

EUROPEAN CITIZENS' PANEL



Preparedness

Summary Report
Session 1



Session 1 – 20-22 March 2026

Overview of structure and results

A promising first session

How can all European citizens be empowered and better prepared for crises? How do we ensure that the actions and initiatives of the EU Preparedness Union Strategy are inclusive, effective, and respond to the needs of all citizens?

Over three weekends, 150 randomly selected EU citizens, representative of EU diversity, brought together by the European Commission, will answer these questions. The participants of the panel in the end will submit a list of recommendations that will feed into the European Preparedness Union Strategy.

The first session of this Citizens' Panel took place from March 20 to 22 in Brussels. The goal? To develop a shared understanding of types of crises and explore personal experiences of these. Through a framing of wishes and concerns, crisis experiences were extrapolated into prioritised lists of topics to be explored in further depth. These discussions laid the foundations for the drafting of meaningful, impactful and concrete recommendations.



Session 1: Day by Day

Day 1 – Plenary

Exploring the notion of Population Preparedness

The first day of the Panel introduced the concept of Preparedness, what it means, and the multiple dimensions it relates to.

The opening address was given by the European Commissioner for Equality, Preparedness and Crisis Management Hadja Lahbib. In this address she set the scene for the whole-of-society approach fundamental to the Commission's work on population preparedness and underlined the relevance and urgency of the European Preparedness Union Strategy.

The opening address was followed by an expert testimony on different elements of preparedness, consisting first of case examples and subsequently illustrating the interconnectedness of crises, sowing the seeds for citizens' own exploration of crises and preparedness.

Hadja Lahbib, European Commissioner for Equality, Preparedness and Crisis Management:

“When we developed this strategy [the Preparedness Union Strategy], we learned that preparedness is only possible when we work on it together as a whole society. This means that preparedness is not just a task for politicians or governments. You, the citizens of Europe, play an important role in Europe's preparedness.”



Click [here](#) to watch the recording of Friday's plenary session!

Day 2 – Working Groups

Wishes and concerns regarding Preparedness

The second day of the session had the 150 citizens convene in 12 working groups.

Here, they first shared their personal experiences of encountering, being affected by, and at times enduring crises.

These experiences then formed the basis for exploring the citizens' wishes and concerns when it comes to preparedness.

Based on in-depth brainstorming, the working groups collectively agreed on the five most important wishes, concerns or priorities.

To help support this work, the Knowledge and Information Centre, consisting of members of the Knowledge Committee and experts from the European Commission, toured the rooms and answered questions and provided written additional information.

Day 3 – Plenary

Sharing and Reflecting

For the third day, the citizens reconvened in plenary.

Here, one person from each of the 12 working groups took the stage to share their most significant wishes and concerns from their own working groups. These included but were not limited to calls for: transparency from authorities to build trust and combat mis- and disinformation, rethinking the education system to include training on preparedness, as well as utilising and building local solidarity in times of crises.

Four members of the Knowledge Committee provided additional insights based on the presentations, and expressed their recognition and appreciation for the work of the participants toward constructive recommendations.

Participant Andrey, Bulgaria: *“I will remember this experience for the rest of my life!”*

Expert Alina Bângăoanu, National University of Political Studies and Public Administration: *“The next crisis doesn’t start from zero. It starts from the scars that the previous crisis has left.”*

Participant Martina, Germany: *“Our approach to preparedness is guided by five core principles: transparency, inclusion, security, balance, and trust. If we implement these correctly, we can create a system that people not only rely on, but also believe in.”*



Click [here](#) to watch the recording of Sunday’s plenary session!

Expert interventions during the session

Jeanette Serritzlev, Military Analyst, Royal Danish Defence College

Gordon Rattray, International Disability Alliance

Sébastien Français, Head of Unit, Emergency Preparedness and Response, Directorate of Health of Luxembourg

José Segarra, environmental scientist and civil engineer, member of the Mission Board for Adaptation to Climate Change

Christina Andersson, Risk Communication strategist Swedish Civil Defence and Resilience Agency

Miriam Alba Reina, Disaster Management Officer, Red Cross EU

Claudia Schedlich, Federal Office of Civil Protection and Disaster Assistance, Germany

Nathan Clark, Assistant Professor, Department of Organization Sciences, Vrije University Amsterdam

Alina Bârgăoanu, Professor, National University of Political Studies and Public Administration, Romania

Adrian Bucalowski, Deputy Director of Civil Protection Department, National Headquarters of the State Fire Service of Poland

María Martín de Almagro, Research Professor, Department of Conflict and Development Studies, University of Ghent

Reminder: Objectives of all 3 sessions

Session 1: 20-22 March

- Develop a shared understanding of population preparedness and the scope of the Citizens' Panel
- Explore personal experiences to elicit wishes and concerns
- Prioritise the shaping of themes of future work on recommendations

Session 2: 24-26 April

- Build on the work of session 1, explore the dilemmas of the prioritised themes and related action points of the Preparedness Union Strategy
- Hear from experts and researchers
- Work in groups to start developing recommendations

Session 3: 22-24 May

- Refine and finalise the ideas into recommendations with the support of experienced facilitators and experts
- Assess and vote on these recommendations
- Present recommendations to the European Commission

Check out the **Citizens' Engagement Platform!**