

The People's Green Deal: Citizens' Participation in Europe's Sustainability Agenda

**REAL
QDEAL**

RESHAPING CITIZENS'
DELIBERATION FOR THE
EUROPEAN GREEN DEAL

PROJECT Summary

REAL DEAL will stimulate a pan-European debate to reshape citizens' and stakeholders' active participation through deliberative processes around the European Green Deal (EGD). It brings together researchers and practitioners of deliberative democracy from a wide range of disciplines including environmental rights and the law of public participation, ethics and responsible innovation, gender studies and ecofeminism, psychology, geography, urban planning, and sustainability studies. It includes the EU's largest civil society networks advocating on the environment, climate, sustainable development, local democracy, and the European movement. It teams up with youth climate, social justice and women's organisations, SMEs, universities and research institutes, mobilising networks with thousands of CSOs, uniting millions of citizens and activating contacts to thousands of policymakers. In a large co-creation exercise, REAL DEAL will develop, test, and validate innovative tools and formats to propel deliberative democracy to the next level. It will test its innovations at citizens assemblies for the transition in at least 13 countries. We will scrutinise pan-European formats ranging from digital deliberation through our online platform www.realdeal.eu to in-person processes such as an Assembly for a Gender-Just Green Deal and a pan-European Youth Climate Assembly. REAL DEAL will co-create a comprehensive protocol for meaningful citizens' participation and deliberation to work towards the objectives of the EGD. It will validate recommendations on how to design such processes and how they can be applied by European institutions, Member States, and civil society alike. Gender equality will be embedded into the project's DNA. It pays specific attention to the leave-no-one-behind principle, fostering the engagement of disenfranchised groups that are disproportionately burdened by environmental damage. REAL DEAL will develop a new model of environmental citizenship across Europe.



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ANNUAL MONITORING REPORT on Civic Participation and the European Green Deal

INTRODUCTION

A key element of legitimate policy making is enabling the meaningful participation and deliberation of citizens, amplifying their voices, and ensuring they are heard and reflected in the process. For policies at all levels to be able to tackle real issues and propose effective solutions, citizens and their representatives must be involved through all steps of the policy-making cycle, from agenda-setting to monitoring and reformulation.

A deep transformation of our economies and societies towards climate-neutrality and sustainability requires setting up meaningful and effective processes for participatory and deliberative policymaking. The European Green Deal (EGD), the EU's strategy to achieve climate neutrality by 2050, foresees some instruments for the participation of citizens and civil society organisations, including stakeholder consultations, as well as more structured tools such as the Just Transition Platform and the European Climate Pact. But how are these instruments performing? How democratic are they? And what other recent instruments, both at the European Union (EU) and national level, have been used to shape the green transition? In this brief publication we aim to answer these questions by providing an overview of some of these instruments and formulating recommendations for how to improve them.

Our assessment of civic participation in the European Green Deal comes at a crucial time. Today, our societies are severely impacted by continuous and interconnected crises: the aftermath of the Covid-19 health crisis, the ongoing Russian aggression in Ukraine, the climate and environmental emergency, inflation and rising energy prices, and the cost-of-living crisis. While such crises may call for rapid responses, far too often decision-makers use them as a pretext for making swift decisions without consulting citizens. In a modern democracy such decision-making should be an exception, not the rule. Cutting back on consultation is cutting back on democracy.

We must strengthen civil and social dialogue, so that when swift and bold action is necessary civil society, trade unions and other affected stakeholders can promptly take part in decision-making. Through forms of participatory and deliberative democracy, the European Green Deal can gather wider support and it can be implemented more effectively.

THE CIVIL SOCIETY FORUM

for Sustainability: Shaping the European Green Deal

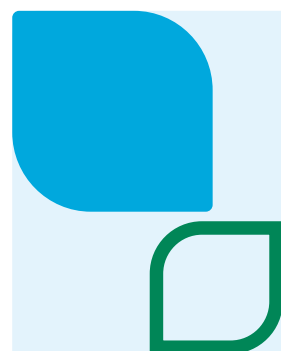
The European Green Deal is one of the broadest and most ambitious policy frameworks of the European Union, aiming to transform the EU into the first climate-neutral region of the world by 2050 and to achieve the objectives set in the 2030 Agenda and the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). It is crucial that these bold transformations benefit all of society, and the costs of climate action do not fall on the least privileged. Ensuring such profound change requires active engagement and meaningful participation of citizens to shape and take part in the design, implementation and evaluation of policies and strategies surrounding the EGD.

In the framework of the Real Deal Project, SOLIDAR in collaboration with the European Environmental Bureau (EEB), and the support of SDG Watch Europe and the European Alliance for a Just Transition organises **'The Civil Society Forum (CSF) for Sustainability: Shaping the European Green Deal.'** In order for the CSF to reach its purpose, it aims to bring together and provide spaces for collaboration between a large spectrum of stakeholders, such as CSOs, researchers and policymakers from all across Europe. Also involved in the organisation of the CSF are REAL DEAL project partners, namely Trilateral Research (TRI), Alleanza Italiana per lo Sviluppo Sostenibile (ASviS), Climate Action Network Europe (CAN E), Association des Agences de Démocratie Locale (ALDA), European Movement International (EMI), Institute for Advanced Sustainability Studies (IASS), Nyt Europa (NE), Women Engage for a Common Future (WECF) and Youth Environment Europe (YEE).

The forum serves as an informal agora for discussing democratic participation in relation to the themes, topics, policies, and processes of the European Green Deal (EGD).

The main objective of the CSF is to provide a space to discuss, build synergies and deliberate on how organisations with different interests and concerns can collectively contribute to achieving the goals of the EGD in the member states as well as at the EU level through civil dialogue processes and in a way that benefits all of society. For this, the Civil Society Forum will meet three times a year over the project implementation period between 2022-2025.

More than 40 civil society organisations from across Europe were gathered online for the second edition of the "Civil Society Forum for Sustainability: Shaping the European Green Deal" on the 21st and 22nd of September, for two half-days of lively debate and discussion. Topics discussed by the Forum included citizens' and civil society participation, elaborating on the positive elements and challenges based on the Real Deal project's criteria (fairness, transparency, competence, efficiency, and legitimacy). The forum generated key recommendations of notable participatory processes addressing EGD topics, such as **the Conference on the Future of Europe, the Just Transition Platform, the European Climate Pact, and Citizens Assemblies at National level** in this first annual monitoring report.



METHODOLOGY

of the **First Annual Monitoring Report**

During the first Civil Society Forum participants discussed the gaps and shortcomings of the EGD towards achieving the SDGs. Through this exercise we were able to produce a [Gap Analysis report](#) with concrete recommendations for strengthening the Green Deal. A highlight of the first Forum was identifying the limitations of citizen involvement in the EGD. This helped us to organise the second edition of the Forum around the topics of citizens and civil society participation in the EGD with the following objectives:

- To discuss the different mechanisms for participation in the EGD with a goal to share good practices and to strengthen capacities, utilising participatory formats at every step.
- To assess the progress of the EGD, considering the current state of play in citizens deliberation for the EGD and its shortcomings, as well as how to institutionalise active citizens' participation and environmental democracy in Europe's green transition.

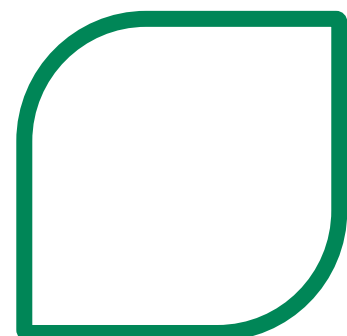
Four different working groups were established to deliberate on the participatory instruments of the EGD, namely, **the Conference on the Future of Europe, the Just Transition Platform, the European Climate Pact, and Citizens Assemblies at National level**. The forum provided an online space for participants to discuss the positive elements, challenges and key recommendations of these notable participatory processes in the working groups.

The challenges were identified under the Real Deal project's five criteria for innovative processes, participatory and deliberative democracy:

- **Fairness** can be divided into procedural (internal) fairness and structural (external) fairness. Procedural fairness means that participants are offered fair conditions during the process. This includes information on the rules and process beforehand or being treated equally. The rules applied in a participatory process should not only be decided before the process starts, but also consensually by the participants (Webler 1995: 62f). Structural (external) fairness means that all relevant and affected stakeholders have an equal opportunity to take part in the process and that all voices can be heard equally throughout the process.
- **Competence** refers to the fact that participatory processes without issue-related and communicative competence will be hollow. Issue-related competence is necessary for participants in order to assess the consequences of their decisions within a process. Communicative competence is necessary to exchange norms, values, emotional expressions and being able to communicate with each other.

- **Transparency** means that all rules, procedures and methods are transparent to all persons involved in the process. Important to note is that ‘all persons involved’ refers not only to citizens participating, but also facilitators, organisers and stakeholders. The product or result(s) of the process should be transparent to all stakeholders, including the public.
- **Efficiency** refers to the most economical use of all resources in the process for the outcome achieved. The efficient use of the time of participants is crucial for their subjective satisfaction with the process.
- **Legitimacy** refers to the potential effect of the results for informing policymaking. Participatory processes cannot bind legal decision-makers, but the process should have an impact on political decisions. The design should incorporate commitments from policymakers to consider all recommendations and to provide a justification if recommendations are not taken onboard (Atlee et al. 2009). Other aspects of legitimacy include the recognition of the participatory process as a major design element of the general public discourse and the acknowledgment of its legitimising power for policymaking within democratic institutions and norms.

This report is divided into five distinct sections, with the first four sections covering specific participatory processes related to the European Green Deal (the Conference on the Future of Europe, the Just Transition Platform, the European Climate Pact, and Citizens Assemblies at National level). Each of these sections includes an analysis of the process, highlights, challenges, and recommendations for the participatory processes. In addition, the fifth section of the report provides key overall recommendations on citizens’ and civil society’s meaningful engagement and participation in these processes around EGD.



EUROPEAN Climate Pact

INTRODUCTION

No doubt remains about the seriousness of the climate crisis. We don't have to look far for evidence that we have progressively degraded the majority of the Earth's ecosystems and influenced the earth's climate. However, there is also evidence to suggest that not all is lost, and that working together will give us a huge advantage in the fight against the climate crisis. To this end, in line with the European Green Deal, the European Commission has launched a **European Climate Pact**, an initiative that seeks to engage people in climate action and more sustainable behaviour.

What is the EUROPEAN CLIMATE PACT?

The European Climate Pact is a European Commission initiative to engage with different stakeholders and civil society actors to bolster their commitment to climate action and encourage sustainable behaviour, offering ways for people and organisations to learn and engage in the fight against climate change, while at the same time demanding stronger action from citizens.

An important goal for the European Climate Pact is to be climate neutral by 2050. To achieve this goal the need to drastically reduce our emissions is fundamental, people need to be part of this. People can contribute, propose their best ideas, learn from others, and exchange their best practices.

HIGHLIGHTS

Climate Pact Ambassadors: The Pact invites people and organisations to learn and commit to specific actions by becoming Climate Pact Ambassadors. The European Climate Pact Ambassadors inform, inspire and support climate policy and action in their communities and networks. They also connect their networks with others in the European Climate Pact.

The Peer Parliaments: Between November 2021 to March 2022, EU citizens across Europe were invited to run bottom-up deliberative debates in small groups known as Peer Parliaments. In these debates, important and relevant insights into the desires and demands of EU citizens regarding climate action and future EU climate policies were provided. It also became clear that citizens need guidance and funding from governmental institutions on different levels to tackle climate change effectively and fairly.

Multi-level participatory policymaking: The Climate Pact works alongside numerous existing initiatives, networks, and movements. It aims to bring together regions, local communities, civil society, industry, and schools. Initially, the Climate Pact has prioritised actions focused on green areas, green mobility, efficient buildings, and training for green jobs, within existing and relevant Commission support mechanisms. These four areas offer immediate benefits not only for the climate but also for the health and well-being of citizens.

Bottom-up approach: The European Climate Pact calls on citizens to propose solutions for changing our ways, to start living differently, and recreating a balance with our natural environment, for us to survive as a human species. In this regard, Civil Society Organisations (CSOs) are important actors in raising awareness about climate change and environmental sustainability, pushing for participatory processes where Local Authorities, Institutional Actors, and citizens cooperate in designing our future.

Youth-focused: The Pact invites young people to continue bringing climate and environmental issues to the top of the global agenda. Young people are demonstrating a strong commitment to the fight against climate change, as they are aware that the decisions that are being taken today will shape the world they will live in as adults and leave behind for their children. To foster their increased involvement in climate policy and to support youth action on climate, the Commission is engaged in regular dialogue with young people and offers them a prominent space in the Pact.

CHALLENGES

1. Fairness: Issues of inclusion

Although the Pact helps participants to be at the centre of debates, the 2nd Civil Society Forum proved to be crucial in identifying that there is still work to do regarding **inclusion**. Structural barriers such as gender, age and disability continue to be a challenge regarding involvement in democratic and participatory mechanisms.

2. Competence: Gender inequality

It is a well-known fact that women and girls are particularly vulnerable and at risk of being heavily impacted by global warming and environmental damage. The European Climate Pact, like any other EU climate policy, will only succeed if it fully **integrates gender equality** into all its solutions. To this end, genuine growth will be possible only if we tackle gender inequalities.

Another challenge the European Climate Pact faces is **the support of local green deals**. The alignment between local government, towns, and regions is fundamental. In this regard, it is important to create and strengthen alliances between cities and rural areas so that they can support each other in enhancing the fight against climate change.

3. Transparency: Lack of transparency

As the European Climate Pact is all about citizen engagement, citizens must be able to track its progress. Hence, it is important to **share relevant information on the actions, methodologies, and results between participants and the public**. This way it is easier to understand how to be part of the Pact's actions and to learn from or join each other's initiatives.

4. Efficiency

According to the participants, an important challenge for the European Climate Pact is to **evidence more tangible impacts, monitor the process, and improve local coordination** to accomplish the objectives of the Pact. At the same time, it is important to keep the ambassadors motivated, since they are one of the key actors in the process.

5. Legitimacy

Guaranteeing that policymakers follow up on the European Climate Pact processes is essential for their legitimacy and ensuring a bottom-up approach. It is important to keep track of each stage of the process, thus maintaining the Pact's credibility and reinforcing the call to action of all citizens.

RECOMMENDATIONS:

The recommendations that arose from the second forum emphasise the **importance of communication**. It was recommended that public figures such as young influencers and YouTubers are involved in promoting awareness and understanding of the European Climate Pact. Likewise, it was suggested that virtual reality technologies are used for the elaboration of tutorials or guides informing about the process of becoming climate ambassadors. At the same time, to be more inclusive, the use of intergenerational language, based on a gendered approach, and accessible to persons with disabilities is recommended.

Another recommendation was to **improve funding to support local proposals by governments and citizens** for environmentally responsible actions in both urban and rural areas. These funds should also be widely disseminated to diverse segments of society and more information should be provided to encourage more people to be Climate Pact Ambassadors.

To conclude, given that environmental issues such as climate change and global warming have a major impact on the lives of people all over the world, especially those who are already vulnerable, all citizens should be **encouraged and motivated to act and participate in initiatives that promote and implement environmentally friendly and sustainable development policies**. By this logic, the European Climate Pact appears as a vital initiative that has the potential to lead to people's active engagement. This can be achieved through communication tools that reach out to more citizens; through incorporating an intersectional approach for the inclusion of all; and by creating an environment that allows the real participation of citizens in the decision-making processes.

Just TRANSITION PLATFORM

INTRODUCTION

Within the context of the European Green Deal (EGD), aiming to transform the EU into the first climate-neutral region of the world by 2050 and to achieve the objectives set in the 2030 Agenda, the European Commission (EC) launched the **Just Transition Mechanism (JTM)**.¹ The JTM addresses the social and economic effects of the transition and aims to ensure that this is a fair, 'just' transition for all, in line with its core value of leaving no person or region behind.

As part of the JTM, the **Just Transition Platform (JTP)**² was established in 2020 as a key tool supporting regions' access to support made available by the JTM. The platform acts as a forum where views and experiences are shared about the process with different stakeholders, including local, regional, and national authorities, and representatives of civil society.

For this reason, the JTP builds on the Initiative for Coal Regions in Transition, which is also aimed at facilitating dialogue and exchanges between fossil fuel producing regions in the EU. The dialogue and exchanges are maintained through providing technical assistance and capacity-building that is tailored to these regions' needs when transitioning to a low-carbon economy.

Similarly, the JTP aims to provide technical assistance for capacity building of such stakeholders. Capacity building is a crucial aspect of the just transition, to ensure that all stakeholders have access to the guidance and support needed to transition to a sustainable climate-neutral economy in a way that is just for all, especially for those regions that are more affected by the transition.

¹ https://ec.europa.eu/info/strategy/priorities-2019-2024/european-green-deal/finance-and-green-deal/just-transition-mechanism_en#just-transition-platform

² https://ec.europa.eu/regional_policy/funding/just-transition-fund/just-transition-platform_en

The way toward a **‘JUST TRANSITION’**

To contribute to the aforementioned objectives, the JTP organises events regularly gathering relevant stakeholders, including financial actors, civil society partners, and experts on the just transition, to discuss the challenges, needs and opportunities that they are confronted with.

Moreover, the JTP has put together **four working groups**³ for carbon-intensive regions that focus on cement, chemicals, steel, and a horizontal stakeholder strategy. These working groups were established in November 2021. They aim to ensure comprehensive stakeholder engagement in the JTP. They provide a thematically focused space for exchanging and developing practice-oriented solutions that address decarbonisation in a just way. This is achieved through the engagement of key stakeholders that are involved in the implementation of the **Just Transition Fund (JTF)**⁴ via problem solving, advocacy and meaningful engagement. The four working groups adopt a cross-cutting approach that focuses on further engaging all stakeholder groups, through the identification of good practices and mechanisms that allow reaching out to and actively engaging all those who are disproportionately affected by the just transition.

To access funding, Member States must prepare dedicated planning documents called Territorial Just Transition Plans (TJTPs) for their regions. The TJTPs must justify the need for investments in the proposed regions and design a clear roadmap on phasing out of fossil fuels and the launch of new green and sustainable economic activities.

In addition to the working groups and their meetings, the JTP organises bi-annual meetings that gather stakeholders from EU coal, peat, shale oil and carbon-intensive regions to discuss the challenges and opportunities that arise around the just transition. These events include networking sessions, capacity building activities, and several exchanges with authorities and public administrations at the local, regional, national, and European level, involving civil society organisations, business, and other social partners. These meetings also include sessions with updates and lessons learnt from the preparation of the TJTPs, as well as sessions with further information on ways to access the JTF, and cross-cutting priorities such as reskilling or future-proofing jobs.

The following chapter of this report focuses on civic participation and the EGD from JTP perspective and development, outlining positive elements, challenges and key recommendations discussed to further improve the quality of just transition processes.

³ https://ec.europa.eu/regional_policy/funding/just-transition-fund/just-transition-platform/groups_en

⁴ https://ec.europa.eu/info/strategy/priorities-2019-2024/european-green-deal/finance-and-green-deal/just-transition-mechanism/just-transition-funding-sources_en

HIGHLIGHTS

Based on the discussions made in the breakout rooms, participants identified the focus on **stakeholders' involvement in just transition processes** as a positive development. This process openly brought together a diverse set of Civil Society Organisations (CSOs), organisations from local and national contexts, and representatives from the EU leadership (President, EVP, VPs, etc.) Furthermore, participants also identified that the **EU Commission is open to engage more with CSOs** which was seen as an opportunity to establish constructive dialogue, a stronger link between the EU, national and local levels.

In addition, **enabling regional and local contributions**, including from industries, toward just transition processes brings an added value and a unique perspective because of their specific context and unique experience. Engaging different stakeholders in the process ensures inclusion and gives equal status for each stakeholder to provide input at all stages of the transition process. In this context, the regions which began a meaningful transition demonstrate the promising potential of engaging various stakeholders. This approach fosters local development and innovation by empowering and equipping local experts to actively participate in the just transition processes.

The **engagement of young people in just transition processes** is necessary considering they will be tomorrow's adults, carrying out the work to ensure the objectives of the JTM are accomplished. In this regard, the participants outlined that the EU has made considerable efforts to have youth included in the process at early stages by supporting their participation in the development of just transition. Similarly, the specific focus on gender within the JTP's framework, policies, and actions in terms of tackling and **reducing gender inequalities** and **integrating a gender perspective**, at every part of the transition, was indicated as a success. The recognition of **the role of the coal industry/climate polluters** was also highlighted as important.

CHALLENGES

1. Fairness: Lack of access to participatory process

Under this criteria, **lack of fairness with regards to participation in just transition processes** from different coal regions was identified as a major concern. In the participants' view, the lack of a real discussion about the objectives of the just transition and the lack of genuine involvement of diverse and citizen-led groups will only lead to a few privileged groups benefitting from the transition. To overcome this, it was recommended that the process make local voices count through active engagement and meaningful participation in shaping the future of Europe and taking part in the design, implementation, and deliberation of the Just Transition.

2. Competence: Limited capacity and lack of representation

As defined under the Real Deal project, the actual work of the Just Transition within the participatory processes requires two major competencies. Issue-related and communicative competencies are needed to assess the consequences of the participants' decisions and ensure effective communication. It is evident that achieving an inclusive and successful transition requires vision, expertise, and skills. However, the limited capacity of local authorities and entities has been identified as a challenge, hindering the achievement of inclusive public participation in the just transition processes. Similarly, **the representation of civil society** in the design of the just transition process was raised as one of the major challenges. According to the participants, the JTP does not address diversity (economic and social) and inclusivity to a sufficient degree when it comes to participation.

3. Transparency: Lack of transparency, capacity, and knowledge

Although the Just Transition Platform aims to be a transparent and accessible process, the participants raised some concerns about access to information and inclusivity, with decision-making processes often being opaque. Regarding access to information, the main remark from the participants was that the JTP does not ensure **the transparency of the information** collected. Information gathered in Just Transition processes such as how much money was generated or spent, or the number of people impacted etc. were not shared publicly with citizens. Another remark from participants was that the JTP does not ensure **the early inclusion of citizens** in just transition processes. This mainly refers to citizens' meaningful participation in dialogues, meetings, and decision-making structures. Not including them in the process at early stages may create challenges for involving them in the later stages of the JTP. One of the significant reasons for citizens' lack of engagement in just transition process at the early stages was identified as **a lack of capacity and knowledge** about the JTP. This shows that the JTP targets only stakeholders and partners with the technical, financial, and human capacity and diminishes the role of citizens. The JTP should provide tailor-made support and trainings to increase citizens' capacity to understand and take part in the process.

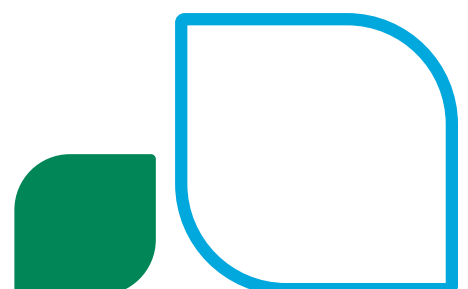
4. Efficiency: Inefficient monitoring and evaluation mechanisms

One of the objectives of the JTP is to strengthen the capacities of stakeholders and citizens in a participatory transition. In this context, monitoring mechanisms play a crucial role in ensuring and assessing a sustainable and inclusive transition. The current **monitoring mechanisms are found to be inefficient** in providing data on citizens' involvement in the processes. In addition, it was also perceived that **lengthy decision-making processes and complicated administrative procedures** at national and EU level deter meaningful and sustainable engagement of citizens in the JTP.

5. Legitimacy: Lack of opportunity and equal representation

The outcomes of these participatory processes are not binding on decision-makers. Nevertheless, they are useful in ensuring a solid presence within democratic institutions when making relevant and required changes. This in turn can have an impact on the ability to implement a successful transition. One way to achieve this change comes from the recognition and legitimisation of the process and the involvement of citizens in the decision-making processes. During the discussions, several concerns were raised regarding the legitimacy of the process. Firstly, the main remark from the participants was the **lack of opportunities for citizens and local stakeholders to participate in the transition processes**. Considering the JTP's aim to ensure a fair, 'just' transition for all, it is a major problem that the JTP does not ensure access for the citizens and local stakeholders to actively take part and share their views, flag challenges, and ensure local input is included in the transition processes. This challenge also refers to the institutionalisation of the role of minorities in the just transition processes and therefore challenges the legitimacy of the platform.

Furthermore, the **lack of civil society organisations representation and presence** in these processes was also identified as a significant challenge. It is important to highlight that civil society organisations play a vital role in healthy and participatory democracies as they are an important source of information for both citizens and governments. They provide a space for people to come together to share interests and identify common goals to engage in advocacy to challenge and influence the systems for a better and inclusive society for everyone. Their absence raised concerns about how balanced in terms of representation these processes are.



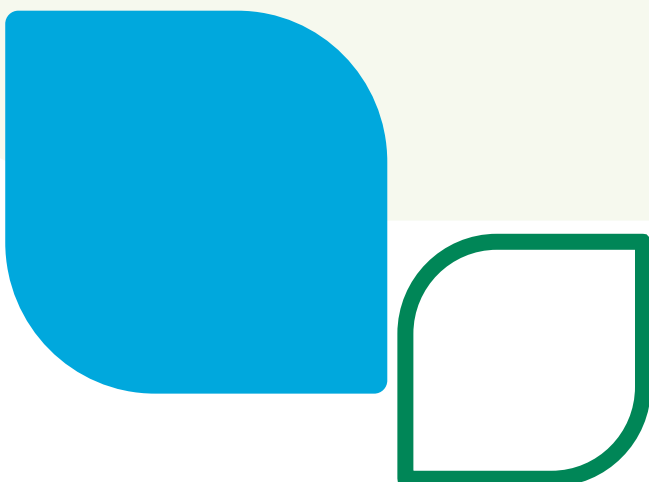
RECOMMENDATIONS:

The JTP should redesign its policy and objectives by putting people with diverse backgrounds, CSOs, stakeholders and the society at the centre of its approach. To this end, the JTP should ensure **expanding civic space** by **meaningful community engagement, citizen-led dialogue and participatory approaches** that are built on existing groups and civil society organisations. In addition, citizens, CSOs and local stakeholders should have more structural participation in the implementation processes considering their lived experience and knowledge of the local context.

In order to improve efficiency in terms of participation and timeliness, **the monitoring mechanisms should be improved**. The mechanisms should ensure deliberative processes by reflecting on the involvement of citizens and stakeholders at the local level with solid presence of civil society participation. The monitoring process should not be rushed.

The JTP must consider **strengthening the role of citizens** in the design of its plans and projects, starting from transforming the existing participation processes by increasing the capacity of civil society actors and ensuring ongoing and sustainable financial support. This should also include awareness raising and promotion of local and grassroots level CSOs' work.

The JTP should ensure **transparent process** by providing an enabling environment and access to public information in various European languages. It should define a clear timeline for citizens and other stakeholders' engagement to provide their input on plans, reviews and assessments.



Conference on the **FUTURE OF EUROPE**

INTRODUCTION

Described as an unprecedented example of transnational deliberative democracy, **the Conference on the Future of Europe (CoFoE)** constituted a unique and novel approach in enabling a broad and meaningful dialogue between citizens and governing European institutions.

Envisioned as a bottom-up exercise, the CoFoE was structured around a series of citizen-led debates and discussions. The process ran over the course of one year, from April 2021 to May 2022. It featured:

- a) Four European Citizens' Panels with randomly selected citizens from across the EU,
- b) Six National Citizens' Panels,
- c) A Multilingual Digital Platform allowing European citizens to contribute in 24 EU languages,
- d) Seven Conference Plenaries,
- e) Thousands of national and local events.

The whole process was guided by Rules of Procedure, and it is estimated that more than 700,000 people joined the events, while visits to the Multilingual Digital Platform were more than 5 million, making it a major democratic exercise. Its outcomes included 49 proposals to the EU institutions, and they reflected the views of EU citizens on nine topics, inter alia, climate change and the environment. As an ambitious, multilingual, complex and first of its kind method for board deliberation, the CoFoE is to be regarded for both its successes and challenges, setting a good example to build on for future citizen deliberations in Europe and beyond.

HIGHLIGHTS

The innovative approach of the CoFoE has brought about positive outcomes in terms of reinforcing the democratic values of the EU. The process has contributed to:

Increased sense of ownership and trust in the EU institutions: Citizens who actively participated in the CoFoE reflected that the process made them “...feel European, feel engaged and listened to in the process of democratisation...”. Being given the opportunity to share their views and perspectives on vital topics for the future of the EU gave citizens a sense of ownership as well as trust in the EU institutions and stakeholders that they worked with for the implementation of the citizens’ proposals.

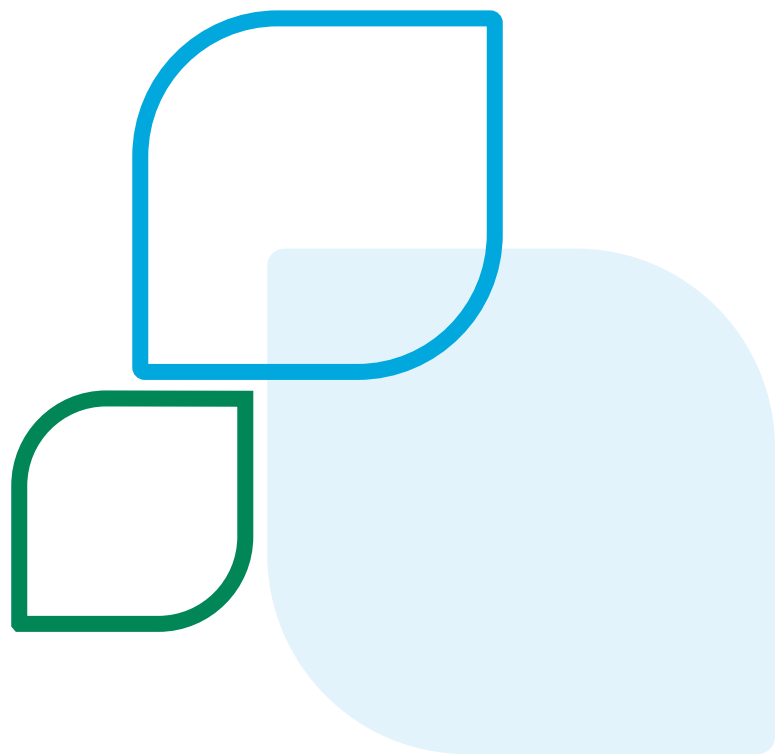
Strengthening common European identity, by embracing the multicultural aspect: With citizens coming from 27 countries, each with a different cultural background, socio-economic situation, and variety of experiences, and with deliberations held in 24 different languages, the CoFoE embraced the multicultural diversity of the EU. Participants shared that working with fellow Europeans from other countries, helped them broaden their horizons, made them able to better understand each other and see beyond differences and language barriers, and work together for a common view of their future. This multiculturalism enriched the deliberations, the co-creation of learning from each other, the sense of belonging, and awareness of the wider community of Europeans. It therefore enabled a new momentum for public participation in Europe. In the context of the COVID-19 pandemic and the war in Ukraine, the perseverance of the CoFoE was valued by participants and reinforced the sense of community between Europeans.

Closing the gap between citizens and their representatives: Working closely and being able to enter into dialogues and directly share their opinions with policy-makers from the European Parliament, the Council, and the Commission, as well as with national actors is perceived as another positive element of the CoFoE process. In a state where citizens were losing trust in the institutions, this process was regarded to be beneficial for underpinning their

democratic legitimacy. It also allowed decision-makers to acquire first-hand knowledge about what different people think about climate and energy policies and their implementation on the ground.

Providing broad accessibility and involving the voices of the youth: In connection to the previous two points, what participants found valuable was that due to the structure of the CoFoE and the three levels combined – a digital space, a citizen panel, and a plenary with citizens and elected politicians - a large scale of people could be reached. This, for example, enabled an engagement with an impressive amount of young people. The European Youth Event gathered around 10,000 young people online, allowing them to be part of the discussions and have their voice heard in an institutional framework. This in turn was able to bring youth closer to the EU Institutions.

Building deliberation capacities and knowledge co-creation: The CoFoE offered a unique opportunity for people from all walks of life to learn the decision-making processes of the EU. For example, participation in the Plenary for the Citizens Ambassadors (including learning the rules of the EP, compromises etc.) and capacity building for deliberation, was found to be highly beneficial for improving citizens ability to construct arguments and their confidence to present their points to high-level politicians. Moreover, it created a space where co-creation of knowledge is possible between various stakeholders.



CHALLENGES

Ambitious in its broad reach and complexity, the CoFoE faced some challenges, from which to learn and to use to improve deliberative methods. These can be split into five categories:

1. Fairness: Lack of access to participatory processes

The concerns identified here were mostly on **representation and the (non-)enabling environment of the process for participation and visibility** of minority groups, LGBTQI+ people and citizens from non-EU European countries. Moreover, the framing was not sensitive to the LGBTQI+ community. The gender equality rule was problematic for representatives of this group because it was based upon their being two distinct genders (male and female). This framing fails to consider and accommodate the diverse experiences and identities of the LGBTQI+ community. Similarly, an observation was made regarding the lack of representation in the selection of lead speakers i.e., there should be two-lead speakers, but they cannot be of the same gender. In addition, the process was also not mindfully created concerning access for people with disabilities. While the attempt to create a multilingual process might be applauded, in practice the multilingual platforms were not very accessible.

2. Competence: Lack of capacity of citizens and CSOs' representation in the processes

Broad processes entail a diversity of actors, with different backgrounds and varying experiences and educational levels. In such an environment, it is important to enable the voices of participants who are not as vocal or have not usually participated in policy consultations to be heard. Moreover, the level of technicality and complexity of language used should be levelled to the capacity of an average citizen to be able to contribute, which was something that the CoFoE did not fully succeed in doing.

Namely, the main remark from participants was that **the overwhelming presence of experts** in some cases created limitations for the general public to follow and fully understand the discussions. Moreover, there was **not a strong enough presence of civil society organisations**, which was seen as a missed opportunity for the quality of the process and the outcomes.

3. Transparency: Few networking opportunities

While aiming to be a process that would increase openness and transparency, there were also some limitations. The main remark from participants was that the CoFoE **did not offer good networking opportunities**. Namely, the CoFoE did not manage to find the balance between protecting people's privacy and providing enough information on the profiles of participants, their occupation, education, and country of residence to allow for people to connect with each other. In many sessions there was also no introduction of the participants. Without knowing the agendas of others, people felt reserved and reluctant to discuss openly to the fullest. Moreover, the lack of clarity with the rules of procedure which tended to vary from one working group to the other added to the ambiguity of the process.

4. Efficiency: Rushed process and lengthy sessions

The CoFoE involved discussion on some of the biggest topics for the EU's future. Fitting such huge topics into the timeframe allowed by the CoFoE resulted in participants perceiving **the process as rushed**, especially in the period of March-April, which, in their view, negatively affected the final outcome and the quality of the policy proposal. On the other hand, since many of the activities of the CoFoE were held on weekends, it was perceived as difficult to have **very lengthy sessions**, due to private obligations of participants. Therefore, finding the right balance between the topics and the time needed to discuss in detail would be valuable for future similar processes.

5. Legitimacy: Lack of institutional follow up and citizens' unequal representation in the process

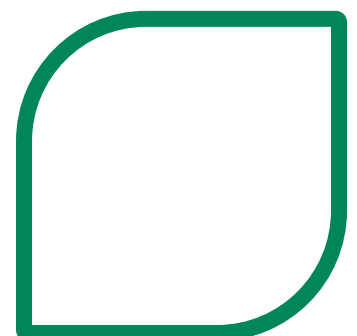
Several concerns were raised regarding the legitimacy of the process.

Firstly, one of the main aims of the CoFoE is to increase the credibility and trust of citizens towards the governing institutions. Nevertheless, the **lack of proper follow-up mechanisms from the institutions** undermines the possible effect and impact of the process as well as the trust in it. Namely, there need to be formal channels through which citizens' ideas raised in CoFoE can be translated into policymaking. It is of utmost importance that citizens' input is followed by tangible proposals. Without the implementation of their policy proposals, people might feel discouraged to take part in a similar process again in the future.

Second, there was an **imbalanced presence of the representatives of the EU institutions versus the citizens**. Namely, this was especially visible in some of the speeches of the Plenary where politicians dominated.

This over-presence of the institutions poses the question of how legitimate the process is when it should serve and be led by citizens. Moreover, citizens felt they were forgotten after 9th of May and the last official communication was on the 16th of June.

Third, **the lack of opportunity for citizens from non-EU European countries**, especially candidate and partnership countries, was also identified by participants as a factor which undermined legitimacy. Considering that both geographically and culturally the EU neighbouring countries (like the Western Balkan countries), are part of Europe, and taking into account the EU's values of solidarity, unity, and democracy, it is a major omission of the CoFoE to not provide access for the citizens of these countries to be able to actively share their views, interests and the challenges they perceive in shaping the future of Europe. This is even more important in the face of challenges such as, inter alia, the energy crisis, migration, and climate change, whose solutions require a joint European approach beyond the EU.



RECOMMENDATIONS:

The scope of the conference should be narrowed for better, more efficient recommendations and outcomes.

In the planning process of future CoFoEs **there must be regular discussions and consultations with people with disabilities**. People with disabilities should be given opportunities to provide input on the design of conference so that the event is accessible. In the planning of the next CoFoE, an adequate budget should be designated to sign-language interpreters, interpreters, and online accessibility support coordinators.

Citizens from non-EU countries should be allowed to participate. A quota should be set for non-EU citizens who:

- a) Live in Europe - people with residence permits, migrants with residence permits and undocumented migrants (please note that not all non-EU people pay taxes);
- b) Live in neighbouring countries;
- c) Live in countries in the global south, quasi colonies, or ex-colonies - to whom Europe has historical responsibilities due to colonialism. This becomes particularly important with regards to discussion topics that have a direct impact on countries outside of Europe, such as climate action;
- d) Live in the EU candidate countries.

Overcome the language barriers by ensuring interpretations in various languages, and speakers in various languages. Also, host pre-meetings and roundtables, potentially online, in local languages.

Reformulate the gender speaker rule and broaden its scope to allow for people from the LGBTIQ+ community whose gender does not fit the gender binary to also lead the sessions.

National citizens' assembly on EGD TOPICS at the NATIONAL LEVEL

INTRODUCTION

National Citizens' Assembly (NCA) is a new form of democracy which allows making decisions at a city, national or even international level. A citizens' assembly is a randomly selected group of residents according to demographic criteria such as gender and age. Citizens' assemblies have been formally established to supplement representative institutions in a variety of contexts, dealing with issues ranging from electoral reform in Canada and the Netherlands⁵ to same-sex marriage and abortion law in the Republic of Ireland.⁶

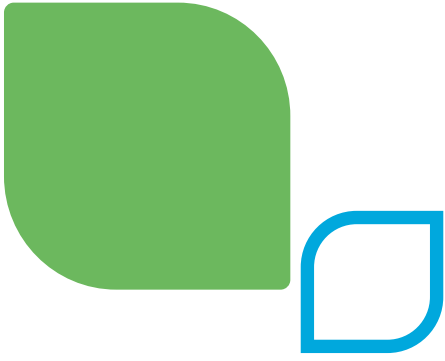
National citizens' assemblies (NCAs) empower citizens to develop an in-depth understanding of an issue and to submit their recommendations free of partisan interference and considerations. The role of a citizens' assembly is to provide an in-depth analysis of a given issue, a deliberation over different solutions, a hearing of the pros and cons, and finally agreements on informed decisions.

In recent years, the climate crisis has been one of the main points on political agendas both nationally and globally. Deliberative processes on this complex issue have begun to emerge and some countries including Austria, France, the United Kingdom, Ireland, and Scotland have launched their NCAs on how to deal with the climate emergency.

The benefits of an assembly for the climate are the generation of learning and reflection, which result in a collective knowledge oriented towards the search for solutions to the great transformations that need to be undertaken, and a better understanding of which policies and measures society is willing to support when it has adequate and plural information on a given issue.

⁵ Fournier, P et al. (2011) *When Citizens Decide: Lessons from Citizen Assemblies on Electoral Reform*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

⁶ Farrell, DM, Suiter, J and Harris, C (2019) 'Systematizing' Constitutional Deliberation: The 2016–18 Citizens' Assembly in Ireland. *Irish Political Studies* 34(1), 113–123.



HIGHLIGHTS

During the Forum, the main positive aspects regarding NCAs were discussed with a **specific focus on the case of Ireland**. The participants considered the Irish case as a successful example due to the strong link between the Assembly and the Parliament. In the Irish case, the coal industry climate polluters were highlighted as important to progress a just transition.

Another positive point that was identified was the fact that **the selection of participants for the national citizens' assembly** was done randomly. This refers to truly unbiased selection of people from the whole country, and different people from different backgrounds represented their interests.

The last positive point discussed by the participants **was the role of CSOs as experts** in deliberation. They found it quite productive that the creation of the role of CSOs as experts was developed within the secretariats, boards, etc. of the national citizens' assembly.

CHALLENGES

1. Fairness: Lack of access to participatory processes

Practical issues arose regarding **using one main language for communication. Translation to other languages** should be considered worth the added cost and effort, as it is very important for opening the process to more people. Having all voices represented is always difficult but to have a true representation of society a broad range of stakeholders must be engaged. Participants consider that a successful national citizen's assembly needs to be perceived as legitimate by the population to be effective.

The main challenges identified in the Forum regarding NCAs are related to communication. Communicating complex issues to the public can be difficult if the main message is related to a very technical issue. Connected to this, the identification of subject matter experts who debate the topics is extremely important, as they can influence the whole process.

2. Competence: Lack of inclusion

Participants also found limitations on the effectiveness of NCAs. The positive effects are especially pronounced among the very small number of participants. They must be integrated into better-prepared public campaigns or broader civic dialogue. Transparency also plays a really important role in this, especially when it comes to knowing which organisations are involved in the Just Transition process.

Regarding the duration, in some cases, NCAs can last only a few days, which makes discussions difficult and compressed.

RECOMMENDATIONS:

Among the main recommendations participants identified during the Forum, widespread representation and institutional involvement are fundamental. In their opinion, in the context of a divided society, **the decision-making process** regarding contested issues should be made by the legitimate (policy makers) actors in the best positions. In some cases, this may entail prioritising the involvement of political elites over ordinary citizens. Connected to this, **increasing the randomness of the selection procedure** to be more broadly encompassing was also recommended as a good practice, balancing the process. The NCA should connect the people to the topics very close to their local communities and relevant for their everyday lives, taking into account minorities' interests.

Participants consider as well that it should not be expected that local groups do the bulk of consultation work without equipping them with skills and resources to enable their work to continue in the long term.

One last recommendation would be to **formally outline the role of the citizens'** assembly in a particular situation where a coalition power-sharing government encounters a precarious deadlock on a particular policy issue. Another option, more applicable to existing associations, is to allow citizens' assemblies to consider whether and how to modify institutional arrangements.

Good practice - **IRELAND**⁷

The Irish Citizens' Assembly brings citizens together to discuss and consider important legal and policy issues.

The Dublin Citizens' Assembly shall be convened to consider the type of directly elected mayor and local government structures best suited for Dublin, and to bring forward proposals in that regard. The Assembly will have a total of 80 members, including an independent Chairperson, 67 randomly selected members of the public living in Dublin City and County, and 12 Councillors. Each Assembly agrees to its own rules and procedures for how it will carry out its business. Its meetings must follow six key principles to ensure fairness. The Assembly may invite and accept submissions from people who are interested in any of the issues being discussed, such as expert advisory groups.

Recent political developments in Northern Ireland have increased the likelihood that a citizens' assembly, will be established by the official government. A crisis in the executive branch of the power-sharing coalition in January 2017 led to the collapse of the devolved government and triggered snap elections. The result has done little to resolve differences between the main parties, and several rounds of inter-party talks hosted by the British government have failed to revive the executive branch. However, in January 2020, another round of talks was successful, and the final agreed solution included provisions for the establishment of a group that would be "invited to propose the most appropriate Participatory models. It is worth noting that public support for these models is generally lower compared to holding a referendum, which is often seen as the most significant form of participation. Ideologically uncompromising citizens are less willing to support town hall rallies than political moderates.

Running in parallel with the Dublin Citizens' Assembly is the Citizens' Assembly on Biodiversity Loss,⁸ which counts 100 members, to examine how the State can improve its response to the issue of biodiversity loss, and to bring forward proposals in that matter.

Good practice - **AUSTRIA**⁹

The Climate Assembly was born out of a preferred initiative on climate action in June 2020, which was supported by around 400,000 people. One of the core demands is to let the Austrian population have a say in climate protection measures. In March 2021, the National Council asked the government to implement the proposals of the climate initiative, creating the Climate Assembly.

After the Climate Assembly, participants supported the "Association of the Austrian Climate Assembly of Citizens" to continue their work on climate protection. The 93 proposals of the Climate Assembly presented on 4th July 2022, include:

- Enshrining a basic right to climate protection,
- Implementing a land protection ban,
- Abolishing fossil energy subsidies,
- Establishing a non-partisan climate commission,
- Introducing gas tariffs for food from third countries
- Implementing better taxes for climate-damaging vehicles.

⁷ <https://www.citizensassembly.ie/en/>

⁸ <https://www.citizensassembly.ie/en/assembly-on-biodiversity-loss/about/about.html>

⁹ <https://participedia.net/case/8365>

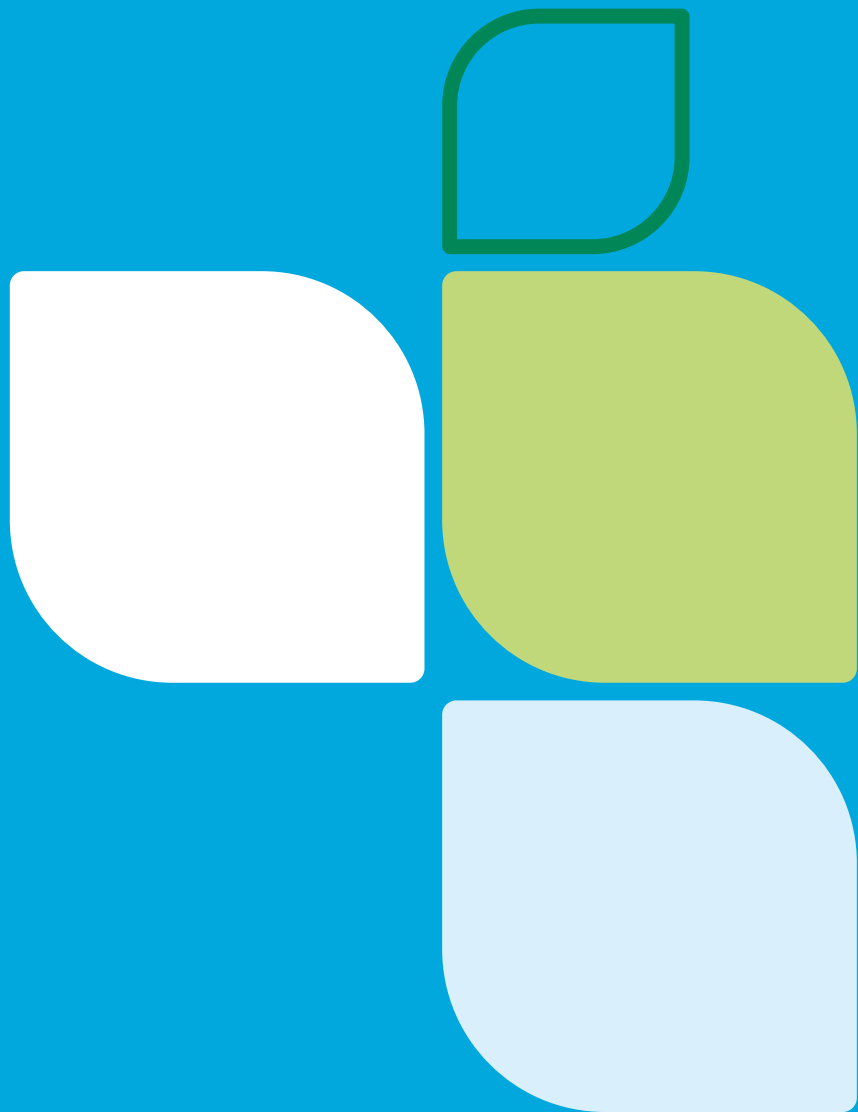
Overall **RECOMMENDATIONS**

The following key recommendations around citizens' and CSOs' participation were generated. These recommendations can be applied to every segment of notable participatory processes addressing EGD topics.

- **Promote inclusive participation among citizens and stakeholders:** To ensure meaningful and inclusive participation in the making of local, national, regional and global policies relating to the EGD, a sustainable mechanism should be created. This mechanism should include and encourage citizens, CSOs, affected groups and other stakeholders at every stage of dialogue, reporting and decision-making processes. Additionally, authorities at the EU, national and local levels should create opportunities and strengthen the enabling environment for CSO representatives working at local and grassroots levels to ensure their active engagement in participatory processes.
- **Transparency and public access to information:** necessary steps must be taken to ensure that transparent, accurate, timely and relevant information is in place and accessible by everyone. The information shall also be provided and available in citizens' native languages in order to ensure citizens' understanding about the participatory processes. Making the information accessible and available for citizens is crucial in ensuring their active and effective participation in dialogues, meetings, and decision-making structures.
- **Equality:** For equal representation in all aspects of the EGD and its participatory processes, a broad range of CSOs including those who focus on women, youth, LGBTQI+ and other marginalised groups must be put at the centre of the EGD's policies and implementation strategies. To ensure equal representation and to tackle gender inequalities, increased inclusion of these groups must be prioritised and ongoing support must be provided to ensure their active and effective participation.

List of **ACRONYMS/ ABBREVIATIONS**

CoFoE	Conference on the Future of Europe
CSO(s)	Civil Society Organisation(s)
EC	European Commission
ECP	European Climate Pact
EGD	European Green Deal
EU	European Union
JTF	Just Transition Fund
JTM	Just Transition Mechanism
JTP	Just Transition Platform
NCA	National Citizens Assemblies
SDGs	Sustainable Development Goals
TJTPs	Territorial Just Transition Plans





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