

Workplace Europe: Mind the Gap!

How can regions and their institutions claim a seat at the table of the Conference on the Future of Europe?

1 July (9:00 – 13:30)

On 9 May 2021, Europe Day, EU leaders launched the long-awaited Conference on the Future of Europe. While some fear that the conference might turn into another unproductive EU talking shop, others believe that it signifies a promising EU-wide exercise in citizen consultation. At least there is one thing both camps seem to agree on: the European Union faces a democratic gap that urgently needs to be bridged.

The explicit goal of *Workplace Europe: Mind the Gap!* is to provide an alternative for those who don't want to join the trenches of this debate. Instead, it will present a forum to discuss what has led to the creation of an EU-wide consultation platform in the first place. It will discuss the gaps the Conference on the Future of Europe aspires - and needs - to address, as well as *how* regions and their institutions can bridge these gaps. In doing so, this *Workplace Europe* aims to empower regions and their institutions to claim a seat at the table of the conference. The focus will be on professionals active in and across the domains of academia, policymaking and civil society. Representatives of these areas will discuss how to *mind* and anticipate the gaps (i.e., the challenges and opportunities) laid bare by the Conference on the Future of Europe.

In what ways is the conference a wake-up call for regions and their institutions to better facilitate the debate and dialogue on European affairs? And how can they utilise it as a window of opportunity to promote trans-local, trans-sectoral collaboration and democratic innovation?

On 1 July, eight weeks after the conference's launch, Studio Europa Maastricht is organising this special edition of *Workplace Europe* in collaboration with the European Committee of the Regions. A high-level panel discussion will open the event, after which interactive sessions will be held. The ideas and insights collected will be shared with the Committee of the Regions, the organisers of the Conference on the Future of Europe and all participants.

We are looking forward to welcoming policymakers, academics, civic actors and anyone else eager to advance the debate and dialogue on the future of Europe.

Registration link: <https://www.aanmelder.nl/workplace-5>

Programme

This event will be partially based on the Open Space methodology, allowing participants to set agenda topics related to the leading questions. The morning will start with a 45-minute panel discussion on the following question:

What has led to the creation of an EU-wide consultation platform, and what does it tell us about the state of existing institutions and mechanisms that stimulate research, debate and dialogue on the future of Europe?

The panel will feature four prominent speakers:

- Wilma Delissen, mayor of Peel and Maas and member of the European Committee of the Regions (tbc)
- Mathieu Segers, professor European integration history and Europe Chair at UM (tbc)
- Niccolo Milanese, founder of European Alternatives (tbc)

Further questions to the panel could be:

- Is it not overly ambitious to try to create a direct dialogue between institutions in Brussels and European citizens from all walks of life?
- What has been the role of national politicians in the run-up to the conference launch?
- What does this tell us about the democratic deficit in Europe?
- How were researchers, regional policymakers and civic actors involved in the design of conference? How are they currently involved?
- How can researchers contribute to closing the democratic deficit between institutions and citizens? What needs improvement?
- How can policymakers contribute and what needs improvement?
- How can civil society organisations contribute and what needs improvement?

The panel discussion will be followed by two breakout sessions.

In the first breakout session, academics, policymakers and civic actors will be separated into groups. Participants will reflect on their sector's current position within European cooperation, the challenges and the inclusion of citizens within this process. These sessions will be chaired by representatives of the three sectors who have extensive experience within their field and with European cooperation.

After a short break and reflection on the outcomes of the first session, the event will continue with the **second breakout session**. At this stage, the Open Space methodology will be used. **Participants will be encouraged to propose different discussion topics on the possible roles that organisations across the three sectors can play during and beyond the Conference on the Future of Europe.** Is the conference another reminder of the need to reconfigure and empower the role of intermediary institutions within the "EU and the citizen" discourse? Or is it an opportunity to strengthen existing, promising initiatives and synergies among the three sectors, the EU and European citizens?

Programme outline

08:45 - 09:00	Check-in
09:00 - 09:15	Inspirational opening word Dr. Gonny Willems <i>Gonny Willems is Managing Director of Studio Europa Maastricht.</i>
09:15 - 09:30	Introduction programme and icebreaker
09:30 - 10:30	Interactive panel discussion on the central question with Q&A
10:30 - 11:15	Break-out session round 1 (45 minutes)
11:15 - 11:30	Plenary reporting
11:30 - 11:45	Coffee-break
11:45 - 12:15	Agenda setting – division of Break Out Rooms
12:15 - 13:00	Break-out session round 2 (45 minutes)

13:00 - 13:30

Reporting round 2 and plenary conclusion

13:30

End of the programme