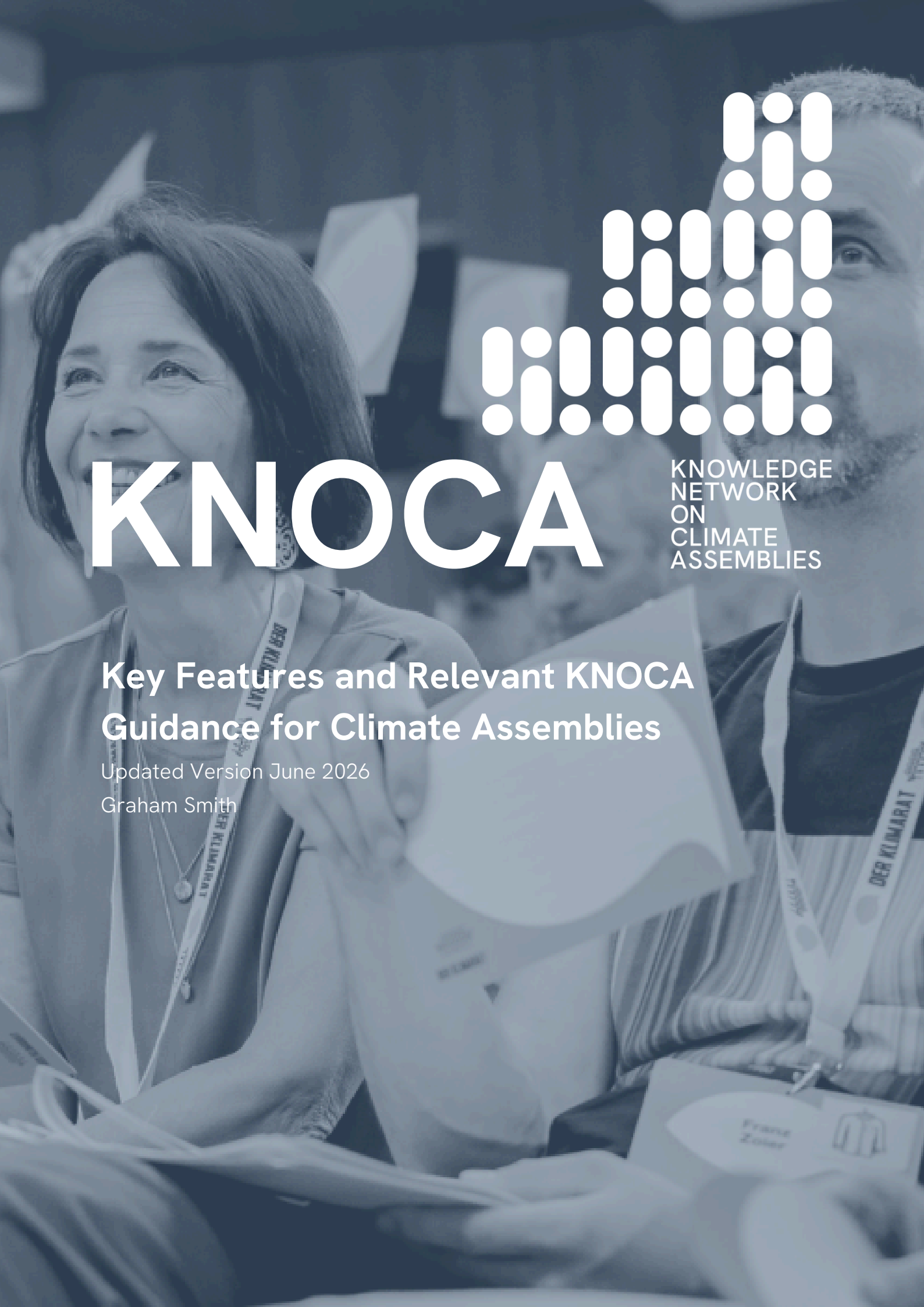

KNOCA

KNOWLEDGE NETWORK ON CLIMATE ASSEMBLIES

Key Features and Relevant KNOCA Guidance for Climate Assemblies

Updated Version June 2026

Graham Smith

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This document draws heavily on Chapter 2 of We Need To Talk About Climate: How Citizens Assemblies Can Help Us Solve the Climate Crisis (open access book and audiobook) and KNOCA Guidance, Briefings and Workshops and Learning Calls.

Executive summary

This document offers an overview of the key features of climate assemblies. Where relevant, it links to existing Guidance and Briefings produced by the Knowledge Network on Climate Assemblies (KNOCA) and other organisations. While the document primarily draws from the experience of national level climate assemblies, it is relevant for local, regional or transnational assemblies. The aim of the Guidance document is to ensure that those considering commissioning, organising, promoting or evaluating an assembly are aware of the implications of different design choices.

What is KNOCA?

KNOCA is a European-based network that aims to improve the commissioning, design, implementation, impact and evaluation of climate assemblies, using evidence, knowledge exchange and dialogue. KNOCA brings together policy officials, practitioners, civil society organisations and academics. You can join KNOCA at https://knoca.eu/.

What is a climate assembly?

A climate assembly brings together everyday people selected by democratic lottery to learn, deliberate and come to recommendations on aspects of the climate crisis.

The terms 'climate assembly' and 'citizens' assembly' are used in different ways by different people, which can get somewhat confusing. When KNOCA uses the term 'climate assembly' two elements are critical:

- A focus on the climate and ecological crisis. We include assemblies that primarily focus on issues such as biodiversity loss as well as other areas such as transport or urban planning, but where climate is a key consideration.
- The combination of democratic lottery, deliberation and collective decision making. We include processes that go by the name of citizens' juries, citizens' panels and consensus conferences. Where assemblies end and juries start is an unanswerable question because those terms have been used interchangeably. KNOCA's is a broad definition.

The 2020 OECD report Catching the Deliberative Wave: Innovative Citizen Participation and New Democratic Institutions provides a useful overview of the development of this type of participatory process.

Around 200 climate assemblies have taken place across Europe – most in the last six years. The majority of these assemblies have been organised at municipal level. A dozen or so have taken place at national level, along with transnational experiments at European and global levels.

Most assemblies are commissioned by public bodies, but a growing number are organised by civil society organisations and internally by institutions such as universities and pension schemes.

Most assemblies are ad hoc: they take place over a limited period of time. But a small number of permanent climate assemblies have been established. They share many of the same features as ad hoc assemblies, but they take place on a regular (typically annual) basis and are more integrated into climate governance.

While climate assemblies share a common basic structure (democratic lottery + deliberation), plenty of variation happens in practice. Variation in political context. Variation in who commissions. Variation in remit. Variation in size, scale and budget. Variation in governance arrangements. Variation in how the work of the assembly is structured and facilitated. Variation in engagement with wider publics. Variation in number of recommendations. Variation in what is done to implement or make use of recommendations.

It is a mistake to think that all climate assemblies are the same.

Key features of climate assemblies explained

Purpose	Why are assemblies organised?
Commissioner	Which institutions commission assemblies?
Remit	What is the assembly's task?
Commitment to Respond	How will the commissioner respond and when?
Size, Scale and Budget	How many members, how much time and how much does it cost?
Democratic Lottery	How diverse is the membership?
Governance	How is the integrity of the assembly ensured?
Delivery Organisations	Who designs and facilitates the process?
Work Programme	How is the work of the assembly organised?
Evidence Base	How to ensure relevant and balanced information?
Facilitation	How is the relationship between members and with witnesses managed?
Developing Recommendations	How are proposals developed?
Decision Making and Assembly Reports	How do members make decisions and present their recommendations?
Communication	How to create resonance with broader publics?
Public Engagement (including Children and Young People)	How to enable the public and interest groups to contribute?
Official Response	How does the commissioner respond (if at all)?
Monitoring and Oversight	What structures are put in place to scrutinise the action of the commissioner and other stakeholders?
Evaluation	How to evaluate the assembly process?

Purpose

The primary purpose of assemblies tends to be to inform government policy making. Most have been organised by public authorities to contribute to the development of climate change mitigation policy, although a small number have also considered adaptation policy and strategy. Some are timed to provide input to specific policy processes. For example, the Danish Climate Assembly was organised to inform the annual Climate Action Plan process; the Luxembourg Climate Citizens' Council to provide input into the new version of the Integrated National Energy and Climate Plan. In contrast, Climate Assembly UK's primary objective was to inform parliamentary scrutiny of government policy and Finland's Citizens' Jury is an example of a scrutiny body which appraised 14 government policy proposals.

The small but growing number of civil society-commissioned assemblies have different purposes. Some are organised to influence government policy and/or to demonstrate the potential of climate assemblies. For example, the German Citizens' Assembly on Climate was organised to put pressure on political parties to commit to more stringent action on climate during the federal election campaign and subsequent government coalition negotiations and to put pressure on future governments to organise climate assemblies. The Norwegian Future Panel was organised in part to contribute to public debate about the future of the country's oil and gas fund.

A trend of institutions organising assemblies internally is emerging – for example, university assemblies that bring together students and staff to consider climate action by the institution. A couple of pension funds have integrated assemblies to hear the considered voice of beneficiaries on sustainable investing. The Metropole of Lyon organised an assembly of its own public servants.

The extent to which assemblies are empowered, varies. The remit of the French Citizens' Convention for the Climate was to develop proposals that could be submitted to a referendum, vote in parliament or direct regulatory application. Most assemblies are more explicitly consultative in nature, providing recommendations to public authorities. A small number of Polish municipal assemblies have been empowered to make decisions, where the mayor has committed before the process begins to implement proposals where a near consensus is achieved within the assembly – over 80 per cent support amongst members.

Commissioner

Who commissions assemblies has a profound effect on their connection with, and influence on, policy and the political system more broadly. Most climate assemblies are commissioned by the political executive. For example, the French Citizens' Convention was commissioned by the President of the Republic, thus giving it a high political profile. The Luxembourg Climate Citizens' Council was commissioned by the Prime Minister.

In Ireland, governments propose assemblies, but their terms of reference are laid down by parliament, which then requires the government to take the lead in commissioning. It is the responsibility of the core executive to deliver. In Scotland, the parliament introduced an assembly within climate legislation, although in this case, it did not have the same degree of support from within the government as enjoyed in Ireland.

In Austria, Denmark and Spain, while the government made a formal commitment, particular ministries led the process. Ensuring whole government buy-in has often proven to be more difficult in such circumstances.

Climate Assembly UK (CAUK) is an unusual example as it was commissioned by six Parliamentary Select Committees to inform their work scrutinising government policy and action on climate across different policy areas. CAUK had no direct relationship with government.

Civil society can play a role in the commissioning of assemblies. The Austrian Citizens' Climate Assembly was commissioned in response to a petition from a citizens' initiative on climate protection. In Germany, Norway, Poland and the UK, national assemblies have been commissioned directly by civil society organisations as part of their campaign and advocacy strategies. For example, the People's Assembly for Nature in the UK was commissioned by three conservation organisations: the National Trust, Royal Society for the Protection of Birds (RSPB) and WWF. The Future Panel in Norway was commissioned by a consortium of seven civil society organisations: Save the Children, Norwegian Church Aid, LNU - The Norwegian Children and Youth Council, Caritas Norway, WWF, Langsikt and the Future in our Hands.

Remit

Climate assemblies work on a particular task that frames their learning, deliberation, and recommendations. Ensuring a clear and answerable question is critical if an assembly is to function effectively.

Climate assemblies are not asked to do the same things. Assemblies at national level have tended to be asked a broad question about climate policy, focusing primarily on mitigation, although the Scottish and Spanish assemblies also incorporated adaptation. The Polish and more recent Irish assemblies had tighter remits, respectively focusing on energy poverty and biodiversity loss.

The remit of a number of assemblies has related explicitly to national commitments under the UN Paris Agreement. For example, 'How can France cut greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions by at least 40 per cent by 2030 compared to 1990, in a spirit of social justice? In Austria, 'How to reach climate neutrality by 2040?' The German assembly made specific reference to how Germany can fulfil its contribution to the goals of the Paris Climate Agreement, limiting global warming to well below 2 degrees, and if possible, to 1.5 degrees.

In Scotland and Spain, the remits broadened further, creating the space for members to deliberate on adaptation: 'How should Scotland change to tackle the climate emergency in an effective and fair way?' and 'A safer and fairer Spain in the face of climate change. How do we do it?'

Sub-national assemblies are more likely to have tighter remits to propose measures on specific policy areas, such as flooding, transport, air pollution and green areas.

Arguably the broadest remit is that of the Global Assembly that deliberated on the question 'How can humanity address the climate and ecological crisis in a fair and effective way?'

Relevant KNOCA guidance

KNOCA Quick Read Setting the Remit for Climate Assemblies
KNOCA Guidance Document Setting the Remit

Commitment to Respond

The commissioning body generally makes a public statement when establishing the assembly as to how it will respond to the recommendations. This will typically include a time frame within which it will consider the assembly's report and provide a public response to how it will deal with each of the recommendations.

In rare cases a legal commitment exists for a response from the commissioner to the report and recommendations. In the Brussels Capital Region, the government is required to provide an initial response after three months and then a more detailed response after a year. In Scotland, the law required that the government must respond within six months. The assembly's report was tabled in the Scottish Parliament in June 2021. Six months later the Scottish Government published a detailed 162-page response to the assembly's 81 recommendations for action. In Ireland the parliamentary regulation for the Citizens' Assembly on Biodiversity Loss states that the report must be considered by a joint committee of both houses of parliament, followed by a government response. No specific dates are fixed.

In most other circumstances, a less formalised promise is made to the assembly to respond within a specified time period – often this is agreed when the remit is set at the start of the process. Some care has to be taken about clarity of commitment. When establishing the French Citizens' Convention for Climate, the French President stated that there would be 'no filter' to the transmission of the recommendations to the Parliament (law), to the general population (referendum) or for direct regulatory application. This commitment helped raise the profile of the Convention, although different interpretations emerged as to what 'no filter' means in practice and to whether the President kept his commitment.

Relevant KNOCA guidance

KNOCA Quick Read Follow-Up to Climate Assemblies
KNOCA Briefing Designing the Follow-up to Climate Assemblies

Size, Scale and Budget

The main determining factor for the size and scale of assemblies is available resources. Some commissioners are simply more generous with budgets and other resources such as secondment of staff. Budgets have varied wildly.

The assembly that has outstripped all others is the French Citizens' Convention with a budget just shy of €7 million. Austria had a budget of around €2 million, with Scotland coming in a little lower. The budget of the German Citizens' Assembly on Climate which was organised by civil society organisations was over €1.9 million, financed by donations and funding from foundations, including, the Schöpflin Foundation, Open Society Foundations, GLS Treuhand and the German Postcode Lottery Foundation. While Climate Assembly UK received limited funding from the parliamentary committees, most of the costs were covered by two philanthropic organisations: the Esmée Fairbairn Foundation and the European Climate Foundation. In Denmark, the budget was less than €100,000. In this case, the Danish Board of Technology (now Democracy x) was willing to take a hit on the budget as they wanted to make sure it went ahead. And in Finland, two academic research centres covered much of the costs of the national Citizens' Jury. This is not a sustainable approach in the long-term.

We have to be careful about making comparisons of budgets, because some costs may be hidden – for example, the salary costs of civil servants working on the project in Denmark. But this cannot explain the difference in budgets available between countries. The French and the Austrians could afford to bring the assembly together in person over a number of weekends and to dedicate sizeable proportions of their budget to communications. The Danes had to accept less in-person time for members and spent next to nothing on engaging the media.

National assemblies tend to aim for around 100 members. This is a symbolic figure that appears to resonate with policy makers. It has no particular statistical significance. The largest assembly to date is the Dutch Citizens' Assembly on the Climate with 175 members. The German Citizens' Assembly on Climate had 160 members, with the French Citizens' Convention at 150. The outlier is Finland's Citizens' Jury on Climate Actions involving only 33 people.

The big difference between assemblies is in the time that members spend together. Figure 1 below captures this variation. Their budget allowed the French to bring the 150 members to Paris across eight long weekends, including a weekend to review the government response.

The Scottish had a similar structure to the French. They could afford to work on this scale because the assembly took place entirely online during the Covid pandemic – travel and accommodation are some of the biggest items for assembly budgets. Both France and Scotland were able to accommodate an extra weekend at the request of the members. It is common for members to ask for more time, but rare to be able to do this because of scarce resources.

The idea of blended assemblies is catching on, with the four-weekend People's Assembly for Nature in the UK designed with face-to-face weekends at the start and end and its two middle weekends online. For the organisers, the in-person weekend at the start was particularly crucial to develop strong relationships between members and at the end to support collaborative recommendation-writing.

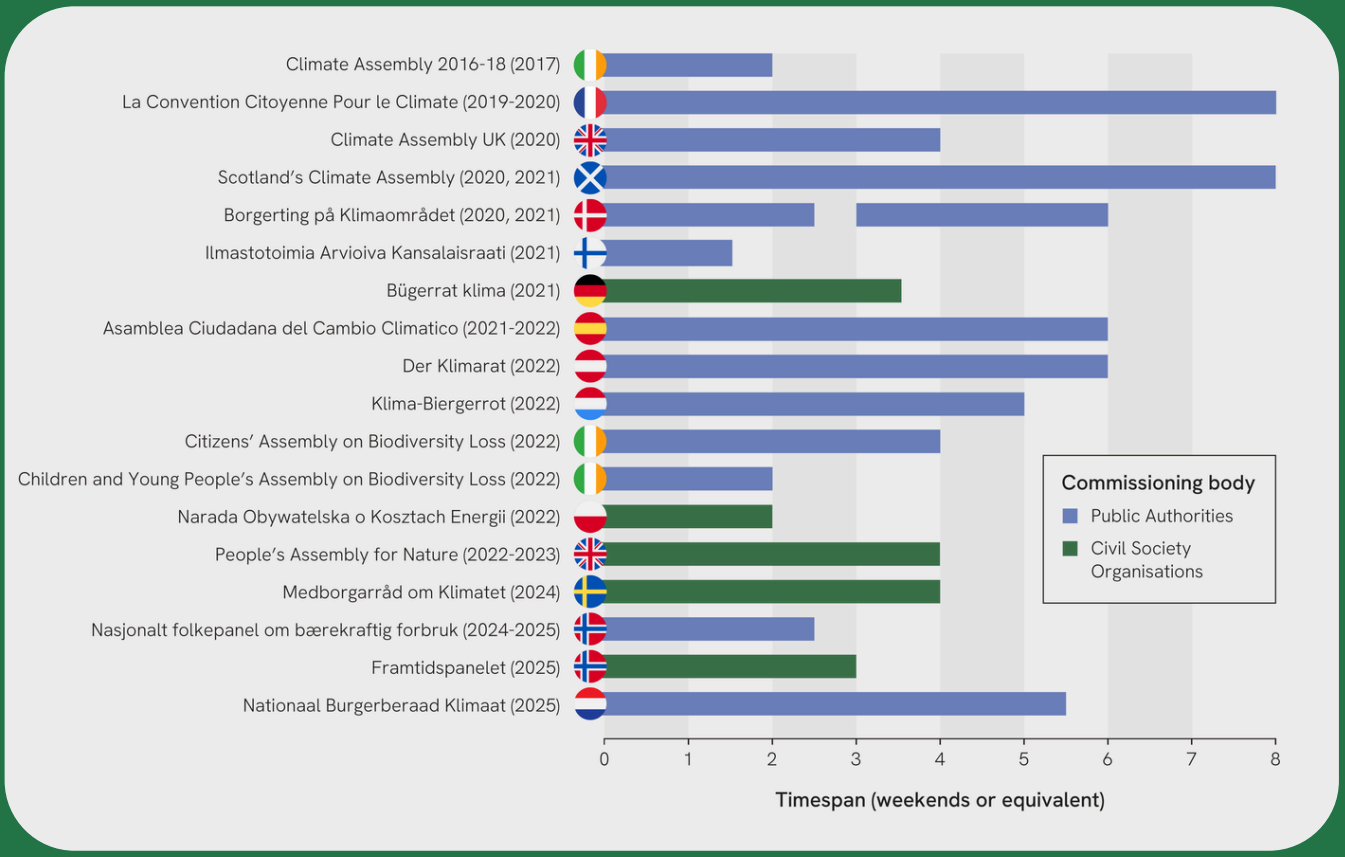

Figure 1. Variations in scale of national climate assemblies

The Danes were the first to run a two-phase process to model how a permanent national assembly might work. For the second phase, a third of the first assembly remained with the rest replaced. The limited budget meant that both phases combined two weekends with evening meetings.

These differences in size and scale are mirrored at sub-national levels, where the salient number is generally around 50 members meeting over a number of weekends, days or evenings. Again though, we can find bigger and longer processes and many that are much smaller and shorter – and every other combination. Costs are lower than at national level because it is rare for members to have to stay overnight. That said budgets vary considerably.

Most assemblies are one-off – they are not repeated. However, permanent climate assemblies have been established in Brussels Capital Region and Milan. This is part of a wider development of permanent citizens' assemblies.

Relevant KNOCA guidance

KNOCA Guidance Document What Next?: Embedding Permanent Climate Assembly Infrastructure (in preparation)
KNOCA Briefing Towards Permanent Climate Citizens' Assemblies: Learning from the Early Adopters

Democratic Lottery

Democratic lottery is a defining feature of assemblies. Everyone should have a chance to be selected, with assembly members resembling the diversity of the wider population from which they are drawn. It is this mirroring of the population that gives climate assemblies legitimacy. Anyone looking at the assembly should see someone like themselves in the room, not the usual vocal minority, politically confident or those with a strong political interest.

The accepted standard procedure for selection is a two-stage democratic lottery (see Figure 2). In the first stage, thousands of invitations are sent out to randomly selected addresses or phone numbers or in some instances, post codes are selected within which door-to-door recruitment takes place. In the second stage, members are randomly selected from the pool of volunteers using targets to ensure that the final assembly members resemble the wider population in relation to selected characteristics such as gender, age, education, geography – and increasingly attitude towards climate.

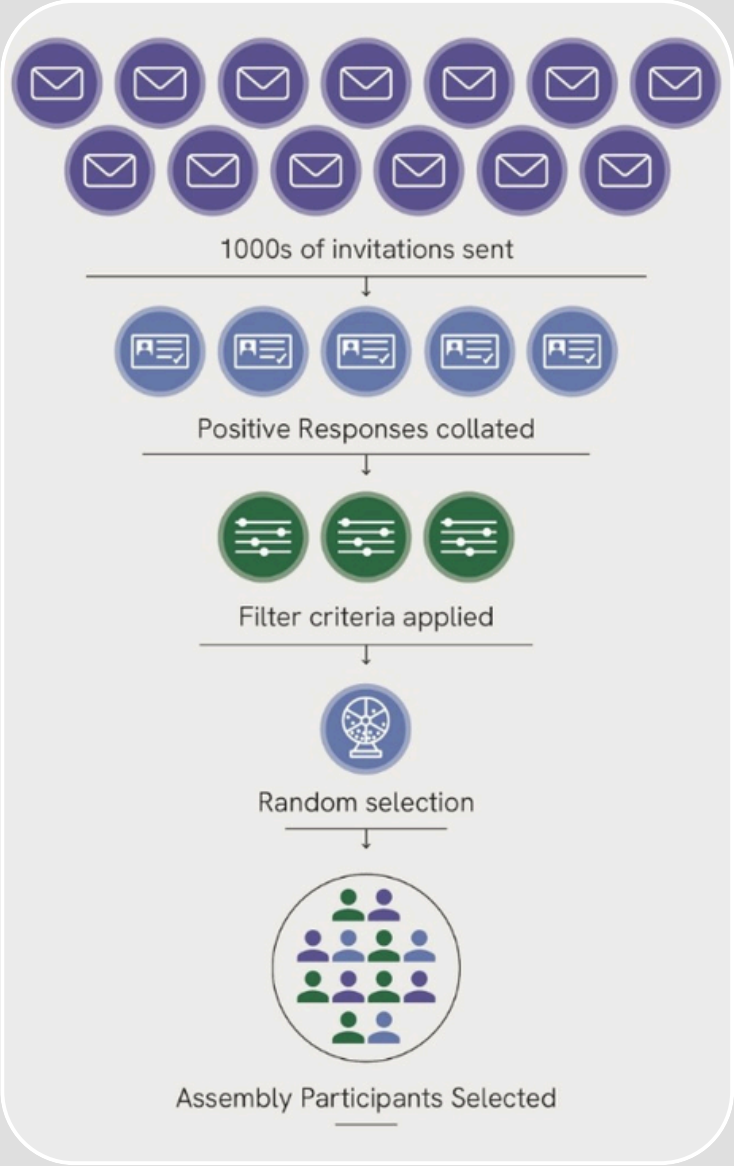

Figure 2. Two-stage democratic lottery

The recruitment process is often carried out by a specialist organisation (on occasion a government statistics agency). Open-access software is available to enable the application of selection criteria.

Once assembly members have been selected, resources are needed to ensure that they turn up on the day and stay committed to the process.

Assembly members are generally paid travel and, where necessary, accommodation along with an honorarium in recognition of the service they are providing – and as motivation to participate.

The Irish Citizens' Assembly 2016-2018 did not offer an honorarium and suffered higher levels of drop-out. Care support is made available to ensure the pool of volunteers is not just those with free time and no responsibilities. For online assemblies, resources need to be targeted to overcome aspects of the digital divide, ranging from access to equipment and the internet through to competence and confidence in using relevant technology and platforms.

Most assemblies have ensured that resources are made available to attract and retain impressively diverse groups of members and are transparent about the selection process and final make-up of the assembly. This is vital as a defence against the criticism that assemblies are full of climate activists and sympathisers.

Scotland's Climate Assembly selected 105 members applying the following criteria: age, gender, household income, ethnicity, geography, rurality, disability, and attitude towards climate change. All residents over sixteen were eligible. Seven replacements were added before the second weekend to cover for no-shows, and 102 citizens completed the seventh weekend.

In contrast, a small number of assemblies have faced challenges with retention. Out of the 99 members for each phase of the Danish assembly, in the first phase, only 59 voted. In the second phase, 68. This may well relate to the limited resources available to support members during the process compared to better funded processes.

Relevant KNOCA guidance

KNOCA Quick Read Recruiting Assembly Members by Democratic Lottery

Governance

Robust governance arrangements are critical for ensuring process integrity and a degree of independence from commissioning bodies and other vested interests. Integrity is achieved in large part by ensuring the commissioner, a variety of stakeholders and technical experts are integrated into the governing of the process, along with an independent design and delivery organisation with experience in designing and delivering deliberative processes (see Delivery Organisations below). Involving stakeholders can help ensure balance and has the additional benefit of buy-in to the process and a greater chance that they will take seriously any recommendations that are directed at their activities.

Two governance bodies are typically created, although in some settings, particularly at more local levels, they may be combined into a single body. An advisory stakeholder body is appointed to oversee the design and delivery of the assembly and to ensure it is informed by different social perspectives. Stakeholder groups include the representatives of different social, economic and environmental interests. For example, in Austria, its Stakeholder Advisory Board included representatives from the Chamber of Commerce, agriculture, labour unions, climate and social justice NGOs and youth. The Stewarding Group in Scotland also included members of political parties and experts in deliberative processes.

The evidence group, knowledge committee or scientific board is the second common governance body. It is made up of technical experts from different disciplines, usually from universities and sometimes civil society organisations. It provides advice on what evidence to present in the assembly and who should do it (see Evidence Base below). The members of the evidence group are often appointed with advice from the stakeholder group.

One of the differences in governance regimes is the extent to which the professional delivery organisation (see next section) takes a leading role in the project. For example, in Austria, the participation practitioners led the co-ordination of the design and delivery of the assembly, working closely in a core team with a public official from the responsible Ministry, two co-ordinators of the Scientific Board and colleagues involved in public communication and engagement. That kind of working arrangement is often replicated in municipal and regional level assemblies.

The Irish developed a slightly different model that was also adopted in Scotland. The lead body for assemblies in those nations is a secretariat of seconded public officials. It is their role to appoint and co-ordinate the work of the participation organisation, the stakeholder body and the evidence group. The Irish appoint an independent Chair to formally lead the process and act as a figurehead for media and public engagement. The Chair of the Irish citizens' assembly that dealt with climate was a judge; for the Citizens' Assembly on biodiversity loss, an academic. Scotland appointed two public figures to act as independent Chairs.

The central role of public officials in co-ordinating the process in Ireland and Scotland and in many local processes can lead to questions about the assembly's integrity. It is a difficult balancing act because the assembly can be criticised for a lack of independence and being too vulnerable to government interests. However, the close involvement of public officials can help smooth the process of integrating the assembly and its recommendations into the government's work. After all, they know how the system works and who to contact.

The French Citizens' Convention took a different approach to governance arrangements, although still embracing the principle of involving diverse interests and climate experts and ensuring oversight. A single Governance Committee was appointed to organise the assembly, with three independent Guarantors with high public profiles to ensure the independence and deliberative quality of the process. The members of the Governance Committee comprised major social interests, including representatives of the economic, social and environmental sectors, climate experts, participatory democracy experts and appointees of the Ministry. Two rotating members of the Convention also joined the Committee. The French rolled into one body the functions of the stakeholder and evidence groups along with participation expertise. But the Committee was not an advisory body as in other assemblies. Rather it had executive powers to design the Convention process. It did employ three professional participation organisations, but their role was more limited compared to other assemblies, and very much subservient to the Governance Committee. Once the assembly began its work, the Governance Committee established an evidence group to help it access relevant experts and advocates to deliver the Convention's programme of work.

The inclusion of assembly members in governance bodies has happened elsewhere, for example in Denmark, where the practice transferred from earlier experience with Consensus Conferences.

A final element of governance arrangements that is receiving more attention is arbitration. What happens if significant disagreements and conflict emerge within or between elements of the governance arrangements? Many assemblies do not codify the responsibilities of different bodies. Even with codification, the Polish assembly practitioner Marcin Gerwin has made a compelling case for appointing independent arbitrators, arguing that this role should be taken by respected academics who not directly involved in the assembly process. With so many interests in play, this is an important innovation in practice.

Relevant KNOCA guidance

KNOCA Quick Read Governance of Climate Assemblies
KNOCA Briefing Governance Structures and Practices of Climate Assemblies
KNOCA Quick Read Engaging Stakeholders in Climate Assemblies

Delivery Organisations

An organisation with experience in designing and delivering deliberative processes is typically appointed. A small industry of professional participation organisations has emerged across Europe over recent years that provides services to governments and other providers. Many are third sector, not-for-profits. Most are deeply committed to high standards of integrity, but as the demand increases, concerns have been raised that less scrupulous players are entering the market which may well effect quality.

Delivery organisations are generally independent organisations with expertise in the design and facilitation of participatory and deliberative processes, recruitment and sometimes communication. Sometimes more than one organisation will be commissioned with expertise in different aspects of assembly delivery. They are usually appointed through a tender process by the commissioning body or its alternate.

In most instances, the structure of the tenders gives the delivery organisations significant control over design and facilitation. The delivery organisations in Scotland and the UK were also responsible for recruitment, whereas this was undertaken by the Statistics Agency in Austria, Denmark and Luxembourg.

In other assemblies, the delivery organisation has worked more closely with the governance committee or secretariat to co-design the process. For example, in France, the Governance Committee established the parameters of the Convention, leaving the delivery organisations, to design the specifics and facilitate the sessions. In Scotland, the delivery organisations worked closely with the Secretariat in designing the process, while taking responsibility for facilitation.

Work Programme

Climate assemblies need to be organised so that they make best use of the time available to respond to the task. For those with broad remits, this has often involved breaking the assembly into workstreams to deal with different aspects of climate policy – in effect, creating smaller assemblies. This partly explains why a lively debate exists about whether assemblies would be more effective if they had tighter remits focused on particularly contentious aspects of the complex policy agenda rather than broad or comprehensive remits (see Remit above).

For most national assemblies, the members have learned about more general issues of climate change together and then are broken into randomly allocated workstreams. For example, Climate Assembly UK learned about the science and ethics of climate change as a full group and developed a series of guiding principles before breaking into three workstreams: how we travel; in the home; what we buy, and land use, food and farming. The full assembly reconvened to consider where electricity comes from and greenhouse gas removals. The French Citizens' Convention divided into five groups: transport; food; consumption; work and production; housing. Scotland broke into four workstreams: diet and lifestyle; homes and communities; work; and travel.

Denmark is unusual in the autonomy granted to members to decide the topics for its workstreams. In all the other assemblies, it is the designers of the process that have decided how to break climate change into topic areas. In the first phase of the Danish assembly, topics were decided through a brainstorming process after members of the assembly had learned about climate change and the challenges facing Denmark; in the second phase, an even more bottom-up process was adopted with members selecting priorities without prior expert input.

Most assemblies have been tasked with generating their own recommendations. CAUK and the Finnish Citizens' Jury are the exceptions to date. Each of CAUK's workstreams focused on evaluating three alternative scenarios and sets of policies. During the last session, the assembly worked as a whole on generating its own recommendations on electricity production, greenhouse gas removal and the impact of Covid-19. The Finnish Jury focused solely on evaluating the fairness and impact of 14 potentially controversial measures that the government was considering for its medium-term Climate Change Policy Plan – focusing on policy evaluation rather than policy development.

One of the challenges faced by organisers is how to ensure that the groups within and across different workstreams understand what others are doing and to ensure that proposals do not conflict with each other. Within workstreams, different groups will often share their draft proposals with other groups in order to get feedback, or in some instances will rotate who is working on particular proposals. Assemblies have tried different approaches to develop learning and feedback across workstreams, such as marketplaces where different groups present their work. Some have made use of online platforms to enable comments and suggestions.

The Luxembourg Climate Citizens Council was designed with the intention that the whole assembly would work together to produce recommendations, following the Irish approach. The organisers misjudged the work programme, not giving enough time for members to deliberate and develop robust recommendations. After the original five in-person weekends, the government agreed to extend the time available but did not provide further budget. The organisers had to opt for a more self-organised process.

While the French, Scottish and Irish Biodiversity Loss assemblies added extra time at the request of their members, they had the resources to support the additional work. In Luxembourg, the organisers had to design a second phase from scratch with no extra resources.

One difference between assemblies is that some have taken place partly or fully online (especially during the pandemic). The platforms that organisers have chosen to use have functionality that allows close replication of in-person design, including smaller break out groups for more intimate deliberation and collaborative working. What digital platforms cannot do, however, is fully replicate the informal spaces such as coffee and lunch breaks that play an important role in developing trust and cohesion across an assembly.

Evidence Base

The organisers of climate assemblies aim to ensure that members receive balanced information on the issues they are considering from a range of witnesses – as well as drawing on and learning about each other's personal experience. An expert advisory group (see Governance) typically provides recommendations on relevant evidence and suitable witnesses, recognising the different kinds of evidence that are useful, whether from scientists (natural and social), stakeholders, advocates, bureaucrats or citizens themselves, like those with direct experience of the impacts of climate change. To cover the range of topics and perspectives, many different witnesses are often involved. For example, the French Citizens' Convention received evidence from close to 140 witnesses.

In a small number of assemblies, members themselves are empowered to decide on the evidence they will hear. Drawing from the earlier practice of Consensus Conferences, the Danes typically invite members to decide what kind of evidence they would like to hear after they have learned some of the basics around climate. The organisers of the Dutch Citizens Assembly on Climate went one step further. A group of members were elected to join a committee that not only selected the type of evidence, but also who would present. Their decisions were then confirmed by an electronic vote of all members.

The task set for a climate assembly informs the type of evidence and witness input that is necessary. For example, where the assembly is asked how to achieve a particular reduction in greenhouse gas emissions, assembly members need to hear from proponents of different approaches to realising that reduction.

Witnesses will typically give presentations either in person or through videos, with supporting written evidence, and will generally answer questions from members. Sometimes this will be done in a carousel format so that witnesses go to tables and the power dynamics therefore shift in favour of the members.

Assemblies have begun to think more creatively about the provision of information in recognition of diverse learning styles. For example, the Dutch, Irish and Luxembourg assemblies arranged field visits to sites relevant to topics under consideration. Online assemblies have been able to curate more professional short videos to sit alongside written briefings.

Many assemblies have live streamed the evidence provided by witnesses and made this available on their websites. An outlier is Luxembourg which provided no public information on who was selected to present evidence or the nature of the evidence provided.

Typically, organisers are careful to draw a clear distinction between the provision of evidence and the role of members in deliberating and crafting recommendations (see Developing Recommendations). In the French Citizens' Convention, this distinction was less tightly drawn, with scientific, policy and legal experts working closely with members in developing recommendations.

Relevant KNOCA guidance

KNOCA Quick Read Selecting and Presenting Evidence in Climate Assemblies
KNOCA Guidance Document Curating Evidence in Climate Assemblies (in preparation)
KNOCA Briefing Knowledge Curation in Climate Assemblies

Facilitation

Democratic lottery generates a group of members who differ widely in terms of their confidence and willingness to speak in front of others. Assembly organisers that favour more directive table facilitation do so with the objective of promoting equality between members. Facilitators work with small number of participants on tables, creating the space to ensure reflection on each other's experience, the input from witnesses, the selection of questions for witnesses, the development of ideas and refining recommendations. Facilitators play a critical role in ensuring that all members feel able to contribute and are heard.

For some organisers, particularly in Scandinavia and France, a different philosophy and practice of facilitation is applied. More emphasis is placed on promoting the autonomy and collective empowerment and creativity of members. A smaller number of facilitators will oversee table conversations, but from a distance, allowing members to self-organise their work. Facilitators will step in if groups become dysfunctional and to ensure members keep to tasks.

The French are unusual in allowing members to work directly with experts and advocates in the development of proposals, to the extent that the Convention's working methods have been referred to as 'co-construction'.

The working practices of the French Citizens' Convention were generally laxer than other assemblies in policing boundaries. Not only did experts and advocates work directly with members on some of the recommendations, but members of the Governance Committee and Guarantors broke with the principle of independence on more than one occasion, expressing strong political positions within the assembly itself and in the media. This may have compromised the integrity of governance, but it also meant more media attention and thus public knowledge and understanding of the assembly.

Developing Recommendations

A distinction can be drawn between assemblies that engage in policy development, where members are empowered to generate their own recommendations, and policy appraisal, where members consider options or scenarios developed by government or experts. For the policy areas covered by Climate Assembly UK, the Expert Leads developed scenarios and policy options which the members considered in their deliberations and decision-making. Members primarily chose between different options offered by the Leads, although they had the opportunity to add additional recommendations. Finland's Citizens' Jury took an explicit policy appraisal approach, where the members were asked to evaluate 14 policy proposals prepared by the Environment Ministry.

In most of the national assemblies, members craft their own proposals. How this has been realised differs. The more open French Citizens' Convention provided opportunities for experts and advocates to work closely with members in the development of proposals. Other assemblies have been more structured to ensure that experts and witnesses are only able to give their evidence and answer questions so that members are the sole authors of proposals.

In policy development assemblies, proposals are drafted by small groups of participants. Feedback mechanisms are typically put in place so that other members can learn about emerging ideas and offer suggestions to those drafting the proposals. In France, for example, on two occasions during the development of proposals, open sessions were organised where members could visit tables where the authors of proposals explained their ideas and proposals. A presentation and debate on the proposals of each thematic workstream was also organised in a plenary session. Austria held regular 'marketplaces' to share proposals across the assembly as they were being developed to identify synergies and duplication. In Spain, groups that had been working on specific recommendations were mixed to exchange insights and to help cluster and merge recommendations.

Austria's is the only assembly to date that has employed 'sociocracy' in its small groups developing recommendations. For a proposal to go forward for consideration by the whole assembly, it had to face no objections from members of the authoring group.

The French introduced an innovation, appointing a group of legal experts to provide detailed guidance to members to turn their proposals into a form that could be presented as a draft law, regulation or referendum as requested by the President. Other assemblies have introduced reviews of draft recommendations to give members a sense of how they might be strengthened to have more impact on commissioners and stakeholders. For example, in Denmark, two external experts, with experience in energy modelling and public administration provided feedback before members prepared their final recommendations on how they might be better worded to have impact on the political system.

In Germany, the Scientific Board provided the members with an evaluation of draft recommendations. Some assemblies have given stakeholders a more constructive role in the development of recommendations. For example, the regional Citizens' Convention for Climate and Biodiversity in Burgundy-Franche-Comté brought stakeholders into the first day of the final two weekends of the assembly at the point where members were developing their recommendations. This allowed assembly members to draw more extensively on stakeholder experience and ideas. When such engagement happens, it is paramount that the power rests with members to decide whether to accept the advice given.

Relevant KNOCA guidance

KNOCA Quick Read Engaging Stakeholders in Climate Assemblies

Decision Making and Assembly Reports

Assemblies need a process to confirm proposals as their final recommendations. Assemblies vary as to whether a threshold of votes is required for a recommendation to be accepted – for example, 70 percent support in Denmark. The potential for experimentation with more sophisticated approaches to decision making has not really been explored.

Often assembly reports will include recommendations that did not achieve the threshold, so that the decision-making process is fully transparent to commissioners and stakeholders.

In assemblies that employ workstreams, members will be voting on recommendations that they have not written or heard the relevant evidence for – hence the importance of created opportunities for members to present and learn about the proposals from different workstreams before voting (see Developing recommendations). Climate Assembly UK is unusual in deciding that only the members who worked on specific workstreams should vote on those specific recommendations. The organisers felt there was not enough time for everyone to hear and learn about the recommendations from other working groups.

Reports generally combine a vision statement agreed by the assembly, alongside recommendations. Most assemblies contextualise their recommendations to provide guidance to policy makers about their motivations and intentions. Denmark has the most codified format with members providing observations (basic facts about the current context), assessments (evaluation of the context) and the recommendations (what should be done). It is thus easier for commissioners and others to interpret the intentions of the assembly.

The number of recommendations varies considerably: from the 13 recommendations on climate policy from the first Irish Citizens' Assembly to the staggering 172 from the Spanish Citizens' Assembly for the Climate. Debate rages amongst practitioners as to whether it is better to require assembly members to prioritise a relatively small number of recommendations – the argument being that it is easier for commissioners to respond to, and to monitor the response to, a more limited number of proposals – or whether this is an unreasonable restriction on members.

Communication

While some assemblies have provided significant resources for communication, for others it has been an afterthought. This can have a profound effect on the impact of assemblies. The Austrian and French national assemblies spent as much as €1 million on communications, whereas the Danes had no communication budget. Those with resources have been able to build relationships with journalists and other media actors and develop social media strategies. The Austrian, French and Irish Biodiversity Loss assemblies have experimented with working closely with social media influencers to extend their reach.

Assembly members have typically been an underused resource in communications. Their authenticity and diversity can help cut through crowded media environments. The Austrian assembly developed a strategy of linking assembly members with their local media ecosystem to tell their specific stories. But any strategy of engaging members needs to ensure training and ongoing support. Too often resources are not available after the assembly ends. The national assemblies in the Netherlands and Scotland are notable for the way that member support remained in place months after the assembly delivered its recommendations.

Assemblies vary in the extent to which they protect the identities of members. Because of their concerns about personal safety in relation to the abortion issue, the first Irish assembly was probably the most protective. The French offered the most open access to journalists, but only to those members who were willing to engage. Some of the members became well known faces and voices in traditional and new media.

Relevant KNOCA guidance

KNOCA Guidance Document Communicating Climate Assemblies: Enabling Pathways to Impact
KNOCA Guidance Document Supporting Members After the Climate Assembly Ends: How to Nurture Action

Public Engagement (including Children and Young People)

Assemblies have varied in their degree to which the broader public and interest groups can contribute to the assembly process – and at what point. The most common is some form of written submissions of ideas and evidence during the assembly. For example, the French and Irish assemblies provided a portal on their websites to facilitate submissions. Collating the responses can be resource intensive and contributions tend to be dominated by active interest groups.

A small number of assemblies have engaged the public before the assembly begins its work. The organisers of the Spanish Citizens' Assembly for the Climate created an online survey which enabled 1,500 submissions on potential themes to be addressed by the assembly. In Poland, 45 local civic events of different scale and structure were organised that engaged around 700 people, with their ideas feeding into the framing of the Citizens' Assembly on Energy Costs.

The most impressive pre-assembly engagement is arguably the National Conversation that took place before the People's Assembly for Nature in the UK. Over a four-week period, organisers received 30,000 submissions on people's relationship with nature and how it could be protected. Thoughts and ideas were shared online and at 74 events across the UK, including at arts centres, National Trust properties, schools and football clubs. These were presented in creative formats to members of the People's Assembly to help inform their deliberations.

The Austrian assembly experimented with using the Pol.is argument mapping platform midway through the process. Pol.is allows participants to vote on statements (agree, disagree, unsure) and to add their own statements for review by others. Based on this engagement, the platform provides insights into where broad consensus and dissensus can be found on the statements. In Austria, Pol.is was seeded with 200 statements from across the assembly's five workstreams based on emerging ideas from the members. Over 5,000 people participated by voting on the assembly's ideas and/or submitting their own statements. Over 5,700 statements were submitted and around 833,000 votes were registered. This not only showed areas of public support for assembly ideas, but exposed areas of public contention, such as vegetarian/vegan diets, food affordability and road pricing.

The Dutch, Irish and Scottish are notable for their engagement with children and young people. Most impressive is the two-weekend Children and Young People's Assembly on Biodiversity Loss in Ireland. It created its own independent report that was considered by parliament and government and also engaged with the adult assembly that was running at the same time. In all cases, adult members have commented on how important this engagement with children has been in shaping their thinking.

The Austrian assembly had two civil society officers tasked with engaging in more in-depth communication with, for example, regional government climate and energy officers, climate NGOs and activists, distributing a newsletter after every session. These officers worked with the members after the assembly finished its activities to raise the profile of their recommendations.

Relevant KNOCA guidance

KNOCA Guidance Document Communicating Climate Assemblies: Enabling Pathways to Impact
KNOCA Guidance Document Supporting Members After the Climate Assembly Ends: How to Nurture Action
KNOCA Guidance Document Children and Young People's Participation in Climate Assemblies

Official Response

Typically, climate assemblies hold official events where the members formally hand over their recommendations to the commissioner. This is often a significant communications moment. The most high-profile handover was without doubt for the French Citizens' Convention where the President received the report in the Gardens of the Elysee Palace.

But what are commissioners obliged to do on receiving an assembly's report? In rare cases a legal commitment exists for a response from the commissioner to the report and recommendations within a certain time frame (see Commitment to Respond). In most other circumstances, a less formalised promise is made to the assembly to respond within a specified time period – often this is agreed when the remit is set at the start of the process. In Austria, the promised official response from the government was never forthcoming because of differences that emerged between coalition partners. Only a review of the relationship between assembly recommendations and current government policy was produced by the administration.

A response does not necessarily require acceptance of a recommendation. What is generally expected is that the commissioner gives a public explanation and justification as to which recommendations it is implementing, which it is modifying and which it is not taking forward.

It is one thing to make a commitment to respond, another to put the structures and processes in place to ensure that the relevant actors within a public authority take the recommendations seriously. In some cases, it will be one department or ministry that commissions the assembly, with an expectation that a very different part of government responds to those recommendations that are within its competence. Hence the importance of preparing the administration for a concerted response. The Luxembourg government decided to make its response transparent by regularly updating a publicly accessible Excel spreadsheet with the current status of their response to each assembly recommendation.

Relevant KNOCA guidance

KNOCA Quick Read Follow-Up to Climate Assemblies
KNOCA Briefing Designing the Follow-up to Climate Assemblies

Monitoring and Oversight

How to ensure that assembly recommendations are treated seriously by commissioning bodies? After most assemblies have delivered their reports, some members will engage with commissioners while it is considering how to deal with the recommendations. Specific support is generally provided to help build the capacity of members to meet with public officials. It is after all a very different experience from participating in an assembly. In Spain, for example, the NGO Red Esapñola para el Desarrollo Sostenible was funded by the European Climate Foundation to undertake this capacity building role. The Scottish Secretariat referred to themselves as the members' civil servants.

The French Citizens' Convention and Scotland's Climate Assembly are the only two national assemblies that reconvened a number of months after delivering their reports to review the government's response.

In Austria, France and Spain, many of the assembly members formed civic organisations to collectively monitor government action. The members found it challenging to move from the facilitated context of an assembly to autonomous self-organisation and to sustain the same levels of diversity – one of the defining features of the assembly.

The biggest challenge of post-assembly engagement by members is ensuring the support and capacity building is in place so that the diversity of assembly members are able to participate – otherwise it will be only the most politically confident and those with available resources that will be able to engage.

Relevant KNOCA guidance

KNOCA Guidance Document Supporting Members After the Climate Assembly Ends: How to Nurture Action

Evaluation

Ensuring robust and independent evaluation is important to secure systematic learning from assemblies so that future practice can be improved. Scotland's Climate Assembly, CAUK and the Austrian Climate Assembly commissioned formal university-led, independent evaluations. The French Citizens' Convention took a different approach. It accredited 40 researchers who were given access to the process.

Formal evaluations often focus on the quality of the assembly process, with particular attention given to its structure and the experience of members during the assembly. What is less systematically considered is the broader impact of the assembly, in large part because of a lack of funding for longer-term evaluations. This is a missed opportunity.

KNOCA has been vocal in promoting a systematic impact evaluation framework that recognises different areas and types of impact. Impact can be on different parts of the political system:

- state actors (e.g., policy makers, politicians, parliamentarians, civil servants)
- non-state actors and civil society (e.g., members of the public, media, business, third sector, assembly members themselves)
- broader systems and structures (e.g., the underlying processes and practices that enable climate action)

And impact can take different forms. The most commonly considered are instrumental impacts on specific policies, attitudes and behaviours. But impact can also be conceptual – on the way we understand and think about climate action – and on our capacity to respond to the climate and ecological crisis through the creation of new forms of expertise and resources.

Evaluating impact can be challenging – practically because of lack of available resources, but also methodologically because of the time it takes for impact to emerge and the difficulties of assigning causation. But it is vital to try if we are to better understand the enablers and disablers of climate action through assemblies.

Examples of impact that have been captured through evaluations, include:

- **On policy**. The Irish Climate Action Bill (2020) incorporated the majority of the recommendations from the Citizens' Assembly 2016-18. A recent KNOCA study of the French Citizens' Convention provides evidence that the uptake of recommendations from the national assembly is more extensive than widely recognised. A number of the recommendations of the Luxembourg Climate Citizens' Council were translated into the redrafted National Energy and Climate Plan.
- **On institutions**. The UK Climate Change Committee (an independent, statutory body established under the Climate Change Act 2008 which committed the UK to achieve net zero by 2050) used Climate Assembly UK's recommendations to frame its Sixth Carbon Budget and then further integrated deliberative methods into its programme of work. In Ireland, the Joint Parliamentary Committee on Climate Action that was established to consider the first assembly's report became a permanent committee for the rest of the parliamentary session.
- **On public debate**. The Austrian Citizens' Climate Assembly was able to garner quite significant media attention in both national and regional newspapers and radio stations, with over 50 per cent of the population aware of the assembly. The French Citizens' Convention stimulated extensive public debate on both climate transition and the use of assemblies. The recent Dutch Citizens' Assembly on Climate received significant media attention, not least because of the febrile, polarised political context within which it was operating.
- **On assembly members**. A significant majority of members of climate assemblies find the process transformative, with emerging evidence from Climate Assembly UK that effects can be long-term: a survey undertaken two years after the launch of its report found strong and consistent effects on the attitudes and behaviours of members towards climate action that is sustained and even enhanced over time.

Relevant KNOCA guidance

KKNOCA Guidance Document Impact Evaluation Framework
KNOCA Evaluation Hub – a collection of evaluations of national assemblies

Further KNOCA resources

KNOCA and its community of practice continues to consider different elements of assembly design and practice to enhance their impacts. We already have an extensive catalogue of Quick Reads, Guidance Documents, Briefings and Recordings of Workshops and Learning Calls which have informed this document, and which dive deeper into the issues raised. We would like to thank the community of practice for being so generous with their time and energy in working with KNOCA to extend the evidence base, improve practice and enhance the impacts of assemblies.

This remains a constantly developing field of work driven particularly by the creativity and energy of practitioners and advocates. Please continue to suggest areas where we could collaborate to enhance practice and let us know about any new developments – even if it's just adding a new assembly to the KNOCA map!