



WHERE: **Brussels, Belgium**

WHAT: **Citizens' Deliberation Event**

WHEN: **10 – 11 February 2024**

EU-WIDE, BRUSSELS CITIZENS' DELIBERATION EVENT ON THE FUTURE OF THE EUROPEAN GREEN DEAL

On **10 and 11 February 2024**, approximately 85 citizens from 28 countries participated in a Citizens' Deliberation Event in Brussels, focused on the future of the European Green Deal (EGD). The 1.5-day event was part of the EU research project **REAL DEAL**, organised by the European Environmental Bureau (EEB), the association of civil society organisations (CSOs) working on environmental policies across Europe. The EEB developed the deliberative methodologies and facilitation techniques, thematic content and policy implications, research framing and conceptual grounding, with inputs from other REAL DEAL partner organisations. This was the first of three EU-level events conducted in the course of the REAL DEAL project during the first half of 2024.



BEFORE THE EVENT: PREPARATION

TOPIC FRAMING

Participants were invited to discuss the future of the European Green Deal (EGD), Europe's plan to decarbonise and become a climate-neutral continent by 2050. At a thematic level, the deliberations were designed to cover four key EGD topics: wellbeing economy, food systems, mobility, and circular economy. The main objective of the event was that participants would come up with one consensus-based recommendation for the future of the EGD in each key subtopic area.

The central question for participants was: What should the future direction of the ecological transition be in each of the four areas, based on a number of guiding policy scenarios and different deliberative perspectives.

— Opening remarks and icebreaker at the Citizens' Deliberation Event

RECRUITMENT

Participants were selected through an open call and a snowball sampling approach, resulting in a “long list” of candidates, from which participants were randomly selected. Efforts were made to get to a diverse sample across criteria such as age, gender, geographic location, and country, with a focus on people who are typically less engaged in European policy processes (identified through the registration form). The 85 participants, representative of 28 countries and 22 EU Member States, received travel reimbursements and accommodation for two nights in Brussels, as many travelled long distances to attend. Recognising the constraints of weekday participation for working individuals, the event was organised over a weekend.

KNOWLEDGE PREPARATION

To support informed deliberation, the process was combined with expert input both in person and online via the [REAL DEAL online platform](#). To prepare beforehand, participants read key briefings on the four priority topics (food systems, circular economy, wellbeing economy, and mobility), and could also connect and pose questions on the online platform.

Facilitators were prepared in advance by completing a [training workshop on feminist moderation techniques](#), organised and delivered by WECF (Women Engage for a Common Future, an ecofeminist network of women’s and civil society organisations in 70 countries).

DURING THE EVENT

KNOWLEDGE BUILDING

Experts from civil society with a high degree of technical knowledge presented diverse perspectives on the four topics. The event commenced with opening remarks, followed by an expert briefing on the European Green Deal led by EEB. This was followed by a second expert briefing by the moderator, on the rights of nature. Furthermore, there were individual expert briefings for each of the four identified key topics, and the methodology of the deliberation was explained to the participants.

FACILITATION AND INTERACTION

After an icebreaker, participants were assigned to four thematic groups. Each group was supported by one nominated expert and two facilitators to support the deliberations. The moderators and facilitators came from the CSO partner organisations of the REAL DEAL project.

The deliberative format alternated between plenary sessions and four breakout groups, one for each topic, moderated by facilitators. Breakout discussions adhered to safe space rules clearly explained at the outset, to ensure respectful interaction.

Group discussion on food systems



“I would like to oblige all politicians to meet with citizen councils every day to come up with solutions and visions for the future. Look what we have achieved in one day!”

“I am here today because as a citizen I have a responsibility to think along. The environment is important to everyone, even if it doesn’t concern me as much”

Summarised Agenda, day 1 (Saturday)

Duration	Content
45 minutes	Introduction and expert input
90 minutes	Citizens' deliberation part 1 (four breakout groups): The future of the European Green Deal
30 minutes	Plenary discussion
90 minutes	<i>Break</i>
90 minutes	Citizens' deliberation part 2 (four breakout groups): Nature and future generations
30 minutes	<i>Break</i>
60 minutes	Plenary discussion
30 minutes	Wrap-up

In the morning session, following the knowledge input, participants were asked to deliberate on behalf of future generations, considering three time horizons (2030, 2050, and 2100). In the afternoon session, participants deliberated on behalf of the rights of nature; they were given an overview of key policy scenarios to aid their discussions, and were asked to discuss the pros and cons of each approach.

The groups discussed openly and expressed their thoughts on flipcharts and Post-it notes, later narrowing them down through consensus to a set of recommendations directed towards policymakers. Participants discussed policy proposals along with possible policy responses and their consequences.

This was intended to guide the discussion and enable collective decision making based on various policy options. Outputs from these discussions were clustered into thematic groups and presented during plenary sessions.

RECOMMENDATIONS

In the morning and afternoon sessions, participants worked towards consensus-based recommendations, based on the expert inputs and with the help of facilitators. In the closing plenary, each recommendation was presented and briefly discussed by all participants. Four main recommendations (one for each topic) were adopted. To obtain a general overview of how the recommendations were perceived by the groups that had not discussed them directly, participants from the other three groups raised their hands if they a) fully supported a recommendation, b) supported with some reservations, or c) disagreed with the recommendation presented.

MAIN RECOMMENDATIONS

Circular economy:

Recommendation on fostering sustainable production and consumption:

Promote smart investments in research and education to facilitate sustainable production and consumption.

The focus is on civil education to enlighten citizens on the necessity of sustainable practices, with an emphasis on recycling, reusing, and redesigning.

Food systems:

Recommendation on regulating the middle chain for fairness:

Better regulate the middle chain in food systems to ensure transparency, accountability, fair benefit distribution, and mitigation of power imbalances.

This includes advertising, food processing, supermarkets, and the industry connecting farmers and consumers.

Mobility:

Recommendation on carbon taxes for sustainable transport:

Implement higher carbon taxes on personal vehicles to incentivise zero-carbon mobility options.

The goal is to regulate and tax unsustainable modes of transport, including flights, highways, and SUVs. The revenue generated should contribute to green subsidies and a just transition.

Wellbeing economy:

The group concluded that more comprehensive debate is needed, suggesting there was little overall consensus.

Recommendation:

A more extensive debate is essential for the concept of a wellbeing economy, particularly concerning nature, future generations, and discussions beyond growth. The debate should encompass conceptual considerations, interconnections between measures, and intersections with other areas.



SIDE-EVENTS

The Saturday itinerary concluded with a social reception providing participants with hot food and drink, fostering informal connections among participants and enhancing the collaborative atmosphere. The following day offered a visit to the House of European History and the Parliamentarium, to provide some cultural and contextual backdrop to European politics and history, following the deliberation. Accessibility was prioritised throughout the event, with provisions for participants with disabilities and financial support to cover participation costs.

Group discussion on food systems

AFTER THE EVENT

DOCUMENTATION AND FEEDBACK

Participants were invited to comment on the overall recommendations after the event, as they were uploaded onto the online platform for further deliberation by participants and wider platform users. In addition, the recommendations were fed into the policy and research activities of the REAL DEAL project, including the Civil Society Forum, where policy outputs were shared with policymakers. Post-event surveys were very positive, noting that the deliberation fostered objective discussions, with many participants expressing that the discussions were diverse, in-depth, and very fulfilling, remaining respectful throughout. Constructive proposals for further deliberative events included allowing additional time for discussion, and ensuring: a space with natural light for participants; that the deliberation is well structured; and sufficient support for experts and moderators, and the roles of civil society organisations as implementers of deliberative processes. The deliberative process demonstrated that – even on contentious topics – constructive dialogue on green policies is achievable among people from all over Europe.

KEY INSIGHTS

The deliberation yielded significant insights:

- (1) Participants identified 5–6 priority recommendations for policy action and one main consensus-based recommendation for policymakers in each of the four areas.
- (2) The event underscored the importance of participatory processes in fostering public trust and understanding, highlighting that consensus is attainable despite polarised public debates.

FOLLOW-UP PROCESS

The four main recommendations were placed on the online platform for further input and comments by participants and wider platform users. In addition, the recommendations from each group fed into the further two EU-wide deliberations, as well as the activities of the Civil Society Forum, co-organised by [SDG Watch Europe](#). This created an interface between the deliberation process and the policy and advocacy activities of the civil society organisations within the REAL DEAL project.

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In the REAL DEAL project, researchers and civil society organisations worked together on green transition and democracy. They conducted research on deliberative methods to find out what works best for involving citizens on the European Green Deal.



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