



WHERE: **Brussels, Belgium**

WHAT: **Citizens' Deliberation Event**

WHEN: **15 – 16 June 2024**

# EU-WIDE, BRUSSELS CITIZENS' DELIBERATION EVENT ON NATURE AND BIODIVERSITY

On **15 and 16 June 2024**, approximately 85 citizens from 28 countries participated in a Citizens' Deliberation Event in Brussels, focusing on the topic of Nature and Biodiversity in the framework of 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 European association of civil society organisations (CSOs) at all levels working on environmental policies. EEB developed the deliberative methodologies and facilitation techniques, thematic content and policy implications, and research framing and conceptual grounding, with inputs from other REAL DEAL partner organisations. This was the third EU-level event conducted in the course of the REAL DEAL project, after one on the future of the EGD in February, and a EU Feminist Festival in April 2024.



## BEFORE THE EVENT: PREPARATION

### TOPIC FRAMING

Participants were invited to discuss nature and biodiversity within the context of the future of the European Green Deal (EGD), Europe's plan to decarbonise and become a climate-neutral continent by 2050. The deliberations were designed to cover three key EGD topics: food and agriculture, chemical pollution, and co-existence with large carnivores. The central question for the participants was to discuss what the future of biodiversity at the EU level could and should look like, centred around the three main themes.

The deliberative event was scheduled just after the European election of 9 June 2024.

Opening plenary

This timing provided an opportunity in opening remarks to emphasise the importance of democratic values and participatory decision-making on the topic of the European Green Deal. Participants were furthermore provided a short journalist briefing on the results of the EU elections and potential implications for the EGD. In addition, given that the deliberation took place soon after the EU election, all three topics had high political relevance, being linked to active legislative files at European level in the months prior to the deliberation, such as the [Nature Restoration Law](#).

## 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 26 countries, 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 citizen deliberation event was supported by inputs from experts both in person and online via the [REAL DEAL online platform](#). To prepare beforehand, participants read key briefings on the three priority topics (food and agriculture, chemical pollution, and co-existence with large carnivores), 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

The event began with opening remarks and two expert briefings: one by an independent journalist on the outcomes of the EU elections, and another by the moderator on the status of biodiversity in Europe. These knowledge inputs, complemented by individual experience-sharing and storytelling on the three identified subtopics, set the stage for subsequent deliberations, during which the methodology of speculative policymaking was explained to the participants.

In an innovative approach to expert input, affected individuals working directly in each topic on the ground (farmers, individuals directly affected by chemical pollution, and shepherds) presented participants with their own diverse perspectives on the three topics in order to aid the discussions.

Expert briefings and shared model-building during Lego Serious Play®



## FACILITATION AND INTERACTION

After an icebreaker, participants chose one of the three thematic groups, each assigned two facilitators to support the deliberations.

The deliberation employed speculative policymaking, a method that aims to provoke new ways of relating to natural ecosystems through arts and creativity. It is designed around portrayal and storytelling, combined with artworks and creative expression, to facilitate creative conversations about policies that affect biodiversity, nature, and the environment. The format therefore alternated between plenary sessions and breakout groups on each of the three topics, moderated by facilitators. Breakout discussions adhered to safe space rules clearly explained at the beginning, to ensure respectful interaction.

The deliberation employed three iterative activities, during which citizens approach questions concerning natural ecosystems. Each activity builds on the former to help push the boundaries of what is considered possible and normal. The deliberation used different prompts, templates, and techniques to set up the conditions for participants to tune-in to discussion on each of the three subtopics. These activities took place in three rounds, firstly using the **four corners method**, then direct **storytelling** of experiences, and finally **shared model-building** of biodiversity.

**(1)** In the first round, biodiversity was represented only through a series of statements and value judgements.

These were discussed in the room with all participants, who then responded by means of the **four corners method** (strongly agree, agree, disagree, and strongly disagree).

Here, biodiversity was represented purely as abstract information as a resource to exploit and manage. The statements corresponded to the broad topic of biodiversity, as well as the three subtopics (food and agriculture, chemical pollution, and co-existence with large carnivores), with one statement per subtopic. Altogether, five statements were covered. Participants were asked to place themselves on a spectrum between strongly agreeing and strongly disagreeing. Their objective was, through discussion amongst themselves, to establish a common position and point of view on the various statements and to understand the variety of different views in the room.

For the four corners method, all chairs were moved away from the middle of the room. The moderator stood in the middle of the room and read out one of the provocative statements. Participants then picked one corner that reflected their position on the statement. The participants in each corner then briefly discussed amongst themselves, and then to the room in general, with the moderator selecting a few people who volunteered to express their opinion. This was followed by a platform with discussions between the four corners. Overall, there were no homogenous opinions within the room; participants had a wide range of views on the statements; and the exercise generated lively, respectful, and thought-provoking discussion.

## Agenda of the main day

Duration	Content
45 minutes	<b>Introduction: Nature in Europe</b>
165 minutes	<b>Citizens' deliberation part 1: Food and agriculture / Chemical pollution / Big wildlife</b>
60 minutes	<b>Break</b>
75 minutes	<b>Citizens' deliberation part 2: three topics (see above)</b>
30 minutes	<b>Break</b>
75 minutes	<b>Plenary discussion</b>
45 minutes	<b>Wrap-up</b>





Group discussion on food systems

(2) In the second round, biodiversity was represented through **storytelling**, through presentations and stories by key voices on the ground. In practice, this meant that a person with direct experience of the topic gave a short presentation of their experience to each group. For example, in the food and agriculture group, two farmers discussed their experience of soil health and regenerative agriculture; for the chemical pollution group, a victim of chemical pollution; and for the large carnivore group, a shepherd shared experiences of co-existence with wolves. Through this storytelling, biodiversity/nature is positioned as a stakeholder in order to meet and understand its perspective, needs, and rights.

The participants' task was: To empathise with the story told and to envision the main obstacles and solutions concerning the story and the broader subtopic; and, through reflection and small group discussions on the challenges of each story, to envisage possible solutions to these challenges.

(3) In the third round, participants moved towards expressive and future-orientated creative representations of biodiversity and their chosen subtopic. The workshop utilised the "[Lego Serious Play®](#)" method to encourage creative thinking, collaboration, and problem-solving by **building physical models** to represent ideas and concepts. This helps participants to articulate complex thoughts, find a shared understanding, and explore innovative solutions through hands-on engagement. After an introduction by trained facilitators, participants were asked to imagine individual models that reflect their vision of a future where people and nature can thrive together – in effect, changing their role to that

of natural servants working in service to biodiversity. Having built their individual models, participants were then tasked with building a shared model of their future and listing several key action points with other participants. Through the design of this shared model, participants were able to express different representations of biodiversity through the placing and positioning of different bricks, as well as demonstrating concepts such as agency, authority, legal standing, and a material presence.

Model-building in the Lego Serious Play® session





## SIDE-EVENTS

The day concluded with a social reception providing hot food and drink for participants, fostering informal connections among participants and enhancing the collaborative atmosphere. The following day, participants could also benefit from a visit to the Naturarchy exhibition at the iMAL Museum and Centre of Digital technology in Brussels. The exhibition was closely aligned with the deliberation topic, including several depictions of nature through, art, digital and physical sculptures and soundscapes, and included thought-provoking content on questions of humans' relationships to, impact upon, and embeddedness within the natural world. Accessibility was prioritised throughout the event, with provisions for participants with disabilities and financial support to cover participation costs.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

In the afternoon session, following the development of a shared Lego model, participants worked towards key action points, based on the first two rounds and with the help of trained Lego Serious Play® facilitators. These action points were less developed than full policy recommendations, as it was perceived to be difficult to move from creative and metaphorical expression through the shared Lego models to key policy proposals. During the closing plenary the action points were presented and briefly discussed by all participants.

## Key reflections from the deliberations

### For food and agriculture

- Ensure close coordination and include farmers in decision-making processes.
- Further research into the impacts of farming practices is crucial; and improving transparency across the entire food supply chain, from clear labelling to better monitoring and prevention of market monopolies.

- Diversity in leadership, including representation of different genders, ages, and local producers, should be enhanced to ensure a wide range of perspectives in decision making.
- Financial support, especially for young farmers, alongside land tenure and ownership programmes, will help secure the future of farming communities.

### For chemical pollution

- Imposing taxes on polluters, enforcing accountability, and increasing transparency across industries.
- Raising awareness is crucial, both through media attention that brings local issues to a broader audience and through civil mobilisation that empowers communities to demand change.
- Polluters must pay for the damage inflicted upon communities.
- Involving experts and creating specialist groups to inform policy is vital, particularly in the pending reform of EU legislation such as REACH, and reporting standards such as the Due Diligence Directive.

### For big wildlife

- Co-existing with wild animals requires a balanced approach that ensures the protection of both human communities and wildlife while maintaining a sustainable ecosystem.
- Education plays a critical role, with primary education fostering an understanding of ecosystems, and specific programmes teaching co-existence strategies.
- Coordinated policies and laws are needed to protect wildlife, regulate hunting, and create secure protected areas.
- Effective management of attractants, such as proper trash disposal and barrier management, is essential to reduce human impacts on wildlife.

### Closing plenary



## AFTER THE EVENT

### DOCUMENTATION AND FEEDBACK

Participants were invited to comment on the overall recommendations after the event. In surveys, many participants expressed that the deliberation fostered objective discussions; and that discussions were diverse, in-depth, and very fulfilling, remaining respectful throughout. Some participants noted that the Lego Serious Play® methodology was very abstract, and that more time would be necessary for deliberation and the development of policy proposals. However, 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 different action points for policy action in each of the three 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

As in the case of the other two EU-wide events, the four main recommendations were placed on the online platform for further input and comments by participants and wider platform users. In addition, the main policy recommendations and suggestions from each of the groups fed into the activities of the Civil Society Forum, co-organised by [SDG Watch Europe](#), which held a further in-person Forum in November 2024 to discuss the emerging political issues for the 2024–2029 mandate. This created an interface between the deliberation process and the policy and advocacy activities of the civil society organisations within the project.

**“I’m wondering how the EU can better integrate the lived experiences of its citizens into climate and environmental policy, and also how we get more effective and inclusive decision making?”**

**“It’s really important to try to find solutions for the environmental problems that capitalism and consumerism are raising nowadays.”**

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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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