



Inclusive civil society for an inclusive Green Deal

Recommendations to civil society organisations to mitigate the negative impacts of Green Deal policies

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Towards a civil society with greater social impact, in solidarity with vulnerable groups.

Non-governmental organisations play a key role in the formation and implementation of European Green Deal policies. They hold expertise in climate change, environmental issues, social justice and sustainable development issues. They work on the ground, locally and in solidarity with local communities, with and for vulnerable groups, representing their voices and interests. In doing so, they enjoy more public trust than governments, corporations, and the media. NGOs' participation in climate change negotiations is significant: they provide policymakers and decision-makers with expertise, and they provide legitimacy to environmental governance. However, not all NGOs have successfully embedded democratic legitimacy in their organisation and actions, diversity in their governance structures and issues, and accountability of the organisation. For the Green Deal to be just and inclusive, it is crucial for civil society organisations to be inclusive, fully reflecting the diversity of the population and stakeholders.

Findings from ACCTING¹

Based on an in-depth analysis of 700 bottom-up initiatives the ACCTING consortium concludes that in terms of inclusiveness **these initiatives focus mostly on vulnerable groups based on income, rural/urban gaps, age and ethnicity, while a relatively low number explicitly addressed race and gender+ inequality issues.**

Only a quarter of the initiatives went into processes of decision-making together with local authorities and generated bilateral consensus building. Less than half worked within a framework of multilateral identification of responsibilities, sharing leadership and accountability with other social actors in the field. The analysis of 410 narratives reveals that a sense of ‘community belonging’ is key enabler for change towards more environmentally friendly behaviour change. Civil society organisations play a key role in this community building. Our research shows the great potential for civil society and other public actors to contribute more pro-actively to behaviour change by providing easily accessible information on why and how to do so, but also by promoting new social norms that are aligned with the Green Deal ambitions.



In our analyses important and innovating drivers for civil society organisations to reach these ambitions are:

- A focus on **vulnerability and intersectionality**, for example by providing information on sustainable food choices related to identity and creating a sense of belonging to communities, adopting feminist and LGBTQ+ values, linking the fight of eco-change to social change and human rights. Some participants in the ACCTING research mentioned that sustainable food choices values are intertwined with fighting for social rights and change.

A vegan feminist LGBTQI+ activist who sees veganism not as a personal choice but as a political issue says: *“In the past, my relationship with food was about filling my stomach and getting by another day. I was already living through poverty, living through*

¹ Zorell, C., & Strid, S. (eds.) (2023). D3.2 ACCTING Report on first cycle experimental studies. Confidential report delivered to the European Commission 28 April 2023. 281 pages.

multiple vulnerabilities. Then, all that I experienced, all the encounters I had – working in a yoga studio, getting involved with food collectives, encountering friends from animal-rights struggles, my conversations with them about veganism – led me to a path that was vegan, vegetarian, sensitive to the environment. Of course, all of this has to do with the climate crisis, with industrial food production.”

- Recognition of the importance of **vulnerable voices to be heard** in order to create an inclusive and just civil society and **to generate just policy alternatives**.

The narrative of a Romanian man with a disability provides a better story of inclusion. He tells the story of creating employment for people with disabilities and sustainable products: *“We produce bags from natural (and some from recycled) cotton and from cloth, as well as backpacks, purses, and some pieces of clothing. We pay a lot of attention to limiting waste. (...) The second important dimension of my work is offering jobs and thus social inclusion for people with disabilities since unemployment in this group is enormous, and many do not get the chance to have proper jobs.”*

- The engagement in **social relationships and the creation of a sense of community and collectiveness** in order to support and achieve behavioural change. An Italian volunteer in various services/associations for the blind, underlines the strength of what can be achieved collectively, in contrast to individually: *“The heritage and experience of people with disabilities should teach to believe in one’s own possibilities and rely on oneself without being afraid to ask for help if some things cannot be done alone.”; “Individually, we do not perceive the change that is possible as a community.”*
- An understanding that the **integration of diversity, inclusion and togetherness lead to wiser and better decisions and solutions, increase the legitimacy and accountability of organisations, make inequalities more visible, challenge normativity**. A 40-year-old woman from Greece, illustrates how an inclusive sustainable business strives for both environmental and social aims: *“... together with another four friends, whom I met by chance in my previous work, and with whom I shared a common ideology, we founded a small business cooperative with a clear community and social purpose. The coffee place is in a neighbourhood of Thessaloniki city centre, and at the core of our philosophy is to keep the prices of our products as low as we can so that it is accessible to everybody. I am not interested in making as much profit as I can, but I am interested in supporting the community, so I just need to have enough money for living and to make the business sustainable. I feel part of a team/group that has a bigger social purpose.”* Their philosophy about accessibility represents a very good example of a vision for businesses which is inclusive of disadvantaged social groups.

- The creation of **solidarity-based communities**.

A Roma flower-seller woman recounted receiving support and care from different actors in her community: *“We have no income, no insurance, nothing, apart from selling flowers daily. (...) The children would beg us to get them something to eat, but what*

could we do, we had nothing. Thank God, we had good neighbours and friends who gave us some food and supported us. I also received some support from my family who would sometimes send soup and other food they cooked at home. We also got some food support from the municipality. Sometimes the bakeries would give out free bread. That is how we survived through the pandemic. We were half full, half hungry. It was very difficult, really very difficult. After we were allowed to go out and open our flower stand, things got much better.”



Recommendations for CSOs and NGOs

Transparency, inclusiveness, and equity must guide civil society organisations and responses at all stages. In achieving this, the organisations should promote and support decentralised community decision-making, co-ownership, accessibility, systems of co-existence and kindness.

- 1. Make agendas inclusive** so that inequalities become more visible, and the organisation can generate egalitarian/just/inclusive policy alternatives.
- 2. (Re)design leadership, membership and representation structures with inclusiveness and diversity in mind**, leading to more critical approaches to forms of power and normativity, and to wiser decisions, and solutions.
- 3. Target activities towards more inclusivity and diversity** so that nobody is left behind, especially not the most vulnerable communities and those more dramatically impacted by climate change. Organisations are encouraged to adopt the principle "nothing about them, without them" in all their activities and actions.
- 4. Look for diversified expertise in the organisation, governance, and representation** so that actions address social sustainability in addition to environmental and economic sustainability. This can facilitate holistic and integrative approaches that address all dimensions of sustainability.
- 5. Establish solidarity networks** and support the existing formal and informal ones. Solidarity with less-resourced civil society actors and organisations is built to increase the overall capacity of the civil society ecosystems.
- 6. Collaborate with local communities**, particularly with vulnerable or less resourced communities and social actors through empowerment, mentorship, and other supportive mechanisms, to strengthen their activism and advocacy.
- 7. Facilitate participatory processes and make the bridge with private and other relevant sectors**, such as donor organisations, to offer disadvantaged and vulnerable communities a platform to voice their needs and expectations.
- 8. Enhance the engagement with the private sector to promote awareness and support capacity building on issues relating to discrimination and inequalities in the workplace**, which have become more important in the context of climate change. This may be achieved through sharing expertise (providing actual data and training) in the field of climate change and human rights, and encouragement and promotion of policies that are eco-friendly and uphold protection of the environment and ensure the rights and well-being of employees.

Better Stories

In ACCTING, we look for inspiring bottom-up initiatives as Better Stories, a concept borrowed from Dina Georgis² to refer promising practices that can instil ideas for how to advance individual and collective behavioural change as envisioned by the Green Deal.



ITALY

The Solidarity and Energy Communities In Fondo Sacca³

The community was created in an area where once a slum stood. The aim of the community was to fight energy poverty. In its place, today, there are buildings equipped with innovative solutions for the production and management of energy from renewable sources. They include socio-educational centres for vulnerable young children and their families, while the energy community also strives for the social integration of former inmates and persons with mental disabilities, who are hosted in some of the residential units.



PORTUGAL

Amadora⁴

This initiative is aimed at rescuing and enhancing the social role of senior citizens, their knowledge, and life experiences, through actions that bring senior citizens closer to more concrete forms of active participation, particularly in accident and disaster prevention and protection.



HUNGARY

Bayaerdo⁵ (“Forest of the Witches”)

This is an inspiring case of building gender+ solidarities that simultaneously address gender and ethnic exclusion, as well as poverty and unemployment. This organisation consists of a network of volunteers assisting Roma women in a rural village in selling their local produce (mostly mushrooms and berries) with a zero-waste policy in packaging and distribution. Through cooperation, Roma women take pioneer roles in strengthening their deprived societies, increasing their access to healthy and sustainable food, and developing sustainable business skills.

² Georgis, D. (2013). *The better story: Queer affects from the Middle East*. Suny Press.

³ <https://nesoi.eu/content/fecos-fair-energy-communities>

⁴ <https://www.cm-amadora.pt/pt/>

⁵ <https://www.bayaerdo.hu/>

Green Deal policy area

These recommendations are linked to the following Green Deal policy area: [A healthy food system for people and planet](#).

About ACCTING

ACCTING is an EU-funded project aiming to understand the impact of Green Deal policies on vulnerable groups, prevent inequalities, and produce knowledge and innovations to advance behavioural change at individual and collective levels.

Running until May 2025 and based on two research cycles, ACCTING mobilises research experimentation and innovation to promote an inclusive and socially just European Green Deal, focusing on the inequalities produced by its policies.

Find out more about the project and discover more factsheets at <https://accting.eu>

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