

A man with dark hair, seen from behind, is carrying two young girls on his shoulders. He is wearing a bright yellow t-shirt and dark trousers. The girl on the left has blonde curly hair and is wearing a pink and white striped long-sleeved shirt and pink leggings with owl patterns. The girl on the right has blonde hair and is wearing a light blue long-sleeved shirt and pink leggings with colorful patterns. They are standing in a field of tall green grass and many red poppies. The background is a soft-focus landscape with trees and a blue sky.

Conference on the Future of Europe
ACTIVITY REPORT
March - June 2021



Conference
on the **Future**
of Europe

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I. Introduction

The Conference on the Future of Europe is well on its way – the debate has started! On 10 March 2021, the [Joint Declaration](#) on the Conference on the Future of Europe was signed by European Parliament President David Sassoli, Portuguese Prime Minister António Costa, on behalf of the Presidency of the EU Council, and Commission President Ursula von der Leyen, paving the way for this unprecedented, open and inclusive European democratic exercise which places citizens at its very heart. Just two weeks later the Executive Board, which includes representatives from the three EU institutions and observers, and oversees the organisation of the Conference, held its first meeting. The Common Secretariat that assists the Executive Board also took up its work.



From left to right: Signature of the Joint Declaration by Portuguese Prime Minister Costa, European Parliament President Sassoli and Commission President von der Leyen

A first important milestone was the launch of the Multilingual Digital Platform of the Conference on 19 April 2021. Citizens from across Europe now have the possibility to share their ideas about the future of Europe on this platform, as well as information on Conference events.

The inaugural event of the Conference took place on 9 May 2021 in the European Parliament's premises in Strasbourg, in a hybrid format. French President Emmanuel Macron welcomed the participants of this event, who included members of the Executive Board, Ministers or State Secretaries responsible for European Affairs, Members of the European Parliament and national Parliaments, Erasmus students from across the EU and over 500 citizens. The Presidents of the three EU institutions had the opportunity to outline their vision for Europe. Citizens from across EU Member States could ask questions to the three Co-Chairs of the Executive Board: Member of the European Parliament Guy Verhofstadt, Secretary of State Ana Paula Zacarias for the Council Presidency and Commission Vice-President Dubravka Šuica.



From left to right: Commission President von der Leyen, European Parliament President Sassoli, Portuguese Prime Minister Costa and French President Macron at the inaugural event of the Conference

Ahead of this event, the Executive Board endorsed the [Rules of Procedure of the Conference](#), which provide a comprehensive framework for the work of the different Conference structures and their interaction.

II. Activities at the European level

II.1. Multilingual Digital Platform

Since 19 April 2021, citizens from across Europe have the possibility to provide their views on the future of Europe on the Multilingual Digital Platform of the Conference (<https://futureu.europa.eu/>)¹. This platform is a key component of the Conference; it gives everyone the chance to participate. Citizens can put forward their ideas, endorse other people's ideas and comment on them. It is also the place where everyone can share information on Conference events and report on their outcomes.

The platform is fully multilingual: all contributions are available in the EU 24 official languages thanks to machine translation.

Since the launch of the platform, nearly 19.000 participants have registered on it. They have shared more than 5.000 ideas and over 10.000 comments, and endorsed other people's ideas over 29.000 times. Close to 1 million people have just visited the platform.



State of participation on 5 July (source: futureu.europa.eu)

Almost 1.400 events all over Europe have been announced on the platform, allowing as many people as possible to participate. [Guides and campaign materials](#) have been made available on the platform for the organisers, helping to ensure that the events are interactive and inclusive.

This is a good start, but many more citizens should be reached to have a real debate on a European scale. Promoting the platform and broad citizen participation should therefore be a top priority for everyone interested to contribute to the success of the Conference.

The platform should be a space where citizens from every walk of life and all corners of Europe feel comfortable and welcome to contribute to the debate. Everyone using the platform must therefore commit to the [Conference Charter](#) and respect the [rules of participation](#). A moderation team has been put in place and is working under the supervision of the Common Secretariat on behalf of the Executive Board to ensure that this is the case.

¹ See also [video](#) presenting the Multilingual Digital Platform

The platform is where the debate starts but it does not end here. Contributions on the platform will be taken into account by the European and national Citizens' Panels and debated in the Conference Plenary. Reports will be drawn up and include an analysis of the contributions, made with a combination of digital tools, data mining and human analysis. These reports will also be available on the Multilingual Digital Platform itself. A first interim report will become available after the summer.

II.2. 17 June European Citizens' event

On 17 June 2021, a first European Citizens' event took place in Lisbon in a hybrid format, ahead of the inaugural Plenary of 19 June, to kick off the citizens' participation in the Conference. It brought together the 27 representatives of national citizens' panels or events of each Member State, the President of the European Youth Forum and more than 50 citizens selected to participate in the European Citizens' Panels of the Conference, as well as a group of Erasmus students. The event gave the participants an opportunity to discuss their expectations for the Conference with the three Co-Chairs of the Executive Board: Member of the European Parliament Guy Verhofstadt, Secretary of State Ana Paula Zacarias and Commission Vice-President Dubravka Šuica.

The other members of the Executive Board were invited to join remotely. The event was publicly broadcasted on the Multilingual Digital Platform and on Europe By Satellite.



European Citizens' event, Lisbon

In their welcoming words, the Co-Chairs highlighted that it was essential to kick-start the Conference activities with a citizens' event, since citizens are at the core of the Conference. They also stressed the need to listen to people, to engage actively with them and to narrow the gap between citizens and policy-makers. Citizens were then invited to share, via an interactive polling system, what word they associate with the EU today. The words that came up the most were "solidarity", "unity" and "cooperation".

Co-Chair Zacarias outlined the different types of national events within the framework of the Conference, stressing the need to reach out to all citizens and involve civil society. Co-Chair Šuica then presented the Multilingual Digital Platform and encouraged citizens to use it to share their ideas. Co-Chair Verhofstadt informed participants on the role of the Conference Plenary and its interaction with the European Citizens' Panels.

During the discussion, several citizens mentioned that education and health should be a priority and underlined the need to tackle the challenges of climate change and migration. Some insisted that the dialogue with citizens should take place on an equal footing and that true engagement with citizens was key including with those more sceptical towards the EU. Some concerns were raised about the ambition and outcome of the Conference and its follow-up by the EU institutions. Several citizens called for more and better communication on the EU and in particular on the Conference and its Multilingual Digital Platform.

In conclusion, citizens were invited to indicate the word they associate with the EU's future. The ones most commonly occurring were 'hope' and 'challenge'.



Live poll, European Citizens' event

II.3. 19 June Inaugural Conference Plenary

The inaugural Plenary of the Conference on the Future of Europe took place in a hybrid format (physical and online) on 19 June 2021. 337 Conference Plenary Members participated.



Inaugural Conference Plenary, European Parliament hemicycle, Strasbourg

On behalf of the Co-Chairs, Co-Chair Guy Verhofstadt welcomed the Conference Plenary Members to the inaugural session and noted that there were no objections to the agenda. He underlined that this inaugural Plenary was still incomplete as regards its composition, notably because the representatives of the European Citizens' Panels could only be designated once the Panels had been constituted. He furthermore highlighted the uniqueness of the process by combining participatory and representative democracy, the interaction between Panels and Plenary, and the need to reform the EU in order to address together some urgent challenges.

In her welcoming remarks, Co-Chair Ana Paula Zacarias recalled the first European Citizens' event in Lisbon, organised two days earlier by the Portuguese Presidency of the Council of the EU, in the framework of the Conference. She also highlighted the importance of interaction not only among citizens within the Member States, but now also among citizens across the Union in order to come up with ideas and proposals for Europe's future. She noted that the EU has its strengths but also its limits and recalled that it had successfully delivered to European citizens during the current crisis: on vaccines and on economic recovery through the Next Generation EU fund.

This sentiment was echoed by Co-Chair Dubravka Šuica, who underlined the necessity of keeping citizens at the heart of the process and for them to be involved at every level. For the first time citizens are on an equal footing with representatives. She noted the unprecedented nature of this

deliberative democracy exercise at the EU level. She underlined that the Conference reinforces representative democracy, by bringing citizens into the heart of policymaking in the European Union.

The Co-Chairs then outlined how the three pillars of the Conference - the Multilingual Digital Platform, the European and national citizens' panels and the Plenary - will work.

Co-Chair Dubravka Šuica explained how the Multilingual Digital Platform functions as the hub of the Conference. She called on the members of the Plenary to raise awareness and make sure that citizens across the EU are aware of the various ways to participate in the Conference including through the Platform. Furthermore, she described the composition of the four European Citizens' Panels, which will start their work in September and how they will feed into the process.

Co-Chair Ana Paula Zacarias stressed the importance of national citizens' panels and events as multipliers and the need to reach all citizens, including those who do not normally engage. She informed the Conference Plenary Members that the preparations for national citizens' panels and events have started in many Member States, stressing the commitment of Member States to contribute to the Conference, and urged for such national panels and events to be registered on the Platform. She further underlined the need to communicate better about the Conference. She also recalled the discussions held with the citizens participating in the European citizens' event in Lisbon on 17 June.

In the debate that followed, in which over 150 participants spoke, a wide variety of topics were addressed. There were a number of reoccurring subjects and sentiments, such as:

- The Conference represents a unique and unprecedented opportunity for a bottom-up approach, where participative democracy complements representative democracy;
- The need for the Conference to be an inclusive exercise, to reach out to citizens from all walks of life, in all regions and parts of society, and to listen carefully to their concerns, ideas and proposals, in particular those of young people;
- The importance of concrete outcomes and to provide effective follow-up;
- The need to learn from recent crises and prepare for future challenges.

Other issues that were highlighted by Conference Plenary Members included:

- A more united Europe was called for, stressing that Member States are stronger together in particular in the light of global challenges and on the international scene;
- The need to respect the subsidiarity principle and to involve regional and local governments;
- The need to enable the participation of Western Balkan countries in the Conference;
- The need to acknowledge and cherish progress made by the EU and not to take any of these achievements for granted, while also acknowledging the need for changes to deal with future challenges.

On a number of topics, divergent opinions were voiced by the speakers:

- Some argued the process should focus on policy priorities for the Union, while other speakers proposed to also include questions about the capacity and functioning of the Union;
- Similarly, some speakers said Treaty changes would be needed, while others argued that changes are possible within the current framework;

In addition, interventions by Conference Plenary Members set out a broad array of priorities within the following policy topics: digital transformation, economy, social justice, health, rule of law and democracy, environment and climate, migration, energy, food supply, values, foreign policy, security, education and culture.



Representative of national events/panels from Finland at the Inaugural Conference Plenary



Representative of national events/panels from the Netherlands at the Inaugural Conference Plenary

Co-Chair Guy Verhofstadt introduced the Co-Chairs' proposal for the general organisation of the nine thematic working groups. This was endorsed by the Conference Plenary. He noted that more detailed modalities of the working groups will be elaborated.

Co-Chair Guy Verhofstadt also presented the provisional Conference calendar which the Conference Plenary took note of.

Co-Chair Dubravka Šuica and Co-Chair Ana Paula Zacarias called for action and courage, not only words, and moreover underlined that the success of the Conference depends on the active engagement of all involved.

The three Co-Chairs thanked everyone for their participation and contributions and recalled the dates of the next Conference Plenary on 22 and 23 October 2021. Co-Chair Ana Paula Zacarias closed the Conference Plenary.

II.4. European Citizens' panels

The European Citizens' Panels are one of the main pillars of the Conference, together with the Multilingual Digital Platform and the Conference Plenary. They will take the form of four panels of 200 randomly selected participants each, representative of EU geographical and sociological diversity. They will meet during three multilingual deliberative sessions of minimum 2 days each in order to draft collective recommendations on the future of Europe, taking on board contributions gathered through the Multilingual Digital Platform.

Ideas from European Citizens' Panels will feed into the Conference Plenary meetings, and ultimately into the report on the Conference's final outcome to the Joint Presidency for the three institutions to follow up on. 80 citizens representing the four European Citizens' Panels will participate in the Conference Plenary sessions to present and discuss the Panels' recommendations with the other Plenary members².

The [updated practical modalities](#) of the European Citizens' Panels of 26 May 2021 contain further details on the Panels' organisation. Furthermore, the Executive Board endorsed the [provisional calendar](#) of the European Citizens' Panels and Plenary meetings.

The ongoing preparatory steps to implement these principles and modalities are the following:

Random selection of the participants

The 800 citizens are now being selected in all 27 Member States. The selection started in May 2021 and the full list of panellists is expected for mid-August. European Union citizens are randomly selected (random calling is the main method used by 27 national polling institutes coordinated by an external service provider), with the aim of constituting "panels" which are representative of the EU's diversity on the basis of 5 criteria: gender, age, geographic origin (nationality as well as urban/rural), socio-economic background and level of education.

The number of citizens per Member State is calculated according to the degressive proportionality principle applied to the composition of the European Parliament, taking into account that each panel should include at least one female and one male citizen per Member State.

² See also [video](#) presenting the European Citizens' panels

As the Conference aims at allowing a specific focus on youth, one third of the citizens composing a Citizens' Panel will be between 16 and 24 years old. For each group of 200 persons, additional 50 citizens are selected as a reserve.

Topics and design of the panels

The topics for discussion for each of the Panels are based on the themes of the Multilingual Digital Platform and are clustered in the following way:

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

Work is ongoing with the help of experts to design a proper framing of the issues and a deliberative methodology that will allow for a transparent, effective and truly bottom-up approach.

The Panels' sessions will take place successively in Strasbourg, online and then in the Member States.



**3 sessions of at least
2 days each per panel,
from September 2021
to January 2022**



**Physical events,
or online sessions,
depending on the
Covid-19 situation**



**Multilingual panels
(all 24 EU languages in
Panel plenaries)**

II.5. Executive Board

The Executive Board of the Conference on the Future of Europe met five times in the period March-June 2021, namely on 24 March, 7 April, 22 April, 9 May and 26 May. For each meeting, a detailed report is available in all languages on the Multilingual Digital Platform, under the section on the [Executive Board](#).

At its first meeting on 24 March, the Executive Board held an exchange of views on the Multilingual Digital Platform in view of its possible launch on 19 April 2021. The Executive Board discussed the possibility of a formal event on 9 May. It also held an exchange of views on its internal working methods and the working methods of the Plenary.

At its second meeting on 7 April, the Executive Board endorsed the Multilingual Digital Platform, including the Charter and the visual identity for the Conference. The Executive Board also endorsed its draft working methods and tasked the Common Secretariat to prepare a draft text for the Rules of

Procedure for the Conference. The Communication services of the three institutions were tasked to prepare a joint proposal for an inaugural event on 9 May.

At its third meeting on 22 April, the Executive Board endorsed the Rules of Procedure of the Conference as regards the Common Principles of the Conference, its Scope and on Citizens' Participation. It also held an exchange of views on the draft Rules of Procedure regarding the Conference Plenary, and in particular its role and composition. In addition, the Executive Board was informed of the practical modalities for the organisation of the European Citizens' Panels.

At its fourth meeting on 9 May, the Executive Board endorsed the Chapter of the Rules of Procedure concerning the Conference Plenary.

At its fifth meeting on 26 May, the Executive Board endorsed the provisional calendar of Conference Plenaries, European Citizens' Panels and European Citizens' event as well as the draft agenda for the inaugural Conference Plenary. The Executive Board also held an exchange of views on the organisation of the Conference Plenary. Furthermore, the Executive Board was informed of the preparations for a European citizens' event on 17 June 2021 in Portugal, and of the updated practical modalities of the European Citizens' Panels and the guidance for the organisation of national citizens' panels. Finally, the Executive Board tasked the Communication services of the three institutions to prepare a coordinated plan to promote the Conference and in particular the Multilingual Digital Platform.



Co-Chairs at the Executive Board meeting, Council premises, Brussels

II.6. Other activities

Communication and outreach activities have accompanied the signature of the Joint Declaration by the three Presidents on 10 March 2021, the launch of the Multilingual Digital Platform on 19 April 2021, the inaugural event on the Europe Day and national launch events in many Member States. Building on this, the three EU institutions have been working jointly to significantly boost – and sustain – both the awareness and the participation of European citizens on the digital platform.

At the request of the Executive Board, the communication services of the three institutions have also elaborated a joint communication plan with contributions from the Committee of the Regions and the European Economic and Social Committee. Based on preliminary data on participation on the platform, a set of actions have been put in place and are planned in order to ensure stronger and more diverse participation in the Conference by citizens from every part of Europe.

Sustained efforts have been made in order to mobilise a variety of stakeholders in raising awareness and in promoting activities related to the Conference. Specific outreach and training activities have been addressed towards stakeholders, such as civil society organisations, regional and local authorities, civic engagement and participatory democracy action groups and networks, rural development, cross-border communities and youth organisations.

The Committee of the Regions has also activated its members and networks to actively contribute to the debate and the outreach of the Conference. It hosted a kick-off event on 9 May 2021 in Strasbourg, ahead of the inaugural event of the Conference. The Committee is also working to make the voices of cities and regions heard through innovative participatory processes, and online tools to host local citizens' panels in the second half of 2021. In addition, local dialogues are being used as participatory fora for co-designing and sharing ideas on the future of Europe.

The European Economic and Social Committee has also launched a dedicated campaign. In this regard, a civil society kick-off event took place on 10 June 2021, officially launching the Committee's activities in the framework of the Conference. For reaching out to citizens, the Committee is partnering up with its network of national and regional Economic and Social Councils, with civil society organisations, National Youth Councils and similar organisations. The Committee has also launched a series of "going local" missions in the Member States, running from July to September 2021.

Social partners, many civil society organisations and other stakeholders are also active in organising events and promoting the Conference and are at the forefront of efforts to make the Conference a success.



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III. Activities at the national, regional and local level

According to the Joint Declaration, Member States of the European Union are associated in the Conference and are part of this joint undertaking with the European Parliament, the Council and the European Commission.

Member States are committed to 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 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.

Recommendations from National citizens' panels will be debated, together with the recommendations of European Citizens' Panels in the Conference Plenary. 27 representatives of national events or national panels (one per Member State) have been nominated as members of the Conference Plenary. These representatives include officials or citizens responsible for coordinating national events, representatives of civil society or youth organisations, academics and students.

A national process is underway in each Member State, following launch events in most cases around 9 May 2021. In general, bottom-up and policy-centred approaches are promoted and civil society is due to play an important role. The aim is to have a particular focus on young people, on people who would not usually engage and on what matters to them.

Activities are often coordinated or facilitated by national authorities at high level, in cooperation with *inter alia* parliaments, regional and local authorities, social partners, non-governmental organisations, academic partners and research centres. Discussions and debates with citizens are organised, with varying degrees of decentralisation.

In some Member States, activities are organised in cooperation with Commission representations and European Parliament liaison offices.



Some Member States also intend to organise Citizens' Panels at national level with randomly selected citizens, representative of the sociological diversity of their territory and/or regions. The methodologies used, while tailor-made to each Member State, follow the principles of an acknowledged methodology guaranteeing the neutrality and independence of the Panels. To assist Member States intending to organise Citizens' Panels, a [guidance note](#)³ was prepared in the context of the Conference, and is available on the Multilingual Digital Platform.

A number of Member States have organised or will organise events and citizens' dialogues with other Member States or specific third countries, involving notably young students and pupils.

Member States are determined to raise awareness and communicate on the activities of the Conference and in particular on the Multilingual Digital Platform. There are some examples of national Conference websites, which refer directly to the Multilingual Digital Platform.

Member States' events and their outcomes are to be uploaded on the Multilingual Digital Platform where they can be highlighted as 'institutional events'.

Specific guidelines on how to organise events are available in the form of [toolkits](#) on the Multilingual Digital Platform and, especially, in the "[Step-by-step guide for event organisers](#)".

³ This guidance is inspired by the principles of good deliberation, defined notably in an OECD report which has reviewed hundreds of case studies of deliberative processes, and is meant to assist Member States which intend to organise Citizens' Panels at national, regional or local level.

IV. Next steps

The Multilingual Digital Platform, as the main interactive hub for citizens' contributions and information, will continue to receive ideas and input about the multitude of events taking place under the umbrella of the Conference. Following the finalisation of the random selection process, the four European Citizens' Panels will start their work in September 2021. The next Conference Plenary is scheduled on 22-23 October 2021. Activities at the national, regional and local level will continue to be organised in the next months.

More information about the dates of activities is available in the COFE provisional calendar:

<https://futureu.europa.eu/uploads/decidim/attachment/file/12999/sn02900.en21.pdf>

More information on the Conference is available on:

<https://futureu.europa.eu>

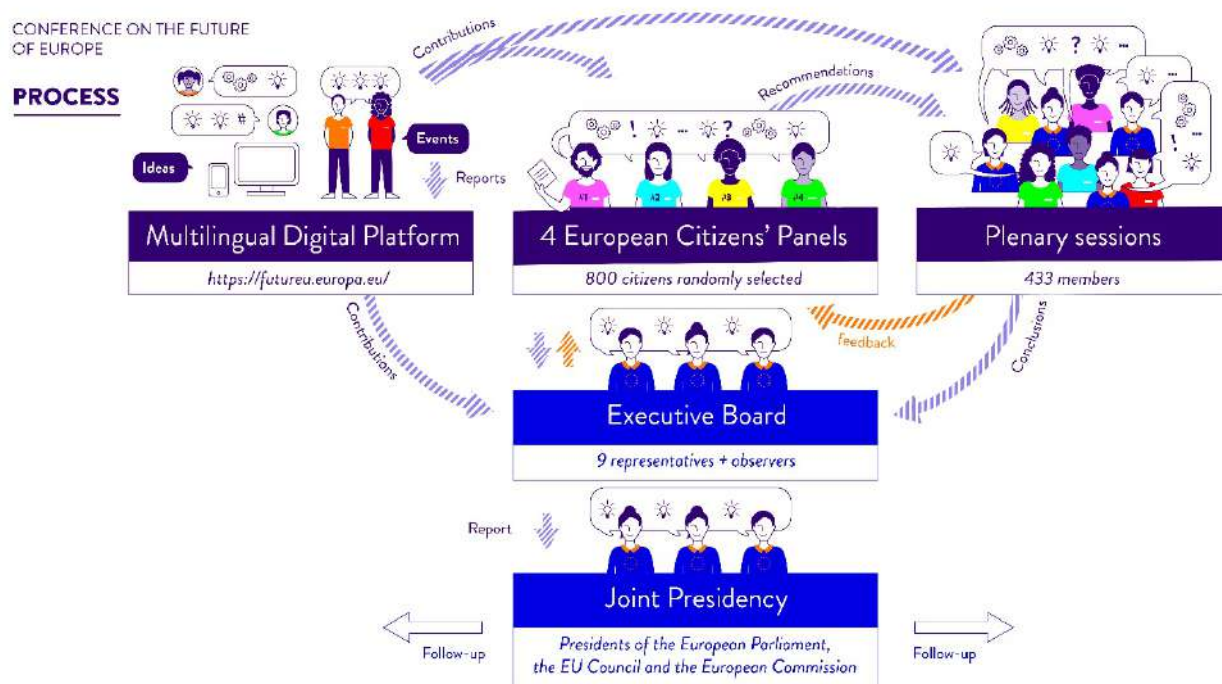


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Annex: Process and timeline of the Conference

CONFERENCE ON THE FUTURE OF EUROPE

PROCESS



CONFERENCE ON THE FUTURE OF EUROPE

TIMELINE

