

— shortcut —



The French Citizens' Convention on the End of Life

Issue 11 – August 2023

shortcut
What it's all about

The second Citizens' Convention established by the Conseil Économique Social et Environnemental

During his re-election campaign, French President Macron committed to opening the public debate on assisted suicide and euthanasia. For years, there has been tension between a growing number of French citizens in favor of changing the law to introduce active assistance in dying (*un aide active à mourir*) and those who do not want the country to move beyond the current law.

On September 13, 2022, Macron announced the launch of a national debate to explore this issue. "The necessary time will be taken, and all guarantees must be given to ensure the conditions for an orderly, serene and en-

lightened debate", the Elysée stressed. Prime Minister Borne followed up with a letter which tasked the CESE (*Conseil Économique Social et Environnemental*) with establishing the Citizens' Convention on the End of Life (CCFV). Since 2021, the CESE is now recognized as the Third Assembly of the French Republic with a consultative mandate to engage with citizens and lead national debates. The CCFV remit invited citizens to shed light on the following question:

Is the end-of-life support framework adapted to the different situations encountered, or should any changes be introduced?



shortcut
How it works

End of life convention: actors

Strategic and operational organisation

Governance Committee

Organises all operations and deals with any problems that may arise.

Steering Committee

Responsible for organising meetings, cooperation with service providers and the operational implementation of the strategic guidelines adopted by Cogouv.

Operational implementation

Drawing of lots

Recruitment service provider according to criteria set by the Governance Committee.

Participatory platform or website

Service provider responsible for implementing the participatory platform for the general public.

Leaders and facilitators

Service provider responsible for leading the working sessions throughout the attendance periods.

Support

Experts / people interviewed

Received by members at their request and/or that of Cogouv.

Fact-checkers

Responsible for verifying information at the request of Convention members.

Writers

Drafting of texts based on reports from the sub-groups; group discussions and drafting of the final versions.

Guarantors

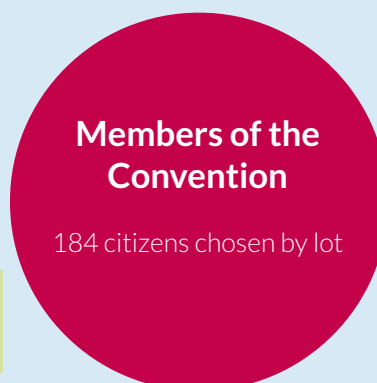
Board of guarantors

Ensures compliance with essential principles: sincerity, equality, transparency, respect for citizens' views, etc.

Neutral observers

Researcher, observers and evaluators

Observe the process as part of a research project in order to produce analyses and draw conclusions.



Citizens' Convention in France 2022–2023

The Citizens' Convention on the End of Life began with **185 participants** with one person dropping out for employment reasons.

The Sortition process used to bring together a **representative sampling of France** included the following **six criteria**: gender, age, region (including overseas France), education level, socio-professional category, and urban/rural/peri-urban.

CCFV participants committed to a total of **nine weekends**, stretched over **27 days** at the Palais D'Iéna in Paris.



They received a **stipend** along with all expenses paid for (travel, accommodation, food and childcare).

The **final report** included **65 proposals** and received a **92 per cent participant approval**.

In the end, 76 per cent of participants voted to introduce a French model for assisted suicide and euthanasia within a well-defined framework of strict guidelines.

The costs of the CCFV is estimated at approx. **five million Euros**.

shortcut
Good to know

How did the CCFV work?

An Evolving Co-Creation Process

- » The 184 French citizens chosen by democratic lottery represented a broad range of perspectives and views.
- » Given the sensitivity of the topic area, effort was made throughout the process to ensure that the minority voice was given sufficient space to express its perspective and insights.
- » Early sessions were designed to create a sense of community and build social cohesion. The Common Convictions section of the final report represents the areas of consensus with subsequent sections documenting areas of divergence.
- » Another notable CCFV innovation was the introduction of a team of graphic designers to tell the story of the process. This group injected humor, empathy, and nuance into sessions in an accessible way.

The Participants Present at the Elysée

- » President Macron received the CCFV participants at the Elysée in April, 2023.
- » He has requested the National Assembly to build on the CCFV report and introduce a legislative bill by the end of Summer 2023.
- » The CESE has committed to a follow-up session with CCFV participants within six months. The participants have also considered establishing Les 184, an association to help guide their work in the months ahead.

An institution to lead Citizens' assemblies

- » Given the success of the CCFV, Macron has announced his intention to engage the CESE for future citizens' assemblies on other public issues of national importance.
- » Recognized as the Third Assembly of the French Republic, this consultative body mandated to lead innovative citizen engagement and public consultations is a valuable asset.
- » As envisioned by mechanisms like the Democratic Action Fund, over time, institutions such as the CESE can accelerate the number of citizens' assemblies across a country and create platforms for government bodies to organise these at different levels of government.



Lessons learned from the CESE

For the future of citizens' assemblies there are three areas for improvement: The selection of the topic, the development of robust co-creation plans and the need for a stronger link with the broader public.

To provide citizens with more agenda setting powers, the option to select topics should be open for citizens. An increasing number of deliberative platforms are incorporating mechanisms for citizens to have a say in the topic while balancing this need with the existence of political will. This could lead to more interest in certain topics.

During the design phase, a plan for linking citizens' assemblies to the political decision-making process should be developed. Participants should clearly be provided with greater agency and responsibility throughout the implementation. Such plans for amplifying these voices and including them in the decision-making process did not exist and, instead, evolved gradually. In addition, for greater transparency, guarantors should begin their engagement as early as possible to provide input for the design of the citizens' assembly.

A robust connection between a citizens' assembly and the broader public is an important component for building legitimacy. Some CCFV plenary sessions were livestreamed, and, after the learning phase, the public was able to register and attend sessions in person. The press conferences with participants also helped increase knowledge of the CCFV. However, a greater focus on the profiles of the participants would have been beneficial. An online public education campaign would have created a greater connection between the CCFV and the general public.

A citizens' assembly does not need a binding mandate to be consequential. Political will together with a strong co-creation process can have a great impact.



**The future
of democracy**



shortcut *More on the subject*

The CCFV is not the first Citizens' Convention established by the CESE

The Citizens' Convention on the End of Life was the second national citizens' assembly organised in France. The first was the Citizens' Convention for Climate (2019–2020) implemented on the heels of President Macron's Grand Débat National (2019). For more information on these processes, see the references.

Authors:

Marjan H. Ehsassi
mehsassi@berggruen.org

Lina Grob
lina.grob@outlook.de

Christian Huesmann
christian.huesmann@bertelsmann-stiftung.de

Sources and further reading

Citizens' Convention on the End of Life:
<https://conventioncitoyennesurlafindevie.lecese.fr>

Link to the CESE website: <https://www.lecese.fr>

Ehsassi, M. and Landemore, H. Learnings from the French Citizens' Convention on the End of Life, [RD-Note-CCFV.pdf \(newdemocracy.com.au\)](#)

Citizens' Convention for Climate website:
<https://www.conventioncitoyennepourleclimat.fr>

Link to the Democratic Action Fund website: <https://www.demafund.org>

Shortcut 4 French Citizens' Convention on Climate:
[Shortcut 4 - The French Climate Citizens' Council \(bertelsmann-stiftung.de\)](#)

Putting The Public Back In Public Policy:
<https://www.noemamag.com/putting-the-public-back-in-public-policy>



The future of democracy



Imprint

© August 2023 Bertelsmann Stiftung

Bertelsmann Stiftung, Carl-Bertelsmann-Straße 256, 33311 Gütersloh, www.bertelsmann-stiftung.de/en

Responsible: Dr Dominik Hierlemann, Prof Dr Robert Vehrkamp, Anna Renkamp

Cover picture: © Katrin Baumann / CESE

The shortcut series presents and discusses interesting approaches, methods, and projects for solving democratic challenges in a condensed and illustrative format. The Bertelsmann Stiftung's project New Democracy publishes it at irregular intervals.