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NOTE

From:	General Secretariat of the Council
To:	Delegations
Subject:	Conference on the Future of Europe - note on national citizens' panels and national events

Delegations will find attached a note prepared by the GSC, in consultation with the GSC part of the Conference's Common Secretariat, providing some practical information to Member States on National Citizens' Panels and on national events as well as on their integration in the Multilingual Digital Platform.

Note on National Citizens' Panels and National events

I. Introduction

According to the Joint Declaration signed by the Presidents of the European Parliament, of the Council and of the Commission, Member States of the European Union are associated in the Conference on the Future of Europe and are part of this joint undertaking.

Member States contribute to the Conference through a variety of activities and structures at national, regional, local and in some cases transnational level, putting citizens at the heart of all events. Next to European activities, *“each Member State and institution can organise additional events, in line with their own national or institutional specificities, and make further contributions to the Conference, such as national citizens’ panels or thematic events bringing together input from different panels”*.

The purpose of this note is to provide some practical information to Member States on National Citizens’ Panels and on national events as well as on their integration in the Multilingual Digital Platform.

II. National Citizens’ Panels

The “Guidance for National Citizens’ Panels in the context of the Conference on the Future of Europe” of 26 May 2021 is inspired by the principles of good deliberation, defined notably in the OECD report titled “Innovative Citizen Participation and New Democratic Institutions, Catching the deliberative wave”¹ and is meant to assist Member States organising Citizens’ Panels at national, regional or local level².

This guidance provides the 11 principles for good deliberation and is included in Annex I to this note.

¹ Report available on: <https://www.oecd.org/gov/open-government/innovative-citizen-participation-new-democratic-institutions-catching-the-deliberative-wave-highlights.pdf>

² The guidance is also available in doc. 9159/21 and on the multilingual digital platform: https://futureu.europa.eu/uploads/decidim/attachment/file/10231/Guidance_for_national_panels_EB260521.pdf

Recommendations of National Citizens' Panels organised under these guidelines will be discussed by the Plenary, grouped by themes. According to the Joint Declaration, "*A Conference Plenary will ensure that the recommendations from the national and European citizens' panels, grouped by themes, are debated without a predetermined outcome and without limiting the scope to pre-defined policy areas*".

In this regard, and in order to facilitate the preparation of the Plenary, it is important for the GSC part of the Common Secretariat (commonsecretariat-COFE@consilium.europa.eu) to receive detailed information from Member States which are organising National Citizens' Panels, notably on the methodology used, the topics addressed, the number of sessions and the number of citizens involved and the timing of the expected recommendations by the National Panel. This information will help to prepare the agendas of the Conference Plenaries.

a) Interaction between National and European Citizens' Panels

Citizens from European and National Citizens' Panels will interact in the Conference Plenary as they form the 'citizens' component' of the Plenary. In this framework, the updated practical modalities of the European Citizens' Panels indicate that European Citizens' Panels will be informed of any recommendations by National Citizens' Panels. This information could be provided orally or in writing.

b) Recommendations from National Citizens' Panels in Plenary

As stated in the Joint Declaration, recommendations from European and National Citizens' Panels should be debated, grouped by themes, in the Conference Plenary.

In terms of calendar:

- the Plenary on 17-18 December 2021 will debate the recommendations from the European Citizens' Panels on:
 - Stronger economy, social justice, jobs/ education, culture, youth, sport/ digital transformation (Panel 1)
 - European democracy/values and rights, rule of law, security (Panel 2)

- The Plenary on 21-22 January 2022 will debate the recommendations from the European Citizens’ Panels on:
 - Climate change, environment/health (Panel 3)
 - EU in the world/migration (Panel 4)

Following this calendar, and without prejudice to the agendas of the Plenary meetings, recommendations from National Citizens’ Panels will be debated in the Conference Plenary, in principle alongside the recommendations from European Citizens’ Panels on the same or similar topics.

Without prejudice to the agendas of the Plenary meetings, for National Citizens’ Panels addressing transversal or other issues, their recommendations should in principle be allocated to and debated in the relevant Conference Plenaries, according to the specific topics addressed by the recommendations.

It is up to the Member States organising National Citizens’ Panels to decide who presents their recommendations, i.e. the Member States’ representative to the Conference Plenary or the representative of national panels or national events, to the Conference Plenary³.

c) Reporting of National Citizens’ Panels

Member States are expected to register their National Citizens’ Panels on the Multilingual Digital Platform as ‘institutional events’ before these panels take place to announce them. For more details on ‘institutional events’, see Annex II.

Regarding the outcome, a concise report on a National Citizens’ Panel should be prepared, including the following information:

- Topic of the National Citizens’ Panel;
- Number of panel sessions;
- Number of citizens participating;
- Methodology used, including description of the selection used and deliberative process and how other principles for good deliberation included in the above-mentioned guidance have been followed;
- Recommendations by the participating citizens.

³ It is recalled that 27 representatives of national events or national panels (one per Member State) have been nominated as members of the Conference Plenary.

Member States will be invited to send the final report of the National Citizens' Panel to the GSC part of the Common Secretariat (commonsecretariat-COFE@consilium.europa.eu) in due time before the respective Conference Plenary. Pursuant to the Rules of Procedure of the Conference, the documents to be tabled for the Conference Plenary meeting shall be sent in all the EU official languages at the latest seven working days before the date of the meeting.

The contractor for the Multilingual Digital Platform will upload the report on the digital platform in a section dedicated to Member States' panels and events (see also point IV below), and add a link to the report to the 'institutional event' created on the platform.

III. National events

National events other than National Citizens' Panels should also be registered on the Multilingual Digital Platform before they take place.

Major national events (flagship events) can be registered on the platform as 'institutional events' to give them more visibility on the event map, while for all other national events, the institution organising the event should create an account and register the event directly on the platform.

For more details on the registration of different national events on the platform, see also Annexes II and III.

Regarding the outcome, it is important that the organisers always add an 'event report' to their national events registered on the platform once the event has finished, following the steps outlined in the [Website guide for event organisers](#). Events without an event report cannot be taken into account in the analysis of the contributions on the platform.

In terms of substance, it is particularly important to cover in the event report the concrete suggestions for the future of Europe put forward by citizens during the event, which will be the focus of the analysis. It is also recommended to create 'ideas' or find existing 'ideas' on the platform corresponding to these suggestions and to link them to the event report as 'Related ideas'. This will allow the participants on the platform to engage on these ideas and develop them, adding comments and endorsements.

As regards the timing of events and reporting on them, another important element to take into account is the timeline for the preparation of the platform reports and the contributions they will cover.

In terms of calendar:

- The 3rd interim report is scheduled for December to feed into the 3rd sessions of European Citizens’ Panels and the December and January plenaries. It is expected to cover contributions on the platform until the last week of October.
- A final report will be drafted in early 2022 so that it can be published ahead of the last plenary in Spring 2022. Considering the drafting and translation constraints, as well as the deadline for tabling documents for the plenary, this report will likely cover the contributions on the platform posted at the latest six weeks before the last plenary.

Member States should keep this calendar in mind when organising events in order to ensure that their outcome feeds into the Conference process through interim and final reports on contributions on the platform.

It is also recalled that on the occasion of the publication of the interim reports and the final platform report, the service provider is expected to prepare reports per Member State, based on contributions made on the digital platform.

IV. Platform section on Member States’ panels and events

A new dedicated section on the Multilingual Digital Platform is planned under the title ‘National panels and events’. The aim of this section is to provide information on and give specific visibility to Member States’ panels and events.

This section will cover the following succinct information on each Member State:

- Short general information regarding the organisation of national events
- Link to national website related to the Conference, if any
- A limited number of links to flagship events as registered on the platform, in particular National Citizens’ Panels
- Reports on National Citizens’ Panels submitted to the plenary, if any

Member States will have the opportunity to provide input for this section, following a pre-defined format.

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

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

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

The guidance described below is inspired by the principles of good deliberation, defined notably in an OECD report which has reviewed hundreds of case studies of deliberative processes,⁴ and is meant to assist Member States which intend to organise Citizens' Panels at national, regional or local level.

NB: National events, different from citizens' panels, should be organised in line with the purpose and the principles of the Conference, in an open, transparent and inclusive way. Specific guidelines on how to organise such events are available in the form of toolkits on the Multilingual Digital Platform and, especially, in the “Step-by-step guide for event organisers”⁵. The document offers also examples of event formats that could inspire and guide the choice of the Member States. A specific guide on how to make the events inclusive is also available on the platform.

1) Purpose

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

⁴ Report available on: <https://www.oecd.org/gov/open-government/innovative-citizen-participation-new-democratic-institutions-catching-the-deliberative-wave-highlights.pdf>. Quotes in this text are taken from the good practice principles for deliberative processes for public decision-making of that report.

⁵ [How do I organise an event? - Conference on the Future of Europe \(europa.eu\)](https://europa.eu/epf/how-do-i-organise-an-event/)

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

2) Follow-up

“The commissioning public authority should publicly commit to responding to or acting on participants’ recommendations in a timely manner.” National dissemination and coordination measures that could ensure the uptake and visibility of the outcomes of national Citizens’ Panels will enhance the integration of the national/regional/local actions into the wider process of the Conference. This holds true especially given the potential overlap of similar discussions unfolding on the one side at local/national level, and on the other side at EU level.

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

3) Transparency

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

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

4) Inclusiveness

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

5) Representativeness

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

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

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

6) Information

“Participants should have access to a wide range of accurate, relevant, and accessible evidence and expertise” on the fundamentals of the topic to be discussed in order to enable collective reflection. There should be clear procedures in place to ensure that the knowledge provided to citizens is adequate and balanced. According to this, citizens should have the opportunity, within the scope of their panel, to choose what specific topics they want to focus on and the type of expertise they need.

7) Group deliberation

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

8) Time

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

9) Integrity

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

10) Privacy

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

11) Evaluation

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

Institutional events' category on the platform

a) Main characteristics of the category of 'institutional events'

In addition to registering national events on the platform as any other users, Member States have the possibility to register some of their events – namely major events (or flagship events) – as 'institutional events' to give them more visibility on the platform.

Member States are for example expected to register their National Citizens' Panels as 'institutional events'. As regards other events, it is for the Member State concerned to indicate which events they consider 'major'. This may be for example because of their wide national coverage or the time invested in the design of an innovative methodology.

As the 'institutional event' category relies on manual uploading by the team of moderators, it is important to interpret the notion of 'major' events narrowly and to register only a limited number of events in this category.

In practice, an 'institutional event' is marked with a specific colour on the platform's map of events (blue, rather than purple as for the rest of the events). It is also possible to search for 'institutional events' under each topic.

It is important to note however that whether an event has been registered as an 'institutional event' or not does not affect the analysis process. All national events are taken into account in the analysis based on the 'event report' (substantive information about the event), rather than the category under which an event has been registered.

b) Procedure for registering and reporting on 'institutional events'

In order to register an event as an 'institutional event', Member States are invited to fill in the dedicated form in one of the EU official languages, and if possible in English or French. The form should be sent to the Common Secretariat (commonsecretariat@futureu.europa.eu).

Requests should be made sufficiently in advance to allow time for their processing and uploading the events on the platform.

Once uploaded, the information will appear on the platform in all EU languages, after being machine-translated. If the institution organising the event so wishes, it can also provide the translation into the other EU languages itself, thus ensuring a higher quality of the translation.

As for all events organised as part of the Conference, it is important to draw up an event report after an institutional event has finished, so that the concrete ideas emerging from that event can feed into the analysis. The event reports should also be sent to the Common Secretariat (commonsecretariat@futureu.europa.eu) for uploading on the platform.

More details on the procedure are included in Annex III.

Platform checklist

For details regarding the registration of events on the Multilingual Digital Platform, check the [Website guide for event organisers](#).

1. National Citizens' Panels**Before the panel:**

- Register the panel on the platform as an 'institutional event' by filling in the required form and sending it to the Common Secretariat (commonsecretariat@futureu.europa.eu).

Please note that cross-cutting topics should be registered either under 'Other topics' or under the most relevant topic, to avoid duplicate postings.

After the panel:

- Send the final report of the panel to the GSC part of the Common Secretariat (commonsecretariat-COFE@consilium.europa.eu), taking into account the deadlines related to the submission of documents to the Conference Plenary in all EU languages.
- The contractor for the Multilingual Digital Platform will upload the report on the digital platform in a section dedicated to Member States' panels and events, and add a link to the report to the 'institutional event' created on the platform.

Recommended:

- Create 'ideas' or find existing 'ideas' on the platform corresponding to the recommendations put forward by the panel. Please note that only ideas published under the same topic as the event can be linked to it.
- Send an e-mail to the Common Secretariat (commonsecretariat@futureu.europa.eu) indicating the exact URL addresses of these ideas and that you would like these ideas to be linked to the event as 'Related ideas'.

2. Major national events (flagship events)**Before the event:**

- Register the event on the platform as an 'institutional event' by filling in the required form and sending it to the Common Secretariat (commonsecretariat@futureu.europa.eu).

Please note that cross-cutting topics should be registered either under 'Other topics' or under the most relevant topic, to avoid duplicate postings.

After the event:

- Send an ‘event report’ to the Common Secretariat (commonsecretariat@futureu.europa.eu), covering in particular the following elements:
 - Context, purpose, subject and structure/methodology of the event
 - Number of participants and their background
 - Main ideas suggested by participants and the shared or debated narratives and arguments that led to them

For a more details on what to cover, please see the [Website guide for event organisers](#).

- The contractor for the platform will upload the event report on the platform.

Recommended:

- Create ‘ideas’ or find existing ‘ideas’ on the platform corresponding to the proposals for the future of Europe discussed at the event. Please note that only ideas published under the same topic as the event can be linked to it.
- Indicate in the e-mail sent to the Common Secretariat the exact URL addresses of these ideas and that you would like to link these ideas to your event as ‘Related ideas’.

3. Other national events

Before the event:

- Register the event on the platform from the account of the organiser (the account of the public authority or an official representing the public authority).

Please note that cross-cutting topics should be registered either under ‘Other topics’ or under the most relevant topic, to avoid duplicate postings.

After the event:

- Close the event by adding an ‘event report’. For more details, check the [Website guide for event organisers](#).

Recommended:

- Create ‘ideas’ or find existing ‘ideas’ on the platform corresponding to the suggestions for the future of Europe discussed at the event and link them to this event. Please note that only ideas published under the same topic as the event can be linked to it.