Participation Pop-Up France

8 July 2026

Paris, Académie du Climat

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Participant Breakdown

Total Participants	25 + 1 online meeting with a local elected person of La Rochelle (who could not join in July)
Gender	20F & 6M
Age distribution	12,5% 18-24 - 50% 25-34 - 29% 35-44 - 4,2% 44-55 - 4,2% 55+
Persons with disability	0
Part of a marginalised group	22,2%
CSOs	16,7%

Executive Summary

Purpose of event
The event served a two-fold purpose: contributing to the EU project's objectives and pursuing specific goals for the French national partner.

1. EU project objectives

- Gather practical lessons from climate democracy projects and other related initiatives in France, with particular attention to initiatives focused on the participation of vulnerable and under-represented groups (i.e. youth, women/girls, people with disabilities, migrants/mobile EU citizens, LGBTQIA+, ethnic minorities, and people from socio-economically disadvantaged backgrounds)
- Identify what worked, what didn't, and why
- Explore which practices could be replicated elsewhere or at other scales to feed into the transnational learning process of the Citizens4Climate project

2. French event objectives

- Strengthen the network of organisations, individuals and practitioners working on climate participation topics in France
- Foster new connections and facilitate exchanges across sectors
- Expose participants to perspectives and practices beyond their usual networks
- Ensure participants leave with concrete ideas and renewed motivation to address the challenges they face in their own projects

Key activities

A full-day, in-person peer-learning event held at the Académie du Climat, structured around an exploratory morning, a visit and keynote at the venue, followed by a co-construction afternoon. *(See full agenda under Event Implementation.)*

Main outcome

The day brought together practitioners, members from CSOs, and institutions to share their lived experiences, whether as participants or as practitioners. The discussions covered different scales and formats: from national, institutionalized deliberative processes (French Convention for Climate, CESE, CNDP) to more local citizens' assemblies (Est Ensemble,

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Romainville, Créteil, Plaine Commune, Vincennes) and youth/student-led initiatives and organizations (Local Student Assemblies Sustainable Food, Banlieues Climat).

Commenté [GM1]: To review // not all are present here

See full list of projects at the bottom of the report.

Main successes identified across projects:

- Breaking down silos between institutional actors, associations and citizens, creating space for genuine listening rather than advocacy – whether through the creation of dedicated third places like l'Académie du Climat or through specific project methodologies (e.g. reversed expertise);
- Financial compensation for participants involved in deliberative processes as an effective, if administratively complex, lever for reaching a more diverse and representative group;
- When proposals are concrete and actionable, they sometimes lead to lasting citizen engagement and a sense of ownership (e.g. new associations created post-process);
- Presenting scientific, sometimes complex topics in ways that speak to citizens' lived realities, rather than in a top-down manner.

Main challenges identified:

- Insufficient follow-up and accountability after the process ends: participants often struggle to get accessible information regarding what became of their contributions;
- Processes are often too short or too broadly scoped to allow for concrete deliberations, leading to polarization between groups with unequal expertise or diverging interests;
- Weak or inconsistent institutional buy-in (elected officials, administrations) undermining the transformative potential of otherwise well-run processes;
- Difficulty renewing and diversifying participants over successive project cycles;
- Despite projects being successful, they are not self-sustaining and sometimes remain stand-alone events, worsened by possible project memory loss if not nurtured (especially in the case of high staff turn-over rates).

Key lessons learned:

Participants converged on the idea that the legitimacy of a climate participation initiative depends less on its format than on three conditions: (1) *a sincere intention* (not communication-driven, no intent to instrumentalise the process), (2) *a clear mandate and defined margin for manoeuvre,* and (3) *a genuine link between citizen input and public decision-making.* Where these conditions are missing, participation risks becoming symbolic ("greenwashing" or "demo-washing") rather than transformative.

General guidelines for overcoming common inclusion challenges:

These general ideas, distilled from the co-construction session, centre on three principles: (1) *going toward* citizens rather than waiting for them to show up (meeting people where they are, using trusted intermediaries); (2) *building conditions for trust* (transparency, reporting back, reasonable framing of scope and timeframes); and (3) *ensuring continuity*, both in follow-up communication with participants and in institutional memory across project cycles and staff turnover.

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Relevance for project

The event directly informed the French contribution to Citizens4Climate. Consistent with the project's core focus on inclusive climate democracy, the day placed particular emphasis on collecting lessons about the participation of vulnerable and under-represented groups: what enables their engagement, what excludes them, and what conditions allow initial awareness to turn into sustained involvement. These findings will be the basis behind the French perspectives and best practices shared into the transnational Review Event where they will be compared with practices from the other six partner countries. The full results of the projects will be published in the European Climate Participation Booklet.

Why this event?

In France, participatory and deliberative tools for climate policy have multiplied and become increasingly institutionalised in recent years, from the national Citizens' Climate Convention to a growing number of local climate conventions and assemblies. These mechanisms nonetheless continue to face challenges and criticism, including regarding their inclusiveness: marginalised and under-represented groups are often among those most likely to disengage or drop out of such processes, frequently because they do not feel sufficiently equipped, supported, included, or heard.

The French event of the Citizens4Climate project contributed to this landscape by creating a peer-learning space that goes beyond the sector's usual, often siloed networks. By bringing together practitioners, institutions and citizens with direct experience of these processes, in a venue dedicated to climate and civic engagement - l'Académie du Climat in Paris - the day allowed participants to exchange openly on what has and hasn't worked in their own initiatives, with a specific focus on how to make climate participation more inclusive and diverse.

Beyond the exchange of experiences and best practices itself, a core aim was to foster new connections across organisations, institutions and individuals that don't typically interact, strengthening the broader ecosystem of actors engaged on the topic of inclusive climate democracy in France.

Target Group(s)

The event aimed to bring together a mix of practitioners working on citizen participation, associations working directly with minority groups, institutions, and active citizens, including past participants of citizen deliberation and young people connected to the Académie du Climat's own network.

To reach underrepresented groups specifically, we relied primarily on intermediary organisations already working with these communities, rather than direct outreach. This included the Académie du Climat's existing network of CSOs, young activists and individuals engaged in the climate space, such as the RESES, alongside our own contacts with associations working with these groups, including Banlieues Climat, which works with young people from disadvantaged socio-economic backgrounds.

We also use broader open channels: personalised emails and an open invitation via our newsletter to widen participation from our immediate network of practitioners and beyond.

Because the Académie du Climat is an open public space, the event also benefited from occasional walk-in participants at the start and end of the day.

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Event Implementation

Venue rationale

The choice of venue was a deliberate part of the event's design rather than a logistical afterthought. The Académie du Climat is the former town hall of Paris's 4th arrondissement, repurposed into a dedicated "third space" for climate engagement: a public building explicitly designed to host encounter, dialogue and co-construction around ecological transitions. This is a unique and innovative initiative from the City of Paris. Hosting the French event there also came with practical benefits: the room provided fit within our budget, with an on-site vegan lunch for the participants, keeping the event's footprint and cost down while staying consistent with its themes.

As part of the day, participants took part in a guided visit of the building and a keynote from the Académie's director, Sarah Alby, and her team, on why the space is designed the way it is and how its underlying strategy connects to the aims of the Citizens4Climate project.

Keynote from Sarah Alby: The Académie du Climat as a "third space"

The director of the Académie, Sarah Alby, presented the design of the space as a deliberate strategy for encounter and co-construction, built on three guiding principles:

1. **Embracing the long-time frame**: engagement doesn't start or stop with a single, stand-alone event or process; sustained impact depends on *building relationships before, during and after a given project.*
2. **Designing spaces around real needs, not chance**: nothing about how the venue and its formats are structured is accidental; every choice is made strategically to *maximise long-term impact and create synergies* between the actors who pass through it.
3. **Using crises as catalysts for action:** a crisis can compress years of policy change into a short window (the Covid-19 pandemic and the rapid rollout of cycling infrastructure in Paris was cited as an example), and cultivating a culture of adaptability allows organisations to seize such moments when they arise.

The keynote closed on a guiding image for the space's ambition — *"d'ici part, d'ici fleurit"* ("from here it starts, from here it blossoms") — capturing the intent for the connections made at the Académie to radiate well beyond its walls.

Agenda Overview

Time	Activity	Objective	Format
9:45 – 10:00	Welcome & coffee	Make every participant feel welcomed	Informal welcome, sign-in sheet
10:00 – 10:15	Introduction & framing	Set out the day's objectives, structure and ground rules for dialogue	Presentation of the Citizens4Climate project and the day's agenda by French project team
10:15 – 11:00	Part 1 – Getting acquainted & topic familiarisation	Introductions, motivations for attending, first reflections on climate & citizen participation	Show of hands (roles present); round of introductions; photo-language exercise; paired "facing circles" discussion around 3 guiding questions
11:00 – 11:50	Part 2 – Observations from participants' own contexts	Identify good and bad reasons for involving citizens in climate policy; identify effective ways to include citizens	Small-group discussion on good/bad reasons (4 rounds); "Moving Debate": participants position themselves on a 1–5 scale in response to 4 questions on when, at what scale, and with whom to associate citizens, including

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Time	Activity	Objective	Format
			inclusion of under-represented groups
11:50 – 12:00	Break	—	—
12:00 – 12:30	Part 3 – Sharing lived experience	Reflect on participants' own past initiatives: success conditions, benefits, concrete examples, limits, areas for improvement	Trios (interviewer / interviewee / notetaker) using a structured reflection sheet
12:30 – 13:30	Lunch	—	Courtyard
13:30 – 14:30	Visit of the Académie du Climat	Guided visit and Q&A on civic engagement and climate, with the Académie's director and team	Guided tour + open discussion
14:30 – 15:20	Success stories	Share a challenge successfully overcome in involving citizens (or specifically vulnerable/under-represented groups) in climate-related work	Paired storytelling (interviewer/interviewee), then transmission in groups of 4 to identify success factors; brief plenary share-out
15:20 – 15:30	Break	—	—
15:30 – 16:30	Part 4 – Problem-solving & solutions	Collectively find solutions to challenges raised earlier in the day	Troïka Consulting in groups of 3–4 (at least 3 rounds), collective share-out of key takeaways
16:30 – 16:50	Debrief	Reflect on the day's key learnings and identify concrete next steps	"Emotion wheel" in small groups; plenary sharing of highlights and action points
16:50 – 17:00	Closing	Explain how the day's insights will feed into the project's final deliverable	Presentation of next steps for Citizens4Climate; participants complete the Cit4Climate and EU surveys
17:00 – 17:15	Wrap-up	—	Room clean-up

Facilitation Approach

- **Different group sizes:** the day deliberately alternated between formats, from pairs, trios, small groups of 3-4, and full group discussions.
- **Inclusive facilitation**: exercises combined verbal and non-verbal entry points (e.g. photo-language, physical positioning in the “moving debate”) so participants less comfortable speaking up early could still engage and contribute.
- **Safe space and dialogue creation**: Most exercises used timed, structured turn-taking (e.g. one minute per person per round) to ensure that every participant, not just the most vocal, had a guaranteed moment to speak. The day closed with a dedicated collective feedback moment. Consent was systematically requested before recording discussions.

Inclusivity Measures in Practice

- **Accessibility (venue, language)**: the event was held on the ground floor of a building in central Paris, easily reachable by public transport; a vegan lunch option was provided (no meat and only local fresh produce); and all sessions, presentations and materials (slides, printed handouts) were delivered in French with easily readable, if not minimal written content.
- **Moderation style**: the day relied primarily on structured, self-directed group activities with clear written instructions, rather than heavy top-down facilitation. Only three

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facilitators supported more than 20 participants, focusing mainly on timekeeping and ensuring exercises ran to plan. The goal was to ensure collective ownership of the takeaways and lessons learned by the group itself.

Results and Outcomes

Although participants arrived with different backgrounds and lived experiences (national conventions, local citizens' assemblies, student-led advocacy, neighbourhood-level mediation), each activity block aimed at identifying convergent challenges and work together to find solutions, forming general best practices.

Before diving into specific challenges and solutions, participants converged on **why citizens should be involved in climate policy-making**: greater legitimacy and trust, better decisions through collective intelligence, stronger social cohesion across otherwise disconnected groups, citizen agency, skill-building, and policies that better reflect lived reality. But, they also flagged how participation can be misused: as a communication exercise ("greenwashing"/"demo-washing"), a way to validate decisions already made, a box-ticking exercise with no real mandate, or a means of steering which voices get heard.

On **who to include**, no consensus emerged: one view held that only directly-concerned citizens should weigh in, since broadening the pool dilutes those most affected (illustrated by the Notre-Dame-des-Landes referendum, where widening the vote diluted local residents' voice), while the opposing view held that everyone is eventually concerned through ripple effects, and that the real safeguard against dilution is facilitation quality ("bienveillance"), not the perimeter chosen. This is the point where both camps converged.

On **when to associate citizens**, there was near-consensus that it can almost always be done, with the real question being degree and timing rather than principle, tempered by caution against "consultation fatigue" without follow-through, and a reminder that some technical points still benefit from expert-only discussion.

Main challenges identified across projects:

- **Weak or absent follow-up**: the most recurrent challenge across nearly all projects is that participants rarely learn what became of their contributions, undermining trust for future cycles.
- **Time constraints**: processes are often too short to properly deepen complex topics, creating imbalance between theoretical input and actual deliberation.
- **Legal/administrative ambiguity around compensation**: risk that participants receiving compensation could lose other social benefits above a certain threshold.
- **Difficulty renewing and diversifying participants** across successive project cycles: the same people tend to show up repeatedly.
- **Uneven institutional buy-in**: some internal services declined to support mobilisation because they saw the initiative as "someone else's project" rather than their own, and more broadly, elected officials and operational/administrative services aren't always aligned.
- **Persistent "entre-soi"** (in-group dynamics) even when the explicit intent was inclusion.
- **Scope too broad or poorly framed**, creating confusion between what's genuinely open for discussion and what's already fixed.

- **Difficulty moving from individual awareness to collective action.**
- **Unequal ability to speak**: reproducing pre-existing inequalities of expression, with more dominant voices crowding out others, especially acute in large or mixed groups.

Identified guidelines to overcome the identified challenges:

- **Go toward people, don't wait for them**: field presence, trusted intermediaries (outreach workers, neighbourhood mediators, existing local associations), and starting the relationship before the "official" process begins.
- **Build trust through recognition**: compensation, formal frameworks (e.g. a "work contract" for participants), and early team building to establish legitimacy before deliberation starts.
- **Frame positively and locally**: presenting climate issues in a way that's positive, non-moralising, and grounded in the audience's own reality, rather than imposing an external framing (e.g. reverse expertise method).
- **Stay flexible mid-process**: willingness to expand scope or add workshops as new issues surface, rather than rigidly sticking to the original plan.
- **Clarify scope and margin for manoeuvre upfront**: define what's genuinely negotiable versus fixed before opening the debate ("don't have the debate before the debate").
- **Separate dialogue from decision-making when conflict is high**: for polarised topics, creating a space explicitly without decision-making stakes can free up listening capacity and reduce conflict over time, even if it takes longer to produce results.
- **Train the internal side too**: elected officials and administrative staff need training on participatory methods, not just citizens. Internal buy-in is as critical as external mobilisation.
- **Guarantee and communicate the link to decision-making**: be capable, systematically, of reporting back on what was done with citizen input, regardless of the outcome.
- **Ensure continuity over time**: document throughout the process (not retrospectively), and actively manage institutional memory across staff turnover and successive project cycles.
- **Let method and facilitation quality do the safeguarding work**: rather than over-engineering who's "allowed" to participate, invest in facilitation that can hold space for both broad and targeted participation without diluting the most concerned voices.

Taken together, these guidelines are largely context-agnostic rather than specific to the French setting, making them directly relevant to Citizens4Climate's transnational ambition and well-suited for comparison across the consortium's other events. It is also worth noting that most of them address *sustaining* engagement over time (accountability, continuity, internal buy-in), rather than simply *triggering* initial participation, reflecting the day's own emphasis on what happens after the first spark of interest.

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Risk Management

1. High representation of institutionalised processes

Description: A large share of the experiences shared during the day came from large-scale, institutionally-led processes, rather than smaller-scale, informal or grassroots initiatives.

Relevance: This carried a risk of skewing the day's tone toward professionalised, technical narratives that can be intimidating for participants with different profiles or less experience of these processes, including younger participants or those newer to the field.

Mitigation measures: The day's small-group and trio formats guaranteed every participant equal speaking time regardless of institutional weight, rather than defaulting to a panel/plenary format that tends to favour more practiced institutional speakers. Groups were deliberately mixed across organisation types rather than clustered by profile.

Evaluation: In fact, several less institutional or younger participants appeared comfortable in being vocal: a positive signal for the design of the event. For future editions, recruitment could more deliberately target grassroots and less-institutionalised initiatives to ensure a 50% balance.

2. Emphasis on citizen participation in general

Description: A times, discussions would heavily centre on citizen participation and deliberative democracy in a general sense, due to the profiles of participants in the room, rather than consistently interrogating climate topics.

Relevance: Since Citizens4Climate's mandate is specifically about climate democracy, a day that drifts toward participation-in-general risked diluting the project's distinctive added value and weakening the climate-specific depth of what ultimately feeds into the Booklet and the Review Event.

Mitigation measures: Still, the day's framing was anchored in climate through the venue itself (the Académie du Climat visit and keynote) and through climate-specific prompts within otherwise general exercises (the photo-language question on "an image you associate with climate," the “moving debate” explicit reference to climate policies, and the success-story prompt inviting examples "ideally on a climate topic"). Beyond framing, participant selection itself was climate-anchored: all invited practitioners and organisations were working on climate-related projects, ensuring the underlying experience being drawn on was climate-relevant even where the exercises' prompts allowed for broader participation examples.

Evaluation: While every participant's own current work was climate-related, the specific examples and testimonies they chose to share skewed toward general democratic-participation cases, with climate more often present as backdrop than as the central lens of analysis. This is flagged as a genuine lesson learned: future editions could more explicitly require a climate-framing element in every shared testimony or success story, rather than leaving the choice of example open.

3. Paris / Île-de-France-centric participation

Description: Most participants and the initiatives they represented were based in Paris or the wider Île-de-France region due to logistical and financial reasons.

Relevance: Given the project's ambition to capture experiences representative of France's diverse realities (rural, peri-urban, and other regions facing different practical and political constraints) a Paris-centric event risked producing lessons and a case study skewed toward

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metropolitan, well-resourced participatory practice, missing perspectives from less-resourced or geographically distant territories.

Mitigation measures: Outreach did manage to seek and secure participation from outside the city of Paris itself, including one participant from Laval. Within the Île-de-France region itself, outreach also prioritised participants from areas generally considered as less economically advantaged, thus partially offsetting the region's geographic concentration with a degree of socio-economic diversity within it.

Evaluation: Full national diversity was not achievable within the practical and financial constraints of a single one-day gathering in Paris. This is best understood as a structural constraint to flag at project level, rather than something resolvable within this event alone

Communication & Dissemination

Outreach ahead of the event combined targeted and open channels: personalised emails to identified contacts and partner organisations, an open invitation via our newsletter, and collaboration with the Académie du Climat to reach their own network (see Target Group(s) above).

On the day itself, communication materials, including the slide deck and printed handouts, were deliberately kept simple and low-text, prioritising accessibility and readability over dense content, and displayed the relevant EU and project logos throughout in line with the project's visibility requirements.

Fig. 1 - Examples of slides used during the event

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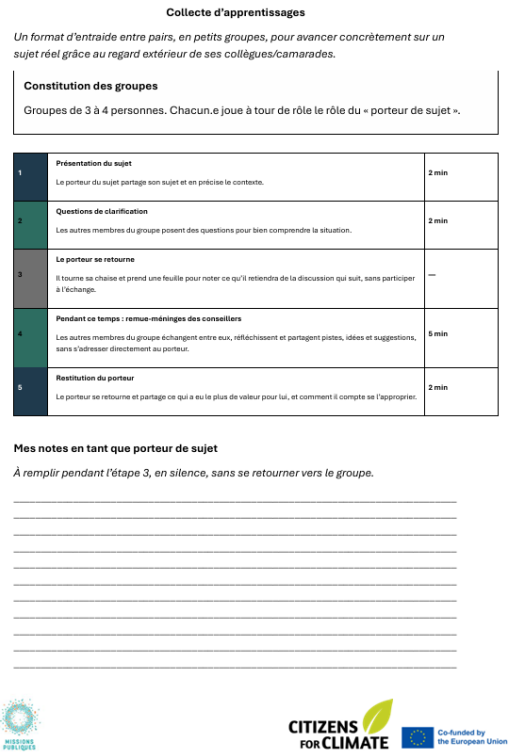

Collecte d'apprentissages

Un format d'entraide entre pairs, en petits groupes, pour avancer concrètement sur un sujet réel grâce au regard extérieur de ses collègues/camarades.

Constitution des groupes

Groupes de 3 à 4 personnes. Chacun.e joue à tour de rôle le rôle du « porteur de sujet ».

1	**Présentation du sujet** Le porteur du sujet partage son sujet et en précise le contexte.	2 min
2	**Questions de clarification** Les autres membres du groupe posent des questions pour bien comprendre la situation.	2 min
3	**Le porteur se retourne** Il tourne sa chaise et prend une feuille pour noter ce qu'il retiendra de la discussion qui suit, sans participer à l'échange.	—
4	**Pendant ce temps : remue-méninges des conseillers** Les autres membres du groupe échangent entre eux, réfléchissent et partagent pistes, idées et suggestions, sans s'adresser directement au porteur.	5 min
5	**Restitution du porteur** Le porteur se retourne et partage ce qui a eu le plus de valeur pour lui, et comment il compte se l'approprier.	2 min

Mes notes en tant que porteur de sujet

À remplir pendant l'étape 3, en silence, sans se retourner vers le groupe.

Fig. 2 - Example of note-taking sheet provided to participants to discuss and collect best practices

- French report shared to the participants;
- Published online on https://particip-action.org
- The European conclusions will be shared online, with participants and all persons invited to the French workshop.
-

Conclusion

Beyond the specific lessons gathered, the day itself modelled what it argued for: a space where institutional actors, associations and citizens could speak as peers rather than through their usual hierarchies. Whether these connections and conclusions translate into sustained collaboration will be a real test of the event's impact.

List of projects/organisations represented:

- Banlieues Climat
- Convention Local pour le Climat Est Ensemble
- City of Romainville - Citizens' Convention Project: Guidelines and the Sharing of Public Spaces
- City of Vincennes - Local sustainable development plan with residents, elected representatives, community organisations and young people
- Plaine Commune - Organising a citizens' assembly to reduce energy consumption at a community level
- Corbeilles Essonne
- City of Créteil - Children's Town Council
- Local student conventions on sustainable food (Paris & Lyon) : Les Conventions Etudiantes Locales de l'Alimentation Durable (CELAD) de Paris et Lyon | RESES
- French electric network: Public consultation on RTE's Ten-Year Network Development Plan (SDDR)
- CNDP - National Commission for Public Debate
- CESE - French Economic, Social and Environmental Council
- DRIEAT - Regional and Interdepartmental Directorate for the Environment, Planning and Transport. Runs the Particip'Action network for public engagement.

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