Climate adaptation and citizen participation – A conversation with EMR citizens.

Citizen Summit to discuss climate adaptation measures in the Euregion Meuse-Rhine (EMR) in Kerkrade

Policy briefing

Dear Policymakers,

Citizens want increased access to drinking water and cooling spaces, stronger regional crisis preparedness, and greater community engagement, especially with youth, to ensure a safer and more sustainable future.

These priorities emerged from the Citizen Summit in Kerkrade, held as part of the euPrevent ACP (Active Citizenship Participation) project.

Based on the insights from the summit, the following key actions are needed to improve climate adaptation in South Limburg and the Euregio Maas-Rhine (EMR):

- **Improve public facilities for cooling and hydration:** Increase the availability of public drinking water points and cooling spaces in urban areas, particularly in neighborhoods lacking natural shade or cool indoor spaces. Promote green infrastructure such as tree planting and improve the accessibility of cooling rooms in public buildings.
- **Enhance crisis preparedness and cross-border coordination:** Develop an integrated early warning system across the Euregio Maas-Rijn region for extreme weather events (e.g., floods, storms, heatwaves). Strengthen flood protection and emergency response coordination to ensure swift, effective responses.
- **Inclusive decision-making and community engagement:** Ensure all community members, including vulnerable and younger groups, are actively involved in the decision-making process through both digital and face-to-face communication. Foster local involvement through initiatives like youth education and training programs focused on climate adaptation and crisis management.

The complete insights and recommendations can be found in this document.

Dear Participants and supporters of the ACP citizen summit in Kerkrade,

Thank you for making the effort to attend our event on adaptation measures to the consequences of climate change. We greatly appreciate your valuable contributions on how to respond to the challenges of a changing climate. We have summarized your opinions and experiences on the topic under “Results”.

We would like to thank the Gemeente Kerkrade, especially David de Witte, for their support of the euPrevent “Active Citizenship Participation (ACP)” project. Their help was essential in organizing, running, and following up on the Citizen Summit in Kerkrade. We also want to thank the Bibliotheek Kerkrade for providing a welcoming and convenient space for the participants.

The ACP project is a pioneering initiative in the field of cross-border citizen participation. By starting with the key topic of climate change and health, Kerkrade has demonstrated a strong commitment to addressing urgent societal challenges. We hope this is the start of building a sustainable system for citizen participation across the Euregio Meuse-Rhine.

Curious how other communities in the Euregio approached these discussions? The reports from the other summits are available **online**, offering insights into how citizens across the region view the situation.

Recruitment and structure of participants

The Kerkrade Citizens' Summit on October 31st, 2024 was attended by eleven people from South Limburg (NL) aged 29 - 70. Five of them were residing in Kerkrade, the other six in other places in South Limburg. All of the participants visit neighboring countries in the Euregio at least several times a year, if not more often. The Citizen Summit took two hours, from 7:00 to 9:00 p.m. The meeting language was Dutch.

Participants were recruited through the GGD ZL Gezondheidspanel which consists of approximately 20,000 citizens (https://www.ggdzl.nl/over-de-ggd/gezondheidspanel/). A random selection of 5,500 panel members (500 from Kerkrade and 5,000 from the rest of South Limburg) received an email, inviting them to participate in the online PST-EMR (Place Standard Tool Euregio Meuse Rhine). The PST EMR is a citizen-centered framework developed in the ACP project to assess the quality of living in the EMR, considering the region's cross-border dynamics. The email also inquired about their interest in a citizen summit. Kerkrade residents received details on time and location, while the others were asked about potential future participation. In total, 11 citizens participated in the summit. During this citizens' summit, we engaged with participants in more detail using the PST-EMR. Everyone was able to express his/her views and reflect on the opinions of others.

Who's in charge of the project?

The GGD Zuid Limburg, together with partners from the entire Euregio Meuse-Rhine, is carrying out a cross-border project (euPrevent Active Citizenship Participation / ACP). Your place of residence is also part of the Euregio Meuse-Rhine.

The project aims to promote cross-border citizen participation in the Euregio Meuse-Rhine. As a first topic, we would like to know how citizens feel about various climate change adaptation measures in their communities and what protective measures they would like to see implemented in the entire Euroregion. Participation events and an online version of the survey instrument are being used throughout the border region and are available in four languages: Dutch, German and French, as well as English.

The tool is based on the German survey instrument “StadtRaumMonitor” and was adapted to the situation in the border region.

The project is funded under Common Ground, a project of the Robert Bosch Stiftung GmbH.

More information can be found on the website.

What happens with your information?

We will process your data anonymously. The results will be handled in accordance with the European General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR).

After the project ends in September 2025, your results – in combination with those of all participants – will be published on the project homepage. We will also present the opinions and wishes of the citizens in the Euregio Meuse-Rhine to politicians and administrations.

Thank you for your support!

Gefinancierd in het kader van Common Ground, een project van Robert Bosch Stiftung GmbH
Gefördert im Rahmen von Common Ground, einem Projekt der Robert Bosch Stiftung GmbH
Soutenu dans le cadre de Common Ground, un projet de la Robert Bosch Stiftung GmbH

Results

Summary

The results of the summit can be summarized as following:

- **Need for Better Cooling and Water Availability**
  Participants highlighted the lack of accessible water refill stations and shaded areas, especially in urban neighborhoods with limited tree coverage. The availability of cool indoor public spaces was also deemed insufficient, with a strong call for more shaded outdoor seating and better-designed green spaces.
- **Concerns About Climate Resilience and Safety**
  Views on safety during extreme weather events varied, with some feeling secure while others reported flooding, poor drainage, and inadequate emergency preparedness. Compared to neighboring countries, Germany was seen as better equipped in crisis management, while Belgium faced challenges with water management.
- **Community Engagement and Inclusive Decision-Making**
  The summit emphasized the importance of local voices in shaping policies. Participants valued direct communication over digital channels and called for continued engagement, especially involving youth and underrepresented groups. There was a push for more neighborhood-focused approaches and concrete actions rather than just discussions.

Results of the individual discussion points

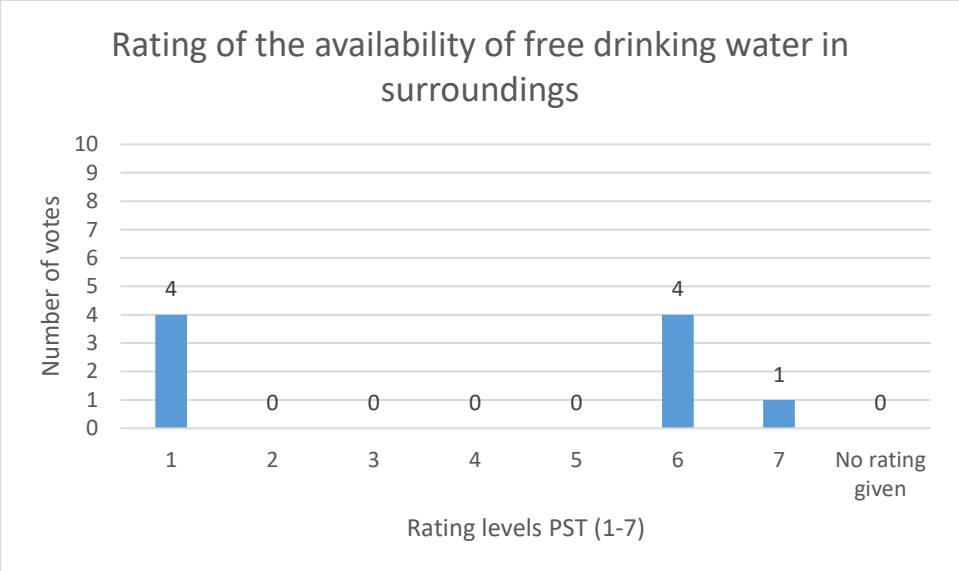
(Presented in absolute figures)

Drinking water

Due to climate change, it is often more hot and dry. Especially during the summer, it is important for your health to drink plenty of water - also when you're away from home. In the South Limburg, tap water is of very good quality. Free, easily accessible and appealing drinking water supplies, such as public fountains, can therefore be very helpful.

How do I rate the availability of free drinking water in my surroundings?

Participants assigned a rating with a number between **1 = very bad** and **7 = very good**



The assessment of free drinking water supply is rather polarized in this group with strong opposing views.

Feedback:

- **Limited Awareness and Mixed Perceptions** – People are unaware of the availability of free drinking water in their area, while some find it sufficient, and others report a lack of water taps in specific locations.
- **Personal Need Influences Perception** – The necessity for free water varies; some do not feel the need, such as older generations who mention that they do not know about

public drinking water supply but also do not feel the need for it as they barely take refillable water bottles. Younger generations indicate that they see the need for more water supply but there was not so much supply.

- **Accessibility and Availability Issues** – Water taps are generally located outdoors and in hospitality settings, water is provided voluntarily rather than as a standard offering.

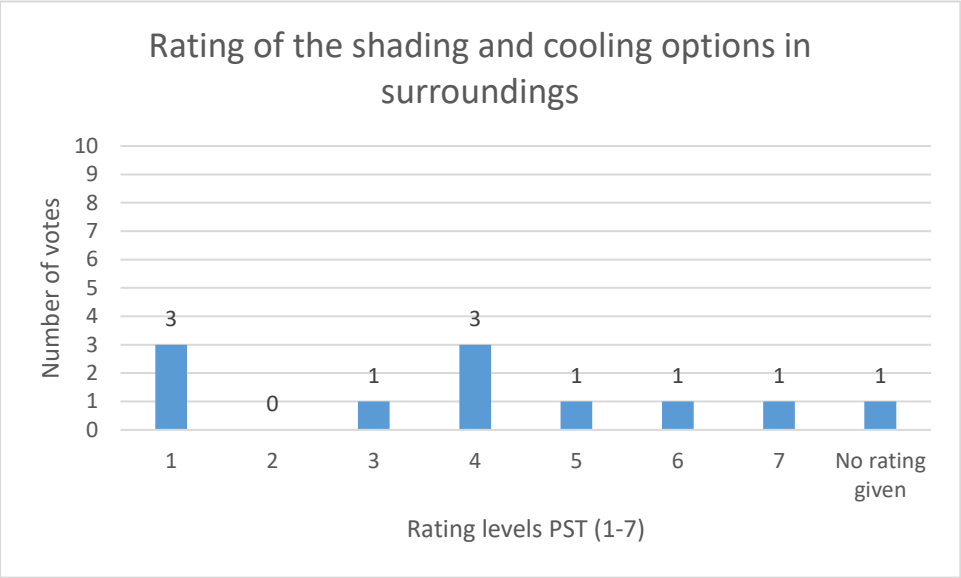
The availability of free drinking water in the area is unclear and varies depending on personal needs and awareness. To improve access and awareness, better information and strategic placement of water points may be beneficial.

Cooling Outside

Our cities and communities are becoming warmer due to climate change - especially where buildings are close together. Green spaces and water features as well as sunshades and the like help to cool the environment.

How do I rate the shading and cooling options in my neighborhood?

Participants assigned a rating with a number between **1 = very bad** and **7 = very good**



Participants rate the shading and cooling options in their surroundings as rather average and the overall perception is leaning towards negative or average, with some dissatisfaction and only minor positive feedback.

Feedback:

- **Lack of Shade and Cooling Spaces**: Participants pointed out the absence or insufficient presence of shade and cooling areas, particularly in streets without trees or shaded spots. This suggests a significant need for more natural or man-made shaded spaces to provide relief from heat.
- **Trees and Green Spaces as Cooling Sources**: Higher trees and green spaces were identified as important for providing shade and cooling. However, there are mixed opinions about the potential dangers of trees and the need for more upkeep or maintenance. Participants also noted trees as valuable for both comfort and socialization.
- **Facilities and Amenities**: The availability of nearby amenities like benches or other facilities was mentioned by participants who assigned higher ratings. But it was also noticed that while there are trees and cooling features, more seating or spaces to relax would be beneficial.

- **3-30-300 concept**: One participant introduced the 3-30-300 rule of thumb, which is a concept related to urban greenery and its impact on the environment. This rule suggests that for optimal environmental and social benefits, urban areas should aim for:
    - 3 fully grown trees need to be visible from each apartment. This ensures that trees are distributed throughout neighborhoods, promoting cooling, air quality, and aesthetic value.
    - 30% tree canopy coverage: A target for the proportion of the area that should be covered by tree canopy, helping with cooling, reducing heat islands, and improving overall liveability.
    - 300 meters from every home to a park or green space: This ensures that all residents have easy access to natural areas, contributing to mental and physical well-being.

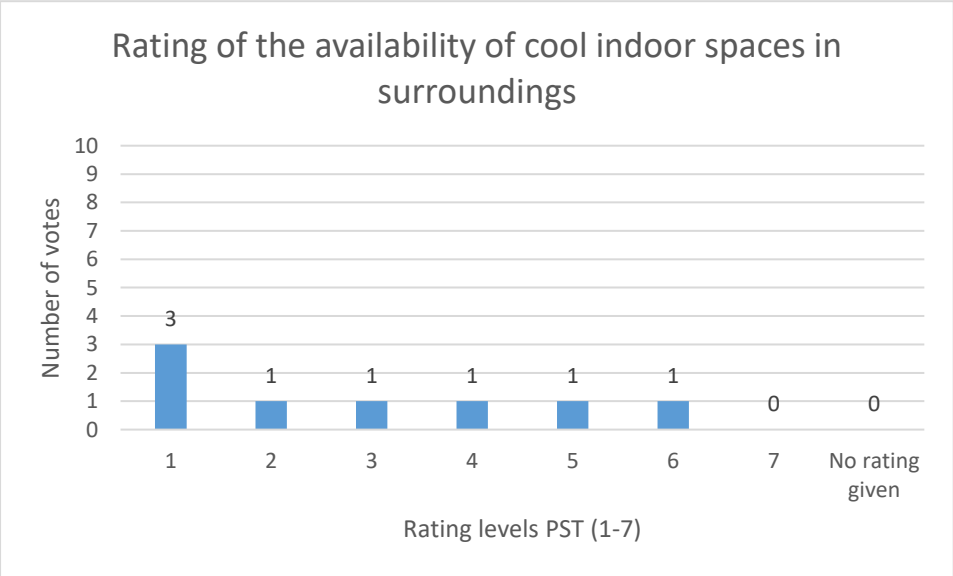
In summary, there is a noticeable desire for more shaded spaces, especially in areas lacking trees, as well as a call for improved maintenance and more facilities for relaxation.

Cooling Inside

When it gets hot, cool public indoor spaces can also help in the short term when you are away from home. However, cool public spaces should be available, open and freely accessible during the day.

How do I assess the availability of cool indoor space in my neighbourhood?

Participants assigned a rating with a number between **1 = very bad** and **7 = very good**



Participants rate the availability of cool indoor spaces as rather bad. One participant even wanted to assign a rating of "0", which is not possible on the PST-EMR rating scale. But that participant also provided qualitative feedback that is taken into account in the summary below.

Feedback:

- **Moderate to insufficient availability of Cool Indoor Spaces**: Participants reported that there are not enough easily accessible cool indoor spaces available or even no options at all. This points to a clear lack of indoor cooling facilities, which could be a concern during hot weather.
- **Potential for Improvement with Outdoor Spaces**: It was also mentioned that outdoor spaces could be better utilized with trees placed in appropriate locations. While this information is about outdoor cooling, it highlights a potential strategy to improve overall cooling in public spaces, indirectly linking to the indoor cooling situation.

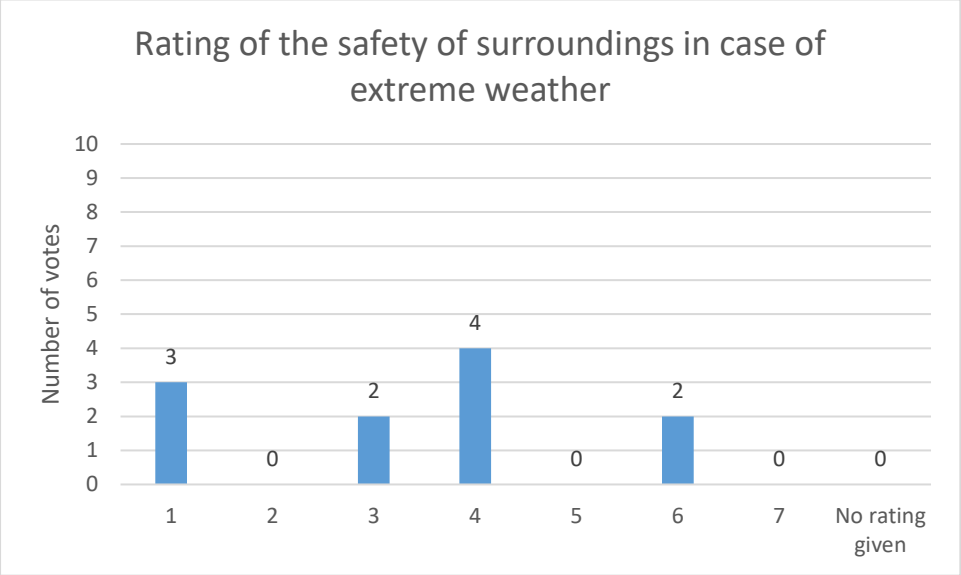
In conclusion, the feedback reveals a lack of cool indoor spaces in the area, with participants expressing dissatisfaction and highlighting the need for improvement.

Extreme weather protection

In addition to heat, climate change often leads to other extreme natural events such as storms, heavy rain or flooding. We cannot completely prevent these. And they often happen quite suddenly. However, good preparation can reduce the risks and minimize the damage.

How do I assess the safety of my surroundings in the event of heavy rain, flooding and storms?

Participants assigned a rating with a number between **1 = very bad** and **7 = very good**



Participants rate the safety of their surroundings in case of extreme weather as rather average and the overall perception is leaning towards negative or average, with some dissatisfaction and only minor positive feedback.

Feedback:

- **Mixed Sense of Safety**: Some participants feel relatively safe during heavy rain, floods, or storms, especially if they live in elevated areas or away from flood-prone zones.
- **Concerns About Flooding and Storms**: Other participants report significant issues with flooding, water entering basements, or safety risks during storms and insufficient protective measures in place.
- **Lack of Protection and Assistance**: Participants express concern about the lack of infrastructure or preparation, particularly when it comes to protecting against heavy rainfall or ensuring quick access to emergency services.

The feedback reveals a divided perception of safety during extreme weather events, even among residents living in the same street. Overall, the feedback suggests a need for improved safety

measures, better infrastructure, and more reliable emergency responses to ensure the protection of all residents during extreme weather.

Situation in neighboring EMR countries

Thinking back to visits in the neighboring EMR countries:

What did you like about one or more of these issues there: **drinking water, cooling outside & inside,** and **extreme weather protection**? And what did you find less good?

For this part, no rating was given. The discussion was purely qualitative. In this case, the neighboring countries discussed were Belgium and Germany.

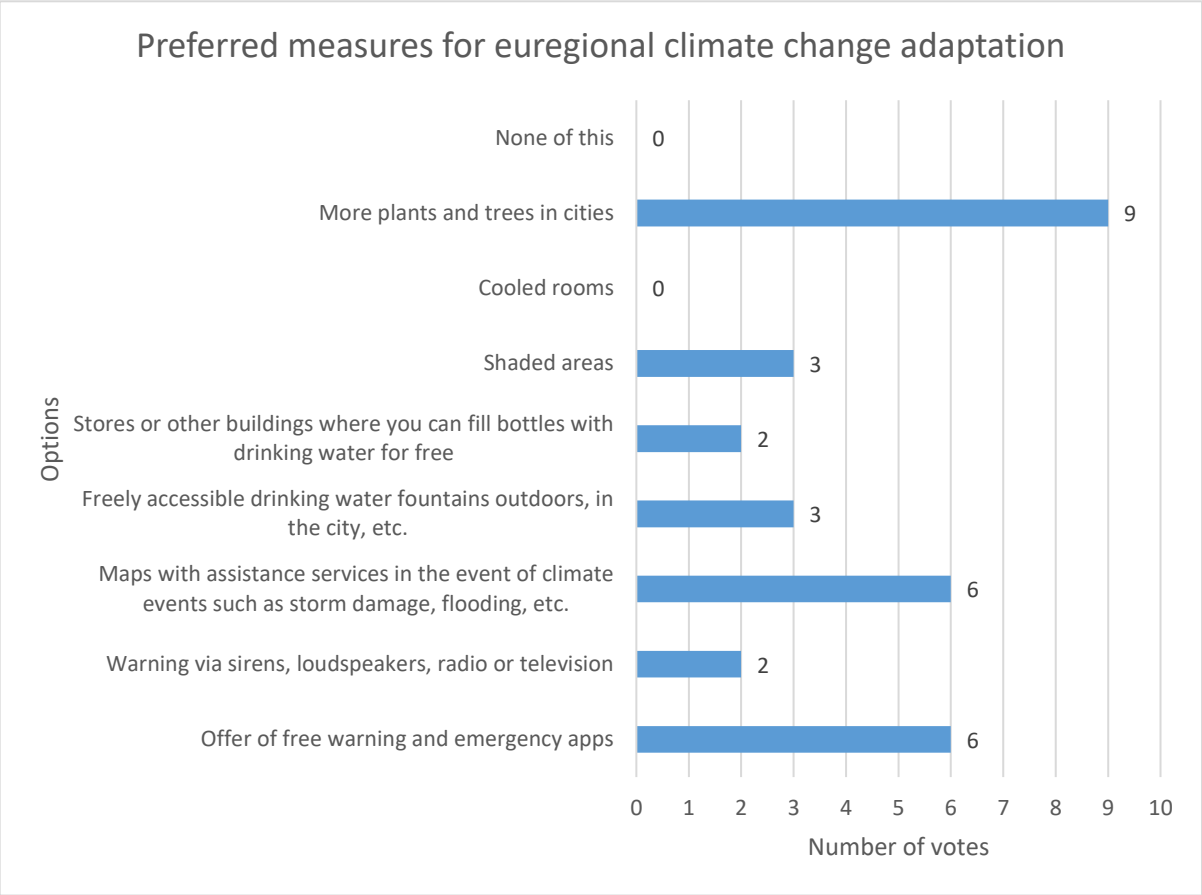
Feedback:

- **Germany** is praised for its fast emergency response, effective green initiatives (like garden subsidies), well-trained volunteer firefighters, and additional amenities like free drinking water on terraces in Aachen. However, its infrastructure, particularly in terms of water storage, is considered lacking when compared to the Netherlands.
- **Belgium** is appreciated for having less urbanization in regions like the Voer area, allowing for better natural water distribution. However, its infrastructure against extreme weather is viewed as inadequate, with water-related issues often being displaced to neighboring countries like the Netherlands. Additionally, participants mention the often poorly developed public spaces for pedestrians and cyclists.
- **General Feedback** emphasizes that wealthier cities tend to have more resources and better infrastructure to manage extreme weather events. Bureaucratic delays in damage recovery were also noted as an obstacle to swift action. In the Netherlands, there is a strong call for improved crisis preparedness, with a particular focus on research into readiness and better training for collaboration during emergencies.

Overall, the feedback points to a need for better cross-border collaboration, more efficient infrastructure, and improved training and readiness to handle crises effectively across all countries.

Assessment of various measures that can be used to respond to the consequences of climate change in your area.

Participants anonymously selected up to 4 answers via a survey sheet.



The bar chart illustrates the preferred measures for climate change adaptation in the Euregio Meuse-Rhine (EMR) region based on the number of votes each measure received. Key takeaways from the assessment include:

1. **Most Preferred Measures:**
    - **More plants and trees in cities** received the highest support, with nearly 9 votes, indicating a strong preference for increasing urban greenery as a way to combat climate change effects.
    - **Maps with assistance services** and **offering free warning and emergency apps** also received significant support, with 6 votes each. These measures highlight concerns information distribution and emergency preparedness.
2. **Moderately Preferred Measures:**

- **Shaded areas and free drinking water** were seen as beneficial, though to a lesser extent (around 3 votes), suggesting some demand for additional cooling infrastructure and services.

3. **Least Preferred Measures:**

   - **Cooled rooms** and **stores or other buildings where people can seek refuge** received minimal support, indicating that they are not seen as primary solutions or may not be widely available in the region.

   - **Warning via sirens, loudspeakers, radio or television** received minimal support as well, indicating warning and emergency apps as the preferable source of information.

   - **"None of this"** received no votes, suggesting that all proposed measures were seen as useful by at least some participants.

Additional qualitative input and conclusion:

Participants also suggested additional measures:

1. Maps with emergency assistance information: A map showing where help can be obtained in case of emergencies like storm damage or flooding, integrated with Google Maps.

2. Focus on community building: Efforts to divide roles within the community and provide training and education.

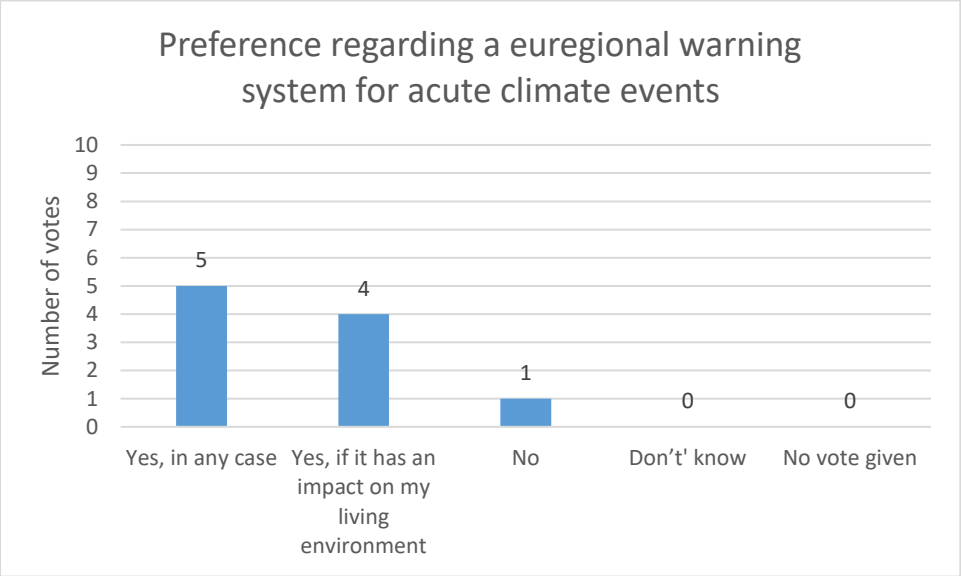
3. Emergency number for every resident: A special emergency number for the municipality of Kerkrade, to be placed in every electrical meter box, which fearful residents can use to get help. The number would connect to a 24-hour helpline.

The overall conclusion is that the residents are focused on a balanced approach to resilience, prioritizing both natural solutions and practical tools. They emphasize the importance of increasing urban greenery, which can contribute to environmental and community health, alongside more immediate and actionable measures like digital emergency tools. These tools, such as integrated maps for emergency assistance and a 24-hour helpline number, reflect a commitment to preparedness and community support during crises, ensuring residents are well-informed and connected when help is needed.

Assessment of cross-border warning systems

Would you like a warning system (e.g. an app) that informs the entire Euregio Meuse Rhine when acute climate events are imminent? (e.g. heat, storms, flooding)

Participants anonymously selected one answer via the survey sheet.



The chart presents the assessment of the need for a **euregional warning system** in case of **acute climate events**, based on the number of votes given for different options.

Strong Support for a Warning System:

- The majority of participants (5 votes) believe that such a system is necessary **in any case**, suggesting broad support for improved climate-related warnings across the region.
- An additional **4 votes** support a warning system **if it has an impact on their living environment**, indicating that while some may see it as potentially relevant, but that it should be used in a targeted manner.
- Only one participant does not think that a cross-border warning system would be beneficial.

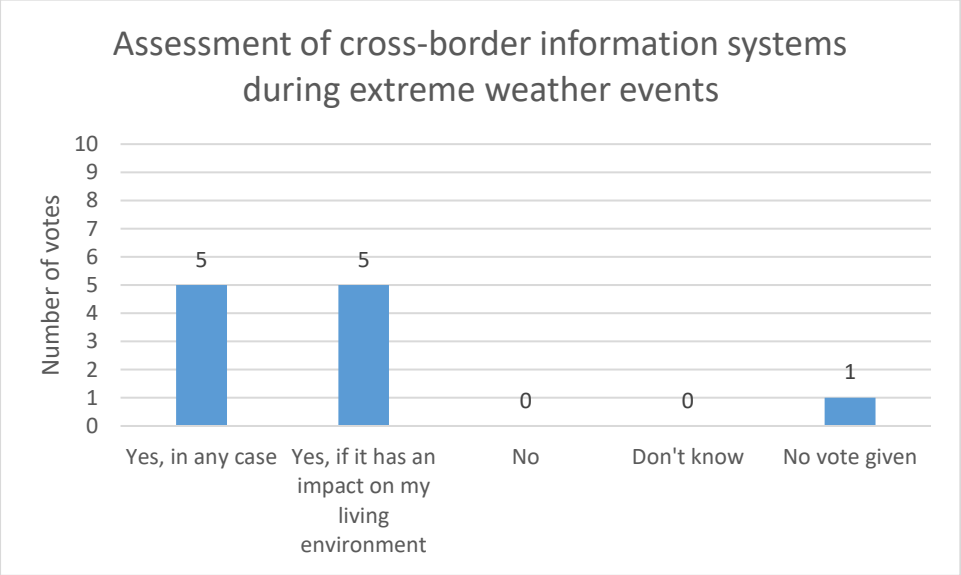
Conclusion:

The discussion shows **clear support** for a **euregional warning system** for climate emergencies, with most respondents favoring its implementation either universally or conditionally based on local impact.

Assessment of cross-border information systems during extreme weather events

Would you like an information system (e.g. an app) that informs people throughout the Euregio Meuse-Rhine where they can get support services or help in an emergency when such extreme weather events occur?

Participants anonymously selected one answer via the survey sheet.



The chart presents the assessment of the need for a euregional information support system in case of acute climate events, based on the number of votes given for different options.

Strong Support for an Information Support System:

Half of the voters (5) believe such a system is necessary in any case, highlighting a broad recognition of the need for cross-border coordination and timely information during climate emergencies.

5 more voters support the system only if it impacts their living environment, indicating some conditional support but still a general acknowledgment of its importance.

Conclusion:

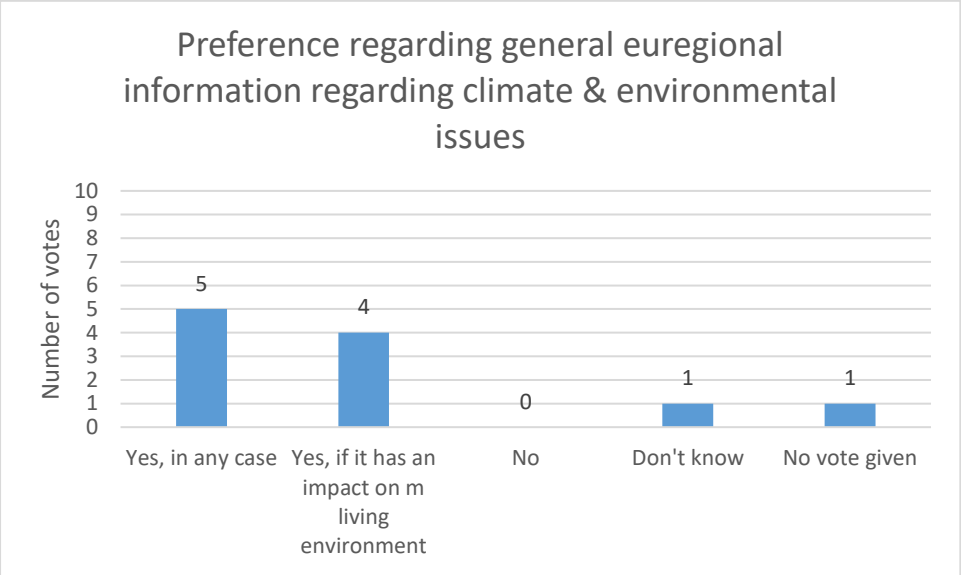
The results highlight strong consensus on the need for a euregional information support system for acute climate events. Combined with the previous question's findings on a euregional warning system, this underscores the urgency of enhancing cross-border communication and coordination to effectively manage climate-related crises.

The results show a strong consensus on the need for a Euroregional information system for acute climate events. In combination with the results of the previous question about a Euroregional warning system, this underlines the urgency of improving cross-border communication and coordination to effectively manage climate-related crises.

Assessment of cross-border information systems regarding general information regarding climate and environmental issues

Would you like to receive general information about current environmental or climate issues in the Euregio Meuse-Rhine?

Participants anonymously selected one answer via the survey sheet.



The chart reflects the assessment of the need for a general euregional information system on environmental and climate issues, based on the votes given for different options.

Strong Support for a General Information System:

Half of the participants (5 votes) believe that such a system is needed in any case, emphasizing the importance of accessible, cross-border climate and environmental information.

4 votes support the system only if it impacts their living environment, indicating some conditional support but still acknowledging its relevance.

One participant is uncertain / had a lack of a clear opinion. Here, additional information would be needed, how this information could be beneficial for this person.

Conclusion:

The results show broad agreement on the need for a general euregional information system on environmental and climate issues. Most participants see it as essential, while a smaller group considers it important only when it directly affects their surroundings. Having one participant indicating some uncertainty however underlines the need for clearer communication regarding the benefits of such a system.

General reflection citizen summit – participants' perspective

The participants reflect on the past two hours and discuss their impressions, suggestions for improvement and feedback on the tool.

1. **Appreciation for Participation and Input**:
   The meeting was valued for its collaborative atmosphere, with active participation emphasized as key. Participants stressed the importance of listening to the needs of the residents and ensuring that these conversations lead to tangible changes. The idea of joint solutions, where everyone plays a role, was seen as positive and necessary. The need for more in-person communication and a 24/7 emergency number to improve accessibility was highlighted.

2. **Key Takeaways**:
   While the discussions were time-consuming, they were seen as valuable. Smaller group settings were preferred as they allowed for more personal, focused conversations. Participants emphasized that the insights gained should directly inform practical policy decisions, with clear involvement from residents in the decision-making process.
   A significant point raised was the recognition of very different needs across various groups in society, often linked to age-based differences in experience and expectations. For example, the need for public water refill stations may vary: older residents might not use water bottles as often, while younger people might demand more public water stations.
   Additionally, it was pointed out that some needs are not visible to the broader community. This includes concerns from people who may not actively participate in meetings but whose voices are important for representative policymaking. The question "How and when do I belong?" was raised as a call to increase access to the decision-making process, ensuring everyone feels heard and involved, regardless of their background or participation in physical meetings.

3. **Future Directions**:
   Moving forward, participants agreed on the necessity to continue the discussions and further develop the insights gathered. Concrete actions were proposed, such as involving youth in community projects, focusing on neighborhood-specific needs, using the central "hub" platform more actively, and ensuring better communication with less reliance on digital tools.

In essence, the feedback calls for a more inclusive, community-driven approach to decision-making, with a focus on ongoing dialogue, diverse participation, and practical solutions that address local and individual needs.

General reflection citizen summit – project groups' perspective

Despite extensive efforts to attract a diverse group of participants, the summit did not result in a fully representative turnout. The no-show rate was around 75%. The participants who did attend were engaged and shared valuable insights, but many acknowledged that the group was relatively small and more privileged in terms of education and economic background. This issue was discussed with the participants, who mentioned that these types of initiatives often need time to establish themselves, and as they grow, the number of participants gradually increases.

The evaluation can be summarized in three main topics:

1. Participation & Representation

- **Inclusive Engagement**: There's a clear call to engage a broader range of residents, including those who may not typically attend meetings. It's essential to find ways to involve "silent" groups (e.g., older residents or those who don't attend physical meetings) and recognize the different needs across various demographics (age, experience, etc.).
- **Enhancing Commitment:** Simply indicating interest isn't enough—requiring participants to actively sign up can increase commitment and reduce no-shows. Additionally, personalized invitations can make participants feel more valued and engaged, leading to higher attendance and meaningful participation.
- **Learning from Participant Engagement**: Although there were 11 participants, not all provided ratings, as many chose to share qualitative feedback immediately. Given that the PST EMR prioritizes facilitating participant exchange and gathering qualitative insights, moderators must carefully decide whether to interrupt the discussion to obtain ratings. In this instance, the decision was made to prioritize the qualitative exchange over quantitative ratings. It was encouraging to see all participants actively engaged and contributing valuable insights for each question. However, this experience underscored key considerations for the moderation process.
- **Personalized Approaches**: The diverse needs of neighborhoods and age groups require more tailored engagement. For example, younger people may prioritize public water refill stations, while older residents might not need them as much. Listening to and addressing these varied perspectives is vital.
- **Democratizing Decision-Making**: The question "How and when do I belong?" highlights the importance of ensuring everyone has equal access to the decision-making process. Organizers should focus on making the participation process more democratic and inclusive.

2. Key Climate Adaptation Concerns

- **Need for Cooling and Shading**: A significant concern raised was the need for more shaded and cool public spaces. Many participants highlighted that areas without natural shade, such as trees, are lacking in comfort, particularly during hot weather. This aligns with the growing demand for more green spaces in urban areas.
- **Public Cooling Spaces**: The availability of indoor cooling spaces is insufficient, and there's a demand for more such spaces. People emphasized the importance of creating places where people can seek refuge during extreme heat or storms.
- **Flood and Storm Protection**: Concerns about safety during heavy rainfall, floods, and storms were common, with some areas experiencing severe flooding. There's a need to improve preparation for such events, including better flood protection measures, better crisis management, and enhanced availability of emergency services.

3. Engagement & Communication Challenges

- **Direct vs. Digital Communication**: Many participants expressed a preference for more direct, in-person communication rather than relying on digital methods. This could be through platforms like the 'hub,' or more face-to-face engagement that fosters deeper, more personal conversations.
- **Clear and Effective Communication**: There was a call for better communication channels, including 24/7 emergency hotlines or clear public displays of information regarding climate-related risks, emergency contacts, and cooling centers.
- **Cross-border Communication**: Participants are keen on improved communication across borders, particularly in the Euregio Maas-Rijn region. There was support for apps and warning systems that could alert residents to climate-related events and inform them of resources available for support during emergencies, especially when events impact multiple countries.

Future Action:

1) **Youth Involvement**: A recurring theme was the importance of involving younger generations more actively in climate adaptation efforts. Organizers should look for ways to include youth, perhaps through youth organizations, and help them become active participants in climate resilience planning.
2) **Localized Solutions**: Solutions should be tailored to specific neighborhoods, as the experiences and needs of residents vary widely depending on location. There's a push for more neighborhood-focused responses to climate challenges.
3) **Community Capacity Building**: There's a desire to build stronger community connections, with an emphasis on distributing roles and responsibilities. Engaging

residents in community-driven training and emergency preparedness could be an effective way forward.

4) **Practicality of Solutions**: The insights gained need to lead to tangible outcomes. Suggestions such as providing free emergency apps, ensuring public spaces offer adequate shade, and having more trees planted in cities should be prioritized. Local governments should take practical steps based on these discussions.