



CITIZENS
TAKE OVER
EUROPE

10 + 1 GUIDELINES FOR EU CITIZENS' ASSEMBLIES

Over the past years, deliberative citizens' assemblies selected by lot have increased their popularity and impact around the world. If introduced at European Union level, and aimed at developing recommendations on EU policy issues such as first ever transnational citizens' assemblies would be groundbreaking in advancing EU democratic reform. The *Citizens Take Over Europe* coalition recognizes the political urgency and democratic potential of such innovations of EU governance. We therefore call for the introduction of European citizens' assemblies as a regular and permanent body for popular policy deliberation. In order for EU level citizens' assemblies to work as an effective tool in further democratising EU decision-making, we have thoroughly examined preexisting exercises of deliberative democracy. The following 10 + 1 guidelines are based on best practices and lessons learned from national and local citizens' assemblies across Europe. They have been designed in collaboration with leading experts. At present, these guidelines shall instruct the Conference on the Future of Europe on how to create the first experimental space for transnational citizens' assemblies. But they are designed for future EU citizens' assemblies as well.

1. Participatory prerequisites

Strong participatory instruments are a prerequisite for a democratic citizens' assembly. Composed as a microcosm of the EU population with people selected by lot, the assembly workings must be participatory and allow all members to have a say, with proper professional moderation during the deliberative rounds. The assembly must fit the EU participatory pillar and connect to the existing tools of EU participatory democracy, for instance by deliberating on successful European citizens' initiatives.

The scope and structure of the citizens' assembly should be designed in a participatory manner by the members of the assembly, starting with the first assembly meeting that will draft and adopt its rules of procedure and set its agenda.

Additional participatory instruments such as the possibility to submit online proposals to the assembly on relevant topics should be included in order to facilitate the engagement of all citizens. Information about opportunities to get involved and participate in the citizens' assembly proceedings must be attractive and accessible to ordinary citizens.

2. Inclusive selection

Members of a citizens' assembly should be selected by lot in order to give all citizens and residents of Europe the same chance to be included. Lot based selection should make the group of participants as representative of Europe's diversity as possible. The recruitment through a civic lottery should follow a two-step selection process that includes stratification: First, a sufficiently large number of randomly selected citizens in the EU should receive an invitation to participate in the assembly. The invitations should reach citizens and residents in an unbiased way, e.g. through phone calls on random numbers, letter invitations to random households, or on-door recruitments at random addresses. Second, only a subset of individuals from those who respond positively to the initial invitation should be accepted as participants. This selection is designed to meet socio-demographic quotas, ensuring a representative cross-section of society. The relevant criteria for the quotas could include, but are not limited to: age, gender, ethnicity, religion, education, socio-economic status, EU member country of origin, urban or rural background, as well as behavioral or attitudinal aspects relevant to the context of the specific assembly's agenda. Moreover, also different attitudes towards the EU, ranging from very positive to very negative, should be reflected in the sample in order to avoid one-sidedness.

This two-step selection procedure is designed to actively encourage individuals to participate in the assembly and thereby to minimise self-selection biases. Adequate remuneration should be offered to compensate for their time, as well as reimbursement of expenses for travelling and accommodation in the case of a physical meetings and, if needed, for childcare. It will be necessary to actively follow up with invitees and to take extra care of socially vulnerable individuals by offering additional support, such as by reserving 10% of seats for marginalized individuals and non-voters.

3. Impactful outcomes

Citizens' assemblies must be designed such that their outcomes will have clear impacts on EU policy-making. Before the start of the citizens' assembly, the EU institutions should commit themselves to an effective follow-up mechanism with respect to the resolutions adopted by the assembly. This requires the citizens' assembly to discuss real EU policy issues and develop solutions that are decided by the citizens themselves.

If the citizens' assembly becomes merely a consultative project that plays only a symbolic role without any policy impacts, this will be detrimental to the objective of involving citizens in governing Europe's future. This would likely lead to further popular disenchantment with the European project. Therefore, it must be clear from the outset that the citizens' assemblies are designed to meet after their recommendations have been turned over to the EU institutions and to check whether and how EU policy-makers have translated them into EU legislation. Such follow-up procedures will raise public awareness and expectations towards the EU institutions, as a prerequisite for legislative and, if necessary, also legal follow-up.

4. Bottom-up agenda setting

The citizens' assembly with its mechanisms for participation, inclusiveness and legislative follow-up and, especially, procedures for agenda setting, should be designed to reflect the concerns, suggestions and ideas from the complete spectrum of European society – from EU sceptics to friends of the EU. Across Europe, ordinary citizens should be invited to voice the most pressing and relevant topics concerning the EU and its future. This bottom-up design of the agenda setting

process starts with a first phase that should be open to all citizens to voice their most pressing problems. The citizens' assembly will then proceed to set the agenda by identifying the topics of highest relevance to European society. The EU institutions will not have the right to limit the range of topics. The citizens assembly should be ensured that their members have the freedom to come up with innovations. A digital deliberative crowdsourcing infrastructure could be put in place to build consensus on the priorities of the assembly's work.

Albeit composed of only a few hundred citizens, the citizens assembly would stay connected with the broader society and ordinary citizens in all regions and member states. Moreover, over its whole duration it will interact also with the EU institutions. The legitimacy of the EU citizens' assembly thus largely depends on its bottom-up procedures of agenda setting, and its connectedness with the general public as well as with the EU institutions.

5. Deliberative methods

Deliberations should be informed discussions that allow for a wide range of viewpoints to nuance discourse and find common ground on which to draft the citizens' assemblies' recommendations. For each topic discussed, information sessions led by thematic experts are of vital importance to ensure that all participants have sufficient information that represent various perspectives. It also requires establishing a space in which participants feel safe to intervene and have the opportunity to speak, a mix of formats that alternates between small group discussions and larger plenaries, and skilled facilitation to ensure that participants feel heard. There is also the vital question of allowing for sufficient time so that participants can learn, deliberations can develop, and that the multiplicity of viewpoints can be expressed and considered. It is recommended to allow time for individual learning and reflection in between meetings. Deliberations must be independent of political timing and must not depend on the goodwill of current mandates to be taken seriously, especially regarding allocation of budget and proper follow up mechanisms.

6. Transnational exercise

To respond to the unique cultural and linguistic nature of the European Union citizenry, it is critical that the citizens' assembly be a visibly transnational exercise that fosters the cultural, geographical, and linguistic diversity of the EU. Opportunities for interaction, deliberation, and collaboration among the diverse members of the assembly need to be maximized. This will require an adequate infrastructure for translation, including live translation of deliberation rounds, translation of plenary discussions, and translation of all documents. Citizens from EU candidate countries should also be invited to attend as observers, as well as citizens from other areas of the world.

An EU citizens' assembly, always maintaining its transnational design, should be at the same time strongly interconnected with national and regional institutions and transregional institutions, including citizens' assemblies taking place at those multiple levels. This could take diverse forms, such as that of an agenda-setting phase with inputs from national, regional and local citizens' assemblies.

The number of citizens in an EU citizens' assembly needs to be high enough to sufficiently represent these diversities. No less than 300-350 citizens are recommended for this purpose, although more scientific research is needed for further evaluation.

7. Transparency

The structures and procedures of the citizens' assembly, the methods by which the recommendations are developed, as well as the information provided by experts, should be transparent, that is open and available to the public. All content released by the assembly should be archived and made easily accessible. The necessity of transparency results from the need for legitimacy and the ability of the public and of the mass media to know what has been discussed by the assembly, and with which outcomes. As a relatively new form of democratic governance, citizens' assemblies need to stand apart from traditional lobbying activities and should rather be fitting a modern, transparent democratic political culture. This is especially critical in order to create social and public trust in the democratic process, also from an outsiders' view.

Although the process, documents, and decisions that emerge from the citizens' assembly must be transparent, its deliberations require a protected space. This is needed to encourage participants to speak from their heart, to openly discuss their thoughts on any point, and to change their minds without external interference. By contrast, full public transparency of assembly deliberations risk constraining deliberations making them respond to public sentiment, rather than to fact-based argumentation.

8. Accountability

EU Institutions must be accountable to the citizens' assembly by providing it with reasons and justifications for the decisions taken or not taken in following up with the recommendations of the citizens' assembly. The institutions should explain in clear written feedback which recommendations they have fully or partially adopted, or rejected, and provide reasons for these decisions. Additionally, holding EU institutions to account requires a public space for citizens' political dialogue on the basis of the feedback. At the end, to ensure accountability, the citizens' assembly must be enabled to give a response to the decisions enacted by the EU institutions.

An impartial coordinating body separate from the citizens' assembly should oversee and decide if the response and follow-up by the institutions is deemed sufficient. The coordinating body would, for example, conduct anonymous surveys among the participants of the citizens' assemblies to make sure there is integrity and coherence by contrasting the surveys with the assembly findings. It would also assess the follow-up response by the institutions and report its conclusions back to the citizens' assembly. The citizens' assembly should also be run by this independent coordinating team that oversees the assembly process. The coordinating body should exclude any members that are direct stakeholders of the assembly, or politicians or any citizen who may have a conflict of interest.

9. Visibility

For the citizens' assembly to become publicly visible, local, regional, national, and EU institutions should actively generate outreach across Europe aimed at fostering media attention and engagement at all levels. Journalists, regional, and national institutions across the EU are invited to observe the assemblies and should be provided with welcome packets that include information about the structure and workings of the citizens' assembly. A strong digital dimension is also critical for the visibility of the work of the assembly, for raising public trust in the assembly, and for ensuring that the assembly is accessible to the general public.

10. Continuity

To ensure the greatest democratic improvement for EU governance, deliberative transnational citizens' assemblies should be established as a permanent body with proper resources within the European system. In exchange, the continuity of citizens' assemblies will help complement representative democracy in the EU.

By making the assemblies continuous, citizens will be given a permanent space to meet on a regular basis. Thereby, EU institutions will benefit from unlocking the potentials of the independent citizens' panels. Practical experiences have shown that citizens' deliberations can contribute to solving a great many tricky issues that have left party politicians in a political deadlock. Institutionalizing the citizens' assemblies would be a proof that EU leaders have the political will and courage to not only bring citizens to the decision-making table, but also keep them there.

+1

Fun!

Lastly, while these ten guidelines outline incremental steps to making the European citizens' assemblies a permanent success, it is important that all citizens be motivated to participate. Therefore the assembly needs attractive incentives for citizens of all age groups and backgrounds that will engage them with following its progress. Such incentives will include moments of enjoyment and sociability, from lunches and dinners, to entertainment and cultural events, such as concerts and performing arts. The deliberations of and events revolving around the citizens' assembly should be memorable and meaningful, therefore both their digital and social dimensions must be wide-reaching, visible, and attractive.

With contributions by:

- Carsten Berg (The ECI Campaign)
- Jacob Birkenhaeger (Buergererrat)
- Oliver Escobar (University of Edinburgh)
- Michele Fiorillo (CIVICO Europa – Scuola Normale Superiore)
- Gerald-Christian Heintges (Friends of the European Republic)
- Angela Jain (Technical University Berlin, Buergererrat and Planning Cells)
- Ulrike Liebert (University of Bremen)
- Jonathan Moskovic (G1000)
- Alvaro Oleart (Studio Europa, Maastricht University)
- Alba Requejo (Stand Up for Europe)
- Fionna Saintraint (Parlement francophone bruxellois)
- Pablo Sánchez Centellas (ECI Right2Water)
- Amélie Snijders (The Good Lobby)

- Daniela Vancic (Democracy International)
- Philipp Verpoort (Sortition Foundation)