



# Europe Up Close

Local, Regional and Transnational Citizens' Dialogues  
on the Future of the European Union



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The project From local to European is a cooperation project of the  
European Committee of the Regions and the Bertelsmann Foundation.



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## Preface

Democracy thrives on citizens actively shaping it of their own free will in a balanced dialogue, and, in turn, elected politicians taking care of citizens concerns. However, in the real world of the 27-member European Union (EU), the democratic participation of EU citizens is not a foregone conclusion. On account of its complex procedures and its linguistic and cultural diversity, the EU and its institutions are still a distant entity for many Europeans, even though many decisions and regulations affect our daily lives. This makes it all the more important to have a European democracy that is constantly evolving and adapting to the needs of its citizens.

In order to participate in political decisions, citizens of the 21st century want to have a say in European politics. They are able to elect their political representatives at local, regional, national and European level. However, they are not satisfied with simply going to the polls every five years. That is why a modern European democracy must become more innovative and participatory. Citizens must be given opportunities to participate directly in political discussion and decision-making processes. Without this participation, without the acceptance and the willingness of citizens to participate, it will not be possible to meet the challenges of the future, such as the consequences of the pandemic, the climate crisis, compliance with the principles of the rule of law, digitalisation and growing social inequality; nor will it be possible to strengthen the sense of belonging of Europe's citizens and their identification with Europe. Regions, cities and local politicians all have an important role to play here, as they not only implement EU legislation and funding programmes at the local level, but increasingly stand for the fact that representative and participatory democracy can go hand in hand very well.

The good news is that Europe is now on the road to a sustainable, participatory democracy. Alongside representative democracy, the EU is committed to

governing more citizen-focussed and to creating a "citizens' Europe" with more dialogue and genuine citizen participation. With the Conference on the Future of Europe, the EU launched its largest democracy experiment to date in May 2021. New forms of participation such as Citizens' Dialogues, European citizens' panels and a multilingual platform allow European citizens to work together on new ideas for shaping the EU.

This experimental form of democracy is supported by the joint project "From local to European" run by the Bertelsmann Stiftung and the European Committee of the Regions.

Three core elements are central to the success of this cooperation project: first of all, **inclusion**. It is essential that people from many parts of Europe participate – not only "pro-European" citizens, but "ordinary" citizens from all walks of life. For this reason, the method of lot-based random selection will be used. Secondly, **deliberation**. Innovative interactive formats are deliberately used to ensure that all voices are heard and innovative citizen proposals are developed collectively. Thirdly, **effectiveness**. Political decision-makers at different levels are actively involved. Political representatives of cities and regions also play a central role, as mayors, local councils and administrations are in close contact with their citizens. They are often the initiators of lively innovative citizen participation and the first point of contact for real-life politics.

### **How have the results of the joint project turned out?**

Great interest was evident right from the start of the "From local to European" project. A total of 23 projects from 67 European regions and cities took part. Around 400 participants were trained in the use of innovative participatory and digital methods. All materials were made freely available to the public. Much was still

uncharted territory for the local initiators from politics and administration. They succeeded in organising 38 local, regional and transnational Citizens' Dialogues with about 2,000 citizens and mobilised about 200 politicians. The citizens presented around 400 concrete proposals for European Union policy, including the establishment of a standardised European recycling system, uniform rules for teleworking and home offices, and better access to health care facilities in rural areas. It is now up to the politicians to examine and implement the proposals.

The results show that the diverse composition of the citizen groups and the participatory methods are paying off. A differentiated approach is taken to the European issues. Different perspectives, factual information and arguments are at the centre of the discussions. The mutual exchange of different perspectives and territorial concerns leads to common proposals that balance the different interests of a diverse European society.

When it comes to participation in European politics, Citizens' Dialogues between twin towns, partner regions and in border regions are very much in demand. Personal encounters with European neighbours strengthen the sense of belonging between them, fostering a sense of identification with Europe. Modern digital tools help to overcome spatial and linguistic distances. Citizens can be reached more easily and communicate multilingually in their own language.

**What happens to the citizens' proposals in the Conference on the Future?** The citizens' proposals are uploaded to the Conference on the Future platform. What is important now is that the citizens' voices are heard and taken seriously. The proposals must not be allowed to collect dust on the shelves of the EU institutions. The proposals must be followed by action.

To ensure this, all 23 projects of the "From local to European" campaign are incorporated into political structures and processes of the cities and regions. Political decision-makers participated directly in the Citizens' Dialogues and discussed their proposals with the citizens. The majority of local and regional political representatives involved have already announced that they intend to implement the citizens' proposals – as long as they are within their area of expertise. Political players at the EU level should follow this example.

The innovative and deliberative Citizens' Dialogues will only strengthen democracy at the local, regional and European level if the citizens' proposals are effectively implemented and the formats prove themselves in the long run. This is the only way that the Conference on the Future's experiment in democracy will have an impact beyond the initial spark.

**What lessons can we learn about the future of European democracy?** The importance of European politics will continue to grow, including for European regions and cities. This makes modern forms of inclusive, deliberative and effective citizen participation on European issues all the more crucial, not to mention all the more important to have locally and regionally elected politicians who, because of their proximity to the citizens, promote how people identify with Europe. The time has come for the next step: on the path to a "Europe for its citizens", we need more deliberative and more real citizen participation in all parts of Europe as well as its sustainable institutional establishment in the EU's democratic system. This means we need a closer connection between local and regional deliberative Citizens' Dialogues and national and European Citizens' Dialogues. And these Citizens' Dialogues have to be linked to political processes of parliaments and governments from the local to the European level. The EU has to take the plunge and move from the experimental stage to one of permanent citizen participation. Cities and regions are ready to play their part in the interplay between deliberative and representative democracy.



**Dr. Brigitte Mohn**  
Member of the  
Executive Board  
Bertelsmann Stiftung



**Apostolos Tzitzikostas**  
President  
European Committee  
of the Regions

# 1. Summary



In the “From local to European” joint project, the European Committee of the Regions (CoR) and Bertelsmann Stiftung – together with 23 cooperation projects from 67 European cities and regions – conducted Citizens’ Dialogues with around 200 politicians. Among these politicians were 14 members of the European Committee of the Regions. 2,000 European citizens contributed to the Conference on the Future of Europe with more than 400 concrete proposals on the future of Europe.

All Citizens’ Dialogues were committed to upholding quality principles. Inclusion: ordinary citizens take part, not just the usual suspects. Random selection guarantees a diverse range of participants. Deliberation: all citizens have a chance to speak in large and small rounds of discussions. They inform themselves about the topic, develop ideas, weigh them up and formulate joint recommendations. Effectiveness: representatives from administration and politics are involved right from the start and ensure that the results of the Citizens’ Dialogues are followed up and at least partially implemented.

Bertelsmann Stiftung brought in its participatory expertise to help key players from administration and politics in the 67 cities and regions involved to apply the innovative methods and quality principles of (digital) Citizens’ Dialogues. The CoR supported the projects in the concrete implementation of their objectives, for example,

by commissioning facilitators and providing the technical infrastructure for conducting digital dialogues.

## The five key results

### 1. The project led to high-quality Citizens’ Dialogues.

Over 90 percent of the citizens and over 90 percent of the organisers rated the Citizens’ Dialogues as very good or good. All initiators stated that the support provided by the project had improved their own Citizens’ Dialogues.

### 2. Expertise for good citizen participation was firmly established.

All initiators rated the quality principles as useful, regardless of their previous knowledge of citizen participation. They were applied in practice. It was only random selection, as a little-known instrument, that had some implementation issues.

### 3. Participatory democracy in the cities and regions has been given a lasting boost.

100 percent of the projects stated that they would apply the quality principles again in the future. In addition, all Dialogues were supported by politicians. Around 200 politicians supported the Dialogues, discussed them with the citizens and promised to take concrete action.



**4. Citizens want to be more involved in European issues.**

The evaluation of the citizens' assessments and the approx. 400 proposals made by citizens in the Citizens' Dialogues clearly show that European citizens want more citizen participation at the European level.

**5. United in diversity: the proposals of European citizens are similar.**

Around 400 developed proposals show: European citizens want more out of Europe and more unified solutions at EU level. Furthermore, it is evident that citizens not only often discuss the same issues, but also often arrive at similar proposals for the future of Europe although these concern different countries.



## 2. The “From local to European” project at a glance

- |                               |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                          |
|-------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <b>Participants and roles</b> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• European Committee of the Regions (CoR): initiator, process control, provision of supporting resources for the Citizens’ Dialogues</li><li>• Bertelsmann Stiftung: initiator, communication of skills for innovative, deliberative citizen participation for key players in politics and administration; provision of expertise</li><li>• 23 projects from 67 European cities and regions: independently conduct Citizens’ Dialogues within the framework of the Conference on the Future of Europe</li></ul>                                    |
| <b>Background</b>             | <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Participation of citizens from all parts of Europe in the shaping of the European Union within the framework of the Conference on the Future of Europe</li><li>• Part of the activities of the European Committee of the Regions for the Conference on the Future of Europe</li></ul>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                            |
| <b>Objectives</b>             | <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Real, long-term effective contribution of citizens from many European cities and regions in shaping the future of Europe (participatory footprint)</li><li>• Establishing participatory expertise for inclusive, deliberative and effective citizen participation in the politics and administration of European cities and regions</li><li>• Contributing to a vibrant, sustainable participatory democracy at local, regional and European level</li></ul>                                                                                     |
| <b>Period</b>                 | <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• April 2021 to Spring 2022</li></ul>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                              |
| <b>Project phases</b>         | <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• April to May 2021 <b>preparatory phase</b><br/>Information on inclusive, deliberative and effective citizen participation, two events, selection of 23 projects</li><li>• May to beginning of October 2021 <b>expertise development</b><br/>Training of initiators, organisers and facilitators from politics, administration and civil society in 15 training sessions on planning, implementation and facilitation of participatory Citizens’ Dialogues and Citizens’ Panels. Project-specific advisory support provided throughout.</li></ul> |



- September 2021 to Spring 2022: conducting of the **Citizens' Dialogues**  
Implementation of 38 local, regional and transnational Citizens' Dialogues by local and regional project partners, technical and financial support provided by the CoR. Developing citizens' proposals and channelling them into the Conference on the Future of Europe and into local, regional and cross-border policies.
- October 2021 to Spring 2022: **evaluation**  
Monitoring and conclusion of the project

#### Results

- 400 participants in training sessions from local, regional and European politics, administration and civil society
- 38 Citizens' Dialogues with around 2,000 participating citizens, 127 participating organisations and around 200 people from politics and administration
- Around 400 proposals from citizens on the future of Europe
- Establishing the method of deliberative citizen participation in the cities and regions of the project partners.

#### Additional information

- <https://cor.europa.eu/en/engage/Pages/CoR-Bertelsmann-Stiftung-project.aspx>
- [www.bertelsmann-stiftung.de/de/unsere-projekte/demokratie-und-partizipation-in-europa/projektnachrichten/from-local-to-european-buergerdialoge-fuer-europas-zukunft](http://www.bertelsmann-stiftung.de/de/unsere-projekte/demokratie-und-partizipation-in-europa/projektnachrichten/from-local-to-european-buergerdialoge-fuer-europas-zukunft)

### 3. “From local to European”: Citizens’ Dialogues for Europe’s future

What do young Spaniards from Castilla-La-Mancha think about the future of the EU? How do citizens from the twin cities of Munich in Germany and Bordeaux in France envision the digital future of their cities? What do citizens from Pforzheim in Germany and Győr-Ménfőcsanak in Hungary have in common when it comes to European values and democracy? What support do citizens from border regions want from the EU, for example, from Lower Silesia, Karlovy Vary in the Czech Republic and Saxony in Germany? In the framework of the Conference on the Future, European citizens discuss the future of Europe locally, regionally and transnationally. Bertelsmann Stiftung and the European Committee of the Regions support 23 projects in implementing good Citizens’ Dialogues at local level.

#### 3.1 The background: the Conference on the Future of Europe

The Conference on the Future of Europe is a unique experiment in democracy in the European Union. It invites citizens from all over Europe to share their ideas and help shape the common future of the EU. The focus is on debates with a cross-border and pan-European dimension: the aim is for the whole of Europe to come together to tackle common issues.

#### Cities and regions are an important part of the Conference on the Future of Europe

The Joint Declaration on the Conference on the Future advocates for local Citizens’ Dialogues that can contribute to the debates and recommendations of the European and national Citizens’ Panels and the final report of the Conference expected in spring 2022. In concrete terms, the proposal is to organise a limited number of local Citizens’ Dialogues, including by regions and cities which have joined together in European partnerships. These are to discuss topics that concern them. The aim is to use the Conference on the Future of Europe to facilitate the interaction of citizens with politicians and policy-makers at all levels of government.

#### 3.2 Project goals

The European Committee of the Regions (CoR), as the assembly of locally elected politicians, and the Bertelsmann Stiftung, with its expertise in citizen participation, have jointly initiated the “From local to Europe – Citizens’ Dialogues on the future of Europe” project to support such locally initiated dialogues. The central message is that European democracy is important for Europe’s regions and cities – just as Europe’s regions and cities are important for European democracy. Furthermore, at the heart of the project is the understanding that new models of dialogue and consultation with citizens can promote democracy in Europe.



**Committee of the Regions and Bertelsmann Stiftung: enabling more qualitative citizen participation together**

The Conference on the Future of Europe offers all European citizens the opportunity to input their ideas into the political process. However, a core challenge of citizen participation is to achieve real impact. The three goals of the project are therefore:

1. To enable citizens from many cities and regions in Europe to make a real, long-term contribution to shaping the future of Europe through the Conference on the Future of Europe. The aim is to produce an evident participatory footprint if possible. Many years of experience show: this succeeds when citizen participation is planned in depth and carried out in a structured way according to quality principles.
2. To develop participatory expertise for inclusive, deliberative and effective citizen participation in the politics and administration of European cities and regions and establish this long-term. By establishing sustainable expertise and activating local, regional and national administrations and political decision-makers, the aim is to achieve the third goal.
3. Making a contribution to a vibrant, sustainable participatory democracy at local, regional and European level.





### Conference on the Future of Europe

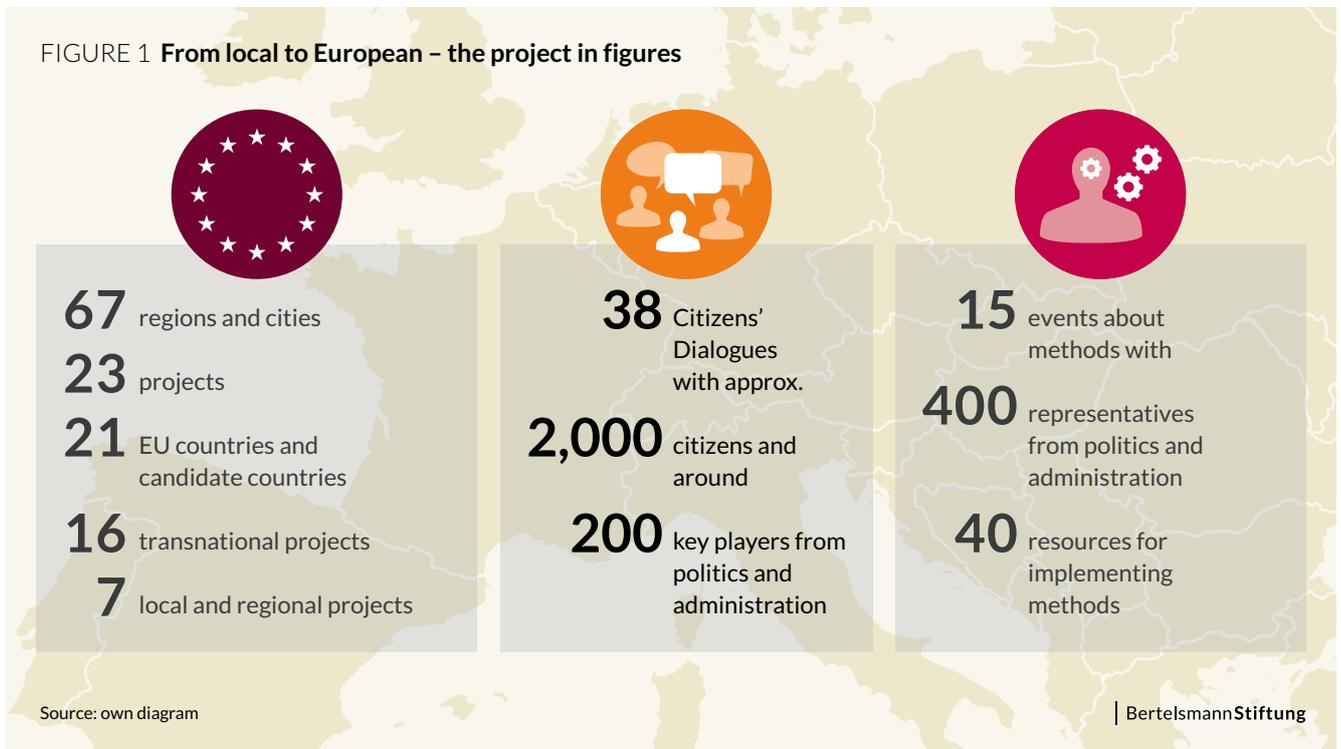
The Conference on the Future of Europe, launched as a joint project of the European Parliament, the Council and the European Commission, started on 9 May 2021. The conference initiates citizen-driven debates and series of discussions where people from all over Europe can share their ideas and help shape the common future of the EU. The conference is the first of its kind: as a Europe-wide experiment in democracy, it offers a new public forum for an open, inclusive and transparent citizens' debate on Europe's key priorities and challenges.

Around 10 thematic areas are up for discussion at the conference: climate change and environment; health; a stronger economy, social justice and

employment; the EU in the world; values and rights, rule of law, security; digital transformation; democracy in Europe; migration; education, culture, youth and sport, as well as the opportunity to incorporate other ideas. The conference plans to use the results of the various discussion forums to formulate conclusions with guidelines for the future of Europe by spring 2022.

The conference will consist of four main elements: Decentralised events, the multilingual online platform, four European Citizens' Forums with randomly selected citizens and plenary sessions. For more information, please go to: <https://futureu.europa.eu/?locale=de>

FIGURE 1 From local to European – the project in figures



### 3.3 From local to European – the project process

The “From local to European” project, running from April 2021 to March 2022, consisted of four different project modules in total:

**Project preparation:** information about the intended inclusive, deliberative and effective citizen participation was disseminated as widely as possible at two events. After a registration period, 23 projects were selected to be partner projects in June 2021.

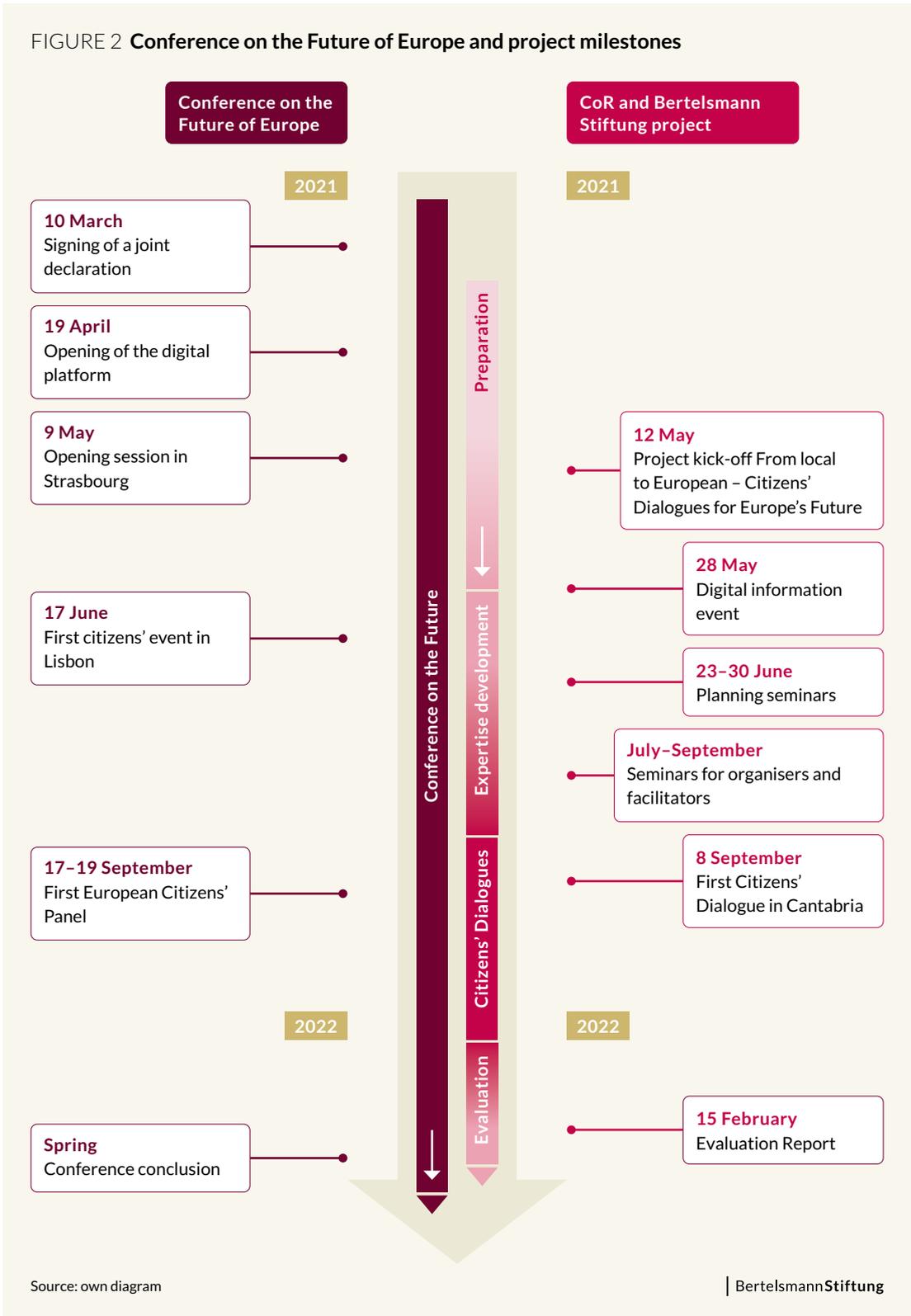
**Expertise development:** in this phase between June and September 2021, the initiators, organisers and facilitators from politics and administration were trained in the method of inclusive, deliberative and effective citizen participation in 15 workshops and seminars

and provided with practical materials for its implementation. Project-specific advisory support was provided throughout.

**Conducting of the Citizens’ Dialogues:** this includes the implementation of 38 local, regional and transnational Citizens’ Dialogues between September 2021 and spring 2022 by the local and regional project partners, technical and financial support by the CoR, development of citizens’ proposals and incorporation of the proposals into the Conference on the Future of Europe as well as into local, regional and cross-border policies.

**Monitoring and evaluation of training and Citizens’ Dialogues:** both the skill-building phase and the actual Citizens’ Dialogues were evaluated and analysed. A coherent evaluation report is produced at the end.

FIGURE 2 Conference on the Future of Europe and project milestones



## 4. The innovation: the method of inclusive, deliberative and effective Citizens' Dialogues

As part of the Future Conference, the "From local to European" project is aimed at cities and regions. Innovative participatory methods and quality principles of inclusive, deliberative and effective citizen participation are applied in all local, regional and transnational Citizens' Dialogues supported by the European Committee of the Regions and the Bertelsmann Stiftung.

### 4.1 The added value of innovative methods and quality principles of good citizen participation

The local, regional and transnational Citizens' Dialogues are conducted by the initiators on site. In the process, the initiators apply the innovative methods and quality principles. This ensures that the citizens develop high quality proposals and that these proposals are actually heard, discussed and hopefully implemented by policy makers. This helps to ensure a more participatory democracy at local, regional and European level.

#### **Citizens want to have a say in European politics – so far, forms of "real" citizen participation have been rare**

The Eurobarometer 2021 on the future of Europe states: the vast majority (92 percent) of Europeans in all Member States demand that citizens' voices be taken more into account in decisions on the future of Europe. Based on the assumption that citizens' views and concerns are to be incorporated more firmly and directly into political decisions, the European Committee of

**Citizens' Dialogues lead to better results if they are conducted inclusively, deliberatively and effectively**

**Inclusive:** "ordinary" citizens from all social backgrounds take part. Randomly selected citizens represent the diversity of society in the regions and cities.

**Deliberative:** all citizens have a chance to speak. Participatory methods and structured exchange of different views and experiences in small groups lead to common proposals.

**Effective:** administration representatives and politicians are involved. Follow-up processes for the implementation of (at least some) proposals at local, regional and European level ensure acceptance by citizens and real impact.

the Regions has been working for years to bring European politics closer to its citizens.

In recent years, numerous EU citizens' consultations and Citizens' Dialogues have been held. The actual implementation of the dialogues has been shaped very differently by the local key players. The lack of expertise and experience with "real" citizen participation has meant that in many cases only "pro-European citizens"



have been reached and a structured, deliberative exchange between citizens to jointly develop ideas and proposals for policy implementation has rarely taken place.

There have been no standardised rules for dealing with the results and citizens have had little influence on political decisions.

**Citizens and politicians benefit from innovative participatory methods and quality principles**

Bertelsmann Stiftung’s many years of experience have shown that the quality of Citizens’ Dialogues, their results and their impact can be significantly increased if different groups of citizens participate, if the dialogues are structured according to quality principles for good citizen participation and if political participants are involved from the beginning. By applying an inclusive, deliberative and effective participatory method, the concerns and views of citizens on specific issues are taken into account more directly and effectively in political decision-making.

Experience has also shown that the application of these methods and quality principles leads to quality citizen proposals that are noticed by policy makers. Consensus-based discussions among European citizens shed light on complex European issues in a differentiated way. Different perspectives, factual information and arguments are at the centre of the discussions. Citizens’ Dialogues organised in this way counteract polarising political debates and the populist spread of simplistic solutions.

Politicians learn what is important to citizens who represent the diversity of society. They are able to gain new perspectives. Unlike opinion polls, they are given specific proposals which help them to prepare better for making political decisions. This means that they are better equipped to make decisions that resonate with citizens and have a higher level of acceptance. The added value for citizens is obvious: they can communicate their interests and ideas on political issues directly to politicians and introduce them into political processes. In this way, they help to shape policy. And this in turn creates more trust in politics and greater satisfaction with democracy.

### **Organisers' methodical skills and resources are a prerequisite for the high quality of Citizens' Dialogues**

The positive effects of “real” citizen participation only occur if the methods and quality principles are applied and the necessary expertise and resources are available. For this reason, representatives of the 23 projects from politics, administration and civil society have undergone training in the application of the innovative methods and quality principles.

## **4.2 Inclusive citizen participation: methods, quality principle, practical advice and examples**

The first key element of high-quality citizen participation is inclusion and diversity. Inclusion is mainly achieved through the process of random selection. The addressees of the Citizens' Dialogues are “ordinary citizens” from all parts of Europe, i.e. not only the “usual suspects”, the politically interested and pro-European citizens, or the organised citizens or representatives of civil society organisations.

### **Random selection ensures inclusion and diversity**

The random selection method ensures that citizens who would not normally participate in a Citizens' Dialogue take part. Citizens who reflect the diversity of society are selected by lots. This includes young and old people, all genders, people with different levels of education and socio-economic backgrounds. Depending on the topic and geographical reference, other criteria may be added, e.g. geographical coverage. The randomly selected citizens ensure inclusive participation, allowing a wide range of opinions and perspectives to be included. The results of discussions represent the diversity of society, in turn giving rise to innovative ideas and well-rounded proposals.

**Quality criteria:** citizens are randomly selected and the group's composition reflects the diversity of society.

### **Random selection with the help of professional market research institutes and data from residents' registers**

Random selection can be carried out in two ways: a) by a professional service provider (e.g. a market research institute) and b) with the help of a residents' register, which is available in most European countries at municipal level. The following applies to both methods: a multi-stage procedure is used to ensure that the group of citizens participating is highly mixed in terms of age, gender, education and socio-economic background, as well as additional factors where appropriate, thus reflecting the diversity of society. The methods differ as follows:

Method a) The service provider uses telephone databases and calls randomly selected people. If they are interested, they receive an invitation to the Citizens' Dialogue. The service provider takes the registrations, matches them with the required number of participants in each ‘category’ and recruits until the target numbers are reached. Often ten to twenty percent more citizens are recruited than end up participating to compensate for drop-outs on the day of the dialogue. The cost of the service depends on the number of participants, the recruitment area and the amount of allowances for the participants.

Method b) The organiser determines the number of people for a random selection of citizens to be invited to the dialogue. Experience has shown that about two to five percent of the people invited show interest. This means that if 100 citizens are to participate in a dialogue, a random selection of 2,000 to 5,000 citizens needs to be chosen from the residents' register. An invitation is sent to these people. The registrations are then compared with the required number of participants in the categories. A second random selection may have to be made to reach the target numbers.

A comparison: method a) requires financial resources, which can be considerable depending on the number of participants, search area and duration of the dialogue. On the other hand, it reduces HR costs for the organising institution. Method b) is very cost-effective. It only involves material costs for sending out the invitation letters. However, the organising institution needs access to the residents' register or a similar personal database and the human resources for organising the invitations and participant management.

### **The recruitment of randomly selected citizens in four steps**

Using the random selection method to recruit citizens for Citizens' Dialogues is worthwhile, but it requires human and financial resources. Above all, advance planning is needed. If planning is started early enough, there is time for adjustments to be made and the Citizens' Dialogue can start with the intended, diverse group. Four steps are required.



#### **Step 1: define the recruitment strategy (ten weeks before the Citizens' Dialogue)**

The Institution organising the Citizens' Dialogue (e.g. a local or regional authority) determines the size and composition of the citizens' group: the total number of participants, the criteria or categories according to which the group is to be composed, and the number of participants in relation to the categories. Criteria include age, gender, education and local population distribution. Based on experience, not all those registered will actually participate in the Citizens' Dialogue, so it is important to set a sufficient number of people for over-recruitment.

Compensation for expenses is an incentive for many citizens to participate. In Germany,

for example, 50 euro is an average amount for participation in a one-day Citizens' Dialogue. Non-monetary compensation (e.g. annual passes for museums or swimming pools) can also be an incentive for participation.

**Step 2: determine method for recruitment and prepare invitation (eight weeks before the Citizens' Dialogue)**

The organising institution decides on the method of recruitment. It prepares letters of invitation (e.g. from the mayor or the Minister of Europe) and additional information needed for participant recruitment. Contracts are negotiated with a market research institute or random from the residents' register are prepared. Recruitment then begins according to the chosen method.

**Step 3: start recruitment and send out participation confirmations (six weeks before the Citizens' Dialogue)**

Invitations are sent to the "random citizens". If they send a positive written response, they will receive confirmation of receipt and further information. By maintaining regular contact with those who have registered, the organising institution expresses appreciation and establishes firm communication. It is advisable to keep the enrollees informed and actively ensure transparency about the process. In this way, they increase the chances that those registered will actually be present at the Citizens' Dialogue. The organising institution needs to keep track of the registration status at all times.

**Step 4: ensuring quality (three weeks before the Citizens' Dialogue)**

The institution regularly checks the status of registrations and compares it with the planned number of participants, both in terms of total number and in terms of participants in the individual categories. Which groups are missing citizens? It is advisable to make specific adjustments at an early stage by inviting new random participants or by having the market research institute make additional recruitments.

**Random selection is increasingly becoming an integral part of citizen participation – across all political levels.**

Random selection is increasingly used in various forms of citizen participation worldwide – across all political levels. Bertelsmann Stiftung's experience shows that this method guarantees the inclusion of citizens who have never taken part in participation processes before. This method of recruiting participants also ensures that a mixed group representing society in its diversity engages in the Citizens' Dialogue. Other forms of recruiting such diverse groups of citizens are often even more time-consuming and labour-intensive than random selection.



**TIP**

For more information about the project: <https://cor.europa.eu/en/engage/Pages/CoR-Bertelsmann-Stiftung-project.aspx>

Shortcut 2 – Random selection for citizen participation  
[www.bertelsmann-stiftung.de/en/our-projects/democracy-and-participation-in-europe/shortcut-archive/shortcut-2-random-selection](http://www.bertelsmann-stiftung.de/en/our-projects/democracy-and-participation-in-europe/shortcut-archive/shortcut-2-random-selection)

Citizen participation using sortition  
[www.bertelsmann-stiftung.de/de/publikationen/publikation/did/citizens-participation-using-sortition](http://www.bertelsmann-stiftung.de/de/publikationen/publikation/did/citizens-participation-using-sortition)

### 4.3 Deliberative citizen participation: methods, quality principle, practical advice and examples

The second key element of qualitative citizens' participation is deliberation. In discussions, all citizens have their say. Participatory methods and structured exchange of different views and experiences in small groups lead to common proposals.

#### Deliberation ensures that everyone has their say

A prerequisite for successful deliberation is a clear but open question. The topic of the dialogue should be outlined in the form of a clear task and should be neither too general nor too specific. Sufficient time should be given to citizens to develop concrete proposals. The structure of the deliberation should also be clear to ensure its success: 1) exchange of personal experiences, 2) discussion of new information, 3) development of ideas, 4) developing concrete proposals and 5) dialogue with politicians.

Facilitators assist the citizens in their work. Much of the deliberation takes place in small mixed groups. The citizens exchange different experiences and views and develop common ideas and proposals. All citizens have a chance to speak. Fact-based information and experts help to weigh up the arguments.

**Quality criteria:** the topic and the task are formulated as a neutral question in simple language. Independent facilitators are used in all groups. Information and experts are selected that reflect different interests, thematic aspects and positions in a comprehensible and balanced way.

#### It is essential that the deliberation process is well structured in order to produce high quality citizens' proposals

Deliberation is a complex process that needs to be well prepared and skilfully implemented. It can be organised in a flexible way in practice.

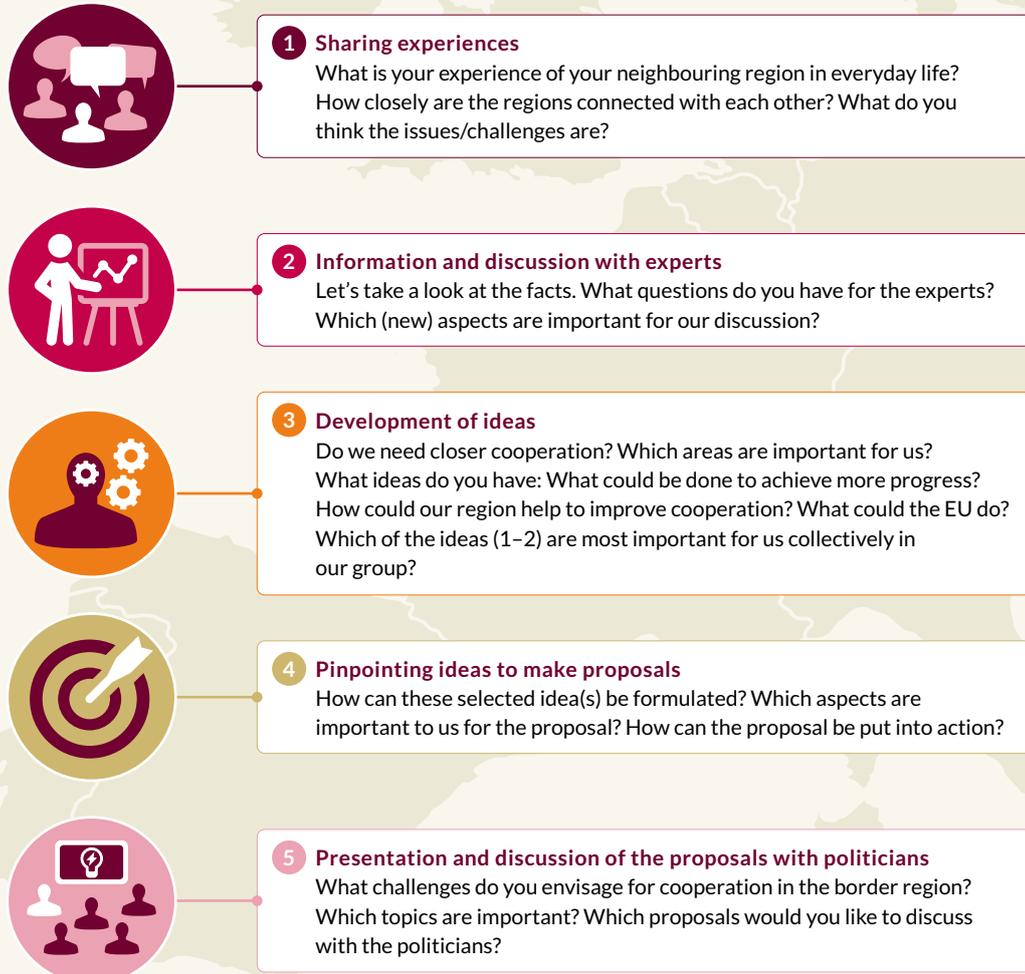
However, the discussion processes must be well structured in all cases so that well-founded and balanced citizens' proposals emerge that the participants are satisfied with.

As soon as the topic and guiding question for the Citizens' Dialogue have been determined, key points for the deliberative process have to be set and the work ahead for the citizens structured. It is important to develop topics, subtopics and questions for the work phases. Which topics will be discussed in the plenary, which in the small groups? Will all the small groups work on the same sub-topics or should they deal with different sub-topics? How will (new) information be communicated? Which experts can provide support and convey data, facts and assessments in a balanced way?

#### Small groups are put together as diversely as possible in order to reflect the diversity of citizens' opinions

The heart of the deliberation is the in-depth, balanced and independent discussion of the topic in the small groups. The balanced nature of the citizens' proposals is significantly shaped by the fact that the citizens' different experiences and perspectives are incorporated into the discussion and that everyone can contribute. This is why the small groups are composed as diversely as possible, with no more than twelve people. In the case of a transnational, multilingual Citizens' Dialogue, it must be taken into account that simultaneous interpreters will be needed in the small groups. Depending on the financial resources available, binational or trinational groups are formed.

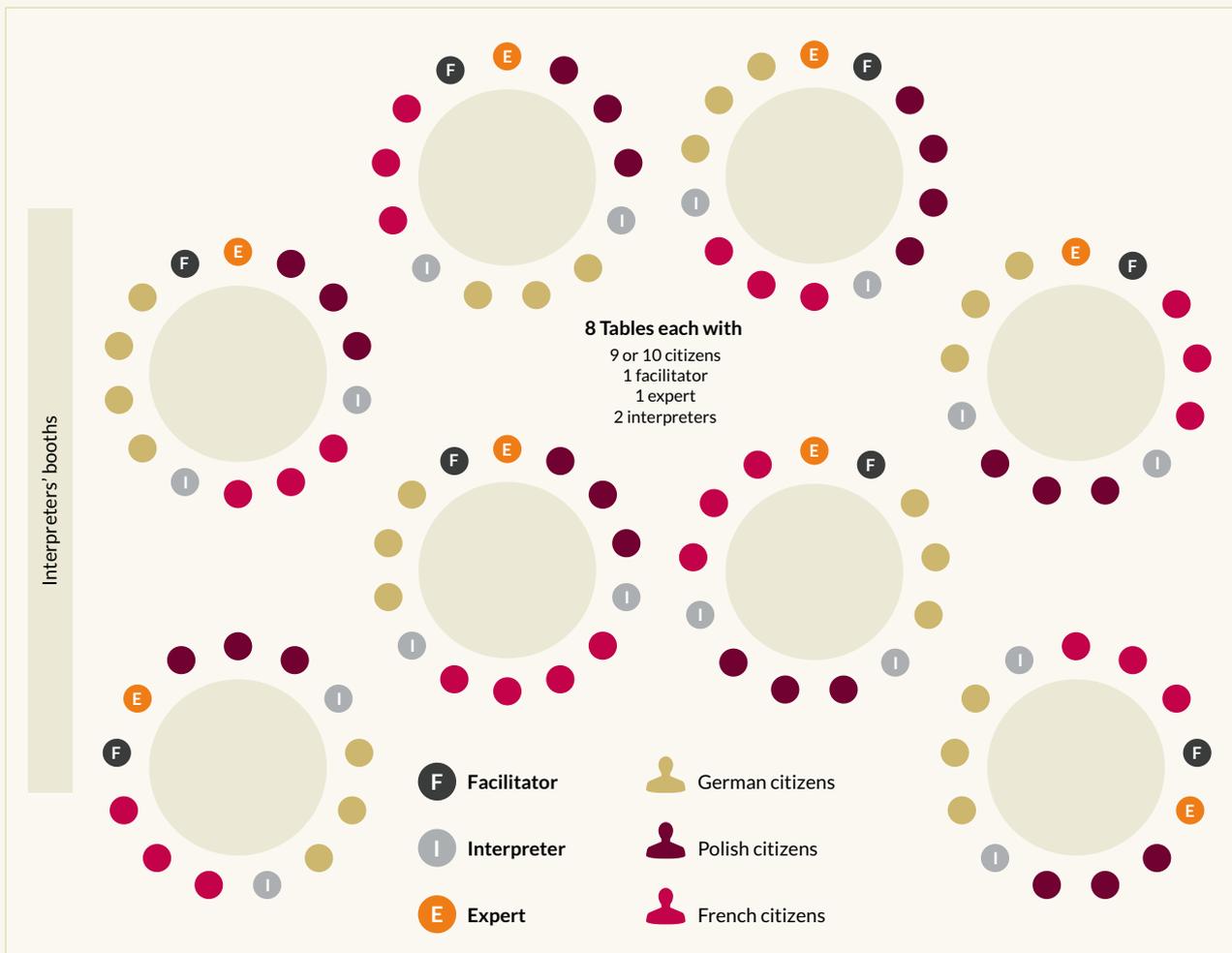
FIGURE 3 **Five steps for preparing citizen proposals based on the example of a border region:**  
How can we strengthen cooperation?



Source: own diagram

| BertelsmannStiftung

FIGURE 4 Example: dialogue setting of the European workshop in Berlin “2020: Shaping Europe’s Future Together”



Source: own diagram

BertelsmannStiftung

**Group size and composition are crucial for ensuring that the process and the results are good quality**

There are different ways to divide the whole group into small groups and subdivide the topics into subtopics. The following three models were successfully implemented in the project and can be used as a blueprint for other group and thematic structures:

**Model 1: 50 citizens**

7 small groups, 7–8 people per group, 7 group facilitators, the same topic for all groups

**Model 2: 75 citizens**

8 small groups, 9–10 people per group, 8 group facilitators, 4 subtopics, 2 groups per subtopic

**Model 3: 100 citizens**

9 small groups, 11–12 people per group, 9 group facilitators, 3 subtopics, 3 groups per subtopic



### Factors to ensure the good quality of the process and results at a glance

1. **Diversity of participants:** differences in knowledge, experience and opinions allow different perspectives to flow into the discussion and in turn have a positive impact on it.
2. **Communicating in your own language:** simultaneous interpreting in the small (possibly digital) group rooms enables participants to easily communicate with each other across language barriers and to have in-depth discussions. The process supports structured dialogue as it demands discipline and mutual consideration.
3. **Structure and variety:** Ein klar strukturierter Ablauf gibt allen Beteiligten Orientierung. Er sorgt für gemeinschaftliches und zielgerichtetes Arbeiten und gewährleistet, dass am Ende ein gemeinsames Ergebnis erreicht wird. Durch kurze und abwechslungsreiche Beiträge, vielfältige Methoden zur Interaktion und Aktivierung aller, sowie kleine Pausen wird die Konzentration hochgehalten.
4. **Facilitation and consensus:** professional facilitators ensure that the structure is adhered to, that everyone has an equal say and that the discussions are respectful and fair. In this way, everyone can contribute and the discussion is focused on the consensual development of joint proposals.
5. **Expert knowledge and information:** experts accompany the dialogue and support the citizens. Fact-based information from the experts supplements the participants' knowledge and makes the discussions more objective. The experts help to weigh up the pros and cons and ensure that convincing arguments and proposals prevail.
6. **Clear definition of the roles of all participants:** citizens are the key people involved. Other participants essentially act as supporters and help citizens to do their job in the best possible way. Politicians receive the citizens' proposals, discuss them, show the follow-up process and decide on the implementation of these proposals.

#### TIP

You can find practical resources for process planning and specific advice for planning digital and transnational citizens' dialogues here:  
<https://cor.europa.eu/en/engage/Pages/CoR-Bertelsmann-Stiftung-project.aspx>



#### 4.4 Effective citizen participation: methods, quality principle, practical advice and examples

The third key element is effectiveness. This element is essentially based on the commitment of political decision-makers. The Citizens' Dialogue is an integral part of the political opinion-forming and decision-making process. Political decision-makers are involved from the outset and discuss citizens' ideas and proposals with them. They give feedback, clarify how they want to deal with the results and ultimately decide on the implementation of the citizens' proposals. The suggestions are documented and published, and at least some of the proposals are implemented.

**Quality criteria:** involvement of representatives from politics and administration, a defined follow-up process, transparency about processes and results, justification on the part of politicians if citizens' proposals are not (or cannot be) implemented.

##### **Participatory footprint increases citizen satisfaction**

Citizens want to see that their involvement leaves a participatory footprint: the effectiveness of citizen participation is a key factor in their satisfaction with the Citizens' Dialogue. This does not mean that citizens want to see all proposals implemented. However, they do want the political addressees to seriously consider the citizens' proposals and to commit themselves to implementing them. If this is not possible, citizens expect to be given good reasons why this is not the case.

Citizens' proposals that are created by the inclusive participation of citizens and the high quality of the deliberation processes are usually of high quality themselves. In practice, what

stops these proposals from being shelved, and instead being noticed and discussed by policy makers? What factors are important to ensure that the results of the Citizens' Dialogues are translated into action?

##### **Early involvement of politicians promotes commitment to "real" citizen participation**

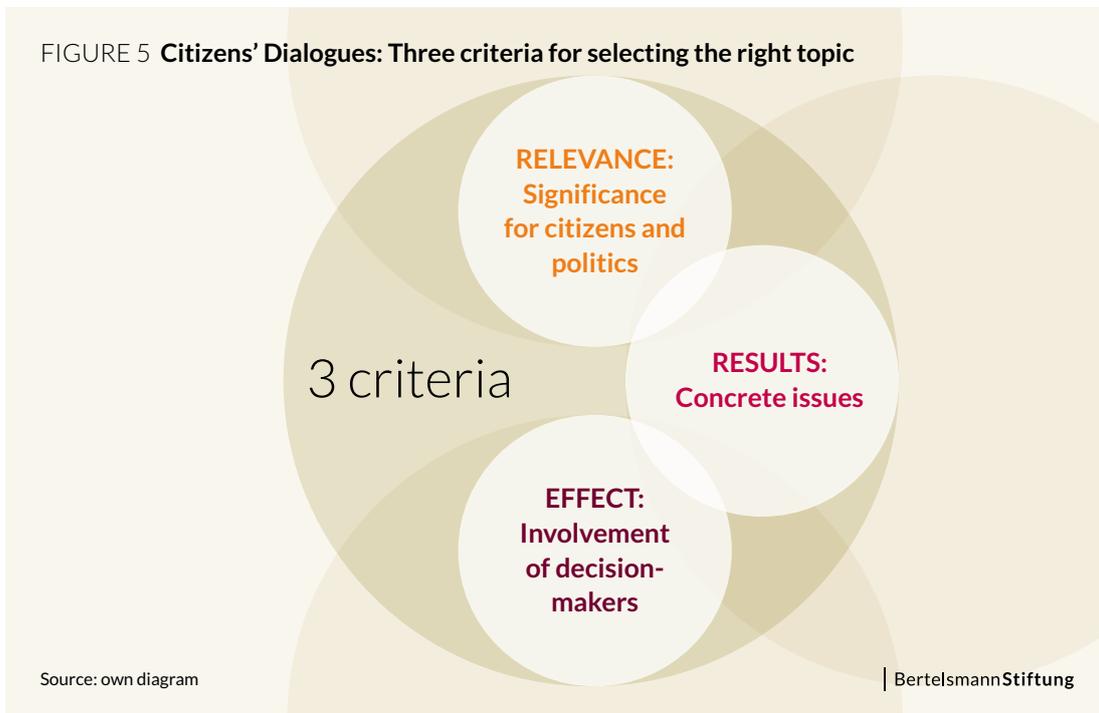
The process will only be effective if politicians are committed to the implementation of citizens' proposals. The chance of such implementation increases if decision-makers from politics and administration are involved from the very beginning. If the political will is there, if politicians are genuinely interested in the citizens' requests and proposals, if they are open and willing to discuss the proposals, then it is realistic to assume that citizens' proposals will actually be implemented.

##### **The topic of a Citizens' Dialogue should be relevant, focused and within the sphere of influence of the politicians involved**

The chances of effectiveness increase if the topic of a Citizens' Dialogue is relevant to politicians and citizens and if the topic still offers scope for political action. Particularly suitable are political issues that need open and creative ideas to be solved, those that affect the lives of citizens in a certain way, and issues that are controversial and not dealt with properly by politicians because of entrenched political positions.

Three criteria help to find the right topic for a Citizens' Dialogue.

FIGURE 5 Citizens' Dialogues: Three criteria for selecting the right topic



**The first criterion is RELEVANCE.** Initiators of Citizens' Dialogues should ask themselves: which topic is relevant for the citizens of my city, my region(s)? Which topic is relevant for politicians? For Citizens' Dialogues concerning the Conference on the Future of Europe, not only European politicians but also local or regional politicians need to be involved. Which politicians have power and influence over which issue? Are there issues where important political decisions will be taken soon? Are there issues where there is still disagreement and where the citizens' perspective could be useful for decision-making?

**The second criterion is RESULTS.** This is about the focus of an issue. The more substantive and detailed the results of a Citizens' Dialogue are, the more likely politicians will be willing to address citizens' proposals, and the greater the chance that policy changes will be made. If

several megatopics are discussed in a general way in a Citizens' Dialogue, the citizens may only scratch the surface and come up with general recommendations which, empirically, have little relevance for political decisions. It is therefore advisable to narrow down the topic for the Citizens' Dialogue and to work on the basis of specific questions.

**The third criterion is EFFECT.** In the Citizens' Dialogues conducted in the context of the Conference on the Future, several political levels are addressed: local, regional, national, transnational and European levels. It is advisable to choose a topic where a) politicians from the different levels have authority and b) politicians from the different levels can commit to a follow-up process that can lead to real policy changes.

### **Citizens' Dialogues should be incorporated into public debates and political processes**

The exchange with political players still takes place during a Citizens' Dialogue. Citizens present and discuss their proposals with political representatives, ideally with the politicians who (co-)initiated the Citizens' Dialogue.

In addition to the direct exchange with politicians, it is important that the citizens' proposals find their way into public debate. Therefore, the proposals are to be made available to other political players, civil society representatives and the general public. For this purpose, the citizens' proposals and reports on the dialogue can be uploaded to the appropriate websites at local, regional, national and European level and disseminated via social and traditional media. This requires the documentation of citizens' proposals and the use of appropriate websites and other communication channels.

Responses to citizens' proposals are required from the political arena. Ideally, the follow-up process for dealing with citizens' proposals is established at the beginning of the Citizens' Dialogue. If this is not the case, extensive information and communication efforts will help. This will put public pressure on the political representatives to define the follow-up process for handling the dialogue outcomes. A public debate also encourages and mobilises political players to push forward the implementation of the proposals in the political decision-making process.



#### **TIP**

Further information and practical resources can be found here: <https://cor.europa.eu/en/engage/Pages/CoR-Bertelsmann-Stiftung-project.aspx>

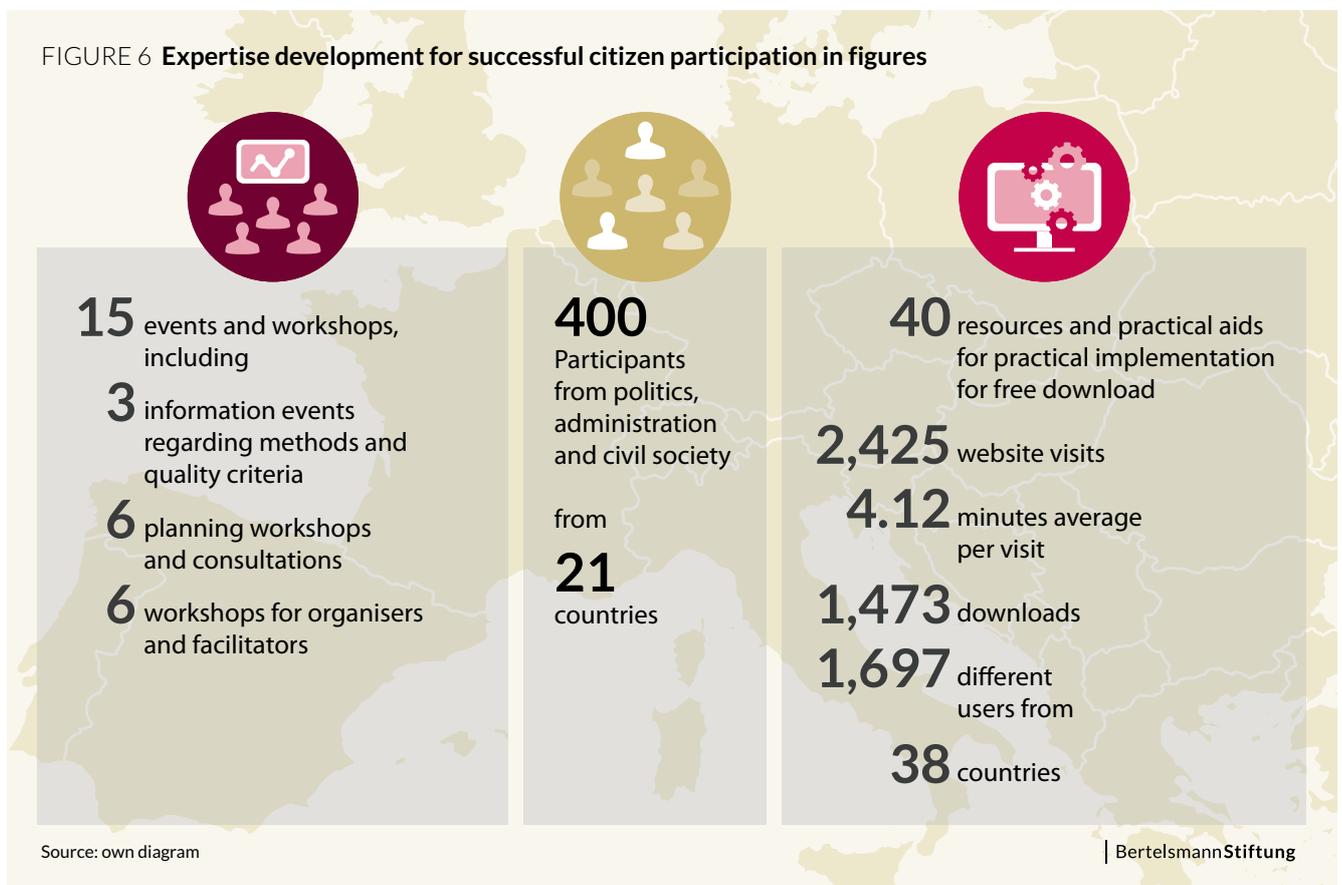
## 5. Expertise development for inclusive, deliberative and effective citizen participation

The project was instrumental in providing the necessary expertise to give a voice to European citizens in the context of the Conference on the Future of Europe. The focus was on providing the methodology for inclusive, deliberative and effective citizen participation.

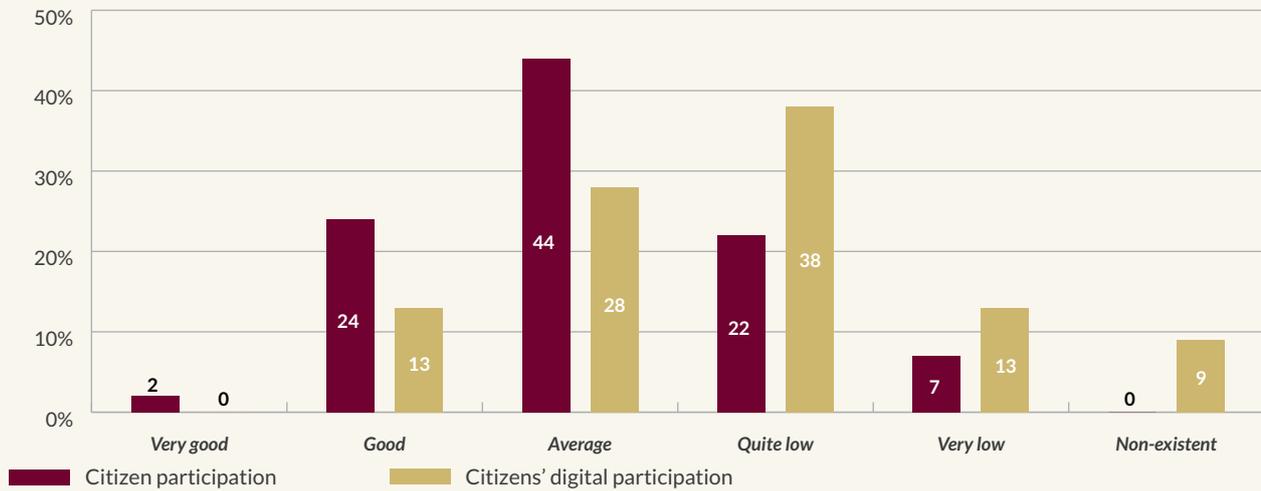
### 5.1 Expertise as the basis for successful citizen participation

Good participation increases trust in political decisions and the legitimacy of decisions. It promotes democracy. However, participation processes are not always well managed. Often those responsible initiate citizen participation

FIGURE 6 Expertise development for successful citizen participation in figures



**FIGURE 7 Organisers have less experience with digital citizen participation**  
 How training participants assess their own levels of experience



Due to rounding inaccuracies, the total of answers does not always add up to exactly 100 percent.  
 n = citizen participation: 46 votes cast; citizens' digital participation: 33 votes cast  
 Source: own diagram

BertelsmannStiftung

too late, they do not allow enough time for the complex process, and they do not give any or only insufficient feedback on the handling of the results. This is detrimental to public participation as a whole: citizens stop taking part in new public participation offerings; initiators will abandon public participation in the future. This is why citizen participation has to be organised in a quality way. The communication of quality principles in the course of this project is geared to the three core elements of good citizen participation: inclusiveness, deliberation and effectiveness.

**The organisers: different areas of expertise in the field of citizen participation**

A survey carried out during skill building made it clear that the organisers themselves assessed the prevailing expertise in the field of citizen participation to be very varied. In addition, the overall level was rather average. While 70 percent of the organisers considered themselves to have

at least average or better levels of proficiency in citizen participation, this figure fell to just over 40 percent in relation to digital participation. The level of expertise in the implementation of inclusive, deliberative and effective citizen participation can therefore only be assessed as rudimentary.

Also due to these partly heterogeneous existing competences, the activities to develop skills were directed at all organisations and persons involved in the respective citizen participation projects: managers from administration and politics, contact persons for the dialogue concept such as process facilitators, the local teams and those responsible for the organisation and coordination of the dialogues (e.g. for participant support), the respective organisers, coordinators and dialogue moderators of the individual projects. The goal: to establish expertise for good citizen participation on a broad scale, but also sustainably in the respective regions and organisations.



## 5.2 Concrete support: training, handouts, practical templates and advice

The transfer of skills was carried out in three modules designed to follow on from each other: these included training sessions on both the basic method and the practical implementation of the quality criteria, accompanying and supplementary bilateral guidance, and a compilation of 40 resources and handouts containing further information on the method as well as practical templates for the actual implementation of citizens' dialogues.

The training sessions comprised three different components: three information sessions on methods and quality criteria, six planning workshops with project-specific consultations, and six practical seminars for organisers and facilitators. This skills-building phase was carried out from May to September 2021. A total of 400 participants took part in the various training sessions. We were also available for bilateral consultations before, during and after the event phase.

### Information events introduce the method

In three different information events, basic knowledge was conveyed about the quality criteria for good citizen participation and their importance for successful citizen participation. Potential project partners were also encouraged to get involved in the project. The first event was aimed at a broad spectrum of potential

partners and multipliers, the second at those specifically interested. In the third event, which subsequently took place, the precise support procedures were communicated. Topics of the information events were:

- Examples of innovative citizens' dialogues, added value of the dialogues
- Key elements of innovative Citizens' Dialogues: inclusive, deliberative and effective
- Examples of dialogue topics and schedules
- Support offered by the CoR and the Bertelsmann Stiftung
- Integrating the dialogues into local and regional politics and linking them to the Conference on the Future of Europe

### Planning workshops provide cornerstones for the conception and work planning of good Citizens' Dialogues

Building on this, the six specific planning workshops focused on the practical planning and design of the respective citizen participation projects. They were aimed at specific project partners who had committed themselves to conducting Citizens' Dialogues according to the method taught. The planning workshops enabled initiators and organisers to design and organise the processes of preparation, implementation and follow-up. They were encouraged to incorporate the Citizens' Dialogues into local or regional political and administrative structures and to establish a link with the Conference on the Future of Europe. Thematically, the workshops revolved around the following:



### Seminars provide training for practical implementation

The six seminars for organisers and facilitators qualified the participants to conduct, evaluate and document the Citizens' Dialogues successfully and with good results. They were aimed at all project staff who have a specific role in the planning and implementation of the dialogues. Both facilitators and people responsible for handling participants took part in the seminars. They prepared the overall moderation or the table group moderation – both for face-to-face and online events. The following topics were covered:

- The respective objectives of the Citizens' Dialogues
- Possible topics: the identification of project-specific themes
- Expectations of the Citizens' Dialogue and its results
- The political incorporation of the Citizens' Dialogues
- Recruitment of participants by random selection
- An overview of different formats and methods
- Communicating the key points for moderation concepts
- Advice on the internal organisation of work and the concrete time frame for the preparation of individual work packages.
- Practical implementation of random selection
- The design of the deliberation: group size and composition, specific topics and sub-topics, guiding questions, programme
- The (technical) organisation of multilingual dialogues
- The importance of in-depth briefings and test runs
- Ways to secure the commitment of decision-makers from politics and administration
- Templates and tips for good evaluation and documentation of the dialogues
- The explicit linking of the dialogues with the Conference on the Future of Europe
- Placing the focus of the seminars on the teaching of facilitation skills

In addition, the interactive and participatory methods of the planning workshops were designed to enable the participants to experience as many of the presented methods and technical tools as possible in practice, such as small group work and digital surveys. Furthermore, emphasis was placed on the presentation of practical examples and the exchange of specific challenges in the conception phase.

The seminars were also designed to be as interactive and participatory as possible. Once again, as many of the presented methods and technical tools as possible were introduced in practical use. For example, specific facilitation situations were created to train the facilitators. In addition, practical examples and sharing specific challenges played a central role here as well.

TABLE 1 Developing expertise for good citizen participation: materials available

<p><b>Random selection, recruitment and invitation to citizens' dialogues</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• General recruiting process: timeline for recruiting committed participants</li> <li>• Example of recruiting process: milestones leading up to a successful dialogue</li> <li>• Blueprint – asking for information from the resident register</li> <li>• Cordial invitation: How to address potential participants</li> <li>• Example of a registration form</li> <li>• Recruiting spreadsheet – keeping track of potential participants</li> <li>• Framework contract – division of labour between service provider and organizer</li> <li>• Event at a glance 1.0: one page of information on an event</li> <li>• Event at a glance 2.0: one page of information on an online event</li> </ul> <p><b>Methods and quality criteria</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Presentation: Next level EU citizen participation. Citizens' Dialogues: Inclusive, Deliberative, Effective</li> <li>• Presentation Planning Workshop: Next level EU citizen participation: Inclusive, Deliberative, Effective</li> <li>• Presentation Workshop for moderators and organisers: How to conduct inclusive, deliberative and effective citizens' dialogues</li> </ul>	<p><b>Examples of deliberation, programs, schedules and templates</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Transnational Digital Citizens' Dialogue: Bertelsmann Stiftung</li> <li>• Digitaler Bürgerdialog Trinationaler Eurodistrict Basel: Bertelsmann Stiftung (DE)</li> <li>• Example for Offline Dialogue Schedule and Moderation</li> <li>• Example for Online Dialogue Schedule and Moderation</li> <li>• Examples for Warm Up Questions</li> <li>• Materials on evaluation and digital surveys</li> <li>• Example for preliminary survey questions</li> <li>• Example for feedback questionnaire for moderators</li> <li>• Example for feedback questionnaire for interpreters</li> <li>• New ways to increase citizens' participation in Europe: Bertelsmann Stiftung</li> <li>• Shaping European Democracy: Bertelsmann Stiftung</li> <li>• Evaluation of the Cross-Border EU Citizens' Dialogue in The Hague: Bertelsmann Stiftung</li> </ul>	<p><b>Information for citizens and technical instructions</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Example: IT instructions for Transnational Digital Citizens' Dialogue</li> <li>• Example: E-mail Zoom links for citizens</li> <li>• Example: Dialogue Rules</li> <li>• Example: Worksheet for three topics</li> <li>• Example: Travel reimbursement</li> </ul> <p><b>Forms for evaluation</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Overall project evaluation form</li> <li>• Example for evaluation sheet for citizens – onsite events</li> <li>• Example for evaluation sheet for citizens – digital events</li> </ul> <p><b>Example – Presentations used by the Bertelsmann Foundation for onsite and online events</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Example: Directional slides for guiding citizens</li> <li>• Example: multilingual digital dialogue_ Warm Up Questions</li> <li>• Example: multilingual dialogue onsite – Getting to know each other without translation</li> <li>• Example: for onsite event</li> <li>• Example: multilingual digital dialogue_ Citizens Evaluation 5 languages</li> </ul>
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**Templates, practical aids and examples:  
40 free resources facilitate the practical  
implementation of citizens' dialogues**

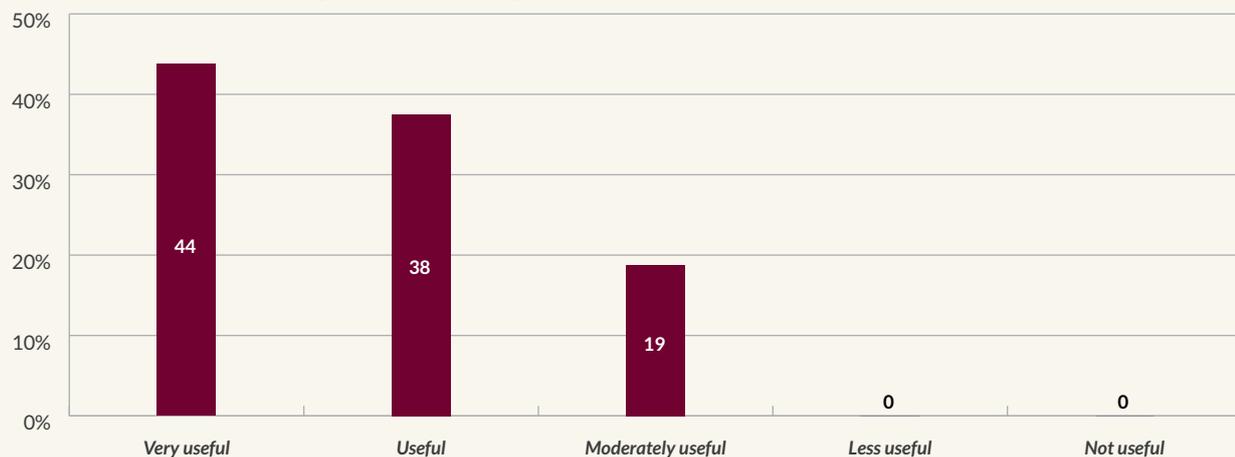
Another important component of the support provided were 40 resources and practical aids for practical implementation, which were made available for free download. These ranged from practical tips and templates for random selection to blank facilitation concepts, draft letters of invitation, examples of project reports, evaluation questions for participants of Citizens' Dialogues and templates for specific methods of breaking the ice and welcoming participants.

**TIP**

The materials can be downloaded here for free:  
<https://cor.europa.eu/en/engage/Pages/CoR-Bertelsmann-Stiftung-project.aspx>



**FIGURE 8 The support of the Committee of the Regions and the Bertelsmann Stiftung was useful for all Citizens' Dialogues**  
Evaluation of the organisers of the Dialogues



Due to rounding inaccuracies, the total of answers does not always add up to exactly 100 percent.  
n = 16 votes cast | Source: own diagram

| BertelsmannStiftung

### Further support for the implementation of the dialogues

In addition to this skill building, the European Committee of the Regions supported the projects in the practical implementation of their goals. This support included assistance in hiring facilitators and providing a technical infrastructure, including a technical support team to set up and run digital dialogues. Resources for facilitators, guest speakers and interpreters were also provided. The CoR also provided support in the form of theme-based information material. In addition, the CoR offered a range of services for media work and the continuous communication of results of Citizens' Dialogues, both within its own structures and beyond. The Bertelsmann Stiftung was also available to provide its expertise for project-specific bilateral consultations.

### 5.3 Evaluation and impact of expertise development

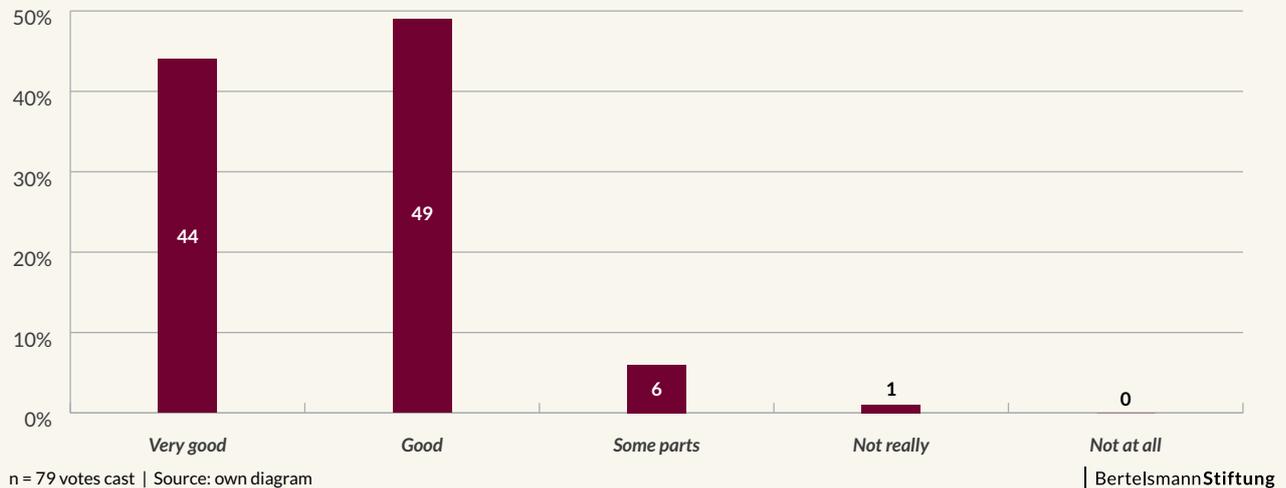
The evaluation of the different components of the skills training consisted of four different elements:

- The survey of the participants at the individual sessions by means of an online poll in Zoom
- The survey of all organisers after completion of the respective projects by means of an online questionnaire
- Individual semi-standardised interviews with selected organisers
- The use of the downloadable materials on the homepage

#### The support services were useful for all Citizens' Dialogues

The survey of the initiators and project partners after conducting their own dialogues shows: the skills transfer was a complete success. The combination of information transfer, training,

FIGURE 9 **93% of participants rate the training courses as very good or good**  
 Reply to the question: How did you find the training sessions?



concrete examples, individual guidance and practical handouts and templates was rated as useful by all projects. The fact that practical support was provided for conducting the dialogues – for example, by providing a technical infrastructure – was also found to be helpful.

*“It is very important for us to receive this support and expertise.”*

*Statement of an initiator*

The interviews confirm this view as well. The useful nature of the support was emphasised both by project participants that have a lot of experience with citizen participation and by those that are organising citizen participation projects for the first time.

**The vast majority of participants rated the training sessions positively**

With regard to the training sessions, the overwhelming majority rated them as very positive: 93 percent of the participants rated them as “good” or “very good”, 6 percent were ambivalent about the sessions and only 1 percent of the participants

hardly liked the sessions. This positive feedback is reflected in all the different types of training, whereby the training sessions with a strong focus on practical implementation scored the highest with 97 percent positive feedback.

*“The training sessions and the general support so far have been very good!”*

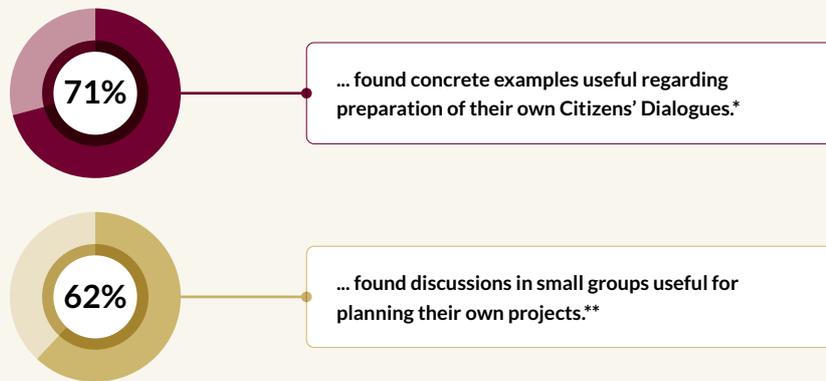
*Training participants*

Despite the rather diverse range of expertise mentioned at the beginning, these high approval ratings can be attributed to the multifaceted components of the training courses. Basic knowledge of methods was taught and time was left for individual questions and discussion among the project groups. Concrete examples also ensured practical relevance, including in detailed questions.

*“I’m very pleased to be here because this is the first time we have ever undertaken this kind of process. And needless to say, we have to be able to show our citizens we have something to offer!”*

*Training participant*

FIGURE 10 **Concrete examples were particularly useful**  
Organisers' survey on the benefit of the training sessions



\* n = 87 votes cast | \*\* n = 89 votes cast | Source: own diagram

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### **Practical relevance is the most important component for participants**

When asked about the most useful components of the training courses, the points “practical examples” and “exchange in small groups” stand out. This speaks volumes for the fact that there was a need both for the conceptual planning of Citizens’ Dialogues and for the actual implementation of individual components.

It is also interesting to note that due to the number of cross-border projects, there was a great need for support in the organisation of multilingual dialogues, both in terms of conceptual planning and concrete implementation. A good 70 percent of the participants in the training sessions wanted support in this regard.

### **Great demand for practice-oriented materials**

A total of 40 practice-oriented resources were offered for download free of charge. These ranged from instructions on how to conduct the random selection to templates for invitations to citizens and concrete blueprints for moderation concepts. The project homepage set up especially for this purpose was visited almost 2,500 times from 38

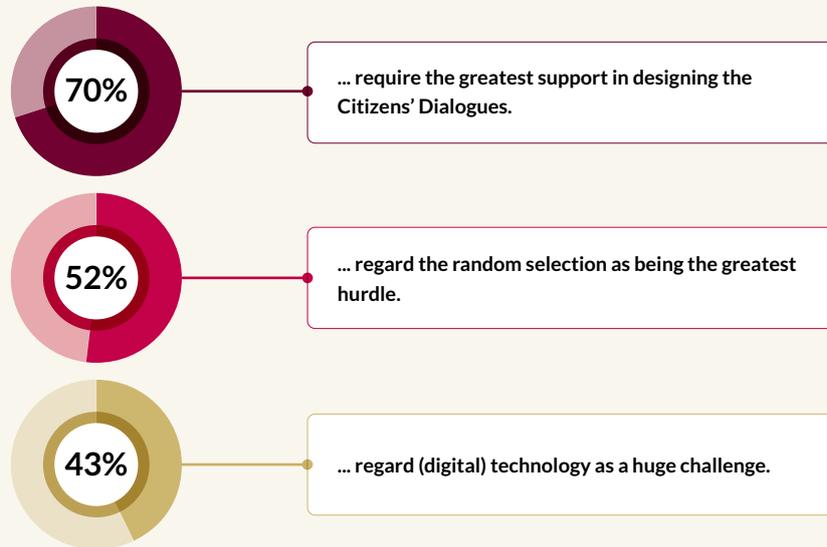
different countries. The average time spent on the site of over four minutes shows that users spent considerable time exploring the content on offer. The resources were downloaded a total of 1,473 times.

### **Biggest challenge: the actual design and organisation of inclusive, deliberative and effective Citizens’ Dialogues**

This evaluation of the individual components of the training basically coincides with the demand for expertise by the participants: 70 percent of the participants needed support in the actual design of their dialogues. This once again underlines the need for developing expertise in citizen participation in the European regions.

In terms of individual components of the actual implementation of Citizens’ Dialogues, random selection and the technology to be used stood out as significant challenges with 52 percent and 43 percent of the mentions respectively. It seems that random selection to ensure diversity of participants is not yet widespread. The technology constraints, combined with the high number of online dialogues, suggest that further teaching of digital skills for citizen participation would also be useful.

FIGURE 11 **The greatest challenge is the design**  
 Survey of organisers on the challenges of the Citizens' Dialogues



n = 28 votes cast | Source: own diagram

| BertelsmannStiftung

**Positive experiences with citizen participation motivate representatives from administration and politics**

When asked about the most positive experience in the course of their own project, 80 percent of the respondents stated that the most rewarding aspects were the activation of their own project team as well as the cooperation with the respective project partners.

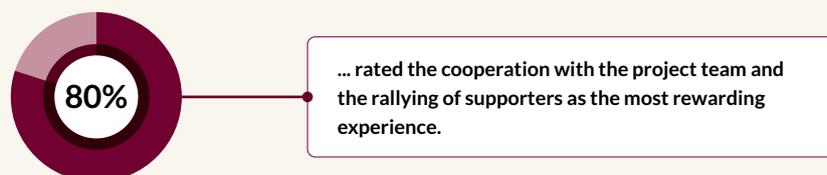
Therefore, there is much to be said for a high level of commitment in local or regional

organisations for the implementation of Citizens' Dialogues. Not only citizens, but also those from administration, politics and civil society are enthusiastic about citizen participation.

**The method is firmly established in the regions**

These positive experiences in the course of organising and carrying out citizen participation have led to an increased willingness to carry out further citizen participation projects. 100 percent of the projects plan to continue carrying out citizen participation projects using the method taught.

FIGURE 12 **Citizen participation motivates both own team and project partners**  
 Organisers' best experience during project planning



n = 28 votes cast | Source: own diagram

| BertelsmannStiftung

## 6. Local, regional and transnational EU Citizens' Dialogues – implementation, results and consequences



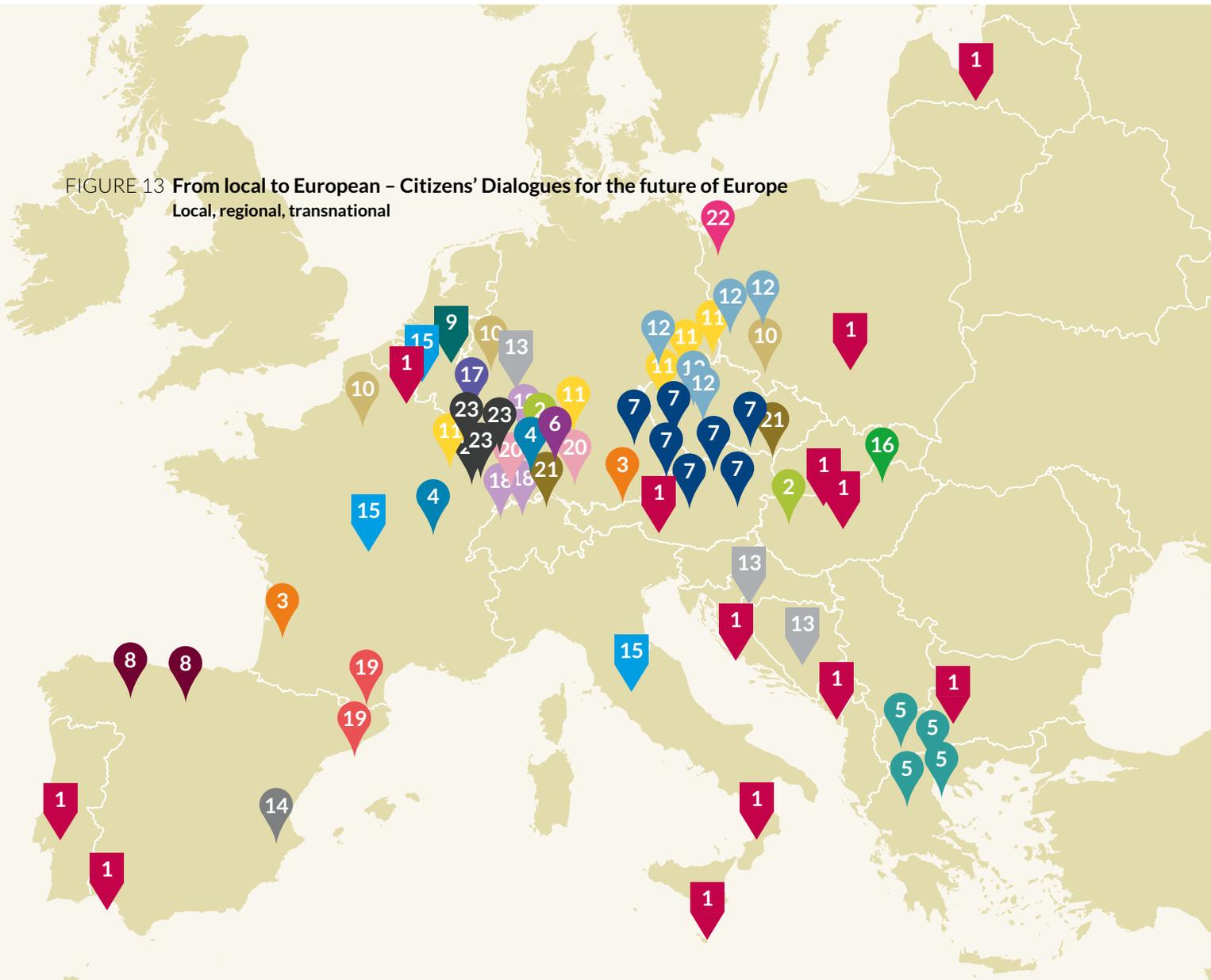
At the heart of the joint project by the Bertelsmann Stiftung and the European Committee of the Regions are the Citizens' Dialogues held at local, regional and transnational level. The majority of the specific Citizens' Dialogues were conducted between September and December 2021. Three projects postponed their dialogues originally planned for 2021 to spring 2022.

### 6.1 Overview: figures and facts about the Citizens' Dialogues

In total, **23 projects** have taken part in the joint venture led by the Bertelsmann Stiftung and the European Committee of the Regions. All 23 projects were involved in the skills transfer process. 19 projects carried out their Citizens' Dialogues with the support of the Committee of the Regions, 4 projects did so without the specific support of the CoR.

In total, about **2,000 citizens** from **21 countries** (18 EU Member States and three candidate countries) in **38 Citizens' Dialogues**.

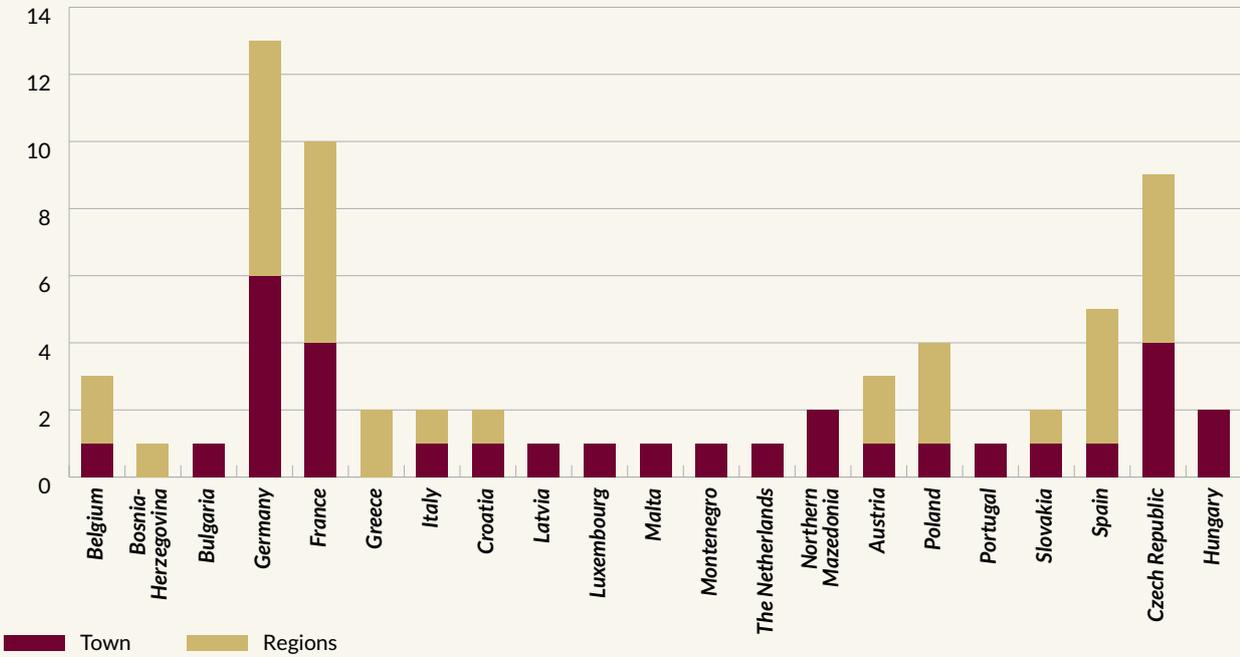
FIGURE 13 From local to European – Citizens' Dialogues for the future of Europe  
Local, regional, transnational



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| <p><b>1</b> – Palma del Condado (Spain)<br/>– Sofia (Bulgaria)<br/>– Brussels (Belgium)<br/>– Salzburg (Austria)<br/>– Zadar (Croatia)<br/>– Szodliget (Hungary)<br/>– Hronský Benedikt (Slovakia)<br/>– Soveria Mannelli (Italy)<br/>– Bełchatów (Poland)<br/>– Riga (Latvia)<br/>– Luqa (Malta)<br/>– Torres Novas (Portugal)<br/>– Kolasin (Montenegro)<br/>Citizens' dialogue was not held with the CoR</p> <p><b>2</b> – Pforzheim (Germany)<br/>– Municipality of Gyor-Moson-Sopron (Hungary)</p> <p><b>3</b> – Munich (Germany)<br/>– Bordeaux (France)</p> <p><b>4</b> – Rhineland-Palatinate (Germany)<br/>– Franche Comté de Bourgogne (France)</p> | <p><b>5</b> – Western Macedonia,<br/>– Central Macedonia (Greece)<br/>– Skopje,<br/>– Valandovo (Northern Macedonia)</p> <p><b>6</b> – Sindelfingen (Germany)</p> <p><b>7</b> – Lower Bavaria,<br/>– Upper Palatinate (Germany)<br/>– Lower Austria,<br/>– Upper Austria (Österreich)<br/>– Pilsen,<br/>– South Bohemia,<br/>– Vysocina (Czech Republic)</p> <p><b>8</b> – Cantabria,<br/>– Asturias (Spain)</p> <p><b>9</b> – Eindhoven (The Netherlands)<br/>Citizens' dialogue was not held with the CoR</p> <p><b>10</b> – Silesia (Poland)<br/>– North Rhine-Westphalia (Germany)<br/>– Hauts-de-France (France)</p> | <p><b>11</b> – Grand Est Region (France)<br/>– Baden-Württemberg,<br/>– Saxony (Germany)<br/>– Województwo Dolnośląskie (Poland)<br/>– Karlovy Vary Region,<br/>– Aussig Region (Czech Republic)</p> <p><b>12</b> – Saxony (Germany)<br/>– Lubuskie,<br/>– Województwo Dolnośląskie (Poland)<br/>– Usti,<br/>– Praha (Czech Republic)</p> <p><b>13</b> – Cologne (Germany)<br/>– Croatia,<br/>– Bosnia Herzegovina<br/>Citizens' dialogue was not held with the CoR</p> <p><b>14</b> – Valencian Community (Spain)</p> <p><b>15</b> – Belgium<br/>– Italy<br/>– France<br/>Citizens' dialogue was not held with the CoR</p> | <p><b>16</b> – Autonomous Region of Košice (Slovakia)</p> <p><b>17</b> – German-speaking community (Belgium)</p> <p><b>18</b> – Alsace (France)<br/>– Southern Rhineland-Palatinate,<br/>– Baden (Germany)</p> <p><b>19</b> – Aude (France)<br/>– Province of Barcelona (Spain)</p> <p><b>20</b> – Strasbourg (France)<br/>– Stuttgart (Germany)</p> <p><b>21</b> – Brno (Czech Republic)<br/>– Stuttgart (Germany)</p> <p><b>22</b> – West Pomerania (Poland)</p> <p><b>23</b> – Esch an der Alzette (Luxembourg)<br/>– Saarbrücken (Germany)<br/>– Nancy,<br/>– Colombey-les-Belles (France)</p> |
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□ Citizens' dialogues were not held with the CoR | Map basis: by infas LT | Source: own diagram

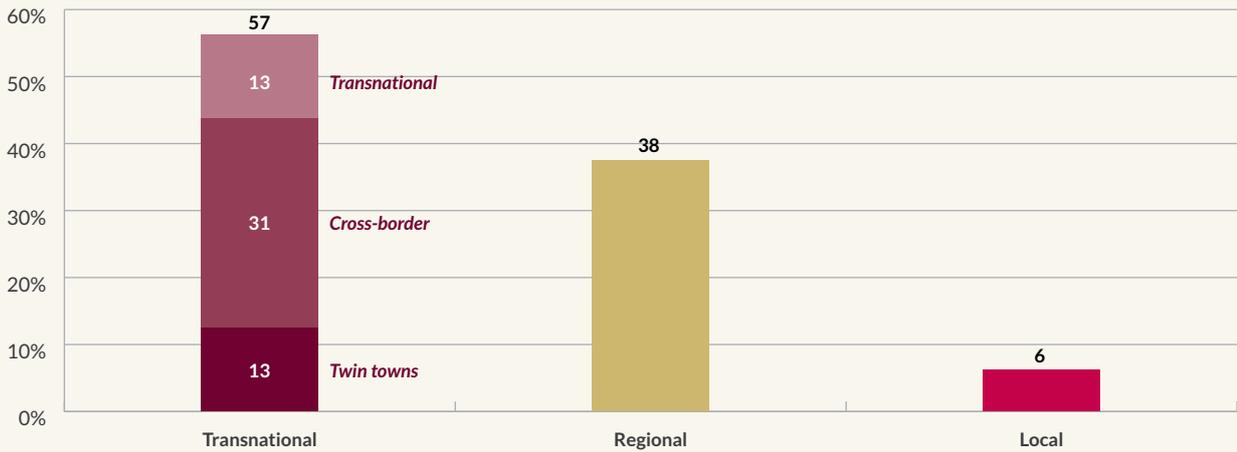
FIGURE 14 **21 countries are involved in the project**  
 Partner regions and twin towns according to countries



Source: own diagram

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FIGURE 15 **57% of Citizens' Dialogues took place in a transnational setting\***  
 Distribution of Citizens' Dialogues according to type of venue location



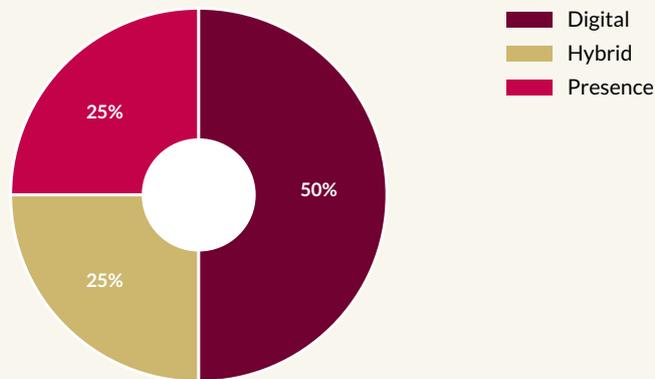
Due to rounding inaccuracies, the total of answers does not always add up to exactly 100 percent.

\*Total dialogues already conducted in cooperation with the CoR

n = 16 projects | Source: own diagram

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FIGURE 16 **75% of Citizens' Dialogues took place in a digital setting\***  
Distribution of Citizens' Dialogues according to type of implementation



\* Total dialogues already conducted in cooperation with the CoR  
n = 16 projects | Source: own diagram

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57 percent of dialogues were conducted transnationally – either in border regions, with twin cities from other countries or with several European regions. 38 percent of the dialogues were purely regional, only 6 percent took place purely at the local level.

Just under 50 percent of the Citizens' Dialogues were conducted digitally and a quarter each (25 percent) took place in hybrid form, and in attendance. This is partly due to the coronavirus pandemic – some projects said they preferred face-to-face events in another case.

In the majority of cases, the aim was to have a diverse group of participants. Particular attention was paid to ensuring gender balance, but also to ensuring a diverse composition in terms of age of participants and level of education. A few projects focused on the participation of specific groups, such as the elderly or young people. The participants developed more than 400 proposals on the future of Europe. A total of around 200 politicians and representatives from administration, from the municipal level to the European Parliament, were also involved in the dialogues.

TABELLE 2 Overview of Citizens' Dialogues of the 23 projects (Status 25 January 2022)

Legend								
Brown = Citizens' Dialogue has already taken place								
Rose = Citizens' Dialogue still to take place								
Grey = Citizens' Dialogue has not taken place with the CoR								
Project number and title	Times	Region(s)	Number of citizens	Number of politicians* involved	Number of Citizens' Dialogues	Format	Topics	Additional information
1 – European Academy Network	02/2022 [planned]	Palma del Condado (Spain), Sofia (Bulgaria), Brussels (Belgium), Salzburg (Austria), Zadar (Croatia), Szodliget (Hungary), Hronský Benedikt (Slovakia), Soveria Mannelli (Italy), Bełchatów (Poland), Riga (Latvia), Luqa (Malta), Torres Novas (Portugal), Kolasin (Montenegro) [planned]	75 [planned]	13 [planned]	1 [planned]	Hybrid Trans-national [planned]	Climate change and the environment Health Digital transformation Values and rights, rule of law, security [planned]	
2 – Digital Citizens' Dialogue on the Future of Europe	26/10/2021 24/11/2021	Pforzheim (Germany), municipality of Győr-Ménfőcsanak (Hungary)	175	14	3	Digital Trans-national	Values and rights, rule of law, security European democracy European values	<a href="#">Additional information</a>
3 – Together into the Future – Strong Cities for a strong Europe! Digital citizens' dialogue Munich–Bordeaux: How can cooperation between cities strengthen European cohesion?	18/11/2021	Munich (Germany), Bordeaux (France)	50	5	1	Digital Trans-national	Climate change and the environment Digital transformation: European cities with respect to digitalisation and mobility	<a href="#">Additional information</a>
4 – Citizens' Dialogue on the Future of Europe. Franche Comté de Bourgogne – Rhineland	15–17/10/2021	Rhineland-Palatinate (Germany), Franche Comté de Bourgogne (France)	40	6	2	Attendance Trans-national	A stronger economy, social justice and employment Values and rights, rule of law, security European democracy Education, culture, youth and sport Climate change, values and implementation of democracy; citizens' rights; education, culture, media, youth, citizenship, European identity	<a href="#">Additional information</a>
5 – Cross-border Citizens' Dialogue on the EU Green Deal. Talking to neighbours about the environment, climate change and regional development	27/09/2021	Western Macedonia, Central Macedonia (Greece), Skopje, Valandovo (Northern Macedonia)	125	16	1	Hybrid Trans-national	Climate change and the environment: climate change and challenges of environmental protection	<a href="#">Additional information</a>

\* Refers to people from politics and public administration in the role of participants in the dialogues as well as initiators and organisers.

Project number and title	Times	Region(s)	Number of citizens	Number of politicians* involved	Number of Citizens' Dialogues	Format	Topics	Additional information
6 – Local Citizens' Dialogue on the Future of Europe	09/10/2021	Sindelfingen (Germany)	75	4	1	Attendance Local	The EU in the world: Local, regional and European expectations of the Conference on the Future of Europe; what kind of Europe do we want in Sindelfingen, Baden-Württemberg and the world?	<a href="#">Additional information</a>
7 – Cross-border Citizens' Dialogue at the Salon Europa Forum Warsaw on the Topic of the Labour Market	29/01/2022 [planned]	Lower Bavaria, Upper Palatinate (Germany), Lower Austria, Upper Austria (Österreich), Pilsen, South Bohemia, Vysocina (Czech Republic) [planned]	100 [planned]	3 [planned]	1 [planned]	Hybrid Trans-national [planned]	Values and rights, rule of law, security Migration [planned]	
8 – Cantabria Speaks to Europe; Citizens' Dialogue with Students from the University of Cantabria on the Rule of Law; Territorial and Demographic Disparities in the EU: the Challenges of Mountain Regions	08–10/09/2021 02/11/2021 24/11/2021	Cantabria, Asturias (Spain)	150	11	3	Hybrid Regional	A stronger economy, social justice and employment Values and rights, rule of law, security Digital transformation European democracy Rule of law, demographic change	<a href="#">Additional information</a>
9 – The Transition to our Work. Personal stories and a European perspective	04/10/2021 13/10/2021 25/10/2021 [planned]	Eindhoven (The Netherlands) [planned]	>126 [planned]	10 [planned]	3 [planned]	Attendance Regional [planned]	Climate change and the environment A stronger economy, social justice and employment Education, culture, youth and sport [planned]	
10 – Working Europe – Future of Work and Education	30/11/2021	Silesia (Poland), North Rhine-Westphalia (Germany), Hauts-de-France (France)	100	6	1	Digital Trans-national	Education, culture, youth and sport Lifelong learning; education and career guidance; European cooperation in the field of training; transformation of regions and the labour market; digitalisation in the labour market	<a href="#">Additional information</a>
11 – Cross-border Citizens' Dialogue; Six-region Dialogue on Cross-border Cooperation and the Future of Europe	19–20/11/2021 10–11/12/2021	Grand Est Region (France), Baden-Württemberg, Saxony (Germany), Województwo Dolnośląskie (Poland), Karlovy Vary Region, Aussig Region (Czech Republic)	150	23	1	Digital Trans-national	Climate change and the environment European democracy Strengthening cross-border cooperation; democracy and European values; strengthening cross-border cooperation	<a href="#">Additional information</a>

\* Refers to people from politics and public administration in the role of participants in the dialogues as well as initiators and organisers.

Project number and title	Times	Region(s)	Number of citizens	Number of politicians* involved	Number of Citizens' Dialogues	Format	Topics	Additional information
12 – European Intersections: Dialogue Between Border Regions	4–8/10/2021 27/11/2021	Saxony (Germany), Lubuskie, Województwo Dolnośląskie (Poland), Usti, Praha (Czech Republic)	100	17	2	Digital Trans-national	Climate change and the environment Health European democracy Education, culture, youth and sport Requirements of border regions; European democracy and identification with the EU	<a href="#">Additional information</a>
13 – The European Union and its Borders	10/21–11/21 [planned]	Cologne (Germany), Croatia, Bosnia Herzegovina [planned]	No specification	6 [planned]	No specification	Hybrid Trans-national [planned]	Values and rights, rule of law, security Migration [planned]	
14 – Conference on the Future of Europe. Be Part of Europe's Future in the Valencian Community	06/10/2021 20/10/2021 27/10/2021	Valencian Community (Spain)	100	8	3	Hybrid Regional	Climate change and the environment A stronger economy, social justice and employment: sustainable tourism – developing a new concept in Europe; industrial policy in Europe; Europe and health – a new era	<a href="#">Additional information</a>
15 – Transnational Citizens' Dialogue on Participatory Democracy in Europe	05/11/2021 12/11/2021 19/11/2021 [planned]	Belgium, Italy, France [planned]	100 [planned]	7 [planned]	5 [planned]	Digital Trans-national [planned]	No information	
16 – Regional Citizens' Dialogue with Students on the Future of Europe	22/11/2021	Autonomous Region of Košice (Slovakia)	75	4	1	Digital Regional	Climate change and the environment Health A stronger economy, social justice and employment Values and rights, rule of law, security Digital transformation Education, culture, youth and sport	<a href="#">Additional information</a>
17 – East Belgian Citizens Discuss the Future of Europe: Life in the Border Region	20/11/2021	German-speaking community (Belgium)	40	5	1	Attendance Regional	A stronger economy, social justice and employment Digital transformation European democracy Education, culture, youth and sport European foreign policy; European cultural market; decision-making mechanisms in the EU; administrative hurdles for cross-border cooperation	<a href="#">Additional information</a>

\* Refers to people from politics and public administration in the role of participants in the dialogues as well as initiators and organisers.

Project number and title	Times	Region(s)	Number of citizens	Number of politicians* involved	Number of Citizens' Dialogues	Format	Topics	Additional information
18 – Citizens' Dialogue on the Upper Rhine: Cross-border Perspectives for European Citizenship	06/11/2021 20/11/2021 [post-poned]	Alsace (France), Southern Rhineland-Palatinate, Baden (Germany) [planned]	50 [planned]	2 [others being planned]	2 [planned]	Attendance Trans-national [planned]	The EU in the world [planned]	
19 – European Citizens' Dialogue in the Context of the Conference on the Future of Europe: "Young Women are the Future of Europe too!"	24/11/2021	Aude (France), Province of Barcelona (Spain)	75	8	1	Hybrid Trans-national	A stronger economy, social justice and employment Values and rights, rule of law, security European democracy Education, culture, youth and sport Youth development as the corner-stone of the future of European democracy	<a href="#">Additional information</a>
20 – Cross-border EU Citizens' Dialogue Stuttgart and Strasbourg: "Environment, Climate Protection and Democracy in the EU – What We Want"	10/11/2021	Strasbourg (France), Stuttgart (Germany)	50	9	1	Digital Trans-national	Climate change and the environment A stronger economy, social justice and employment: economic challenges and potential of the EU to benefit a sustainable environment and EU consumers Free European single market Fair and social production of affordable goods Sustainable production taking into account the environment	<a href="#">Additional information</a>
21 – Twin Cities and Cross-border Citizens' Dialogue to Shape a Sustainable Europe for Future Generations	27/01/2022 [planned]	Brno (Czech Republic), Stuttgart (Germany) [planned]	75 [planned]	4 [planned]	1 [planned]	Digital Trans-national [planned]	Education, culture, youth and sport [planned]	<a href="#">Additional information</a>
22 – Girls of Europe – Local Dialogue with Young Women in West Pomerania	09/10/2021	West Pomerania (Poland)	50	7	1	Hybrid Regional	A stronger economy, social justice and employment Values and rights, rule of law, security European democracy Education, culture, youth and sport Women and LGBT+ rights; femininity and masculinity – does Europe need a new approach to gender? education; work	<a href="#">Additional information</a>
23 – Cross-border Citizens' Dialogue on the Future of Europe and its Local Impact on the Greater Region	24/11 and 26/11/2021	Esch an der Alzette (Luxembourg), Saarbrücken (Germany), Nancy, Colombey-les-Belles (France)	50	5	2	Digital Trans-national	A stronger economy, social justice and employment Digital transformation Education, culture, youth and sport Digitalisation in the labour market; building a social Europe	<a href="#">Additional information</a>

\* Refers to people from politics and public administration in the role of participants in the dialogues as well as initiators and organisers.

Project number and title	Times	Region(s)	Number of citizens	Number of politicians* involved	Number of Citizens' Dialogues	Format	Topics	Additional information
Total 23 projects	First Citizens' Dialogue on 8/09/2021; last Citizens' Dialogue probably in March 2022	30 cities, 38 regions in 21 countries	Approx. 1,931	200 (including 14 members of the CoR)	38	Type of dialogues: 18 digital, 11 hybrid, 9 attendance Location of dialogues: 25 trans-national, 12 regional, 1 local	All topics of the Future Conference were dealt with in the Citizens' Dialogues	Project homepage: <a href="#">Additional information</a>

\* Refers to people from politics and public administration in the role of participants in the dialogues as well as initiators and organisers.

## 6.2 Evaluation of the Citizens' Dialogues on the future of Europe: citizens' and organisers' views

We can draw on several sources to examine the Citizens' Dialogues more closely, to evaluate them and to classify their impact.

- Citizen evaluations: citizens were asked to answer the same evaluation questions across all projects. The project partners were able to answer them in a specially designed online questionnaire.
- Information from the initiators and organisers: the initiators and organisers of each project filled out a detailed digital evaluation questionnaire. In addition, they were able to make their assessments known in digital surveys during the skills transfer phase. Semi-standardised in-depth interviews were also conducted with selected projects.
- Analysis of citizens' proposals: the online questionnaire was used by the initiators to input the citizens' proposals. In addition, we were able to access the information provided by the projects on the online platform of the Conference on the Future of Europe.

### Citizens' Dialogue on the future of Europe: a resounding success for citizens and organisers alike

The survey of citizens following the Citizens' Dialogues tells a clear story: 90 percent of the participants rated their Citizens' Dialogues as "very good" or "good" overall.

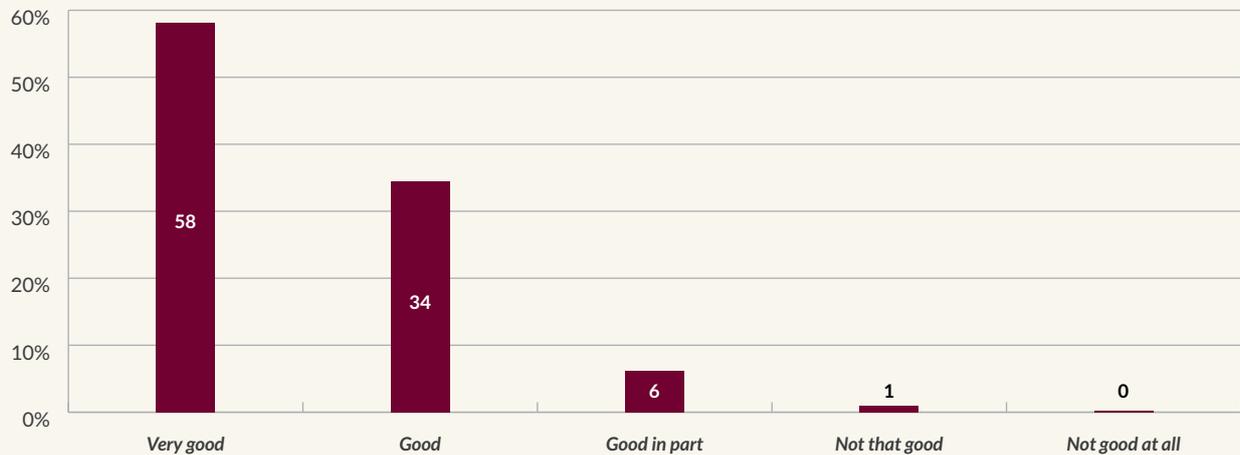
Only a tiny percentage of 0.29 percent of the citizens gave the respective Dialogues a negative rating.

For the most part, the organisers also rated their Citizens' Dialogues very positively: almost 93 percent would describe their Citizens' Dialogues as "good" or "very good", only 7 percent found them less good. In view of such high approval rates, the dialogues as a whole can be considered a success.

### Both citizens and organisers rate the cross-border dimension as particularly positive

Participants and organisers agree: exchanging ideas with fellow citizens and the feeling of togetherness were unbeatable. Like the organisers, the participants particularly appreciated the exchange with politicians and citizens from other countries. In addition to

FIGURE 17 **More than 90% of citizens rate the Dialogues as good or very good**  
Average evaluation of the Citizens' Dialogues by the participants



Due to rounding inaccuracies, the total of answers does not always add up to exactly 100 percent.  
n = participants from 16 projects | Source: own diagram

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the exchange of political ideas, getting to know each other personally and cultural exchange were of central importance – these were genuine European dialogues.

### **All three quality criteria were applied in practice**

Involvement of political decision-makers, genuine deliberation, random selection – all three quality criteria conveyed were applied in practice, albeit to varying degrees. All the Citizens' Dialogues, without exception, were attended by politicians with whom the participants could exchange ideas and discuss their proposals.

In addition to the involvement of politicians, deliberative methods were also a central component of the Citizens' Dialogues and were used by almost 90 percent of all projects.

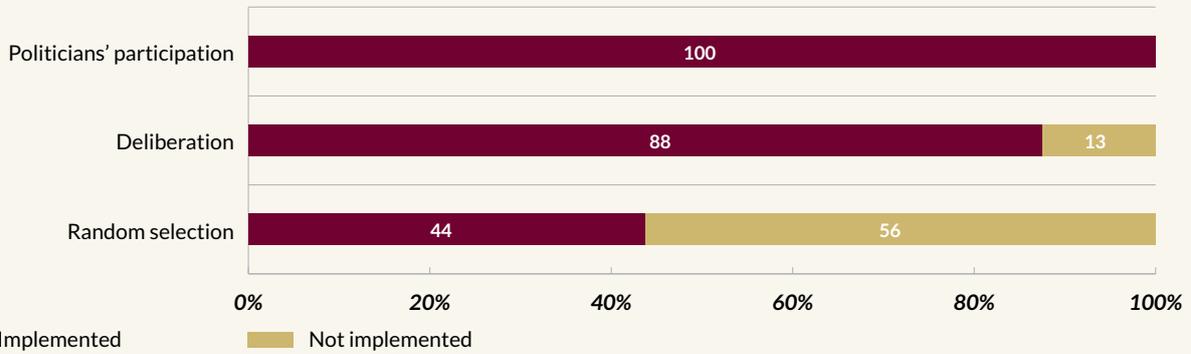
### **The involvement of politicians was particularly successful**

A total of almost 200 politicians and representatives from the administration took part in the Citizens' Dialogues or supported their implementation. This gave citizens the opportunity to present their ideas to relevant politicians and to discuss them with those who can now start to implement the proposals. The majority of the organisers report that they have received wide-spread support from project partners, their own organisations and politicians.

### **The Citizens' Dialogues enable real deliberation**

The evaluation shows that the participants particularly liked the work in small groups and the in-depth discussions. The average duration of the Citizens' Dialogues and the fact that there were often several events per project also indicate that genuine deliberation was possible in the dialogues.

**FIGURE 18 Politicians are involved in all Citizens' Dialogues**  
 Organisers' response to the question: Which key elements of innovative Citizens' Dialogues have you implemented?



Due to rounding inaccuracies, the total of answers does not always add up to exactly 100 percent.  
 n = 16 projects | Source: own diagram

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**Random selection facilitates the recruitment of diverse participants**

In practice, 44 percent of all projects still used random selection, despite having little prior knowledge about this method. Organisers report positive experiences: “The use of random selection by a service provider was very useful in putting together a truly diverse group. It made the discussion deep, diverse and a lot more representative. I don’t think there is an alternative method to achieve such diversity.”

However, it also shows that the majority of the organisers had to forego random selection due to time constraints or lack of financial and human resources. Administrative and legal hurdles also made random selection difficult. For example, in countries such as France, there are no central residents’ registers that could be used as a basis for random selection. In other countries, data protection regulations were cited as an obstacle to random selection. However, it also reveals: among the things they would do differently in the future, many organisers said they would use random selection in the future.

**Here to stay: regional Citizens' Dialogues for Europe will continue to play an important role in the future**

With regard to the sustainability of the project and the dialogues, the picture is positive. In the follow-up survey, all initiators rated the methods taught as good or very good. Likewise, all initiators stated that they would use the method again. The interviews reinforce this impression – all the projects interviewed assume that European topics and European Citizens’ Dialogues will increase both in importance and number in the regions and cities.

*“Inclusive, deliberative, effective: all organisers want to continue using the innovative method and quality principles in the future.”*

*Findings from the post-survey of the organisers*

The organisers’ learning experience with these, in part, first self-organised Citizens’ Dialogues also shows that both the development of expertise and practical experience could be sustainably incorporated. The points emphasised that would be done differently next time were the need for good facilitator training and the possible extension of the planning phase to improve the



quality of the preparation and implementation of the dialogues.

### 6.3 Citizens' proposals for the future of Europe

The purpose of all of the Citizens' Dialogues was for participants to jointly develop ideas and proposals regarding the future of Europe. The overall themes of the individual Citizens' Dialogues were determined by the Conference on the Future selection.

These were defined in detail by the projects and tailored to their needs in the regions. Overall, the topics of the economy, social justice, employment as well as climate change, democracy in Europe and education, culture, youth and sports were discussed frequently.

#### **Exchange, participation, climate change – the citizens' thoughts are clear**

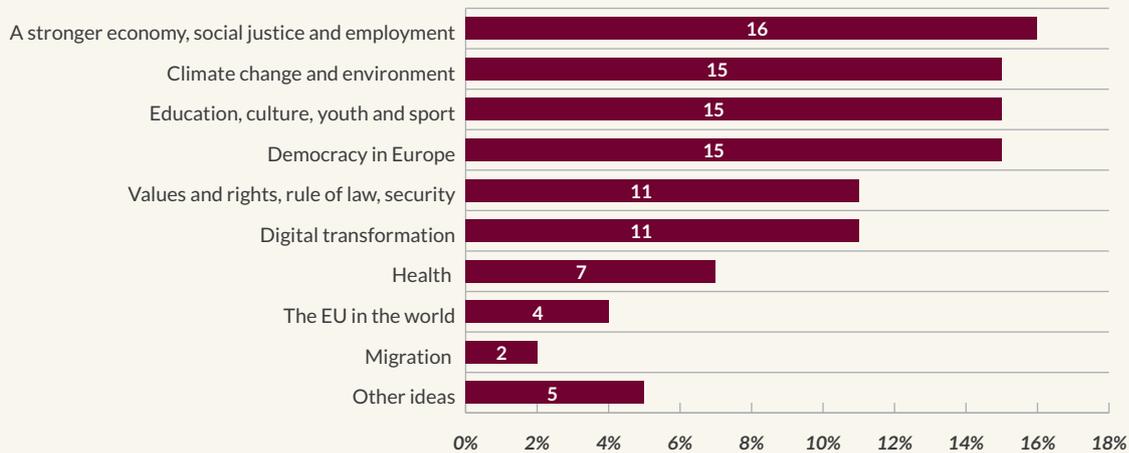
The topics covered by the Conference on the Future of Europe are as diverse as the backgrounds of the citizens. It is therefore all the more remarkable that the Citizens' Dialogues, which took place across the breadth of the EU, came up with very similar proposals. This

was particularly true in the areas of education, culture, youth and sport. However, the areas of democracy in Europe, climate change and the environment also produced similarly clear ideas Europe-wide. Characteristic of all the proposals is the desire for a strong, uniform European approach.

#### **Example proposals for the fields of education, culture, youth programmes and sport: more exchange programmes for employees**

The citizens' proposals state that education, culture, youth programmes and sport meet the essential needs of our societies, whether by promoting economic and social development through education, mutual understanding through culture and sport, or a more inclusive democratic life through youth participation. The focus of the citizens' proposals is lifelong learning. Three concrete proposals represent the thoughts of the Citizens' Panels. Firstly, the area of education and training is not adequately addressed at present. Both internships and apprenticeships are scarce, often poorly paid, and internships are often unpaid. The citizens have proposed financial assistance and support programmes to motivate business owners to take on more young people for their training. Secondly, experience abroad should also be

FIGURE 19 **Citizens most often discuss the economy, social justice and employment**  
The following were the topic of Citizens' Dialogues



n = 55 topics | Source: own diagram

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promoted for apprentices and employees, following the example of the ERASMUS+ programme. For this purpose, an independent programme should be created which motivates employers to support their employees in gaining experience abroad. The third element looks at voluntary further education and training. The citizens would like to see a European platform on which cross-border educational opportunities can be disseminated, as well as regular financial contributions from the EU to be able to take advantage of personal development opportunities so that Europeans can continue to learn in all walks of life.

#### **Example proposals for the field of climate change and environment: more pan-European solutions**

The citizens' core message is clear: climate change is a problem impacting the whole of society. A wide range of ideas emerged from the Citizens' Dialogues. But all were united in the idea of achieving swift implementation

of environmental measures. One pillar to support this is the reduction of individual passenger transport. This is to be achieved by making alternative mobility cheaper and more practical. To this end, the citizens have proposed financial support for the use of bicycles and public transport as well as the switch to e-mobility in order to achieve a socially-just change in transport. The second pillar is the dissemination and reward of good examples. To this end, the citizens propose a European award for individuals, but also for companies and representatives from civil society. Additionally, within the framework of European legislation, the citizens would like to see a harmonisation of recycling and deposit systems. "In Spain there are five different rubbish bags, in France paper and plastic go into one. The question is: does it work?" said Ferran Tarradellas Espuny, Head of Communication at the European Commission Representation in France at the 6-Regions Dialogue on December 10 to 11 2021. Citizens are clearly saying: it does not work. They want pan-European solutions.

**Example proposals for the field of democracy in Europe: more say in the shaping of democracy**

United in diversity is the motto of the EU – and citizens also want more togetherness and a collective say in the shaping of European democracy: European civil society should be more closely networked through a cross-border online forum that enables contact between citizens. Based on this, citizens want to be involved in democratic processes beyond the Conference on the Future of Europe, for example, through referendums on the distribution of public funds, a citizens' budget that citizens' councils can manage independently, and citizens' representation in the European Council. The citizens are critical of the unanimity principle in European institutions. Several Dialogues therefore agreed with the further introduction of majority decisions.

In the Citizens' Dialogues, the citizens made around 400 proposals for the future of Europe. Here is a selection of proposals on the various topics. Some suggestions were made in several Citizens' Dialogues – these are shown in bold in the overview.



## Citizens' proposals

### Climate change and the environment

- **Promotion of regional, organic and sustainable products** by adjusting agricultural subsidies, reducing bureaucracy, offering advice and taxing CO<sup>2</sup> for long-distance transport
- **Establishment of a uniform European recycling system and ban on disposable products**
- **Information campaigns and education on the course and risks of the climate crisis and on individual and corporate opportunities and obligations to protect the climate**
- **Exchange of best practice examples in the fight against the climate crisis and recognition for pioneers and role models**
- Increased sustainability in passenger and freight transport through the expansion of the rail and cycle path network, cost reduction in public transport and support for car sharing and carpooling schemes
- CO<sup>2</sup> tax as a central instrument to promote renewable energies
- Creation of coherent climate targets between Member States and policy sectors
- Social compensation for increased costs due to climate measures
- Creation of community gardens and urban greenery

### Education, culture, youth and sport

- **Focus curricula more on topics relevant to the future:** sustainability, digitalisation, health
- **Promotion of early career orientation**
- **Cross-border school class partnerships and school projects as well as Erasmus+ to also include employees**
- **Harmonisation of educational standards and qualifications between EU countries,** creation of a European diploma
- **Promotion and increased recognition of internships and vocational training**

- Provision of IT equipment for socially disadvantaged pupils and equipping schools with modern hardware
- Language promotion for early learning of the languages of neighbouring countries
- Creation of a common European media and cultural market and cross-border cultural events
- Distribution of education vouchers for further training in professional life to all EU citizens

### A stronger economy, social justice and employment

- **Alignment of social legislation and development of a social union,** establishment of a citizens' insurance scheme as a European social security system
- **Harmonisation of wages** and the creation of a European minimum income
- **Improved workers' rights and strengthening of trade unions**
- **Standardised rules for remote work and home offices**
- **Infrastructure programmes to promote investment in structurally weak and rural areas,** green jobs and social professions
- Relocation of production of active pharmaceutical substances and medicinal products back to the domestic market
- Right to be unavailable outside working hours
- Cross-border employment agencies and advisory facilities for cross-border workers and students

### Values and rights, rule of law, security

- **EU-wide debate and events on European objectives and values, especially the rule of law**
- **Creation of a European anti-discrimination campaign and intensified fight against discrimination against minorities such as the Roma**

Proposals shown in bold were developed in multiple citizens' dialogues.

- **Gender equality in legislation, culture and education**, for example, through educational programmes to combat stereotypes
- Marriage for all (same-sex marriage) and adoption rights for same-sex couples
- Development of accessibility in cities
- EU rules and guidelines for internet platforms: plurality and transparency, regulation of amplification algorithms, wider bans on private sector data use
- Cross-border cooperation between judicial and police authorities

#### Democracy in Europe

- **Long-term inclusion of citizens**, for example, through referendums, the establishment of a self-determined citizens' budget, and citizens' representation in the European Council
- **Establishment of a cross-border online forum to allow interaction between citizens**
- **Increased reporting on EU policies and greater transparency on lobbying activities**
- **Strengthening of EU Parliament**, for example, by giving it the right of initiative
- **Consideration of majority voting at EU level as an alternative to unanimity voting**
- Strengthening of the link between citizens and politicians through local meetings and easier access to contact persons and representatives

#### Digital transformation

- **Investment in public equipment and infrastructure: internet for everyone**
- **Digital literacy education: training of teachers, training of citizens** (especially senior citizens and school pupils)
- Increased media education and education against disinformation and misinformation

- Advancement and central financing of the digitisation of public administration at local, national and European level
- Consideration of sustainability in digitalisation: investment in climate-friendly digital solutions

#### Health

- **Increased accessibility of health facilities in rural areas**, enabling online consultations
- More EU expertise in the health sector
- Funding programmes for research on prevention of health risks and protection of public health
- Education on health issues and healthy lifestyles in the general population

#### Migration

- **Equal social rights for migrants and Europeans**
- More European expertise in the field of migration
- Systematic review of refugee reception policies in all Member States

#### The EU in the world

- More European expertise in the field of foreign policy
- Creation of a schedule for further global networking

Proposals shown in bold were developed in multiple citizens' dialogues.

## 6.4 Impact and follow-up processes of the Citizens' Dialogues

One aim of the Citizens' Dialogues is to incorporate the proposals developed by citizens into the political process at local, regional and European level. Whilst the actual implementation of the proposals cannot yet be assessed due to the close timing of this report to the dialogues themselves, a variety of indicators, such as clear communication activities, suggest that the chances for real implementation are good, for instance at the local and regional level.

### **The course for implementation has been set – the ball is in the EU's court**

All of the projects have undertaken visible dissemination activities to communicate the citizens' proposals:

- Publication of the results on the organisers' websites
- Publication on the online platform of the Conference on the Future of Europe
- Public relations, including on social media
- Participation of political decision-makers in the Dialogues and exchange with citizens regarding specific proposals

The majority of the citizens' proposals is focused on tangible, implementable measures. The appreciation of these ideas and proposals by politicians during the Dialogues acknowledges the value of citizens' input. EU policy makers now need to take these proposals seriously. The ball is in Brussels' court.



### Dialogues resonate with the public

The project and the Citizens' Dialogues have also partially broken through the attention threshold in the media. For example, the Committee of the Regions' website on the project had more than 2,400 hits with an unusually long average stay of a good four minutes (as of 05/01/2022). Most online visitors came from Germany, Belgium, Spain, Italy and France.

A media analysis shows that the population outside of the EU was also interested in the Citizens' Dialogues. Of particular interest were the Dialogues in Kosice, Saxony, Lower Silesian Voivodeship, Usti, Lubusz and Prague and the 6-Regions Dialogue which were investigated by people from third party countries such as Great Britain and Canada. There seemed to be a lot of interest in the project in the media, especially in Spain and Greece.

### Results of the Citizens' Dialogues are incorporated into the decision-making processes

In order to gain more attention and support for the Citizens' Dialogue forum and the concrete proposals developed, the organisers have developed further strategies. There are plans to share and discuss the proposals with local, regional and European decision-makers. The organisers affirm: "On our part, the results have been sent to various addressees (...)", including representatives from EU institutions, national and regional parliaments and governments, as well as civil society organisations with an EU connection. In addition, some projects are already planning to implement proposals at local and regional level.

## 6.5 From local to European: project goals have been achieved

Overall, the evaluation shows that project goals were achieved.

**Establishing participatory expertise:** the solid support of the Bertelsmann Stiftung and the Committee of the Regions have improved all Citizens' Dialogues. Furthermore, all projects will use the method of inclusive, deliberative and effective citizen participation again. Particularly in view of the diverse range of skills in relation to (digital) civic participation, this shows that it has been possible to establish participatory skills in the politics and administration of European cities and regions.

**Contribution to local, regional and European democracy:** positive evaluations of the individual Citizens' Dialogues by both the citizens themselves and the organisers show that the Citizens' Dialogues have contributed to a lively, sustainable participatory democracy. The strong political support that the individual Citizens' Dialogues have received are testimony to the fact that the individual projects have strengthened democracy.

**Effective contribution of citizens to the future of Europe:** the development of in some cases very tangible proposals, the high level of political support for the Dialogues as well as the varied communication activities indicate that there is a real likelihood that the citizens' proposals will be taken up and implemented.

## 7. Findings, conclusions and recommendations

The 23 projects involving 67 European cities and regions, 38 Citizens' Dialogues with around 200 politicians and 2,000 European citizens, more than 400 concrete proposals for the future of Europe – the findings of the “From Local to European” cooperation project between the European Committee of the Regions and the Bertelsmann Stiftung show that European politics are of great importance to European regions and cities, and vice versa. The remarkable commitment in cities and regions to modern methods and quality principles of inclusive, deliberative and effective citizen participation is a strong indicator to further develop participation in the European Union.

The project illustrates that local, regional and transnational Citizens' Dialogues can indeed be successful if they are qualitatively well planned and implemented. Over 90 percent of the citizens and over 90 percent of the organisers rated the Citizens' Dialogues as very good or good. 100 percent of the projects stated that they intended to apply the methods and quality principles again in the future. The resulting citizens' proposals also demonstrate that European citizens not only think in local terms but also in European terms – they would like to see more citizen participation at European level and often come up with similar proposals for the future of Europe even though these concern different countries.

### 7.1 Four conclusions drawn from the joint project

#### **Regions and cities are natural partners when it comes to citizen participation in EU affairs**

Citizen participation has become a feature of policy-making at all levels of government and complements representative democracy in many EU regions and cities. Findings from the joint project confirm that municipalities, cities and regions are interested in developing modern and systematic citizen participation in order to influence local level politics through to the EU level. According to a representative survey conducted in 2021, this interest can be assumed for the vast majority of the 1.2 million local politicians in the EU. (See: European Committee of the Regions (2021), Local politicians of the EU and the future of Europe, Flash Eurobarometer by IPSOS European Public Affairs, 12 October 2021, online: <https://cor.europa.eu/de/our-work/Pages/EURegionalBarometer-Survey-2021.aspx> )

#### **A permanent EU Citizens' Assembly should be complemented by local debates**

There is a realistic chance that the Conference on the Future of Europe could be followed by a permanent EU Citizens' Assembly. The European Citizens' Panels with randomly selected citizens from all EU Member States seem to work. However, their connection to national, regional and local citizens' assemblies

and Citizens' Dialogues is far from satisfactory. For example, only a few Member States have systematically implemented national and regional assemblies based on the Conference Charter or quality principles and linked them to the European Citizens' Panels. If European Citizens' Panels are established in the future, a more systematic way of linking them between the levels of government needs to be provided. For the European Committee of the Regions and for EU regions and cities, this could mean the establishment of transnational citizens' panels dealing, for example, with territorial specificities of border regions, regions under-going industrial change, rural areas or those facing demographic challenges.

#### **The process should be based on common quality principles for citizen participation**

Results of European, national, regional and local participation processes, accompanying research and the findings of this project suggest that citizen participation should be based on some key quality principles. Firstly, inclusiveness must be ensured by randomly selecting the citizens involved so that they reflect the diversity of society while also taking into account geographical origins. Secondly, a participatory framework for deliberation should be created that ensures open-ended and informed debates. Thirdly, the process should include parliamentary feedback and the opportunity to shape policy in order to have a lasting impact. Furthermore, citizen participation at the EU level should be accompanied by a multilingual approach to communication that provides information, transparency and the opportunity for other interested groups to participate as well. Finally, an evaluation by and for the participants must accompany citizen participation processes. With regard to the EU level, such evaluations should also be the subject of discussions and learning about policy.

#### **Developing expertise and continued learning about policy are required by key players**

Experiences from participatory citizen involvement and this project suggest that these processes require significant resources and need to be accompanied by training and dialogue between local key players. The Conference on the Future of Europe has provided a framework for policy learning at all levels of government, which merits consolidation in the run-up to the 2024 European elections. The CoR and the Bertelsmann Stiftung are ready to support regions and cities in their cooperation and in their exchange of ideas at EU level, working together with other institutions.

## **7.2 Recommendations for the future of European citizen participation**

European democracy must constantly evolve and adapt to the needs of its citizens. Due to its complex political procedures, different languages and cultural diversity, the EU is still a distant entity for many citizens. More "real" deliberative citizen participation can contribute to a "Europe of citizens". This requires its sustainable institutional establishment in the EU's democratic system. We need a closer connection between innovative forms of citizen participation across all levels – from the regions to the Member States to Brussels.

The quality of citizen participation and hence its legitimacy is crucial in this respect. Citizen participation must be inclusive, deliberative and effective so that it can also act as a pillar of democracy. And above all: the success of participation depends to a large extent on the willingness of politicians. There have often been isolated attempts at participation at EU level outside of the institutional context. This must be avoided in the future.

Citizen participation is not merely an exercise in communication. The goal should be a general cultural shift in European politics and the EU institutions. The debate on institutionalising citizen participation in the EU has only just begun. Ultimately, there could be a new “architecture of participation” that enables Europe’s citizens to have a greater say and interlinks diverse forms of democracy. This discussion must now be brought to a conclusion. The EU is far from having exhausted its democratic potential – but modern deliberative citizen participation is showing us the way forward.

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Bertelsmann Stiftung  
Carl-Bertelsmann-Straße 256  
33311 Gütersloh  
Phone +49 5241 81-0  
www.bertelsmann-stiftung.de

## Responsible

Anna Renkamp  
Dominik Hierlemann

## Authors

Christian Huesmann  
Anna Renkamp  
Wolfgang Petzold

## With the support of

Nicole Kleeb  
Anna Rachel Heckhausen  
Adrienn Nagy

## Design

Nicole Meyerholz, Bielefeld

## Photos

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Cantabria

## Address | Contact

### **Bertelsmann Stiftung**

Carl-Bertelsmann-Straße 256  
33311 Gütersloh  
Germany  
Phone +49 5241 81-0

Anna Renkamp  
Future of Democracy Programme  
Phone +49 5241 81-81145  
anna.renkamp@bertelsmann-stiftung.de

Dr. Dominik Hierlemann  
Future of Democracy Programme  
Phone +49 5241 81-81537  
dominik.hierlemann@bertelsmann-stiftung.de

Dr. Christian Huesmann  
Future of Democracy Programme  
Phone +49 5241 81-81221  
christian.huesmann@bertelsmann-stiftung.de

<https://www.bertelsmann-stiftung.de/en/our-projects/democracy-and-participation-in-europe>

### **European Committee of the Regions**

Rue Belliard/Belliardstraat 101  
1040 Brüssel  
Belgium  
Phone +32 2 282 22 11

Wolfgang Petzold  
Directorate for Communication of the  
European Committee of the Regions  
Phone +32 2 282 23 58  
wolfgang.petzold@cor.europa.eu

Adrienn Nagy  
Directorate for Communication of the  
European Committee of the Regions  
Phone +32 2 282 21 26  
adrienn.nagy@cor.europa.eu

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