

Citizens' engagement and expectations of the Conference on the Future of Europe

SUMMARY

What sort of European Union do we want to see in the future? What is working well in the EU and what could be improved? These are just two examples of the kind of questions that the European citizens' panels, part of the Conference on the Future of Europe, will have to answer. The Conference on the Future of Europe marks the first time in the history of the EU that citizens have been included in a consultative process in such a structural and innovative manner. The conference, first announced by Commission President Ursula von der Leyen in 2019, is now entering its key phase, with the first European citizens' panel meeting taking place on 17 September 2021.

The widening gap between citizens and institutions is a known pattern, not only at EU level but also at national level in many countries. Against this backdrop, some forms of participatory democracy – such as citizens' assemblies – already successful in Ireland and elsewhere in recent years, promise to provide a format that allows an open exchange of views in a collaborative environment.

The citizens' panels were proposed and designed to give a voice to citizens in the most inclusive way possible. As such, the panels' key requirement is that they represent the EU population faithfully. The result is that 800 EU citizens, equally distributed into four citizens' panels, will be called upon to discuss issues and concerns that they may themselves identify. The debate is supported by a multilingual digital platform, the main hub of the conference. The citizens' panels are not meant to replace representative democracy however, but rather to complement it.

The Conference on the Future of Europe is a complex democratic exercise in which the multilingual digital platform gathers ideas from citizens and civil society, citizens' panels give recommendations, and the conference plenary makes proposals on the basis of which the executive board of the Conference will draft the final report. The contribution of the citizens' panels will feed into the proposals of the conference plenary and, ultimately, into the final report of the conference that the executive board will present at the end of the conference for the institutions to follow up.



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Introduction

With the preparation phase now complete, the Conference on the Future of Europe is entering its key phase. A short look back at the last one and half years reveals a long phase of negotiations between three EU institutions (the European Commission, the European Parliament and the Council of the EU), from January 2020 when [Parliament](#) announced its vision for the conference, to March 2021, when the [joint declaration](#) was signed. Difficulties finding a common and shared approach between institutions, coupled with a lack of agreement on who should chair the conference, were only some of the reasons for this delay. Indeed, the coronavirus crisis, and the shift in priorities brought by it, added further hurdles to an already complex initiative. Once the joint declaration had been signed, the various actors involved began designing the bodies, procedures and rules governing the conference, as reported by the first [activity report](#) (March-June 2021). Although sometimes criticised for being somewhat 'bureaucratic', this preparatory phase, now making way for the first citizens' panel on 17-19 September 2021, was essential to ensure from a political, institutional and democratic perspective that the full range of voices and needs would be accommodated within the conference's representative bodies and working processes.

The [Conference on the Future of Europe](#) consists of four main pillars: the **multilingual digital platform, the European citizens' panels, the conference plenary and decentralised events**. All these components have a specific function and make-up, and are designed to interact together in an inclusive and transparent manner. While touching upon all four components, this briefing focuses in particular on the citizens' panels.

Overall, the [process](#) is intended to follow a **bottom-up approach** whereby the [multilingual digital platform](#) hosts the ideas of citizens and civil society which are then passed on to the citizens' panels and the conference plenary. In parallel, national events connected with the conference may also take place and their findings will be also transmitted to the citizens' panels and the conference plenary. The panels and the plenary will operate according to different procedures and formats; however, they will discuss issues, relating to a number of policy areas, with the aim of coming up with recommendations and proposals. Whereas the citizens' panels represent the **civic component** of the conference, the European citizenry, the conference plenaries [represent](#) the **institutional dimension** of the conference, and are based on the EU institutional triangle (Commission, Parliament and Council), the two consultative committees (the European Committee of the Regions – CoR) and the European Economic and Social Committee – EESC), the national parliaments, and local and regional elected representatives.

This **institutional dimension** however **blends in with the civic dimension** because the citizens' panels will also participate in the conference plenaries, together with representatives of civil society and the social partners.

The aim of this complex process is to ensure that ideas and recommendations coming from the digital platform, or developed and discussed within the citizens' panels, permeate the discussion within the conference plenaries and are ultimately reflected in the final recommendations that the conference plenary is expected to issue. The conference conclusions are to be drawn up – on the basis of the plenary discussions and proposals – by the executive board, operating on a consensual basis in full collaboration with the conference plenary.

Throughout this process, the [executive board](#) will oversee and take decisions regarding the work of the conference. The executive board is composed of nine members representing the three institutions (Commission, [Parliament](#) and Council) equally and of observer members from the European Parliament, Council, national parliaments, the EESC, the CoR, and other EU institutions and European social partners. The current **co-chairs of the executive board** are: Guy Verhofstadt (Parliament – Renew, Belgium, endorsed by the [Conference of Presidents](#)), Dubravka Šuica (Commission) and Gašper Dovžan (Council – Slovenian Presidency, previously Ana Paula Zacarias –

Portuguese Presidency). The conference is under the **tripartite chair of the presidents of Parliament, Council and the Commission**, with conclusions expected by spring 2022.

The whole process is expected to be complex but well-received: complex, because it has the challenging task of channelling wide-ranging ideas, political visions and institutional roles into a process that can lead to concrete conclusions and recommendations; well-received because as a recent [Eurobarometer survey](#) shows, EU citizens see their involvement in the broader discussion on the future of Europe as a very positive initiative.

The multilingual digital platform

The [multilingual digital platform](#) was the first element of the conference to be [launched](#) – in early April 2021. The multilingual platform is the conference's hub, where new ideas and events relating to the EU's future can be made public. On the multilingual digital platform, citizens, stakeholders, civil society and the public at large can post and share ideas on the future of Europe, and on how they would like to see the EU improve, reform or act.

The platform offers the possibility to contribute to the discussion on a wide range of policy areas that, for practical purposes, were condensed into **nine macro policy areas**: i) climate change and the environment, ii) health, iii) a stronger economy, social justice and jobs, iv) EU in the world, v) values and rights, rule of law and security, vi) digital transformation, vii) European democracy, viii) migration, and ix) education, culture, youth and sport. Although the list is broad enough, a **further additional 10th category** ('other ideas') was included to allow people to submit ideas on policy areas not seen as falling within the other nine. Those nine policy area categories largely reflect those identified by the conference's rules of procedure ([Rule 2](#)), which also include within the scope of the conference **cross-cutting issues** relating to the EU's ability to deliver on policy priorities, such as better regulation, application of subsidiarity and proportionality, implementation and enforcement of the *acquis* and transparency.

The multilingual digital platform offers also an [overview of events](#) being organised around the EU on the conference or in connection with it. One innovative aspect of the platform is the fact that, besides being a hub for ideas on the future of Europe, it offers [useful guidance and material](#) for any citizen, organisation or stakeholder wishing to host an event to debate the future of Europe. A fundamental element of any event organised in the framework of the conference is respect for the fundamental values enshrined in the [conference charter](#): inter alia, inclusiveness, respect for human dignity, freedom, democracy, equality, the rule of law, human rights, including the rights of people belonging to minorities.

The multilingual digital platform is also the hub where all the [material concerning the conference](#) is centralised: from the [conference rules of procedure](#), to the [minutes of executive board meetings](#), conference activity reports, information on relations with [external contractors](#) and other [informative material](#) (e.g. a toolkit, conference event recordings, campaign materials, etc.). The platform is therefore an essential interface with the public on the conference's activities and, as such, a living tool updated progressively as the work of the Conference proceeds.

An important link is made between the input of citizens and stakeholders to the platform and the work of the other conference bodies. **Periodic reports** will assess the citizens' input. Those reports will be transmitted to the citizens' panels and the conference plenary, allowing the two bodies to identify issues, topics and areas of major interest to citizens and see what are the main proposals in those areas. The citizens' panels and conference plenaries will be able to tap into those topics in order to stimulate their discussions. The first [interim report](#) of the platform, covering the period from its launch until 2 August 2021, relays 19 679 contributions, 6 115 ideas and 1 685 events covering all nine policy areas (including the residual 10th category). Public participation in the platform peaked close to the launch and again close to Europe Day (9 May). The ranking of policy areas, in terms of the number of contributions submitted by the public in the form of ideas, comments or events, is as follows in descending order: European democracy (top); climate change and environment; the

additional category 'other ideas'; a stronger economy, social justice and jobs; and EU in the world. The contributions under the 'other ideas' category were distributed across the nine policy areas.

The [interim reports](#) will be [made public periodically](#) during the conference. They will be available in 24 languages and will be based on analysis supported by a text-mining artificial intelligence tool run by the European Commission's Joint Research Centre (JRC).

Citizens' panels

Although already tested in some countries, the citizens' panels of the Conference on the Future of Europe are a genuine innovation with respect to traditional EU consultation formats. This participatory democratic tool has been inspired by a trend that has materialised in recent years and that seeks to give a voice to the public on broader policy topics, sometimes even of a contentious nature, or to involve the general public in more concrete/operational projects. While a description of some of these participatory democracy tools is provided later in this briefing, the present section offers a description of the specific citizens' panels put in place in the framework of the conference.

The citizens' panels were conceived as a tool to give a **greater say to citizens on EU matters** that interest them, but first and foremost they are intended to offer citizens a forum where they can express their proposals, concerns and ideas on how to reform the EU. In other words, to give citizens a say on how they see the future of the EU.

The underlying importance of the citizens' panels is expressed in the [joint declaration](#) in the following words:

'The Conference on the Future of Europe will open a new space for debate with citizens to address Europe's challenges and priorities. European citizens from all walks of life and corners of the Union will be able to participate, with young Europeans playing a central role in shaping the future of the European project.'

The citizens' panels were proposed and introduced in the framework of the conference to give EU citizens a voice in an **inclusive and transnational** manner, whereby dialogue between citizens of EU countries can offer a transnational approach to proposals on the future of Europe as opposed to reflecting no more than the sum of national discussions. Taking this into account, the citizens' panels are a genuine innovation in the realm of participatory democracy, as they involve **citizens of 27 Member States**.

The **European Parliament** has been a firm supporter and proponent of citizens' panels for the conference, albeit with a different name ([citizens' 'agoras'](#)), as the essence of transnational participatory democracy and as a means of bringing a truly bottom-up approach to the debate on the future of Europe. In the [preparatory phase of the conference](#), Council and Commission actually centred their proposals on other ways of involving European citizens, such as relying on existing consultation programmes and networks. The Parliament's citizens' agoras however were intended not only to foster transnational bottom-up mobilisation for the conference but also to offer a more permanent mechanism for the longer term.

Composition and structure

Given their intended function, the citizens' panels ought to be as representative as possible of the EU citizenry. This requirement was clearly highlighted in Parliament's [resolution](#) of 15 January 2020, where it was suggested that the citizens' agoras should be representative of the EU public in terms of gender, age, socio-economic background, level of education and geography. To that end, Parliament proposed large-scale citizens' agoras made up of 200 to 300 participants, with a minimum of three per Member State, allocated using degressive proportionality and random selection. This latter method of selection was considered – based on tried-and-tested experiences in other countries (see last section of this briefing) – the best way to guarantee that people who would not normally engage with EU matters could also take part in the discussion.

In its resolution, Parliament also proposed that emphasis should be placed on the participation of **young people** (aged 16 to 25) with the introduction of a youth agora. Although this proposal was not retained in the final design of the conference bodies, the citizens' panels do provide for considerable participation on the part of young people. The idea of citizens' agoras found its way into the [joint declaration](#) signed on [10 March 2021](#), in which the citizens' panels' **representativeness** was detailed in five criteria: nationality, gender, age, socioeconomic background and/or level of education. Emphasis on young people was retained in the joint declaration in the form of recommendations to organise specific events targeting young people, to ensure the conference has a long-lasting impact.

The conference's [rules of procedure](#) (Rule 5), [endorsed](#) by the executive board, provide, as to their composition, that citizens' panels should:

- ensure gender balance (at least one female and one male per Member State);
- take account of degressive proportionality as applied to the composition of Parliament;
- be made up of citizens chosen randomly;
- be representative of EU sociological diversity according to five main criteria: geographic origin, gender, age, socioeconomic background and/or level of education;
- take at least a third of their members from the under-25 age group;
- be dedicated to specific themes.

In [May 2021](#), the executive board decided to **structure** the citizens' panels as [follows](#):

- Panel 1: Stronger economy, social justice, jobs/ education, youth, culture, sport/ digital transformation
- Panel 2: European democracy/values, rights, rule of law, security
- Panel 3: Climate change, environment/health
- Panel 4: EU in the world/migration

The **random selection** of the citizens participating in the panels, one of the novelties of these bodies, was outsourced to an [external contractor](#), who completed the selection in mid-August with the assistance of national partner institutes and by means of a method of random generation of phone numbers. The citizens selected received a mandate letter explaining the purpose of the exercise and will receive professional support throughout the process. For each of the four citizens' panels 200 citizens were selected, for a total of 800 EU citizens. A further 200 citizens were selected as reserves (50 per panel). As to the selection criteria, degressive proportionality was used for nationality. In approximate terms, the citizens' panels also reflect proportional representation of rural (27 %) and urban (73 %) components, while the socioeconomic background mix comprises 44 % of participants with a higher education, 45 % having completed secondary school and 11 % with primary or no school. A third (33 %) of the citizens selected are aged between 16 and 25.

Working methods, time table and location

Rule 5 of the conference's [rules of procedure](#) states that:

- citizens' panels should meet during deliberative sessions, in different locations;
- citizens' panels should be dedicated to specific themes based on the scope of the conference, as defined by the multilingual digital platform and the rules of procedure (e.g. the EU's competence to act and areas that would benefit citizens, Rule 2);
- citizens' panels should take contributions from the platform, debate them and give input to the conference plenary, with recommendations for the Union to follow up;
- representatives of the citizens' panels (of which at least one third should be younger than 25) should take part in the conference plenary to debate and present the outcome of the citizens' panel discussion.

The citizens' panels will meet during three [deliberative sessions](#) of minimum two days each, two of which will be in-person sessions and one virtual. Meetings will be held in the 24 official languages with interpretation provided for that purpose. In terms of transparency, the plenary sessions of the citizens' panels will be web-streamed and documents relating to the discussions of the panels will be made public on the multilingual digital platform.

With the planning for the citizens' panels almost complete, including locations, **the first sessions of the four panels** will take place in person in **Strasbourg**, the second sessions remotely. The location of the third sessions of the [four citizens' panels](#) is expected to be in prestigious European educational institutions – the Institute of International and European Affairs (Dublin), the European University Institute (Florence), the College of Europe (Natolin) and the European Institute for Public Administration (Maastricht). For logistical and organisational reasons, the panel sessions cannot take place simultaneously; they will however take place over the same period ranging from September 2021 to spring 2022. The final event for all the citizens' panels is (provisionally) scheduled for 22-24 April 2022 in a virtual or hybrid form, to be decided. Adherence to the calendar, location and procedures planned will also depend on the public health situation. A [provisional calendar](#) showing panel (and plenary) sessions is available on the conference [website](#). This calendar also indicates when the interim reports on the input on the multilingual digital platform will be published on the platform itself.

When it comes to **working methods**, the citizens' panels will draw on prior experiences of citizens' assemblies in various countries. A discussion protocol will be put in place, assistance from experts and facilitators and fact-checkers will be provided. In this way, a methodology will be adopted to allow for a meaningful process, whereby topics are selected and scaled down for discussion and recommendations are designed collectively and owned by the panels. The panels will work and deliberate in working groups of approximately 13 to 15 people. Moreover, experts and stakeholders will be available to the citizens' panels, who will be able to consult them depending on the topic.

The design and roll-out of the citizens' panels' working methods was entrusted to an external contractor, who also organised the logistical aspects. The whole process, however, remains under the **supervision** of the **common secretariat and the executive board** of the conference.

The **debate** in the citizens' panels (following discussions in their working groups) should lead to the formulation of recommendations to be debated in the conference plenary and ultimately absorbed into the conference's final report. The panels should also produce reports giving an account of the discussion methods, arguments expressed during the deliberations, and conclusions. These reports will be prepared by professional facilitators but endorsed by the respective panels. They will be also available on the multilingual digital platform under the [dedicated section](#) on citizens' panels.

A common methodology, however, will be adopted during the first sessions of the citizens' panels: the first meeting will take place in two stages, which ideally should help to set the scene for the discussion:

- i) the members of the citizens' panel should express what type of Europe they would like to see in 2050 with particular relation to the panel's policy area;
- ii) the participants should compare their vision(s) with the [first interim report](#) on contributions from the multilingual digital platform.

To ensure that the **outcome** of the citizens' panels' deliberations reaches the conference plenary, a strong link is necessary between these two bodies of the conference. This connection is to be ensured, not only by communication of the citizens' panels' recommendations to the conference plenary, but also by the **presence of representatives of the citizens' panels** in it. Twenty representatives from each European citizens' panel, of whom at least one third must be under 25 years of age and in full respect of gender balance, should take part in the conference's plenary sessions, in order to present the issues debated and the conclusions reached ([Rule 16](#)).

A link will also be forged between the European citizens' panels and national citizens' panels, whereby the European citizens' panels will be informed in the course of their proceedings of the outcome of national citizens' panels. A further link will be made between the young members of the citizens' panels and the [European Youth Event](#) (EYE) of 8-9 October 2021, as young members will have the opportunity to participate in the EYE event in order to report back to their (citizens') panel on the EYE debates.

Other experiences of participatory democracy

The democratic erosion and decline observed in recent decades, the public disenchantment, fading trust towards public institutions and the increasing political 'apathy' of citizens towards the political sphere have pushed public actors to explore modern, innovative and direct ways to engage with the general public, to make them feel part of policy decision-making that affects them.

In recent years, a variety of forms of [civic engagement](#) have been observed around the world, and some have been tested out in Europe at national or municipal level.

With '**Reinventons Liège**' the Walloon municipality provided an opportunity to propose and vote on projects in the field of culture, art, social inclusion and mobility by means of a digital platform. The projects winning the most votes would form the city plan. **vTaiwan**, meanwhile, was a hybrid consultative process that stimulated debate on specific issues leading to specific policy recommendations. vTaiwan had a private-public nature, in the sense that was not affiliated with the Taiwanese government, but it won the approval of high-ranked government leaders. The **Icelandic constitutional reform process** in 2011 relied on national assemblies, where citizens could share views and perspectives, while the Constitutional Reform Council prepared drafts of the constitution to be voted on in referendums. Although the latter had a positive outcome, the draft constitution was not ultimately endorsed by the Icelandic parliament. This however did not stop the momentum of constitutional reform in Iceland, and in 2018 the government announced the roll-out of a new constitutional process, to be completed in seven years. The new process began in September 2018 with a conference entitled 'Democratic Constitutional Design – The Future of Public Engagement'.

Participatory initiatives may be led by private ('Reinventons Liège', vTaiwan) or public (Icelandic constitutional reform) actors, or they can have a more concrete/operational outlook, as was the case of the **participatory budgets** that flourished between 2005 and 2012, with 55 examples in 2005 and over 1 300 examples by 2012 in Europe alone. In Paris, for example, the general public was asked to express an opinion on which projects public resources should be spent. Participatory budgeting has also been tested elsewhere in the world, for instance in North America, China, and Latin America. This type of civic participation allows for a form of 'co-decision' as regards spending priorities.

The experiment that most inspired the design of the Conference on the Future of Europe, however, was the **Irish citizens' assemblies**. This successful Irish experiment was in turn inspired in part by the [Canadian citizens' assemblies](#) that in 2004 prepared the reform of British Columbia's electoral system, with a view to being approved by referendum (which failed in 2009).

Returning to the Irish experiment, [We the citizens](#) was a project that ran in 2011 and that intended to spark public involvement in democratic life. In a first phase, public meetings were held to invite people to share ideas and concerns that were then to be taken up by the citizens' assemblies. In a subsequent phase, the citizens' assemblies discussed matters relating to political reform, sometimes of a divisive nature but of interest to the Irish population (e.g. taxation, public spending, property taxes, etc.). 'We the citizens' was made up of randomly selected citizens, the only requirement being that they should be representative of the Irish population. This project was the forerunner of a more significant subsequent initiative, the [Convention on the Constitution](#) set up in 2012. With this initiative, a convention was established, made up of 66 randomly selected citizens together with 33 representatives from political parties (appointed by the respective parties). The work of the convention was supported by an expert advisory group of academics, political scientists and constitutional lawyers who provided the necessary knowledge and expert input for the work of the

convention. The convention met over 10 weekends for a day-and-a-half sessions to discuss topics of a sensitive – and sometimes divisive – nature, such as same-sex marriage, abrogation of the offence of blasphemy, and reform of the electoral system of the parliament's lower house (Dáil Éireann). Of the 43 recommendations issued by the convention, 18 required constitutional amendment by referendum. Three such referendums took place, two successful (on marriage equality in 2015 and blasphemy in 2018) and one unsuccessful (on reducing the age requirement for presidential candidates). Further experiences have been tested in Europe, such as in France ([Grand Débat](#)) and Belgium (['Ostbelgien Model'](#)).

Conference plenary

The conference plenary is the body where the final deliberations take place. The plenary will be tasked with debating the recommendations coming from EU citizens' panels, national citizens' panels, and the multilingual digital platform.

The [composition](#) of the conference plenary ([Rule 16](#)) is quite varied, including an EU institutional presence, a strong parliamentary presence from national and [European parliaments](#), representatives of the citizens' panels and of consultative committees, civil society, local and regional authorities. A total of some **449 delegates** will make up the plenary: 108 representatives of the European Parliament, 108 from national parliaments; 80 representatives from citizens' panels (at least one third of whom younger than 25); 54 representatives from Council, 27 representatives of national events or panels; 18 representatives each from the CoR and the EESC; 12 from social partners and 8 from civil society organisations; 6 elected representatives each from [regional and local authorities](#); 3 from the Commission, and the President of the European Youth Forum. The High Representative for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy will also participate when relevant. In addition, key stakeholders may also be invited to the plenary.

The role of the conference plenary will then be to hold **debates** among its members including the representatives of the citizens' panels, without a predetermined outcome, and in full respect of the diversity of views, on all the different input received, with a view to producing proposals for the executive board. These proposals should be the fruit of a **consensual agreement** at least between the representatives of the European Parliament, the Council, the European Commission, as well as representatives from national parliaments, on an equal footing. If there is a clear diverging position from representatives of citizens from national events and/or European or national citizens' panels, this should be expressed in the report by the executive board. ([Rule 17](#)). The executive board will be the ultimate body to draw up the final report of the conference, on a consensual basis. The report will be available on the multilingual digital platform.

In order to facilitate an in-depth discussion conducive to a thorough and meaningful exchange of views, upon a proposal of the [co-chairs of the executive board](#), **nine working groups** were established within the conference plenary mirroring the nine policy areas of the multilingual digital platform. Eight will be chaired by representatives and observers of the executive board: two from the European Parliament, two from the Council, two from the European Commission and two from the national parliaments. One working group will be chaired by the President of the European Youth Forum.

Decentralised national events

The Conference on the Future of Europe has been designed to stimulate the broadest possible involvement of the public and in this sense the citizens' panels are a key element of it. The idea however was to stir interest in the **discussion on the future of Europe in a decentralised manner too**, involving therefore also the national, local and regional levels. For this reason, the conference rules of procedure ([Rule 4](#)) provide for the express possibility that events connected to the conference be organised by Member States or other actors of a public nature such as regional or local authorities, or of a private nature such as organised civil society, social partners or members of

the public. Decentralised events can be organised under the umbrella of the conference and must uphold the values enshrined in the [conference charter](#) which provides for a set of values and rules to be respected by both citizens and organisers of events. Particularly noteworthy are the **commitments incumbent upon organisers** of events to promote inclusive and accessible events, to observe diversity in the debates by supporting the participation of citizens from diverse socio-economic backgrounds, sexual orientations, religions, ages, etc. The charter also encourages the transnational participation of citizens in events. Respect for freedom of speech is also one of the pillars of the conference charter, together with transparency of debates, respect for EU data protection and use of the conference's visual identity. The outcomes of decentralised events should be reported on the multilingual digital platform (Rule 4).

To encourage and facilitate these decentralised events, the platform contains a specific section addressed to those willing to organise one under the aegis of the conference ('[How do I organise an event?](#)'). The section also contains a [step-by-step guide for organisers](#), a guide on [how to make the event more inclusive](#) and a wealth of [campaigning material](#) and [information material](#) that can be used by organisers.

The decentralised events at national level **dovetail with the work of the conference** as their outcomes and recommendations will be passed on to the citizens' panels and will also be discussed by the conference plenary.

Citizens' expectations

A recent [survey](#) (October to November 2020) conducted on behalf of Parliament and the Commission measured the level of interest of EU citizens in the Conference on the Future of Europe, their opinion on the future of Europe, and the level of democratic involvement of citizens in the discussion. The survey, conducted on a sample of around 27 000 respondents, made the importance and timeliness of the conference very clear, not least with regard to the participatory part.

Three in four respondents (76 %) believed that the Conference on the Future of Europe would represent **significant progress for EU democracy** ([p. 59](#)) and in each Member State this opinion was shared by at least the majority of respondents. The highest degree of support for the conference came from citizens of Ireland (90 %), Sweden (88 %), Belgium (88 %) and Lithuania (87 %). Women and young people were more likely to harbour positive feelings towards the conference. About half of the respondents (50 %) considered that citizens would be **inclined to participate in the conference** if they knew that their participation would have a real impact ([p. 54](#)). Interestingly, 25 % of respondents would consider the possibility to talk directly to politicians an incentive to take part, while 32 % would consider it an incentive if all parts of society were represented.

When it came to **their own participation** ([p. 52](#)), 51 % of respondents expressed a willingness to take part, as a citizen, in the activities of the Conference on the Future of Europe. However, only 14 % stated that they would 'definitely' take part. At the same time, 48 % were less inclined to get involved. In terms of country-by-country results, the three countries whose respondents were most 'inclined to participate' were Ireland, Luxembourg and Belgium, while the respondents 'least inclined to participate' came from Finland, Bulgaria and Portugal. Overall, there was a great variety of results across countries, although national results may have been influenced by previous positive experiences at national level (see for instance the high Irish results).

Coming to the **active participants in the conference** ([p. 65](#)), for half of the respondents (51 %) the participation of ordinary citizens in the conference was the right way to go. Young people were also identified as relevant to such a process by almost half of the respondents (47 %), national governments by 42 % and academics, intellectuals and scientists by 40 % of respondents, while civil society and consumer organisations were considered relevant to the conference by a quarter (25 %) of respondents.

The broader reflection on the future of Europe, embodied by the conference, comes at a time when, in the same survey, almost 60 % of respondents revealed that the **health crisis** had made them reflect on the **future of the EU** (p. 22), three in four European citizens believed that the EU should have more competences to deal with crises such as the coronavirus pandemic (p. 20), and nine out of ten respondents (89 %) agreed that there was still work to be done to protect democracy in the EU (p. 39).

Overall, the survey demonstrates (p. 36) that a very large majority of Europeans (92 %) agree that more should be done to take **EU citizens' voices** into account when it comes to decisions on the future of Europe. The [survey results](#) also therefore seem to indicate that the initiative to convene the conference, in the current format and composition, satisfies citizens' expectations to a large extent, with some room for improvement as regards their desire to participate in the process.

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