogue and practical cooperation. The discussions and workshops confirmed that the initiative’s success will rely on long-term commitment, strong partnerships, and a coordinated strategy across European, national and local levels, ensuring that all citizens can participate equally in the European project.