

Policy brief:

The future of the European Green Deal

By the **Civil Society Forum for Sustainability**



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Introduction

The Civil Society Forum for Sustainability – Shaping the European Green Deal is co-organised by SOLIDAR, the European Environmental Bureau (EEB) and SDG Watch Europe within the framework of the REAL DEAL project, a Horizon 2020 research project focused on reshaping citizens and stakeholders' participation and deliberative democracy in the framework of the European Green Deal (EGD).

Over two days in Brussels on June 26th and 27th, 2023, more than 60 civil society organisations (CSOs) from across Europe came together for the fifth edition of the *Civil Society Forum for Sustainability: Shaping the European Green Deal*. The forum focused on advancing Europe's green transition, with a specific focus on the social, economic, participatory, environmental, and international dimensions of the EGD and its alignment with the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.

A key objective of the forum was to formulate non-exhaustive policy recommendations through discussions with policymakers, CSOs, and other stakeholders. This policy brief articulates a civil society vision and provides overarching recommendations for each dimension assessed by participants at the forum, offering input for EU-level policymakers to align with the aspirations of citizens, civil society, and stakeholders in the pursuit of a transformative European Green Deal 2.0.

Key questions that guided the development of the document included defining overarching goals and aspirations for the next European Green Deal, integrating various dimensions of the Green Deal into a holistic vision, proposing ambitious legislative initiatives, ensuring active involvement of citizens and stakeholders, and establishing mechanisms for broad participation and inclusivity.

A European Green Deal with a Social Heart

The European Green Deal (EGD) holds the promise of a sustainable and climate-neutral Europe. However, for this vision to succeed, it must be underpinned by a robust socially just dimension.¹ To achieve a robust social dimension, a vision for a more inclusive and transformative EGD, addressing social inequalities, environmental emergencies and fostering intersectional social justice is necessary.²

Civil Society's vision is a European Green Deal that transcends environmental policy and becomes a catalyst for comprehensive societal change. It envisions a Europe where environmental sustainability, equal opportunities, fair working conditions, social protection and

¹ Lager, F., Coninx, I., Breil, M., Bakhtaoui, I., Branth Pedersen, A., Mattern, K., van den Berg, H., Sini, E., Gallucio, G., Klein, R., & Vierikko, K. (2023). Just Resilience for Europe: Towards measuring justice in climate change adaptation. ETC CA. <https://doi.org/10.25424/CMCC-BATP-3M95>.

² Youngs and Kambli, Carnegie Europe, 'Climate Action, Social Justice and Democracy: Europe's New Trilemma', 02 February 2023, report that crises such as the Covid pandemic and Russia's war against Ukraine have contributed to a diluting of these commitments, despite the same crises highlighting the inequalities exacerbated by climate change within these events. Read more: <https://carnegieeurope.eu/2023/02/02/climate-action-social-justice-and-democracy-europe-s-new-trilemma-pub-88914>

economic rights³ are intrinsically linked, creating a harmonious, inclusive and resilient society. For this to happen, the policy coherence and the mutually reinforcing role of the EGD with respect to the European Pillar of Social Rights (ESPR) and its Action plan is pivotal. In this vision, the EGD embraces **inclusivity**, diversity of thought and perspective, ensures broad participation and extends **beyond political institutions, enhancing the ownership of people and civil society**. It envisions education and awareness of SDGs and relevance in daily life, in order to make the connection between social, economic and environmental issues stronger at all levels.

The next EGD should put **intersectional social justice** in the centre, prioritising the creation of a social safety net that shields everyone from poverty and social exclusion. This entails a focus on marginalised communities, including migrants, refugees and asylum seekers (MRAs), the LGBTIQ+ community, ethnic minorities, youth, single-parent households, disabled individuals, women-led households, large families, and people with low socio-economic status, ensuring that targeted resources uplift those most in need. In this vision, climate change is not viewed in isolation. Instead, the vision highlights the interconnectedness of climate challenges with broader societal issues. It calls for narratives that emphasise these linkages, fostering a deeper understanding of the complex challenges we face.

For a socially just and holistic EGD to be a reality, **consensus-building** should be operationalised through networks of cooperation that span national, regional, EU, and international levels, ensuring **policy coherence** and preventing inconsistencies in climate action implementation.⁴ It is critical that all policies across the EU assess and underscore the importance of integrating a gender transformative approach into all policies.⁵ Member States are required to undertake public participation in the drafting of their updated NECPs. The evidence to date is that compliance has been “weak and uneven”⁶. While some Member States have delayed submission of their drafts, it is highly unlikely that this is to enable robust public participation. This is disappointing because the most effective moments for public participation in the development of plans and policies are “upstream” – at an early point in the policy development cycle when problems are being defined, options identified and assessed. At the point when a draft is published, many decisions about the merits or otherwise of policy options have been decided. The danger is that participation at this point is simply to rubber stamp decisions already made. We have to be careful not to call for participation when that participation is likely to have no material effect and allows governments to claim that they have fulfilled their commitments.

³ Atanas Kolev, Armin-D. Riess, Georg Zachmann and Edward Calthrop Investment and growth in the time of climate change, emphasise on the need for the EU to balance economic stability with the need to invest in a range of climate mitigation, adaptation and response measures. Read more: [European Investment Bank and Bruegel, Chapter 2, https://www.eib.org/attachments/thematic/investment_and_growth_in_the_time_of_climate_change_en.pdf](https://www.eib.org/attachments/thematic/investment_and_growth_in_the_time_of_climate_change_en.pdf)

⁴ Government of Netherlands, Revision of Environmental and Planning Laws, outlining the current impact of incoherent policy on climate issues as lacking clarity on operationalising policies at national levels. Read more: <https://www.government.nl/topics/spatial-planning-and-infrastructure/revision-of-environment-planning-laws/a-more-consistent-and-effective-eu-environmental-legislation>

⁵ EEB and WECF, Why the European Green Deal needs Ecofeminism, Moving from Gender blind to Gender transformative environmental policies, July 2021, <https://eeb.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/07/Report-16-1.pdf>

⁶ CAN-EU & WWF. 2023. Public Participation in National Energy and Climate Plans: Evidence of Weak and Uneven Compliance in Member States. <https://1point5.caneurope.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/04/REPORT-Public-participation-in-National-Energy-and-Climate-Plans.pdf>

Policy Recommendations

1. **Ensure policy coherence for sustainable development** across all laws and policies in the EU and its Member States using impact assessments. Give particular relevance to overarching policy frameworks including the SDGs and the EPSR (European Pillar of Social Rights) and its Action Plan.
2. **Provide adequate social protection measures through effective and just redistribution** – public finance and taxation should be redistributive to ensure that the green transition is financed by the richest strata of the population who can shoulder the greatest burden, as well as those who pollute the most (which often overlap), with increased financing for cooperative investments, working towards achieving the green transition, economic equality, and social and environmental goals. This can be achieved through strengthening and implementation of existing institutional instruments e.g., the Social Climate Fund, the EPSR, and introducing new social protection such as minimum income measures.
3. **Enshrine non-human rights** through an environmental Charter jointly developed with citizens, civil society, Member States, and the EU.⁷ So far in Europe the non-human is subjugated to the human in rights discourse. Best practices exist to remedy this in other countries e.g., the Ecuadorian constitution recognises the Rights of Nature and forests and rivers have legal personhood in New Zealand.
4. **Enhance social justice** within the context of the European Green Deal (EGD) by focusing on social inclusion and ensuring that marginalized groups have access to their social rights. This can be achieved by civil society's structured and meaningful involvement in policy making mechanisms.
5. **Work towards social and climate justice for people in the Global South by acknowledging historic responsibility** for EU's extractive overseas industries and ongoing human rights violations, including in supply chains. Take actions to prevent further negative impact on human rights and the environment and compensate for damages caused, by supporting the operationalisation of the loss and damage fund at UN level.

A European Green Deal for People

The EGD we want envisions environmental, climate, and social justice that seeks active and participatory democracy involving people living in Europe and civil society organisations. A European Green Deal that sets a vibrant tapestry of participatory democracy, where the **voices of people** (including and prioritising marginalised communities) living in Europe resonate in every corner of the green and just transition with gender equality and an anti-racist approach. A true social EGD that emphasises **local empowerment**, where local actions driven by citizens'

⁷ For more information see EESC, Towards an EU Charter of the Fundamental Rights of Nature (2020) <https://www.eesc.europa.eu/en/our-work/publications-other-work/publications/towards-eu-charter-fundamental-rights-nature>

assemblies, from local to national and EU levels, flourish as engines of this transition and play a pivotal role in shaping policies. This ensures that the concerns and aspirations of communities are not just voiced but also acted upon by governments.

To strengthen the participatory dimension of the EGD in the future, barriers that exist with respect to including minorities, sustaining commitments, and lack of process in monitoring should be addressed. Flexibility, inclusivity and accessibility are essential to ensure that all voices are heard, regardless of work commitments, caring responsibilities, or other constraints. To deter extremism and polarised politics, we commit to tackling misconceptions through evidence-based information and fostering open dialogue, ensuring that people from all walks of life feel heard, valued, and included in the decision-making processes.

In the EGD 2.0, we see a need to connect the European Green Deal with the realities of citizens through active engagement. It is essential for politicians to recognise the importance of profound policy transformations. EU and national policies should ensure that everyone can relate to the possibility of leading a socially just and fair life within the planet's limits. Therefore, the decision-making process should be **transparent** and based on **civil dialogue** between people, CSOs and policymakers, contributing altogether to policy making processes.

To ensure the next EGD is accountable and has meaningful impact, civil society commits to the development of a robust **monitoring mechanism**, measuring transparency, inclusivity, and participation from all walks of life. Verification mechanisms secure implementation, guaranteeing that participatory processes are not just consultative but decisive. Through these actions, we forge a future where the European Green Deal is truly participatory, accountable, and impactful, reflecting the collective will of people living in Europe.

Policy Recommendations

1. **Facilitate and promote the participation of structurally excluded groups in the green transition** by prioritising fair, inclusive, independent and transparent participation of minorities, marginalised groups (youth and politically, institutionally and historically underrepresented communities) in citizens' assemblies and decision-making mechanisms. Addressing intersectional inequalities and implementing gender-transformative anti-racist approaches in all policies is a way to ensure meaningful engagement and representation. The assemblies must be organised in fully accessible venues and provide inclusive communications.
2. **Ensure transparency in decision making and participation by diverse stakeholders to shape policies collaboratively.** From the standpoint of citizens' assemblies, in order for participation of people to be meaningful and effective, decision makers must ensure open communication and access to information about policy making processes. They must involve stakeholders including civil society in all stages of policy debate/making and consider their input throughout the processes, as well as guarantee transparent selection of experts with lived experience and diverse background. Prior to announcing a deliberative process, it is essential to determine the approach for handling citizens' recommendations, clearly outlining the commitment of the authority for effective citizens and CSO report management. This process must include establishing clear objectives and a strategy for managing participants expectations.

3. **Leave no one behind** by strengthening capacity building to facilitate active public engagement, open dialogues, and inclusive decision-making processes, civil society should be integrated at all levels, contributing to a robust European Green Deal 2.0. Therefore, structural support for collective citizen and CSO led actions should be ensured.
4. **Make more public funds available for the civil society sector's resilience, co-creation and collaboration:** Consider structured dialogue between CSOs and public donors and implement participatory budgeting processes for allocating resources and identifying thematic priorities. Furthermore, access to funding for grassroots organisations and volunteer-run organisations must be increased by reducing administrative burden.
5. **Ensure accountability and monitoring,** to track the impact of participatory processes within the European Green Deal. Establish a continuous ranking of country systems to track transparency, inclusivity, and the level of participation. This index should serve as a framework for evaluating participatory processes and outcomes. Encourage civil society organisations to independently monitor and assess participatory processes, introducing an additional layer of scrutiny and accountability. To ensure meaningful engagement in participatory processes, collect feedback from stakeholders, CSOs and citizens who actively participated in these processes.

A Global Green Deal

Europe cannot transform its economy and society alone, becoming a green island by offsetting the negative impacts of its transitional policies. Because of the inevitable global trade-offs, the next European Green Deal should be part of a wider **EU Global Just Transition framework** that encompasses all the effective policies and initiatives the EU has put in place so far. This unified and comprehensive framework could have a strengthened Green Deal at its core: a **Global Green Deal** with a strong external and international dimension, with a primary objective to ensure climate and social justice. Such a framework can protect the Union's fundamental values when embarking on Europe's green transition, meaning it will not be merely at the expense of countries in the Global South, who are least responsible for historic GHG emissions, the global overshoot of planetary boundaries, or overconsumption in wealthy countries.

The next Global Green Deal will therefore need to adopt a holistic approach, becoming the EU's flagship policy tool for the implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) until 2030 and beyond. The future EGD will clearly link the environmental and social targets and indicators of the SDGs, to guide fairer and more inclusive international partnerships with partner countries. In line with the principle of Policy Coherence for Sustainable Development, the abovementioned EU Global Just Transition Framework would allow the integration of all the different dimensions of the Green Deal.

In terms of legislative initiatives, the EU should implement a stringent Corporate Due Diligence Directive, together with a renewed trade and investments policy that can guarantee that company's value chains respect environmental, human and fundamental labour rights. Where violations of rights exist and sustainable norms are not respected, sufficient sanctions should be put in place.

Regarding EU financial instruments for the transition, the EU's main tool is Global Gateway, an infrastructure investment package directed to Global South countries supported by the EU. Currently there are clear concerns over transparency of the funding instrument, the overall focus on de-risking private capital for investment, and who will profit most from such investment projects. In this regard, civil society calls on the Commission to include a Civil Society Platform as part of the governance structure, composed by free, independent and representative civil society organisations and that members of the oversight body will have full access to all the information related to the sponsored projects under the Global Gateway.

The development of a Global Green Deal should not be undertaken without a strong and transparent dialogue with civil society in a co-design exercise. This institutional dialogue between the European Commission and Civil Society Organisations (CSOs) must be based on real trust and cooperation. To this end, a new regulation that puts transparency of information and the right to access documents first, rather than the privacy rights of negotiating parties in trade agreements, is sorely needed. Access to information is the basis for citizens' informed engagement and real participation. In this regard, EU Member States' votes in the Council shall also be made public. Existing rules that allow CSOs' access to information on EU policies and decisions to allow public scrutiny should be strengthened. It is also fundamental that the EU develops innovative and secure mechanisms to ensure meaningful participation and consultation of Global South CSOs, especially for those organisations such as Human Rights Defenders or Environmental Defenders, which are often the most exposed to persecutions in their own countries.

Policy Recommendations

1. **Actively promote an enabling environment for civil society organisations and trade unions**, and counter all measures that could shrink their space to work freely and to contribute to the design, implementation, monitoring and evaluation of the Green Deal. Recognize the heterogenous, local, context-specific work of civil society actors, lift restrictions and support the capacity of CSO actors, monitor infringements and human rights violations.
2. **Implement a concrete set of measures to tackle the negative consequences and spillovers of the next EGD policies**. It needs to conduct in-depth sustainability impact assessments (ex-ante and ex-post) looking into the impacts with a participatory approach of civil society and local communities, including those marginalised groups like indigenous populations, women, afrodescendents and those that are the most vulnerable to the impacts of such policies. In doing so, the EU must put in place participatory processes that ensure the involvement of civil society organisations – including trade unions - in partner countries.
3. **Ensure stringent due diligence processes and the leadership and ownership of local actors**. The EU and its Member States must ensure that the investment packages supported by the EU under the Global Gateway are transparent, lead and supported by local actors, aligned with the SDGs and Agenda 2030 and sufficiently contribute to the transformation of the production system and energy matrix within the framework of human rights and respect for the environment.
4. **Facilitate the mobilisation of domestic resources by supporting debt cancellation efforts**, through progressive tax reforms, anti-tax evasion and tax avoidance measures,

and fighting corruption to ensure the resources needed to allow social investments, scale up universal social protection systems, floors and quality public services, particularly health and education.

5. **Guarantee a human-rights-based approach and the respect of the 'do no harm' (DNSH) principle.** It is also important that interventions comply with and strengthen human rights and natural resources rights, including the right of local communities and indigenous peoples to Free, Prior and Informed Consent (FPIC). Transparency of the financing resources needs to be ensured as a pre-condition to any investment.
6. **Enhance transparency and visibility in the development of the Global Green Deal,** The EU should enact legislation prioritising information transparency over the privacy of negotiating parties in trade agreements. It should proactively release relevant documents, encourage public participation and engagement, and regularly provide progress updates. Public disclosure of EU Member States' votes in the Council is vital, while involving civil society organisations in co-design and conducting thorough impact assessments for public scrutiny are essential steps. Ensuring information accessibility, investing in public education, and establishing robust whistleblower protection will collectively empower citizens, fostering trust and cooperation in shaping a more sustainable and environmentally responsible future.

Living in Harmony with Nature

The triple planetary of climate, biodiversity and pollution is still raging, and our time window to act is shrinking. We need environmental, social, and climate justice to shift to a safe operating space for humanity, complemented by citizen-led, science-based policy making. The next European Green Deal should set forth an ambitious vision for a healthy, sustainable, resilient, and ecologically just future. The current EGD's overarching goal is to achieve climate neutrality by 2050, and far more transformative work will be needed to meet this goal. It involves rapid and sustained emissions reduction, a large reduction in Europe's material footprint, accelerated renewable energy uptake, and the protection and preservation of natural ecosystems. Beyond meeting our existing commitments, a future EGD will need to deliver a headline commitment to systems change and a new social and ecological contract that creates hope for Europe and partner countries in the Global South.

To create a holistic vision, the environmental dimension of the next Green Deal should be fully integrated with the social, and participatory and economic elements for a comprehensive package of measures. This means promoting a green and just transition as Europe's new social contract for the ecological transition. For example, economic policies should incentivise sustainable practices, social policies should ensure that structurally excluded communities are not disproportionately affected by climate impacts, and participatory mechanisms should empower citizens to influence environmental policies. Barriers such as fossil fuel subsidies, lock-ins to false climate solutions and techno-fixes should be avoided. The EU must overcome the barriers to implementation and ramp up implementation towards 2040 and 2050.

The transition itself must be people-led, and wide societal buy-in is needed. Citizens, civil society, businesses, and local communities should actively participate in shaping and implementing the future Green Deal policies via structured and institutionalised dialogue. To ensure broad participation and inclusivity, Europe can revolutionise its decision-making processes with mechanisms such as citizens' assemblies and accessible digital platforms for participation. The

EU can consider implementing participatory budgeting processes to allocate resources for future Green Deal projects, putting citizens in the driving seat to directly influence funding decisions in local communities and ensure accountability in resource allocation.

Policy Recommendations

If the European Commission were to propose legislative initiatives to move beyond or strengthen already existing Green Deal objectives, they should include⁸

1. **Transform our food system to a sustainable food system** by reshaping food environments to make healthy and sustainable food the easy choice. Set a clear direction of travel with the Sustainable Food Systems Law towards a fair, healthy and sustainable food system and driving a shift to agroecology through an overhaul of the Common Agricultural Policy. In addition, implement policies that promote sustainable land use including reforestation initiatives, protection of natural habitats, and support for sustainable agriculture and regenerative practices.
2. **Commit to a zero pollution Europe by 2035** and reduce the air pollution impact on ecosystems to a critical level. Ensure clean air for towns and cities for adequate protection of citizen's health and well-being. Promote safe and sustainable solutions to the chemical pollution crisis by closing loopholes, promoting innovations that serve people and the planet in regulation and research and apply protective, preventive and precautionary approaches. In addition, give higher political priority to achieving ecological and climate resilient water management, by making the Water Framework Directive a key tool to tackle pressures affecting our rivers, lakes and groundwater.
3. **Transition to a wellbeing economy** by departing from a failing green growth approach, breaking with historical injustices with a focus on social and environmental justice, rather than profit maximisation. Introduce resource use reduction targets at least as strong and binding as emission reduction targets.
4. **Transition to a real circular economy** with more durable, repairable, reused and fully recyclable products and waste generation prevention. Commit to a target to tackle and reduce raw material overconsumption and set ambitious waste prevention targets, by making sustainable products the norm.
5. **Ensure a 100% renewable economy with investment certainty**. This means going beyond the current targets for reducing greenhouse gas emissions, raising ambition for at least 65% reductions by 2030, and a clear pathway to reach climate neutrality by 2050. Dynamically adjust carbon emissions caps in ETS & ETS2, following science. There should be no subsidies for investments in nuclear, gas infrastructure & CCS.
6. **Resolve the nature crisis by protecting and restoring nature**. This can be done by putting biodiversity on a path of recovery by prioritising the implementation and funding of the EU Biodiversity Strategy, as well as ensuring sufficient funding for administrative capacity and specific measures for the management of protected areas.

⁸ For more information, see the EEB working thoughts on the European Green Deal 2, available at <https://eeb.org/library/eeb-working-thoughts-on-the-european-green-deal-2/>

A Gender-Just Wellbeing Economy

Despite the European Green Deal (EGD) being proclaimed as Europe's 'man on the moon' moment, the economic model of 'green growth', alongside a relentless pursuit of profit and accumulation, underpin Europe's policies. Following von der Leyen's commitment to a union of equality, the EGD should move beyond its current economic and technical siloed approach to include the goals set out in the gender equality strategy, anti-racism action plan, LGBTQI strategy etc. A European Green Deal 2.0 could introduce new concepts and systems - such as wellbeing, a care economy, and democratic business models with fairness, dignity and participation at the core. The transition to a wellbeing economy means a complete economic system transformation of our institutions, inclusion of civil society, fairer employment, trade, taxation and finance, science-based policy design, reduced emissions and resources, restored nature and biodiversity, as well as better health and universal public services. The European Union should place human and planetary wellbeing at the heart of its decision-making processes and structurally move away from an economic system driven by GDP growth. A new Green Deal must therefore be a beyond growth Green Deal: bringing institutional reform to make coherent beyond growth policies.

To ensure that the next EGD is climate just, new economic models should be prioritised above extractive, accumulative and highly inefficient economic systems which do not meet human needs. Green jobs are the jobs of the future, and new approaches to the world of work will be needed, including improved social welfare, and working time reduction. Investment decisions must be coherent with environment and sustainability policies, twinned with more local investment in sustainable activities, as well as supporting the development of the cooperative and social and solidarity economy, including renewable energy communities.

Policy Recommendations

From the perspective of the economic system, a future Green Deal for our common future should raise ambition by ensuring that it includes policies to address:

1. **Ensure fair taxation in the EU and beyond** by taxing the ultra-rich 1% and those most responsible for pollution in line with the Polluter Pays Principle. Introducing taxation on excess corporate profits and the consumption of luxury goods will raise revenues for society and investment in renewable energies, in order to foster a just green and social transition consistent with the level of ambition indicated by science, fulfil human rights, and reduce inequalities.
2. **Green the EU Budget** through the implementation of carbon taxes, a tax on financial transactions and corporate profit, a digital tax and other fair and environmentally ambitious levies can present a clear way for the EU to leverage the necessary resources for the transition. At a global level, trade, taxation, and financial policies will need to provide equal opportunities, rights, power, and the fair distribution of wealth within society, between countries and across generations.
3. **Change the way the economy is measured** with the introduction of wellbeing indicators that can guide EU decision-making and track Member States' performance. Policies that incentivize businesses which are positively affecting wellbeing should be adopted. Legislation that enshrines the rights of future generations should be adopted.

4. **Reform the international financial system** to facilitate rapid poverty alleviation in most of the world, allowing the IMF to allocate over \$1 trillion annually for green jobs creating investment and cancel all debt to low-income countries. Introduce a global ecological tax to finance a citizen fund to give all citizens in the world their fair share of wealth, meanwhile reducing the ecological footprint of the richer world.
5. **Create and sustain employment that delivers economic democracy, purpose and the means for a decent livelihood**, with safe and healthy working conditions for people.
6. **Ensure an economy of care** by recognising that the productive work envisioned in the green transition is dependent on unpaid reproductive work largely done by women. Acknowledge that nature and care are not infinitely stretchable resources and include them within definitions of a bounded economy.