



## **European Green Deal: Social and economic inclusiveness so that none is left behind**

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### **Introduction**

The Green Deal (2019) is the European Union's strategy to reach the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (2016) to help shape climate-resilient solutions together with European Climate Law (2021), to reach climate neutrality by 2050. These initiatives set the target to reduce net greenhouse gas emissions by at least 55% by 2035. Efforts are within the scope to create a sustainable future for next generations<sup>1</sup>.

Assessed will be the transition to a greener future that sustains social and economic inclusion through small and medium-sized enterprises (SME's) and if they are equally prepared for the green transition as corporate-level enterprises; civic engagement and the Green Deal, and the space for a regenerative transition that encompasses social and economic cohesion.

Findings are based on data collected to date that provides insight for recommendations. The survey questions explore whether the European Green Deal promotes inclusiveness and, if it effectively empowers local and regional governments to promote social and economic cohesion <sup>2</sup>

Seventy-seven respondents from the twenty-seven European Union Member States participated in the survey; Responses centered on four areas: political support, economic unity, social preparedness, and technological adaptation.

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<sup>1</sup> Axelle Griffon, The Green Deal Implementation in: The Council of European Municipalities and Regions

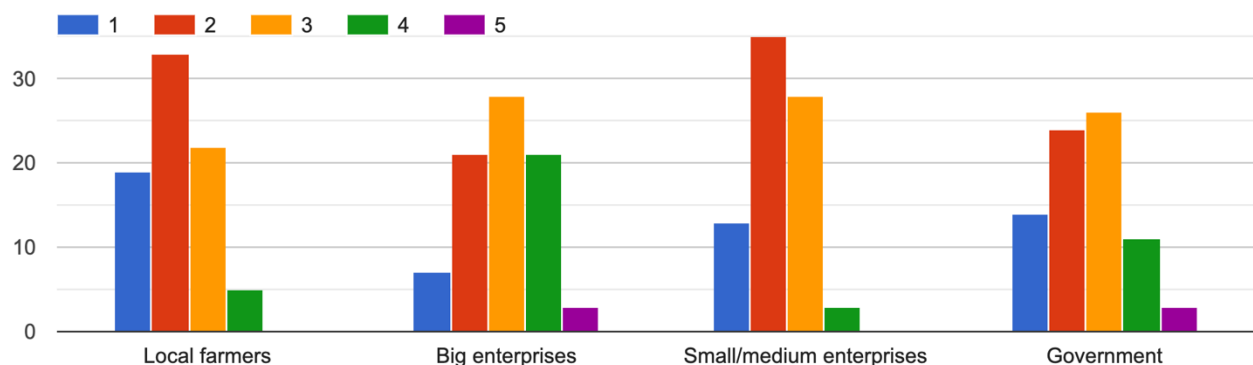
<sup>2</sup> Christina Giannou Farm to Fork: EU's Strategy for a Sustainable Food System in *HAPSC Policy Briefs Series Volume 3 – Issue 1 June 2022*



**Green Deal understanding:** Participants showed moderate discernment of the Green Deal (39% rated their knowledge as 4/5). Awareness of policies like the EU Energy Taxation Directive is low (35.1% rated their knowledge as 1/5).

**Government Preparedness:** Governments are perceived as moderately prepared for green transition (26% rated government readiness as 3/5), local officials are seen as less active (39% rated local central officials as 2/5). A participant from Denmark, variable environmental organisation answered, “...that why we need an over-national unit like the EU to run the green transition.”

2. Please rate how prepared the relevant actors / systems are for the green transition with 1 being not at all prepared and 5 being very prepared



**Policy Implementation:** Cultural traits and regional differences (i.e., northern vs. southern, and eastern Europe) influence acceptance, and implementation of green policy strategies. A respondent from Austria, variable environmental organisation noted, “It has a big effect because in different cultures, clean drinking water, intact nature, ecosystems, etc. have different values.”

**Political Will:** Concerns over political commitment to enforce green policies especially in regions with industrial or fossil fuel dependencies. A participant from Poland, variable domestic politics (local government official) responded, “Coal-based economies have been a deal-breaker for years because of the fossil fuel paradigm as the basis for security and economics.”



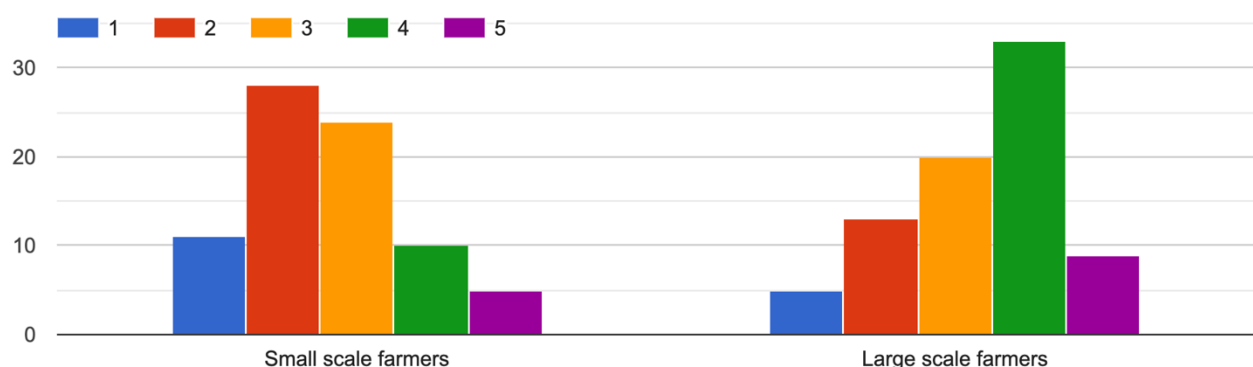
**Business contingency:** Large enterprises are more prepared, (28% rated them as 4/5), while small/medium enterprises and local farmers less prepared (35% rated SMEs as 2/5, and 33% rated local farmers as 2/5). A Spanish participant answered, “Northern countries are more receptive than Southern nations.” A Greek surveyee, professional variable small/medium enterprise (SME) stated, “Culture affects in terms of how things used to work and the notion that Greek stakeholders have that everyone is corrupted and there is no need to try for anything.”

**Economic Sectors of Concern:** Transportation, energy, manufacturing, and water consumption are areas of concern.

**Green Job Development:** Much skepticism on the readiness of actors to provide future jobs and training, (34% rated SMEs as 2/5, and 26% rated central governments as 3/5). A participant from Bulgaria noted, “The impact of the regional culture on the green transition, which is deeply embedded in society and thus play a fundamental role for the people, is combined with signs of skepticism about the new and the unknown and at the same time creates preconditions for the implementation of modern and effective solutions and upgrading the current model.”

**Funding and Investment:** Need for increased investment in clean fuel energy was rated as disappointing by 23.4% of respondents.

9. In your view, are small and large-scale farmers interested in transitioning their produce through research and innovation technologies? With 1 being not at all and 5 a lot.





**Cultural Traits:** Traditions, education levels, and openness to change vary across regions which affects implementation of sustainable practices. A respondent from Romania, professional category farmers union noted, *“It is a matter of education! The poorer the country, the more affected this concern of going green.”* A participant from the same country, professional indicator environmental organisation commented, *“Acceptance of green policies depends on the education curriculum.”* A respondent from Romania, and professional variable political (EU) – Member of the European Parliament (MEP) expressed, *“To a small to medium degree.”*

**Public Awareness:** A clear need to upgrade Green Deal communication, education, and its benefits.

A respondent from Romania in the professional entry environmental organisation articulated, *‘In my opinion, cultural traits play an important role in the green transition. As for Romania, we are a country that has had a communist regime for 42 years, which has produced significant changes in the culture and mentality of the population. Many good measures implemented at that time by force (such as saving resources, recycling) tend to be rejected today, being associated with that very difficult period. At the same time, the excessive promotion of consumerism, the need to recover some stages lost in that period and the acute need for economic growth often determine actions that affect the social and environmental environment and slow down the transition to sustainable development. Unfortunately, environmental protection is not a priority in Romania, neither in the public agenda, nor among the companies and the population...’* An Austrian respondent, domestic politics (local government official) remarked, *‘...Cultures where the environment plays a central role, may be more effective in the transition.’* Someone from Belgium, professional field variable political (EU) – Member of the European Parliament (MEP) commented, *“Especially the degree in which societies are open to change will play an important role.”* A respondent from Austria, entry small/medium enterprise (SME) articulated, *“If people have learned in the past to act as an society (example: Germany, Sweden etc.) it will affect the green transition very positive.”* A participant from Germany stated, *“A lot. The European cultural differences between north, south and east needs to be taken into account as green transition may perceived completely differently (in terms of health, economic motives, national and political social perceptions).”* A surveyee from the Netherlands, small/medium enterprise (SME) noted, *“By being reluctant to change as a way of protecting*



*their existence.*” A participant from Greece, professional variable domestic politics (local government official) expressed, ‘...*Cultural traits affect a lot green transition because people are reluctant to learn new things,*’.

**Consumer Behavior:** Cultural habits, such as overconsumption and reliance on cars, are barriers to the green transition. A respondent from France stated, “*Culture is something very important. The importance of the car for people, men in particular, is very high. People with money never take the public transportation, etc.*” A surveyee from Greece and professional variable political (EU) – Member of the European Parliament (MEP) responded, “...*Green deal requires transformation of the consumer’s model.*” A participant from Latvia and professional entry domestic politics (local government official) underlined, “*Traditions play crucial role in transition. Culture shows most ways of living and consumption.*”

**Generational Differences:** Younger generations are more willing to embrace green transitions, while older ones resist change due to traditional mindsets.

A participant from Greece, small/medium enterprise, stated, “*They affect a lot the green transition. Regarding green transition, we have to look back in the past and in local cultural traits of the past in order to plan a green future. Our ancestors were thinking and applying much more ethical and green methods in their everyday life. Maybe have to reborn their way of thinking.*” A respondent from Cyprus, professional field environmental organisation stated, ‘... *it’s about the values you are taught at home and the way it transforms from one generation to the next through adaptation and external forces acting against it so it can work both ways (for example maybe esp. under economical situations etc).*’ “*It is more about ethics than culture.*” A respondent from France expressed, “*Do we need a transition or do we need to retake slow modes of production?*” A respondent from Italy and professional entry large enterprise/corporation said, “*The new generations of developed countries will make a difference.*”

**Clean Energy Technologies:** The adoption of clean fuel energy is rated as rather disappointing by 23.4% of participants, indicating that there is a need for technological innovation and deployment.

**Transportation Technologies:** Rail and ocean freight are rated as the most important means of transporting goods (27% rated ocean freight as 5/5, and 24% rated road freight as 5/5), suggesting a shift toward more sustainable transport methods.



**Food Technology:** The Green Deal's transformation in food technology is seen as moderately effective for both small and large-scale farmers (31% rated it 3/5 for small-scale farmers, and 29% rated it 3/5 for large-scale farmers).

**GMOs and Innovation:** Respondents feel reluctant about the health and environmental impacts, 25% rated their effect on the environment's health as 5/5 (most harmful).

## Conclusion

There is awareness on Green Deal policies with the exception of the EU Energy Taxation Directive. Weaknesses lie in local governance and implementation. Top-down approaches are problematic; Local and regional actors are needed for implementation of green initiatives due to their understanding of local communities.

Enhanced deployment of energy resources and modernification of infrastructure targeted towards a climate neutral grid needs less nationalisation; A Polish participant expressed, '*coal-based economies being the deal-breaker...*'; An Austrian surveyee further underlined, '*clean drinking water...*' and, '*...different values,*' would help a green transition. Provisions for financial incentives to support SMEs, and local farmers to sustainable practices, investments in green job development, and skills training require a decentralised model; A participant from Greece stated, '*...Greek stakeholders have that everyone is corrupted and there is no need to try for anything.*' Regarding projects and funds, local and regional governments are referred to indirectly by central governments,<sup>3</sup> thus designing and managing programmes centrally, leaving local and regional governments with inadequate education, and training; This leads to unused funds for the green transition, and stagnant green growth in southern, and eastern Europe. A bottom-up approach is required for these authorities who better understand the needs of their local communities, and is key to meet climate goals while maintaining social and economic cohesion.

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<sup>3</sup> Technical Chamber of Greece, in: Green Deal '23 Greece



Necessary are targeted campaigns to address cultural barriers that will further promote sustainable behaviors.

Also, more focus on educating younger generations to drive long-term change, as respondent from Italy noted,

*‘The new generations of developed countries will make a difference.’*

Important is the accelerated development and deployment of clean energy technologies. This requires better education, training and infrastructure. Further promotion of sustainable transportation methods like rail and ocean freight are necessary if, each Member State is to meet the climate grid by 2035. Strategy reforms need the presence of local and regional authorities in the decision making processes.

Fine-tuning EU’s Green Deal strategy will assist the green transition and, deepen relations with democracies that will advance multifaceted sustainable support and cooperation on emerging global issues where EU Member States, with local and regional authorities can share views to support the European Union's target to become the first continent to reach a carbon-free grid by 2035, zero net emissions by 2050, and Europe’s pledge that no one be left behind.