

Foresight for Inclusive Just Transition and Green-Blue Growth

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REPORT

As Europe moves toward a Green and Blue Deal future, it faces a critical question: how can sustainability transitions be inclusive, just and grounded in real community needs? This was the central focus of the workshop *Foresight for Inclusive Just Transition and Green-Blue Growth*, held during Civil Society Week 2025. Organised by Volonteurope, in collaboration with Horizon Europe projects FLOW and BOLSTER, the European Environmental Bureau (EEB), and hosted by the EESC, the session brought together a diverse group of civil society representatives, researchers, policymakers and youth advocates to reflect on how participatory foresight and community-driven approaches can shape transition policies that are not only ambitious but socially rooted and rights-based.

Moderated by **Furkan Sorkuncuk** (Volonteurope) and **Kristina Velimirovic** (ECAS), the session opened with sharp reflections on the risks of top-down governance and the growing need to tackle environmental inequalities. It featured presentations from key EU research projects and initiatives, including **BOLSTER**, which explores how to prevent marginalisation in transition planning, and **FLOW**, which focuses on ensuring that climate transitions leave no one behind. The organisers of the **European Citizens' Initiative (ECI) for a Water-Smart and Resilient Europe** also offered a compelling case for rights-based civic action to embed water justice into the EU's political core.

A distinguished panel brought multiple perspectives into the room. **Kinga Joó** (EESC Group III) and **Dirk Bergrath** (EESC NAT section) emphasised the importance of participatory structures and just transition governance. **César Luena MEP** (S&D, ENVI Committee) offered a strong message of political support for cohesive environmental action that puts people and ecosystems at the centre. From civil society and research, **Sabina Hodžić** (University of Rijeka, BOLSTER), **Ecaterina Mihalcean** (Volonteurope / ECI campaign), **Thomas Müller** (Austrian Climate Council), **Elodie Denizart** (AQUA Water Heritage) and **Kristýna Bulvasová** (YEYS) shared experiences from community mobilisation, participatory processes, and the critical role of young people and local knowledge.

The interactive format of the workshop enabled participants to become deeply engaged in discussions, with three World Café-style breakout sessions. Group 1 focused on the persistent disconnect between EU-level sustainability goals and the everyday challenges faced by local communities. Participants explored how civil society can help bridge and narrow this gap. Group 2 explored the features of inclusive green-blue transition policy, calling for justice, equity and place-based design as guiding principles.

Group 3 looked at how participatory foresight, both as a method and a mindset, can inspire collective responsibility to build a more cohesive future across regions, generations and sectors.

What emerged was a powerful, shared understanding: sustainability must not be imposed. It must be co-created. As one participant noted, ‘the green and blue transitions are not just about reaching targets; they are about how we get there, who is included, and whose knowledge counts’.

The workshop concluded with three overarching messages for EU institutions and national policymakers. First, water resilience must be elevated to the heart of EU policy. Despite its fundamental role, water remains a peripheral issue in major strategies. With millions in Europe lacking reliable access to clean and affordable water, including in several EU regions, the upcoming **Water Resilience Strategy** must guarantee **universal access as a fundamental right**, backed by binding commitments, better infrastructure, and robust governance. Water must be treated not as a sectoral issue, but as a cross-cutting common good underpinning climate adaptation, health, cohesion and equality. The [**ECI for a Water-Smart and Resilient Europe**](#) stands as a strong civic demand to ensure this right is recognised and protected.

Second, participants called for a just green-blue transition that is truly **community-led and socially anchored**. The current Just Transition Mechanism and Territorial Just Transition Plans too often fail to reach those most affected. To avoid deepening inequalities, the EU must move from consultation to **co-creation**, with **direct and accessible funding, proactive outreach and tailored capacity-building**. Tools such as the **Social Climate Fund** must be repurposed to support local actors, not just institutions, and ensure that no one is priced out or left behind in the shift to a sustainable economy.

Finally, the session highlighted the need to formalise the role of civil society in governance. Without structured spaces for participation, including long-term mechanisms such as the **Civil Society Platform under Commissioner Michael McGrath**, the transition risks becoming elitist, opaque and fragile. Young people, grassroots organisations, marginalised communities and rights defenders must have a seat at the table: not as observers, but as architects of the future. Participants called for this platform to become a **permanent feature of EU transition governance**, with real influence over decision-making and evaluation processes.

In conclusion, the workshop made clear that Europe’s green and blue transitions are not only environmental imperatives: they are social, democratic and human rights issues. The path forward must be guided by **foresight, justice and participatory governance**, grounded in solidarity, responsibility and trust. If these principles are embedded from the outset, Europe has a chance not only to meet its sustainability goals but to do so in a way that is inclusive, legitimate and resilient.