

Guidance for National Citizens' Panels in the context of the Conference on the Future of Europe

The Joint Declaration for the Conference on the Future of Europe foresees the organisation of European citizens' Panels. In addition, according to the Joint Declaration, “*Each Member State and institution can organise additional events, in line with their own national or institutional specificities, and make further contributions to the Conference, such as national citizens' Panels or thematic events bringing together input from different panels*”. The Joint Declaration states that “*National and European events in the framework of the Conference will be organised along a set of principles and minimum criteria reflecting EU values to be defined by the Conference structures*”.

In this context, organisers of events should subscribe to the Conference Charter and participants should adhere to it.

The guidance described below is inspired by the principles of good deliberation, defined notably in an OECD report which has reviewed hundreds of case studies of deliberative processes,¹ and is meant to assist Member States which intend to organise Citizens' Panels at national, regional or local level.

NB: National events, different from citizens' panels, should be organised in line with the purpose and the principles of the Conference, in an open, transparent and inclusive way. Specific guidelines on how to organise such events are available in the form of toolkits on the Multilingual Digital Platform and, especially, in the “Step-by-step guide for event organisers”². The document offers also examples of event formats that could inspire and guide the choice of the Member States. A specific guide on how to make the events inclusive is also available on the platform.

1) Purpose

Panels should have a clear purpose and goal: “*the objective should be outlined as a clear task and is linked to a defined public issue. It is phrased neutrally as a question in plain language*”. The role of the citizens and the influence of their input should be clear. Reference should be made to the overall process of the Conference on the Future of Europe.

The Multilingual Digital Platform of the Conference on the Future of Europe offers topic suggestions, but Member States are free to choose any other topic related to the European Union that they consider important. According to the Joint Declaration on the Conference on the Future of Europe, the scope of the Conference should reflect the areas where the European Union has the competence to act or where European Union action would be to the benefit of European citizens. Ultimately, the purpose of the Panels is to provide collective recommendations on specific topics related to the future of Europe.

2) Follow-up

“*The commissioning public authority should publicly commit to responding to or acting on participants' recommendations in a timely manner.*” National dissemination and coordination measures that could ensure the uptake and visibility of the outcomes of national Citizens' Panels will enhance the

¹ Report available on: <https://www.oecd.org/gov/open-government/innovative-citizen-participation-new-democratic-institutions-catching-the-deliberative-wave-highlights.pdf>. Quotes in this text are taken from the good practice principles for deliberative processes for public decision-making of that report.

² [How do I organise an event? - Conference on the Future of Europe \(europa.eu\)](#)

integration of the national/regional/local actions into the wider process of the Conference. This holds true especially given the potential overlap of similar discussions unfolding on the one side at local/national level, and on the other side at EU level.

The three European institutions committed to respond to participants' recommendations in the Joint Declaration: *"The final outcome of the Conference will be presented in a report to the Joint Presidency. The three institutions will examine swiftly how to follow up effectively to this report, each within their own sphere of competences and in accordance with the Treaties."*

3) Transparency

"The deliberative process should be announced publicly before it begins. The process design and all materials [...] should be available to the public in a timely manner." The Multilingual Digital Platform of the Conference is the main hub for Conference related events, contributions and information, thereby ensuring transparency. All contributions should be published on the Multilingual Digital Platform <https://futureu.europa.eu/> which gathers all input for the European citizens' Panels and the Plenary of the Conference and other related activities and events.

The Joint Declaration provides that the recommendations from the national and European Citizens' Panels are debated by the Conference Plenary. In addition to the Platform, the Member States could use existing Union institutional structures to communicate the results of the national citizens' Panels.

4) Inclusiveness

"Inclusion should be achieved by considering how to involve under-represented groups". *"Participation should also be encouraged and supported through remuneration, expenses and/or providing or paying for childcare and eldercare"* as well as providing necessary support and assistance. This applies to both face-to-face events and online events. Similarly to the European Citizens' Panels, an over-representation of young people or other kinds of public could be sought. A particular attention should be given to have an appropriate facilitation of the Panels, with skilled facilitators.

5) Representativeness

"The participants should be a microcosm of the general public. This is achieved through random sampling" representing different geographic origins, gender, age, socioeconomic backgrounds and/or levels of education in the respective country / region, as also stated in the *Joint Declaration* for the European Citizens' Panels. The selection of the participants should foresee the possible exclusion related to elected tenures or political responsibilities.

The number of participants per panel is usually between 50 and 200 citizens, depending on the number of inhabitants of the Member State, region or area. Efforts should be made to reach those who normally do not take part in public debates or political discussions, e.g. by choosing settings and places with easy access.

The organisation of on-site citizens Panels, has shown added-value in terms of diversity and quality of interactions and dialogue between participants. In online debates, the need for more breaks should be taken into account. Online sessions can be split up into multiple sessions.

6) Information

"Participants should have access to a wide range of accurate, relevant, and accessible evidence and expertise" on the fundamentals of the topic to be discussed in order to enable collective reflection. There should be clear procedures in place to ensure that the knowledge provided to citizens is adequate

and balanced. According to this, citizens should have the opportunity, within the scope of their panel, to choose what specific topics they want to focus on and the type of expertise they need.

7) Group deliberation

“Participants should be able to find common ground to underpin their collective recommendations to the public authority. This entails careful and active listening, weighing and considering multiple perspectives, every participant having an opportunity to speak, a mix of formats that alternate between small group and Plenary discussions and activities, and skilled facilitation”. Organisers should plan to have **facilitated discussions** in the Panel plenary and in smaller subgroups with approximately 10 persons per table. The subgroups discuss and formulate recommendations that should be later discussed and endorsed by the Panel’s plenary. The facilitation should be **neutral and skilled**.

8) Time

“Deliberation requires adequate time for participants to learn, weigh the evidence, and develop informed recommendations, due to the complexity of most policy problems”. **At least 4 to 6 meeting days** (e.g. two to three weekends) could be planned when addressing complex topics in a national deliberation process. Alternatively, several decentralised citizens’ Panels could take place across a Member State, using the same method.

9) Integrity

In order to ensure the integrity of the exercise, *“The process should be run by an arm’s length coordinating team different from the commissioning public authority”.*

10) Privacy

National Citizens Panels should ensure participants’ privacy and respect of the EU data protection rules. *“There should be respect for participants’ privacy to protect them from undesired media attention and harassment, as well as to preserve participants’ independence, ensuring they are not bribed or lobbied by interest groups or activists”.*

11) Evaluation

“There should be an anonymous evaluation by the participants to assess the process based on objective criteria (e.g. on quantity and diversity of information provided, amount of time devoted to learning, independence of facilitation). A questionnaire could be submitted at the beginning and at the end of the process to assess the degree of satisfaction with the process and the learning curve they may have experienced due to the deliberative methods of the panels.