



8th Civil Society Forum for Sustainability

Civil Society Organisations demand a socially and environmentally just EU Green Deal

Date: 11 - 12 June 2024
(Online)



Participants came together to develop civil society demands to the EU on the future of citizens' deliberation and the European Green Deal (EGD) for a green and social transition, as the new mandate of the European Commission and Parliament (2024-2029) approaches. This edition of the Forum was particularly important in bringing together people and civil society representatives from different backgrounds to strategise immediately after the European Parliament elections.

The Civil Society Forum is a space for CSOs and other stakeholders from across Europe to come together and exchange views on the EGD, the EU's strategy to make Europe climate-neutral by 2050. The forum is co-organised by [SOLIDAR](#), [SDG Watch Europe](#), and the [European Environmental Bureau](#) (EEB), alongside REAL DEAL project partners.

The eighth edition of the Forum gathered around 40 CSOs from across Europe and beyond, providing a crucial space for people and CSOs to join interactive discussions and develop demands under 5 thematic learning spaces: Social, Environmental, Participatory, Economic and Global dimensions. The Forum was also an opportunity for the participants to learn about the preliminary findings of the citizens deliberation research within the REAL DEAL project at the European level, as well as barriers, challenges, lessons learned and good practices from CSOs' engagement in EGD processes, presented by key speakers at the Forum.

The Forum's first day began with an opening panel hosting representatives from Women Engage for a Common Future (WECF), CEE Bankwatch Network, and the Democratic Society, setting the stage for participants by providing concrete examples about people and CSOs' involvement in the EGD at local, national and European level.

Hanna Gunnarsson, Gender Expert, WECF, shared insights from the Feminist Festival organised by WECF and EEB within the REAL DEAL project and the importance of engaging citizens in political discussions on the EGD and the green transition. Some of the recommendations developed by citizens during the festival included holding aggressors accountable for environmental racism, establishing a commission to examine environmental harms caused by governments and companies, and fostering mutual agreements with Global South countries on environmental justice, gender, and human rights.

Bogdan-Alexandru Chelariu, Policy Officer, CEE Bankwatch Network highlighted the importance of improved evaluation of EU funds to enhance citizen engagement, as well as the need for technical assistance and financial support for public participation in policy making mechanisms. He emphasised the important role of monitoring committees in member states, functioning as underdog institutions, crucial for planning

and programming of funds in a democratic manner. The committees help to engage and build the capacity of civil society organisations in these processes.

Saha Balaganesh, The Network Engagement Lead at Democratic Society, discussed the Net Zero Cities Project, which aims to help cities overcome structural, institutional and cultural barriers to achieve climate neutrality by 2030. The project focuses on citizen participation and tackles challenges such as renewable energy adoption. These challenges also include ensuring the participation of those who oppose climate action, limited resources and capacity, a lack of follow-up on recommendations from participation processes and resistance to change within governmental structures.

The opening panel was followed with an interactive discussion in two simultaneous learning spaces: Social and Environmental dimensions. Participants had access to the recommendations on Mural boards derived from the previous publications and recommendations developed together with the participants of the Civil Society Forum. These recommendations were used as a starting point to initiate discussions and later to develop 2 top action points. The learning spaces were moderated by facilitators and serve as an interactive platform for input and suggestions from civil society.

On the second day of the Forum, **Marcel Mersch**, Head of Department, Deputy Secretary General, Department Sustainable Development: Green and Social Europe, S&D, provided insights on the aftermath of the European Parliamentary elections, including the EU's political priorities and agenda. He noted significant changes taking place among various political groups following the elections. He also highlighted the potential influence of the extreme right-wing representatives across the EU and discussed the possibility of new alliances and group formations. Mersch concluded his intervention with emphasising the need for strong civil society advocacy to maintain the European Green Deal for 2050 agenda and to ensure the achievement of a comprehensive social and ecological transition. Later, the participants continued their discussions in three simultaneous learning spaces: Economic, Participatory and Global dimensions, to develop their core demands.

Throughout the Forum, participants engaged in discussions with the speakers and continued their discussions in their respective learning spaces. One of the main outcomes of the Forum was the importance of civil society's involvement and continuation of advocacy on the political system to ensure the EGD evolves into a robust and socially inclusive policy framework. The outcomes of these discussions will be compiled into a report summarising the main findings of the forum.