

**EVENT DESCRIPTION SHEET**

(To be filled in and uploaded as deliverable in the Portal Grant Management System, at the due date foreseen in the system.

 Please provide one sheet per event (one event = one workpackage = one lump sum.)

PROJECT	
Participant:	[3] <b>FONDATSIYA BLULINK (BLUELINK)</b>
PIC number:	PIC 913731174
Project name and acronym:	Discussions and Actions on Climate and Environment – DACE

EVENT DESCRIPTION			
Event number:	D5.1		
Event name:	Policy landscape mapping and civil society needs assessment		
Type:	Summary report based on the participation of 25 participants in a focus group and individual interviews		
In situ/online:	[in-situ and online]		
Location:	Bulgaria, Sofia		
Date(s):	27.06.2023		
Website(s) (if any):	<a href="https://www.bluelink.net/en/discussions-actions-climate-environment.html">https://www.bluelink.net/en/discussions-actions-climate-environment.html</a>		
Participants			
Female:	75		
Male:	40		
Non-binary:	3		
From country 1 [Slovakia]:	1		
From country 2 [Hungary]:	1		
From country 3 [Bulgaria]:	116		
...			
Total number of participants:	118	From total number of countries:	3
Description			
<i>Provide a short description of the event and its activities.</i>			
BlueLink conducted an online survey among several priority target groups: local communities, climate activists, environmental protection organizations and other interested citizens. The purpose of the survey was to answer the following questions: How aware are the target groups of their climate rights? To what extent are they ready to exercise their climate rights? What needs do the target groups have			

for extending their climate rights? Following the survey, we organised an in-situ focus group and conducted interviews to gather more precise observations on the survey questions.

You can [find the event report on deliverable 5.1. here.](#)

You can [find an article on the findings of the survey and the focus group](#) here.

## Survey results

The survey was distributed online to 5000 + civil society activists through e-mails, mailing lists, thematic Facebook groups and Facebook ads. (You can find a [link to the Facebook post promoting the survey here.](#))

The survey was filled out by 103 people from 3 countries. Among the 103 respondents, women predominated (65%) compared to men (32%). Only 3% identified as non-binary. In terms of age, citizens aged between 31-64 years prevailed (84.5%).

The need for reliable and timely information was cited as one of the most important factors for environmental activism and action to protect climate rights.

According to the self-assessment of the participants, 37.9% of them are relatively well acquainted with the concept of "climate rights". The questionnaire allows them to use a five-point scale to rate their knowledge, with 1 meaning "poorly familiar" and 5 meaning "excellent knowledge". The data are as follows: 1 (18.4%), 2 (12.6%), 3 (37.9%), 4 (28.2%), 5 (2.9%).

The main motive is the need for reliable information and raising awareness. To the three questions - what actions have you taken so far, what actions would you take in the future, and what support would you need to protect your own or others' climate rights - the leading answer (about 70%) is the need for information about climate change and its consequences.

To the question "Which of the following rights are related to climate?" as many as 92.2% of respondents indicate the right to a healthy living environment, which includes clean air, clean water and food. At second and third place, the respondents indicate the right to participate in decision-making for climate change mitigation and adaptation (which directly affects especially those municipalities suffering from severe air pollution coming from thermal power plants) - with 86.4% - and the right of social justice in dealing with climate change (indicated by 83.5% of respondents). This brings to the front the growing intersections between environmental and climate policies and concerns about the impact on poorer communities. A large percentage of respondents indicate as a climate right the right to take measures and actions by the state and other persons in order to guarantee adaptation to climate change (78.6%). Another 67% cite the right to compensation for damages caused by actions or lack of actions that have led to climate disasters. Answers related to the right to protect home, property and life from natural disasters (55.3%) and the right to life itself (48.5%) are ranked 6th and 7th. Only 2% of respondents indicated other types of rights other than those mentioned.

To the open question "In your opinion, what other climate rights are there?" grouping the answers is a difficult task, due to the subjective and descriptive nature of the inquiry. But again, the trend for the need for information can be drawn: several respondents responded with similar understandings of what other climate rights there are, highlighting the right to information, the right to be protected from misinformation, the right to make an informed choice, the right to timely information and awareness campaigns. A trend is also outlined in the requirements and understandings for social justice policies and the protection of disadvantaged communities, if responses such as "rights of climate refugees", "right to asylum", "rights of Third World peoples" are taken as a common denominator, as well as "the right to a fair distribution of responsibilities and burdens arising from climate change adaptation and mitigation actions". Along with other rights mentioned by the respondents (such as children's rights, right to clean water, right to associate around green policies), two more answers make an impression - aesthetic rights, which bring to the front the option to think in an immaterial direction when it comes to the quality of life and the quality of the environment. The mention of the right to preserve the traditional way of life is also impressive - a possible indicator that green policies and the fight against climate change are going beyond their social range and are already becoming acceptable, if not necessary, even for more conservative groups of society .

To the question "Have you taken any of the following actions to protect your own or other people's climate rights", the answer "Searching for reliable information about climate change and its

consequences" comes first with 70.9%. In second place is participation in the creation of climate laws and policies with 27.2%, followed by participation in administrative procedures related to the protection of climate rights, for example reporting to the administration (25.2%), taking no action (14.6%) and litigation for the protection of climate rights (2.9%). A considerable percentage of the research participants took other actions - as many as 24.5% - described in free text, independently by the participants (for example, participation in signatures, protests, educational initiatives, round tables, including those at a high level, setting a good example civic activism, etc.). To the additional question "If you have not taken action to protect climate rights, what is the reason for this?" among the open responses, obstacles such as lack of a clear definition or framework of what climate rights are, lack of legal knowledge or assistance, lack of time or information are observed.

To the double question "Would you like to stand up for your own or other people's climate rights in the future?" and - if yes - "Which of the following forms of action would you take to assert your own or other people's climate rights?", 75.5% of the respondents indicated that they would take action to assert climate rights. 23.5% are hesitant (18.6% answered with "I can't decide" and 4.9% with "I don't know"), and only 1% answered negatively.

To the follow-up question "Which of the listed forms of action would you take?" again the trend is maintained regarding the information factor: the most popular response (84.4%) is the disclosure of reliable information about climate change and its consequences, followed by participation in the creation of climate laws and policies (54.2%), participation in administrative procedures related to the protection of climate rights (43.4%), litigation in defense of climate rights (18.1%) and other, similar actions (15.7%), again described in free text by the respondents (such as personal restriction of consumption, participating in strikes and protests, conducting research).

The last question, "What would you need to take action to protect your own or others' climate rights?", reaffirms the need for information. The largest percentage indicated the need for more information about climate rights (68%), followed by those who pointed out needs such as connecting with like-minded people in order to organize joint actions (60.2%), training for the protection of climate rights (54.4%), engagement of an active state policy to protect climate rights (53.4%), communication support for better media coverage (52.4%), attracting a wider range of organizations working in this area of climate rights (45.6%), changes in climate change mitigation and adaptation laws (42.7%), funding (32%), advocacy (26.2%) or other (3.9%).

## Focus group results

After processing the results of the questionnaire, the team proceeded to refine the results within a focus group of 15 representatives of CSOs active in the field of environmental protection, human rights and climate policies. The focus group was part of the first event of the project: the Citizens' Forum "Time to Act for Climate Rights", which took place on 27 June at the House of Europe in the capital.

If the main motive that emerged in the answers to the questionnaire was the need for reliable information and awareness raising, the conversations with focus group participants allowed us to summarise the type of information needed by our target groups.

The main information needed is reliable expertise to serve as evidence in court cases. This is necessary because judges are not experts on climate or climate policies, but need to refer to experts. That is to say, the more scientific information the public has, and the more accessible and understandable it is, the more easily they can defend their rights. Conversely, a lack of information leads to a lack of understanding of the problem and a lack of public commitment to solving it. In this context, the problem of the lack of environmental education to civic education was also pointed out.

Unfortunately, Bulgarian institutions do not conduct targeted information campaigns to inform citizens about climate change and the climate policies to address it. There are even often unwilling to provide basic information, such as data from air quality measurement stations. Several participants mentioned that institutions deliberately place stations away from polluters in order to report normal pollution levels. How can people prove pollution in court then? All lawsuits start with the collection of information, said one focus group participant. Without it, the team cannot assess what steps it can take.

Apart from basic environmental information, institutions refuse to provide other types of public information as well. An example of this is the claim of Sofia Municipality that the municipality's air quality plan is an internal administrative document that is not subject to public and judicial review. This led to a criminal procedure in the EU against Bulgaria. Another example is the refusal of the institutions in 2019 to say on what grounds the state-owned Maritsa East 2 thermal power plant was granted a derogation from the obligation to upgrade its air purification installation. This information is important if the public is to be able to protect itself. The lawyers arguing against the derogation only

had access to a draft of the derogation decision, which made it hard to prepare the best arguments in court.

When institutions do provide information, it is either difficult to understand or incomplete, some respondents pointed out. Citizens, for example, do not have the legal right to choose the type of pollutant to see data on, nor can they request additional measurement stations. Consideration should be given to how institutions can be incentivised to provide information in a more accessible way, one respondent said.

Another problem identified by focus group participants was that the expertise required in court is complex and expensive. In addition, it is difficult to guarantee independent expertise. For example, the national experts had no previous experience in making the necessary assessment in the case against Maritsa East 2. There was no mechanism or methodology for the claimant to prove that the TPP's claims were untrue. The court had, on the one hand, the expert opinion of the TPP's consultants and, on the other hand, the expert opinion of the plaintiffs from the NGOs that brought the case.

Expertise must be paid for by the party requesting it. In such a situation, winning a case rests on the ability of the claimant to secure funding. One of the lawyers in the focus group said, "These cases are decided by the expertise. There is no guarantee of expertise being independent. Everyone who can be called an expert works for municipalities tied to one particular political party. Their independence is invented. It came to the point where we had to become experts. Thanks to that, we persuaded the court to accept what the defendants presented with a pinch of salt."

One of the proposals for addressing the expertise problem was to create an independent scientific council under the Council of Ministers. The shortage of climate specialists in the ministries calls for the creation of a coordinating body within the Council of Ministers to introduce, monitor and develop policies in every field, not just the environment. This independent council of experts should be developed to the extent that it has good, independent expertise. The council must also equally represent citizens, business, municipalities, administration.

Another interesting finding from the focus group relates to the answer to the question: Which human rights do you identify as climate-related. Without the availability of the ready-made multiple choice answers listed in the questionnaire, most participants did not spontaneously identify clean air lawsuits as climate lawsuits. This was especially true for cases where the defendant emitted a pollutant that was not among the major greenhouse gasses (such as sulfur dioxide). Even the lawyers in the relevant cases did not think they had won climate cases, but rather environmental cases.

The conclusion from the focus group was that the wide definition and concept of climate rights creates the potential for a broad coalition of stakeholders and supporters, as climate rights involve a wide range of stakeholders: climate migrants, children, women, future generations, etc.

HISTORY OF CHANGES		
VERSION	PUBLICATION DATE	CHANGE
1.0	01.04.2022	Initial version (new MFF).