

Level Up – Transforming Participatory and Deliberative Democracy in Europe

Key Facts

EU citizens want to contribute to a stronger European democracy but feel disconnected from its institutions: [92%](#) want their voices to be better taken into account by the EU and [89%](#) say there is still work to be done to strengthen democracy in the EU. Yet, [65%](#) feel like they cannot make a difference in politics. Although much has been done to address this challenge, such as through the European Citizens' Panels (ECPs), EU citizens feel that more needs to be done.

Our Method

To transform participatory and deliberative democracy in Europe, and specifically to aid ECPs in reaching their full potential, we have built the Level Up Toolkit. Its key features are in-person interactions, gamified activities, and breaking down barriers to participation. It provides effective and actionable means of improving ECPs by fulfilling the recommendations below. The Toolkit is however a flexible method that can be implemented at multiple governance levels.

Recommendations for European Citizens' Panels

1. Enable Community-led Topic Selection

Challenge: Citizens want options to set the agenda and have more direct input in the policymaking process.

Recommendation: Use a tripartite ECP topic selection process:

- A** **Community-sourced** (25% of ECP topics): suggested by CSOs and community stakeholders on a rolling basis. Topic proposals should be disseminated digitally (e.g. [Have Your Say](#)). Citizens can rank these proposals, using a digital [preferendum](#) voting procedure, with topics of highest rank discussed in an ECP.
- B** **Citizen-sourced** (25% of ECP topics): determined by surveying participants following their selection. Our pilot projects underline that surveys are an effective method for citizen-led agenda setting.
- C** **Institution-sourced** (50% of ECP topics): Institutions should pre-select topics, as a permanent part of the Commission's public consultation procedure.

Suggested change-makers: Colin Scicluna (Commissioner Šuica's Cabinet, Conference on the Future of Europe) and Director-General Pia Ahrenkilde Hansen (DG COMM)

2. Improve Diversity and Inclusion

Challenge: Marginalised groups remain underrepresented, despite random selection and diversity indicators.

Recommendation: ECP composition needs to be diversified:

- A** Participants should include stakeholders and CSOs led by and for marginalised communities. Transparent criteria should be used for selection (see our [guidelines](#)).
- B** A Diversity, Equality, and Inclusion (DEI) Policy should be adopted by the facilitators and communicated to all participants (see [example](#)).



- C** Diversity targets should be set and measured with continuous reflection for improvement.
- D** DEI experts should work in conjunction with topic experts of ECPs to equalise understanding while ensuring meaningful representation and inclusion.

Suggested change-makers: Alison Crabb (Disability and Inclusion, EMPL.D3) and Vesna Loncaric (Commissioner Šuica's Cabinet, equality)

3. Boost Transparency, Follow-up Procedures, Communication

Challenge: Insufficient transparency regarding ECP results contributes to erosion of public trust. Limited dissemination and formal communication hampers the ECPs' reach, impact, and legitimacy.

Recommendations: Clearly communicating through innovative and creative means:

- A** ECP policy proposals should undergo a referendum. Our research and pilot projects show that this provides invaluable information on public acceptance and is the basis for follow-up procedures.
- B** Art-Based Initiatives should be made integral to ECPs to make policy proposals more tangible (see [examples](#)). This creates space for different actors to connect in equal and dialogic ways beyond the institutional realm.
- C** ECP policy proposals and creative outputs should be disseminated through a centralised platform (e.g. ['Have Your Say'](#)), with status indicators (e.g. introduced, considered, rejected, accepted).
- D** Communication campaigns should be designed to showcase the impact of ECPs with tangible, accessible, and relatable stories, using innovative marketing and User-Generated Content.
- E** ECPs and their outputs should have transparent impact assessments (see [example](#)).

Suggested change-makers: Joachim Ott (Citizens' Dialogues, COMM.C3) and Iris Abraham (Commissioner Šuica's Cabinet, communications)

4. Improve Connections Between Citizens, Institutions, Stakeholders

Challenge: Disconnect between institutions and communities persists, leading to distrust.

Recommendations: Bridging the gap between social groups through engaging practices:

- A** ECPs should include citizens, CSOs, experts, stakeholders, and policymakers (see [suggested composition](#)), to ensure all participants are informed and included. Both pilot projects demonstrated that including these groups led to better mutual understanding (60-95% increase after the events).
- B** ECP participants should engage in a selection of value-based games (see [examples](#)), building a basis for equitable engagement, reducing the risk co-option. Our [Madrid pilot project](#) showed 95% of participants felt empowered through gamified activities.
- C** ECP deliberations should be structured and facilitated. Our [Brussels pilot project](#) showed that participants collaborated, building trust, and sharing expertise. Facilitated knowledge-sharing built connections as an end in itself.

Suggested change-makers: Theo Duivenwoorde (Stakeholder Engagement and Programme Impact, EAC.A.3) and Deša Srsen (Commissioner Šuica's Cabinet, interinstitutional relations and outreach).

