Citizens, local politicians and the future of Europe

Final report
Foreword

This report is published on the occasion of the 9th European Summit of Regions and Cities in Marseille, France, on 3 and 4 March 2022. It presents results from more than 130 local, cross-border and EU-wide events, which the European Committee of the Regions (CoR) held in cooperation with cities, regions and non-governmental organisations in 2021 and early 2022 in the context of the Conference on the Future of Europe. The latter has provided the opportunity for citizens to interact with politicians across different levels of government and express their aspirations for Europe’s future. As the assembly of locally elected politicians, the CoR believes that if democracy is to be strengthened it is high time new models of dialogue and deliberation with citizens were established.

The final report confirms that EU regions and cities apply multiple approaches and experiments to constantly develop and innovate democracy. Inclusiveness, deliberation and valuing the impact of citizens’ assemblies and panels appear to be important conditions for ensuring successful and sustainable citizen engagement. However, participatory citizen involvement requires significant resources, continued evaluation, and learning by all partners involved. EU regions and cities would be well advised to organise regular exchanges on lessons learned from such processes. The CoR stands ready to support them in this.

As a follow-up to the Conference on the Future of Europe, the CoR suggests, for example, establishing a permanent European citizens’ assembly. Linking the different levels of parliaments and governments is key to addressing specific territorial challenges that citizens face in the different regions and cities of the EU.

Apostolos Tzitzikostas
President of the European Committee of the Regions
The Conference on the Future of Europe: events held by the CoR

Since the end of 2020, the CoR has held — in addition to its regular debates during plenary sessions and commission meetings — a variety of events in the context of the Conference on the Future of Europe, with the double objective of informing citizens and local politicians and developing its position with regard to the future of Europe. In so doing, the CoR has worked together with local and regional administrations, associations representing local and regional interests, and EU institutions. A total of around 140 events took place. Local, regional and cross-border citizens’ dialogues were held reaching out to 10 000 citizens, local politicians and stakeholders. The ideas and recommendations from these events were uploaded to the Conference platform.

Moreover, as the EU body representing the level of government closest to citizens, the CoR has a significant political role in the Conference. Its representatives actively participated on the Executive Board and in the Conference Plenary. The CoR delegation’s objective at the Conference’s plenary sessions is to reach out to the other 420 delegates to strengthen the role of local and regional authorities in the democratic functioning of the European Union and to promote the territorial dimension of EU policies.

CoR events in the context of the Conference on the Future of Europe

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>type of event</th>
<th>number of events</th>
<th>target groups</th>
<th>main purpose</th>
<th>outreach</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>High-level CoR events</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>CoR members, representatives of EU institutions, stakeholders</td>
<td>Presenting and debating CoR positions</td>
<td>4 000 (including the Summit in Marseille)</td>
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<tr>
<td>CoR-Bertelsmann Stiftung project and local events organised by CoR members</td>
<td>60</td>
<td>Citizens, local/regional politicians</td>
<td>Input into CoR work and the Conference</td>
<td>3 500</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>EU Regions Week</td>
<td>67</td>
<td>Stakeholders, politicians, citizens</td>
<td>Debates in the wider context of the Conference</td>
<td>2 500</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Young Elected Politicians programme</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>Young politicians</td>
<td>Input into CoR debates and the Conference</td>
<td>400</td>
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From local to European - Citizens’ participation and deliberation by EU regions and cities

Launched by the European Committee of the Regions (CoR) and the German Bertelsmann Stiftung in May 2021, the project’s objective was to involve regional and local politicians and authorities in holding local or transnational citizens’ panels in autumn 2021, to give a voice and visibility to regional and local concerns, in line with the Conference Charter. The Charter stipulates that citizens’ panels at local, regional, national and European level will provide input into the deliberations of the Conference. Following two online information events on 12 and 28 May 2021 attended by about 100 participants each, a total of 23 applications were received by June 2021. All partners were invited to attend online planning workshops and training seminars held between the end of June and early September, with some 400 participants taking part.

Results so far can be summarised as follows:

<table>
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<tr>
<th>19 partnerships materialised, most of which held online events, in accordance with the Conference Charter, between September and December 2021</th>
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<tr>
<td>the final project included 32 regions and 11 cities from 17 EU Member States and one candidate country</td>
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<tr>
<td>most partners are German cities or regions (13), followed by France (8) and Czechia, Poland and Spain (4 each)</td>
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<td>3 projects were delivered by 1 region or city, while 16 involved between 2 and 6 regions and cities</td>
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<td>in total, all the partners together held 38 citizens’ panels involving almost 2 000 citizens</td>
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<td>among the topics chosen for the panels, 9 partners chose “a stronger economy, social justice and jobs”, followed by “climate change and the environment”, and “education, culture, youth and sport” (7 each), “European democracy” (6), and “health” and “values and rights, rule of law, security”</td>
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<tr>
<td>all projects were supported by local or regional politicians, 14 of whom are CoR members</td>
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<tr>
<td>14 Europe Direct Centres were involved in the organisation of events</td>
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A series of 67 local dialogues took place alongside the European Week of Regions and Cities in October and November 2021 and were attended by citizens, stakeholders and politicians. Most of these events were held by the Week’s event partners and 58 CoR members were involved in them.

Some messages from these dialogues can be found below:

- The importance of developing Urban Greening Plans (Gdansk, Poland, 13 October and 3 January 2022)
- Sustainable mountain tourism should be supported by an integrated European strategy involving local and regional authorities (Cugir, Romania, 19 October 2021)
- EU cohesion policy projects should focus on a smarter, greener, carbon-free, more connected and social Europe (Valencian communities, Spain, 12 and 21 October 2021)
- Member States should support more local and regional level actions and measures aimed at fighting child poverty (Harghita, Hungary 28 October 2021)
- Digitalisation and EU funds should support entrepreneurship, health care and tourism (Pomorskie, Poland, 26 October 2021)

In addition, more than 30 local information events were held by CoR members in their constituencies, in the context of the Conference on the Future of Europe, often in cooperation with local and regional authorities, non-governmental organisations, and in partnership with EU institutions. The events reached out to 2 400 citizens. For more information, please consult the list here.
Events prepared jointly with regions, cities and the Bertelsmann Stiftung and local events initiated and supported by CoR members

Events prepared jointly with regions, cities and the Bertelsmann Stiftung
The future of Europe: What the citizens suggest

This chapter presents a selection of recommendations made by citizens during local, cross-border and transnational events, most of which were held between September and January 2022. They are organised according to the nine themes of the Conference on the Future of Europe.

Climate change and the environment

The objective of making Europe the first climate-neutral continent by 2050 through the “European Green Deal” needs to be adapted locally. Local and regional authorities implement 70% of climate mitigation measures and 90% of climate adaptation policies. Because EU territories are diverse, a bottom-up approach is needed in order to comply with the principle of subsidiarity. Flexibility is also required, to adapt to different needs. Regions and cities are in a privileged position since they work directly with people and foster citizens’ behavioural change to achieve sustainability.

Recommendations

Citizens, businesses and youth parliaments should be consulted during the project planning phase of Green Deal initiatives.

Cities and regions should receive direct funding for climate adaptation investments. City officials need training, in their native languages, on available funds and tools for implementing European Green Deal objectives. There is a need for more good practice exchanges through study visits and workshops to trigger inspiration and regional policy development.

Encourage and support effective climate protection measures. Global companies with a European interest must meet climate protection requirements, including in countries without climate targets. This would include the abolition of all environmentally harmful subsidies.

Favour alternative energy sources (solar, wind, water and geothermal). Favour public transport in big cities and make it cheap or free. Use innovative concepts to encourage better sharing of public spaces, in order to move away from private cars.

EU support for an EU-wide system providing less-waste intensive and long-lasting products, which can be repaired, together with common standards on the recycling of waste.

Northern and Western Ireland, 22-26 February 2021

Lódź, Poland, 24 September 2021

Stuttgart, Germany, and Strasbourg, France, 10 November 2021

München, Germany, and Bordeaux, France, 18 November 2021

Baden-Württemberg and Saxony, Germany, Grand-Ést, France, Dolnoslaskie, Poland, Karlovasy Kraj and Ústecký Kraj, Czechia, 10-12 December 2021
**Health**

Local and regional authorities organise and deliver healthcare services on the ground. In many places, they also manage, inspect and finance healthcare professionals and property. Stretched to the limits by the pandemic, these healthcare infrastructures and systems need rethinking in order to become more resilient. They are the very cornerstone of the European Health Union, in which all EU countries prepare and respond together to health crises, medical supplies are available, affordable and innovative, and all countries work together to improve prevention, treatment and aftercare for diseases such as cancer.

**Recommendations**

Enhance cross-border healthcare cooperation; facilitate permanent cooperation, in particular, in the event of crisis and pandemic situations

Extend the principle of health to all policy areas and increase EU competences in health matters

Keep local hospitals running. The closure of local hospitals may cause unemployment and limit access to health services within reach

Cross-border recognition of preventive measures and medical treatments, and better cooperation in the area of rescue services

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**A stronger economy, social justice and jobs**

Disparities between and within EU regions and cities in terms of economic performance and employment vary significantly, which is why the European Union has put cohesion policy and funds in place to reduce such disparities. Moreover, Europe is currently experiencing its most severe health, environmental, economic and social crisis, which is affecting EU territories differently and risks widening existing disparities even further. Action at EU level alone is not enough: the key to success lies in the hands of national, regional and local authorities, as well as social partners and relevant stakeholders at all levels. Given the central role of local and regional authorities in the execution of employment and social policies, it is imperative to ensure proper representation of the local and regional dimension in the design and implementation of EU policies.

**Recommendations**

Local and regional authorities should be able to access the Recovery Fund easily with decentralised procedures. The targets that are set should be monitored closely through accurate, efficient, effective and timely data collection

Companies should adapt policies to promote gender diversity. Some good practices would include gender-blind job applications, covering baby-sitting costs, coaching for young parents, allowing flexible working hours and part-time working, applying a strong ethical code, a mentoring programme called “breaking the glass ceiling”, and developing a culture of self-care and care for others

Sustainable mobility, networking of transnational transport systems and infrastructure. Borders should not be a barrier.

The EU should intervene more in the social sphere. The development and promotion of a social union should be just as much a priority as a strong economic union. European integration should therefore continue steadily, but with a greater focus on a Europe of the regions. A prerequisite for this is the strengthening of common values.

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Montalito di Castro, Italy, 17 December 2020

Bologna, Italy, 26 March 2021

Dijon, France, 15-17 October 2021

Eupen, Belgium, 21 November 2021
EU in the world

Regions and cities are affected by the EU’s external relations and by related policies such as those supported by the United Nations and the OECD. They also have partnerships with local and regional authorities outside the EU and are actively involved in EU programmes with enlargement countries, the European Neighbourhood Policy, development cooperation and the relationship with the United Kingdom. The work of the CoR, and its opinions, is nurtured by the discussions and political interactions in the joint bodies the CoR has established with external partners and in dedicated working groups. These bodies enable the CoR to effectively contribute to EU enlargement and neighbourhood policies from a local and regional perspective.

Establish cross-border early warning mechanisms operating across different levels of government to address international emergencies

Economic dependence on China is too high. The EU should invest in keeping its industrial production local, especially for renewable energy. This would limit China’s industrial monopoly

Recommendations

Values and rights, rule of law, security

Local and regional authorities play a crucial role in protecting fundamental rights in a multi-level governance system. Enjoying better rights has a positive impact on economic and social development, and it is the best way to gain citizens’ trust and enhance their engagement in policy-making at all levels of governance. Promoting a culture of respect for the rule of law is therefore a shared responsibility at EU, national, regional and local levels. With regard to security, the fight against terrorism is part of the broader concept of the European Security Union, and the key role of cities in the protection of public spaces and preventing radicalisation, for example, is highlighted by the EU Pledge on Urban Security and Resilience.

Regional authorities, as well as civil society, should promote a culture of respect of EU values, fundamental rights and the rule of law. Educating young people on EU values and diversity can make a positive contribution to combating the risks of democratic regression and can build more tolerant and open societies

Stronger cross-border and cross-sectoral coordination is necessary. This could be facilitated by the completion of the European Cross-Border Mechanism (ECBM)

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Organising conversation formats/conversation campaigns about values and democracy
### Recommendations

#### Digital transformation

Access to digital infrastructure and services varies significantly between, and even within, EU regions and cities. Digital transformation is crucial for economic and societal development and digital technologies have become imperative for every aspect of our lives. At the same time, the COVID-19 pandemic has exposed a growing digital divide across the EU, confirming that the availability and accessibility of digital transformation opportunities has a major impact on cohesion between EU regions and cities.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Recommendations</th>
<th>Location/Date</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Implement more paperless governmental procedures and a digital administrative account for all Europeans</td>
<td>Heraklion, Greece, 29 May 2021</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Better connection to digitalisation for students and older people, especially by investing more in equipment and internet access for all</td>
<td>Munich, Germany, and Bordeaux, France, 18 November 2021</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Digital Transformation is a must, digital training prior to employment and on the job will increase efficiency</td>
<td>Kosice, Slovakia, 21 November 2021</td>
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<tr>
<td>Concerning digital work, we need a legislative framework on separating work from personal time</td>
<td>North Rhine-Westphalia, Germany, Hauts-de-France, France, and Silesia, Poland, 30 November 2021</td>
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#### European democracy

Enhancing the democratic functioning of the EU is a way to relaunch the European project. Regions, cities, municipalities and more than one million politicians elected at subnational level play an important role in making European democracy more resilient. A greater involvement of local and regional authorities and the European Committee of the Regions in EU policy-making could bring Europe closer to the citizens.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Recommendations</th>
<th>Location/Date</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>There is a need for reinforced cooperation among decision-makers and a greater involvement of young politicians. This could help in bridging the gap between the EU and its citizens.</td>
<td>Rzeszów, Poland, 12 March 2021</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Strengthen mechanisms for citizens’ participation and citizens’ assemblies on a regular basis. Citizens should be able to participate more continuously and could take over the use and management of some regional financial areas of the EU funds</td>
<td>Saxony, Germany, Lower Silesia, Poland, Ústí and Karlovy Vary, Czechia, 27 November 2021</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Strengthen the concept of a single European public sphere through more common cultural activities such as transnational festivals in culture and art, and create a European news platform for EU citizens, who should be empowered to deal with disinformation, manipulation and false news in the media</td>
<td>Saxony, Germany, Lower Silesia, Poland, Ústí and Karlovy Vary, Czechia, 27 November 2021</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Establish networks of young local administrators or “EU councillors” (also in cross-border areas), to share best practices and experiences on EU issues that have a direct impact on local territories</td>
<td>Trieste, Italy, 22 September 2021</td>
</tr>
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Migration

Migration has had a strong impact on EU regions and cities, in particular those on the frontline of migration flows. These regions and cities are often responsible for the reception and integration of migrants, and for providing them with vital infrastructure and services. In addition, the demographic situation of all EU regions and cities, including its impact on labour markets and public services, is significant, and will play a greater role in policies delivered at local and regional level.

Only a few ideas and recommendations on this topic were put forward during the citizens’ dialogues held by the CoR. These included giving the EU more competences in foreign and migration policy.

Sindelfingen, Germany, 6 October 2021

Recommendations

Education, culture, youth and sport

Education, culture, youth and sport meet the essential needs of our societies, whether by encouraging economic and social development through education, mutual understanding through culture and sport, or a more inclusive democratic life through youth participation. The role of regions and cities in these fields is crucial and in many Member States they are in charge of the relevant infrastructure and services. The digitalisation of education and culture, high levels of youth unemployment in some regions and the aggravation of economic and social disparities are some of the most pressing challenges that lie ahead for local and regional governments. Some of these challenges and their regional dimensions may become even more visible and pressing due to the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Provide more workshops and European lessons for young people, including classes on gender equality, democracy and basic EU values as part of school curricula

Western Pomerania, Poland, 9 October 2021

Promote and raise the profile of Erasmus+ and EU-wide apprenticeship programmes

North Rhine-Westphalia, Germany, Hauts-de-France, France, and Silesia, Poland, 30 November 2021

Strengthen the single European cultural market — abolish geo-blocking on media channels

Eupen, Belgium, 21 November 2021

Create a more pragmatic and uniform education system in Europe and guarantee freedom of speech and thought

Görlitz, Germany, 4-8 October 2021
High-level events of the CoR

- **9 May 2021**: Launch in Strasbourg
- **29 June**: European associations linking with CoR
- **14 October**: Urban perspectives on the Conference on the Future of Europe
- **3 December 2021**: High Level Group on European Democracy
- **26 January**: CoR plenary
- **3-4 March 2022**: 9th European Summit of Regions and Cities

- The CoR launched a series of events on the Conference on the Future of Europe, together with the French Ministry for Territorial Cohesion, the City of Strasbourg, the French association Régions de France, the Assembly of Départements de France, and the association of French Mayors.
- Representatives from the EU and from national and regional parliaments and governments discussed the future role of regions in the EU and adopted a declaration on the place of regions in the European Union architecture.
- Mayors and representatives of European associations representing local interests discussed about “urban perspectives on the Conference on the Future of Europe”.
- During the CoR plenary, a debate on the vision for rural areas and the Resolution on the contribution of the local and regional authorities to the Conference on the Future of Europe was adopted.
- The CoR’s 9th European Summit of Regions and Cities in Marseille, France, will be held under the headline “Citizens at the heart of Europe”.

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The future of Europe: what the CoR members suggest

In 2021 and early 2022, all six Commissions of the CoR made reflections on the Conference on the Future of Europe a priority of the political debates. Together they held 22 such debates involving almost 50 experts, adopted about 15 opinions and received four academic studies.

Among the CoR Commissions, the one dealing with Citizenship, Governance, Institutional and External Affairs (CIVEX) started debating the Conference on the Future of Europe already in late 2019.

There were 13 debates in CIVEX and six opinions in total and the main issues reflected upon and suggestions included:

1. The role of the CoR and of local and regional authorities in the future of the EU
   - proximity of local and regional authorities to citizens: bridge between citizens and the EU institutions
   - a stronger role played by cities and regions in the EU would contribute to the EU's democratic legitimacy
   - the role/influence of the CoR and local and regional authorities in the EU decision-making processes, focusing on regional parliaments

2. Citizens’ participation
   - call to engage citizens in structured forms of dialogue at local and regional level
   - call to set up a permanent mechanism for dialogue with citizens at EU level
   - encouraging young people's participation and listening to them

3. The impact of the COVID-19 crisis on the future of EU
   - the crisis showed the need for a more resilient and efficient EU
   - the crisis brought innovations in decision-making and participatory tools (e.g. digital tools) that should not be lost
   - regions and cities on the frontline of the crisis. Any reform should take into consideration their role and the principle of subsidiarity

4. European values and citizenship
   - cities and regions implement (or not) European values through their decisions and policies
   - equality is key to boosting citizens’ participation and is a key value of the EU. Cities and regions should promote inclusiveness and fight discrimination;

5. EU in the world
   - call to include Western Balkan countries in the Conference and to organise citizens’ dialogues in those countries too, to support the accession process

CIVEX also commissioned the London School of Economics and Political Science to write a study on “The Conference on the Future of Europe: Putting Local and Regional Authorities at the Heart of European Democratic Renewal”, published in October 2021.
The political groups of the CoR were also active in the context of the Conference on the Future of Europe and held several local events in 2021 and 2022:

The members of the Renew Europe group in the CoR held more than ten online and in-person citizens’ dialogues in their respective municipalities and regions, on topics such as decreasing the urban-rural divide, recovering from the COVID-19 pandemic together, mobility within the EU and the role of education in promoting European values. One of the key highlights was the multiplex event of 13 January 2022, bringing together citizens from 12 municipalities and regions from 8 different countries for giving it a truly European setting. The unique multiplex citizens’ dialogue gave the participants an opportunity to contribute to the Conference on the Future of Europe by discussing the future of their municipality or region and formulating in total 36 concrete recommendations submitted to the Conference’s multilingual digital platform.

In February 2021, members of the CoR’s European Alliance group organised a three-day local dialogue in the Northern and Western region of Ireland where they presented the European Green Deal and discussed how local authorities, business and citizens could access the funding and support it will provide. The event gathered experts and policymakers from the European Commission, European Parliament, NGOs, think-tanks and businesses who held an exchange with more than 200 citizens across three half-day sessions. Another event was held in Bastia, Corsica, with the European Free Alliance and the Council and parliament of Corsica on “stateless nations and regions”.

In the framework of the Conference on the Future of Europe, a series of local dialogues were organised in the Czechia, Italy and Poland by the group of European Conservatives and Reformists in the CoR. The ECR President and members brought some wide-ranging hot topics such subsidiarity, cross-border cooperation and green and smart transport modes to the regional and local levels. The key message resulted from these events was that local and regional authorities must play a key role in strengthening the voices of the citizens in EU decision-making.
The future of European democracy

In spring 2021, ahead of the Conference on the Future of Europe, the CoR asked a High Level Group on European Democracy to develop innovative ideas on improving European democracy and reinforcing the impact and influence of regions, cities and the CoR in the EU process. The group was chaired by the President Emeritus of the European Council and former Prime Minister of Belgium, Herman Van Rompuy, and composed of six more members including Joaquin Almunia, former European Commissioner for Competition and for Economic and Financial Affairs, Tomasz Grosse, Professor of the University of Warsaw, Rebecca Harms, former Member of the European Parliament, Maria João Rodrigues, former Member of the European Parliament and former Minister for Qualifications and Education in Portugal, and Androulla Vassiliou, former Commissioner for Health and for Education, Culture, Multilingualism and Youth. Having met throughout the year and had regular exchanges with CoR members, the Group presented its final report in January 2022[2], which can be summarised as follows:

More specifically, the report looks at the challenges for “democracy in Europe” and its Member States as well as the “democracy of Europe” and its institutional system. It discusses the relationship between local, regional, national and European democracy, the development of the EU’s legal order and the emergence of a de facto “transnational democracy”. Moreover, it makes the case for the EU’s unique institutional system of a “Union of citizens and of states”, in which EU, national and sub-national levels of democracy and government work together towards shared objectives. The report highlights the importance of better explaining the EU’s distinctive nature, which can lead to a reinforced legitimacy and democracy through a more traceable political process involving the various layers of governance in Europe.

The report goes on to propose ways and means of strengthening democracy in the EU. It suggests reducing the gap between citizens and decision-makers (“input democracy”) and highlights the need for inclusiveness, participation and the development of policies that are close to the needs and interests of citizens. Delivering more effectively on these needs (“output democracy”) will require a more dynamic interpretation of the Treaties on EU policies such as health, migration and climate policy, coupled with an improved EU decision-making capacity. The report ends by highlighting the need to strengthen the role of local and regional authorities in EU decision-making (“active subsidiarity”) as well as the role of citizens through, for example, “local hubs”, improving the European Citizens’ Initiative and taking on board the best outreach practices and lessons learned from the Conference on the Future of Europe. Finally, as the political body representing more than one million locally elected politicians in the EU, the role of the CoR should be strengthened in all parts of the EU policy and decision-making processes, including in the preparatory, decision-making, implementation and evaluation phases.

The views of regional and local politicians

Between 21 July and 10 September 2021, the first-ever survey of the more than one million politicians elected at subnational level in the 27 Member States of the European Union was carried out by Ipsos European Public Affairs, on behalf of the CoR. The report is available here.

The results in a nutshell were:

**Of the nine topics discussed, local politicians find most important**
- a stronger economy, social justice and jobs
- climate change and the environment
- education, culture, youth and sport

**With regards on how democracy works at EU level**
- 64% of local politicians believe that there is not enough influence of regions, cities and villages on EU policy-making.

**On involvement in the Conference on the Future of Europe**
- 3% are actively engaged
- 51% are aware
- 46% are not aware

**With regards on how democracy works at EU level**
- 66% have sufficient information
- 32% do not have sufficient information
- 2% don’t know
Young Elected Politicians for the future of Europe

Between May and December 2021, nine events were held as part of the CoR’s Young Elected Politicians (YEPs) programme and were attended by 400 participants. In particular, in September, YEPs discussed the future of European Democracy with the members of the High Level Group on Democracy, while in October they met two MEPs in the context of the “Young leaders for the future of Europe” event. In November, YEPs gathered in a forum to draft recommendations for the CoR.

This resulted in 19 recommendations being agreed on four topics:

- Building resilient and inclusive communities
- Digital transformation
- A lively local democracy for a healthy European democracy
- Jobs and education for young people

YEPs had the opportunity to present their recommendations at the December plenary session during the debates on democracy and on the European Year of Youth, at the High Level Group conference on European Democracy on 3 December, and at the CoR’s various commission meetings.

The CoR survey of local politicians on the future of Europe confirmed that 40% of young local and regional politicians are aware of the Conference on the Future of Europe.
Conclusions and next steps

1. Regions and cities are natural partners in citizens’ participation on EU affairs

Citizens’ participation has become a common feature in policy-making at all levels of government and complements representative democracy in many EU regions and cities. Findings from the joint project with the Bertelsmann Stiftung confirm the interest of local governments in developing deliberative citizen involvement on both a local and European scale. This interest also became apparent in the 2021 representative survey among local politicians and was confirmed by the CoR High Level Group on European Democracy.

2. A permanent EU Citizens’ Assembly should be underpinned by local debates

It appears that the Conference on the Future of Europe could be followed up by a permanent EU Citizens’ Assembly. While the European Citizens’ Panels seem to work, it can be said that their link to national, regional and local citizens’ deliberations is far from satisfactory. Only a few Member States have systematically linked national and regional assemblies to the European Citizens’ Panels in respect of the Conference Charter. If a future EU Citizens’ Assembly is set up, a more systematic link between the levels of government should be in place. For the CoR and the regions and cities of the EU, this could mean setting up transnational citizens’ assemblies, which address territorial features of, for example, border regions, regions facing demographic challenges, rural areas and tourism destinations, etc.

3. Application of key principles for citizens’ participation

In line with the principles developed in the context of national, regional and local citizens’ assemblies and research, evidence from the CoR-Bertelsmann project confirms that citizens’ participation needs to be based on (a) inclusiveness, i.e. random selection, demographical and social stratification of citizens involved; (b) deliberation, i.e. a process that creates conditions for open and informed debates; (c) impact, i.e. the need to embed the process in genuine policy-making and follow-up of recommendations by parliaments and governments. Moreover, citizens’ participation on a European scale should be accompanied by a multilingual communication approach, providing information, ensuring transparency and making it possible for other interested parties to become involved too. Finally, evaluation by and for the actors involved must accompany citizens’ participation processes. At EU level, such evaluations should be subject to exchange and policy learning too.

4. There is a need for capacity-building and continued policy-learning

Lessons learned from participatory citizen involvement suggest that such processes require significant resources and need to be accompanied by capacity-building and exchange between local actors. The Conference on the Future of Europe has provided fertile ground for policy-learning across different levels of government. It is important to build on this in the run-up to the 2024 European Elections. The CoR would stand ready to support regions and cities when it comes to cooperation and exchange at EU level.
The European Committee of the Regions (CoR) is the EU’s political assembly of 329 regional and local representatives from all 27 Member States. Our members are elected presidents of regions, regional councillors, mayors and local councillors - democratically accountable to more than 446 million European citizens. The CoR’s main objectives are to involve regional and local authorities and the communities they represent in the EU’s decision-making process and to inform them about EU policies. The European Commission, the European Parliament and the Council have to consult the Committee in policy areas affecting regions and cities. It can appeal to the Court of Justice of the European Union as a means of upholding EU law where there are breaches to the subsidiarity principle or failures to respect regional or local authorities.