



CITIZEN ENGAGEMENT IN ENVIRONMENTAL POLICY:

Policy Recommendations from EU-wide citizens' forums



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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This policy brief examines three distinct European Citizens' Forums designed to enhance public involvement in environmental governance. These forums, focusing on the future of the European Green Deal and the Feminist Festival, served as platforms for citizen deliberation on crucial environmental policies. The brief provides an in-depth look at the methodologies, engagement strategies, and outcomes of these forums, offering recommendations for optimizing future initiatives to strengthen democratic processes in EU policy-making. The insights and recommendations aim to guide the implementation of more effective citizen engagement strategies across EU institutions.

RELEVANCE FOR POLICYMAKERS

The EU-level test cases presented in this policy brief are particularly relevant for policymakers for several reasons.

First, many of the topics discussed during the forums transcend national borders and require a coordinated approach across the EU. Environmental issues such as climate change, biodiversity loss, and pollution do not recognize political boundaries, making it imperative for policies to be formulated and implemented at a supra-national level. This collective approach ensures that solutions are comprehensive and tackle the root causes of environmental challenges rather than just addressing symptoms.

Moreover, the REAL DEAL project encompassed not only these EU-level forums but also national test cases that focused on issues pertinent at European, national, and local levels. This multi-tiered approach allows for a nuanced understanding of how global policies can be adapted to fit local circumstances while also addressing broader European concerns.

Additionally, certain sensitive topics require discussion within safe spaces where participants feel respected and heard. The use of feminist moderation techniques in the Feminist Festival, ensured that discussions were inclusive and equitable. Organizers trained in these techniques could effectively manage dynamics to allow for a free and fair exchange of ideas, ensuring that all voices, especially those from marginalized or underrepresented groups, were amplified.

These test cases demonstrate the necessity of well-structured and thoughtfully moderated forums in shaping policies that are not only effective but also equitable. By providing safe spaces for open dialogue, and ensuring that discussions are inclusive and comprehensive, policymakers can develop strategies that are more likely to be accepted and supported by the public. This approach ultimately strengthens the democratic processes within the EU and contributes to more sustainable and just policy outcomes.

CITIZENS' FORUMS

DETAILS

The European Green Deal 2.0 and the Feminist Festival were organized to gather diverse citizen perspectives on the EU's environmental policies. The forums aimed to harness the collective intelligence and insights of EU citizens to refine and guide future policy directions, particularly those pertaining to sustainability and gender inclusiveness in environmental governance.

The table below summarizes the key characteristics of each one.

CATEGORY	THE FUTURE OF THE EUROPEAN GREEN DEAL	FEMINIST FESTIVAL	WILD TALKS
Date and Location	February 10-11, 2024, Flemish National Theatre (KVS), Brussels, Belgium	April 20-21, 2024, Area 42, Brussels, Belgium	June 15-16, 2024, Area 42, Brussels
Objective	To facilitate broad-based discussions on the future of the European Green Deal, focusing on public perceptions and recommendations for the green transition.	To explore feminist perspectives on the European Green Deal, encouraging a structural analysis of environmental policies.	To engage citizens in speculative policy making on biodiversity, exploring themes like food and agriculture, chemical pollution, and big wildlife.
Organisers	European Environmental Bureau (EEB) with collaboration from Dialogik, and facilitation support from SOLIDAR, CAN Europe, and EMI.	Led by EEB and WECF, with significant input and collaboration from other organisations for communication and logistical purposes.	European Environmental Bureau (EEB), with input and collaboration from various partners.
Participants	85 participants representing a diverse European demographic engaged through an open call.	Around 100 participants based on feminist diversity criteria (see below).	85 participants focusing on a diverse and inclusive representation.

Recruitment Strategy	Open call with strategic outreach efforts to ensure a diverse demographic, including marginalized and underrepresented groups.	The participant selection process emphasized diversity and inclusivity, using a feminist methodology to identify and prioritise individuals from underrepresented and structurally excluded groups. Participant names were anonymised to avoid biases during selection. A security question helped further refine the candidate pool by excluding those closely associated with NGOs.	Utilized a snowball method for participant recruitment, emphasizing inclusivity and diversity.
Knowledge Dissemination	Extensive briefing materials provided from the European Environment Agency with discussions facilitated by subject matter experts.	Extensive briefing materials focused on feminist perspectives and gender-focused environmental policies.	involved voices from the ground to provide a more grounded and practical view of biodiversity issues. Utilized creative formats like Lego Serious Play to facilitate discussions and build shared models reflecting future-oriented solutions.
Forum Structure	Structured to foster open dialogue with facilitators guiding discussions to ensure productive and equitable participation.	Carefully structured with innovative feminist moderation techniques to foster a gender-inclusive dialogue. Topics were chosen based on the expressed interest of participants when they applied.	Featured innovative methods such as the 'four corners' debate on biodiversity, storytelling from firsthand experiences, and a hierarchy model using Lego Serious Play to structure policy discussions.

KEY FINDINGS

In an effort to summarize the outcomes of the Citizens' Forums, we have categorized the findings into broader themes. These themes encapsulate the significant insights gained from the discussions, reflecting the diversity of perspectives and the depth of engagement among participants.

1 PARTICIPANT ENGAGEMENT:

- **European Green Deal 2.0:** This forum successfully engaged a diverse range of European citizens, including a notable representation from various socio-economic backgrounds. While overall participant diversity was high, the representation from marginalized communities such as the Roma or ethnic minorities was less than anticipated. This points to a need for targeted recruitment strategies to ensure their inclusion in future discussions.
- **Feminist Festival:** Although the festival aimed to attract a diverse audience, the turnout particularly excelled in gender diversity, including a significant presence of participants identifying across the gender spectrum. The forum was less successful in attracting older participants and those from rural areas, indicating potential barriers in accessibility or interest alignment.
- **Wild Talks:** Focused on nature and biodiversity, this forum uniquely engaged participants with a passion for environmental conservation. The inclusion of diverse voices, especially from indigenous and local communities directly impacted by environmental policies, highlighted the importance of including these crucial perspectives in discussions about biodiversity and conservation.
- Overall, the Horizon 2020 grant agreement rules meant we could not reimburse for childcare, which was a significant barrier to parents participating. This also posed a barrier to gender equality, as often the people doing care work are women, reflecting a need for more inclusive support measures in future forums.

2 QUALITY OF DIALOGUE:

- **European Green Deal 2.0:** The dialogue was rich and multi-dimensional, with participants actively engaging with complex topics. However, some feedback suggested the need for more simplified briefing materials to better cater to those new to the policy discussion, indicating a disparity in the baseline knowledge among participants.
- **Feminist Festival:** The use of feminist moderation techniques contributed to an environment where power dynamics were actively managed, allowing for a more equitable discussion space. Participants appreciated the innovative approach to discussion, although there were comments on the need for more structured dialogue to avoid digressions and ensure focus on the main topics.
- **Wild Talks:** Discussions were deeply rooted in personal experiences with nature, providing a powerful and emotional depth to the dialogue. The format allowed for an exchange of traditional knowledge and modern conservation strategies, enriching the overall quality of debate.

3 POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS:

- **European Green Deal 2.0:** Participants generated robust sets of recommendations that reflected a strong consensus on key aspects of the Green Deal. Recommendations included enhancing green public transportation, stricter environmental regulations for industries, and increased funding for sustainable urban planning.
- **Feminist Festival:** Recommendations focused on incorporating gender perspectives into all layers of environmental policy, such as ensuring that climate adaptation strategies explicitly address the needs of women and non-binary individuals. There was also a call for greater accountability in policy implementation to ensure gender and environmental justice.
- **Wild Talks:** Recommendations emphasized the need for integrated management of natural resources and the inclusion of indigenous and local knowledge in policy-making. Participants advocated for policies that prioritize biodiversity conservation and sustainable use of resources.

4 METHODOLOGICAL INSIGHTS:

- **European Green Deal 2.0:** The method of using structured deliberation sessions interspersed with expert briefings was highly effective. However, feedback suggested a need for more interactive components to maintain participant engagement throughout longer sessions.
- **Feminist Festival:** The approach of integrating feminist principles into the deliberation process was seen as a groundbreaking method to democratize discussions. However, there was a learning curve for participants unfamiliar with these techniques (for example “drafting recommendations”), suggesting the inclusion of a preparatory session in future forums.
- **Wild Talks:** The use of storytelling and scenario exploration allowed participants to engage deeply with the topics, although some found the discussions to be too theoretical. Future forums might benefit from a more grounded approach that links global issues with local actions.

5 ENGAGEMENT TECHNIQUES:

- Both forums utilized various engagement techniques such as small group discussions, expert panels, and interactive briefings. These methods were generally well-received, but feedback highlighted the importance of tailoring these techniques to fit the specific audience and topic to maximize engagement and comprehension.

POLICY

RECOMMENDATIONS

Jointly, the forums recommended the integration of more inclusive engagement strategies and clear, accessible communication to ensure all community voices are heard and valued in policy formation. They emphasized the need for continuous engagement with citizens to adapt policies that reflect broad societal interests and sustainability goals.

1 EMBRACE DIVERSITY IN VOICES FOR A STRONGER EUROPE

- Ensure that EU policy-making forums actively seek and incorporate voices from all corners of Europe, using community outreach, feminist diversity selection criteria, and material reimbursement to participants, with the aim of including the most marginalized and underrepresented communities, to enhance the legitimacy and effectiveness of our policies.

2 ACCESSIBLE INFORMATION, EMPOWERED CITIZENS

- Commit to providing clear, concise, and multilingual materials to increase the accessibility of events, ensuring meaningful participation and informed discussions.

3 EQUALITY IN DIALOGUE, EQUITY IN OUTCOMES

- Adopt feminist moderation techniques across EU deliberative platforms to balance participation and ensure that every voice is heard, fostering equitable policy outcomes that reflect the true diversity of the European populace.
- A key deliverable from the REAL DEAL project has been the development of a Feminist Moderation Online Course, which has already been initiated by over 1,000 participants. This course provides essential training in feminist moderation practices, equipping organizers and participants with the skills to facilitate inclusive and equitable discussions.

4 POLICY WITH PERSPECTIVE: INTEGRATING DIVERSITY FOR RICHER POLICIES

- Integrate a wide array of perspectives into the policy-making process, especially from those most affected by the European Green Deal who are often structurally excluded from decision making and related initiatives, to craft policies that are both comprehensive and considerate of diverse needs.

5 DYNAMIC DISCUSSIONS FOR DYNAMIC POLICIES

- Utilize engaging and interactive discussion formats, e.g., using creative storytelling, art, etc. to keep participants invested and discussions lively, as well as to reflect the diversity of ways people engage ensuring that policy deliberations are as dynamic and adaptable as the policies they aim to influence.

6 BUILD A CONTINUUM OF ENGAGEMENT

- Establish ongoing channels of communication with citizens post-forum to refine and implement policies based on continuous public input and feedback, enhancing the responsiveness of the EU to its citizens' evolving needs.

7 EXPAND THE AGENDA: PROMOTE CURIOSITY AND ENGAGEMENT

- Encourage forums to explore a broader range of environmental and economic topics, allowing citizens to lead the dialogue on emerging issues that matter most to their communities and future generations.

8 TRANSPARENCY TRANSFORMS: OPEN OUTCOMES TO ALL

- Ensure transparency by publicly sharing outcomes and discussions from citizen forums, educating the broader EU populace and stakeholders about the processes and results of participative governance.

9 COMMIT TO CONTINUOUS IMPROVEMENT

- Implement a systematic evaluation of deliberative forums to continually refine and enhance their format and impact, demonstrating the EU's commitment to improving its engagement strategies and policy development processes.

10 FOSTER INCLUSIVE PARTICIPATION: ENHANCE SUPPORT SYSTEMS

- "Emphasize inclusivity by implementing support systems such as childcare provision during forums and deliberations to remove participation barriers. This recommendation addresses the critical need for practical support that ensures all community voices, particularly those with caregiving responsibilities, can attend and contribute to policy discussions without undue hardship. By alleviating logistical challenges like childcare, we can ensure a more equitable representation and participation, thus enhancing the legitimacy and diversity of insights in EU policy-making."

11 PROMOTE BIODIVERSITY AWARENESS AND ACTION

- "Prioritize biodiversity in EU policy-making by actively integrating considerations of nature's intrinsic values and rights into environmental legislation and public discourse. Encourage the inclusion of diverse voices, particularly from communities directly impacted by biodiversity loss, in discussions on environmental policy. This would ensure a comprehensive understanding of the ecological stakes involved and foster policies that effectively address the interconnectedness of human and natural systems. Support educational initiatives and public engagement campaigns that raise awareness about the importance of biodiversity, thus empowering citizens to participate meaningfully in conservation efforts."