



EUROPEAN CITIZENS' PANEL
Tackling Hatred in Society



European Citizens' Panel on Tackling Hatred in Society

Summary of Session 3

[17-19 May, 2024]

In a few words...

What are the priority actions to tackle hatred?

The third and final session of a European Citizens' Panel gathered around 150 citizens from across the EU in Brussels on 17-19 May. This weekend of intense debate and work was dedicated to finalizing the recommendations to the European Commission.

Thanks to their unfailing dedication and their unwavering commitment, the citizens adopted 21 recommendations to tackle hatred in society. These were adopted in plenary and handed over to Ana Gallego Torres, Director-General, Directorate-General for Justice and Consumers (DG JUST).

What happens now?

The citizens' recommendations are expected to feed into the design of future Commission initiatives to tackle hatred in society. Here are the [21 recommendations](#) submitted to the European Commission. The final document translated in 24 EU official languages will be provided shortly.

Stay in Touch

We will be in touch with all of you to organize a feedback event where we will discuss how the European Commission is taking your recommendations into account.

To keep in touch with you in the future, we are establishing an alumni network for participants of European Citizens' Panels and other European citizen engagement projects. If you **do not** wish to be part of this network, please email us at COMM-CITIZENS-PANELS@ec.europa.eu and we will remove you from the mailing list.

You can find a selection of photographs from the Panel sessions on the [Citizens' Engagement Platform](#). Feel free to share them with your friends, family, and social networks!

DG JUST circulates a **monthly newsletter** covering the latest news, events, and publications. You can subscribe to it by visiting this [link](#).

More information on EU policy on justice, consumer rights and gender equality is available on their website: [Justice - European Commission \(europa.eu\)](https://european-council.europa.eu/media/en/press-operations/infoboxes/justice-european-commission-europa.eu) or on X: [@EU_Justice / X \(twitter.com\)](https://twitter.com/EU_Justice).

“We, citizens of the 27 European Union Member States, believe that combating hatred in Europe and around the world is a priority.”

From hatred and division to the shared enjoyment of European values of equality, respect for human rights and dignity

“What you bring to the table helps to protect our democracies.”



At the conclusion of two months' hard work, citizens returned to Brussels for the last weekend of this European Citizens' Panel on Tackling Hatred in Society. They had come together for one final weekend to transform the ideas developed during the two previous sessions into recommendations to the European Commission. On Friday, citizens were back in plenary, welcomed by **Dana Spinant, Director-General, Directorate-General for Communications (DG COMM)** who congratulated their work: “You have

a lot of wisdom, I was impressed by the empathy you showed in this Panel, as well as the honesty and open-mindedness in discussions on such a complex subject. It means a lot to us that you all support bringing citizens' voices to the European level.”

Problem definition: Setting up the basis of the recommendations

Since Session 2, an editorial committee made up of members of the Panel have been working on finalising the problem definition, incorporating the comments of all Panellists.

“The aim was to collate the results of the working group and produce a common text (...). In the end, we spent 3.5 hours going over it word-by-word and sentence-by-sentence to add all the information from the 12 working groups.” explained Gerhard, member of the editorial team.

Hate affects all parts of society. Participants believe that combating hate in Europe and around the world is an important task. The text stresses that without active efforts to address and heal the wounds caused for example by wars, conflict-fueled hatred threatens to perpetuate a cycle of hostility and division. The text also highlights the responsibility of politicians and public figures in the spread of hate speech, exacerbated by the media and social networks. Citizens highlight that the lack of education about different identities, cultures, tolerance, and communication as well as a lack of reliable online information can reinforce misunderstandings, perpetuate prejudices and lead to hatred.

Experts' feedback in a nutshell

Education as a fundamental value to shape the adults of tomorrow

Robin Sclafani, Director of CEJI, *“Education is so important for making happy and functional people. EU powers are currently limited, but there’s a lot that can be done to encourage state action as well.”*

Potential of Citizens' Panels to reinforce social cohesion

Federico Faloppa, Professor of sociolinguistic at the University of Reading, *“In medium-sized towns, in Italy/UK, organizations are trying to bring together citizens' panels. In one of these towns in Italy we see that businesses are flourishing because they are “hate free” and support human rights. We need to get the local voices together. This is how we should also work together—EU, national, and local institutions.”*

Is AI a good solution to combat hatred?

Nesrine Slaoui, Independent Journalist, *“If we do not combat hatred on the internet there is no point. Algorithms are key here, but we also need a human presence. We should not*



forget the financial side of things: platforms are multinationals, they can make money out of good content or bad. Citizens need to be educated as well. AI has built-in racism and sexism; we can’t bet our future on tools that are influenced by these biases.”

Balancing data protection and the fight against online hate

Louisa Klingvall, DG JUST, *“In Europe we live in a democratic context, but that’s not necessarily the case everywhere in the world. Anonymity can change the situation and allow some people to express themselves, but it also leads to hate speech. Law enforcement agencies can obtain information on those who spread hate messages, particularly under the DSA (Digital Services Act)”.*

Martin Sacleux, DG JUST, *“The balance between data protection and the fight against online hate content is something we are constantly seeking at the European Commission, which is why the data protection regulation is very protective. We’re talking about billions of items of content published every day, so we also need resources to help the authorities identify and filter content. It is important to report on hate content so that the perpetrators can be prosecuted.”*

Protecting the most vulnerable groups by training people collaborating with them

Daris Lewis Recio, Legal and policy officer at Equinet, *“There are a lot of political and legal initiatives, particularly about migrants, and how can we deal with hate speech with people who have just arrived.”*

Support victims and allow them to express themselves freely without judgment



Arun Mansukhani, *“We need to train people who take statements to provide the best possible support for victims. The best psychologist is the police officer who has been made aware of the situation and the people who receive the victim's testimony.”*

Ingrid Bellander Todino, Head of Unit, Fundamental Rights Policy, DG JUST, *“We legislated on victims' rights in 2012, which provides support and assistance to victims of crime. There is already protection for victims*

in the Member States, but we need to ensure that it is implemented and accessible to victims, and the availability of support services is a crucial point in defining what is needed to help victims.”

21 recommendations ratified and celebrated!

On Saturday, citizens worked in 12 groups to finalize their 21 recommendations. You may read a selection of some of them below:



- **Increasing awareness about hatred and existing measures and remedies to counter it with a public campaign.** The Citizens' Panel proposes that the European Union should organise an awareness campaign on the dangers of hate, its causes and measures to combat it. At the same time, the EU should provide information about its various initiatives against hate and the available support channels and measures for victims.

- **An EU Safe Surfing Card** to ensure safe Internet navigation for children from the age of 8. With this card, children should acquire the skills necessary to navigate the Internet independently and safely.

- **Promoting non-violent communication.** The EU should better publicize its existing training courses on hate crime, hate speech and non-violent communication and promote these to specific target groups. Non-violent communication should be made accessible to all generations in all EU member states through educational programs.
- **More independent media.** Media should be required to work with independent fact-checking organizations and be transparent about their funding sources. The number of



media outlets a person or company can own should be limited. Greater citizen participation in the media is also recommended to give more weight to their content and promote a shared culture of reciprocity and respect.

- **Monitoring and prosecuting online hate speech.** Internet anonymity should be regulated so that authors of hate speech can be better tracked and prosecuted by the competent authorities. The European Commission should create a working group to update and expand the common definition of "illegal hate speech." Artificial intelligence should be used to curb the

spread of hate speech on social networks. Platforms/operators must be required to adapt their algorithms to broadcast a broader spectrum of opinions.

- **Code of conduct for MEPs.** The Citizens' Panel proposes setting up an independent committee of trust to develop a code of conduct for Members of the European Parliament and monitor hate speech and misinformation.
- **European youth panels.** In schools, organizing debates modelled on the Citizens' Panels could help spread a culture of deliberation among the younger generation. For example, a debate on food in the school canteen, considering the habits of different religions, would be an opportunity to initiate discussions on specific topics that affect children daily, with students benefiting from the expertise of canteen staff and chefs. School twinning could allow exchanges at the European level. For 16-25-year-olds, European panels on hatred should be organized (same model as existing ones) on topics directly impacting them: online harassment, etc.

“You represent the essence of democratic debate.”

On Sunday, the citizens were back in plenary to present and assess the final 21 recommendations. Citizens assessed each recommendation using a scale from 1 to 6 to express their strength of support. The votes were counted in the presence of citizen observers to ensure transparency.

Following the presentations and voting, the recommendations were presented by the oldest panelist, Gemma from Italy, and the youngest, Camille from France, to **Ana Gallego Torres, Director-General, Directorate-General “Justice and Consumers” (DG JUST)**. The Director-General thanked the 150 citizens for their unfailing commitment, their active participation and impressive achievement.

To conclude this weekend, citizens received a message of thanks from **Dubravka Šuica, Vice-President for Democracy and Demography**, who emphasized the importance of including citizens in the policy process, to hear their voice and ensure that European institutions serve the concerns of citizens, *“Your commitment is helping to make our democracies resilient. We are proud of these Citizens' Panels... I look forward to reading your recommendations, thank you for your work.”*

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

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

Your highlights of the Panel

Matilde, Italy, *"My highlight was meeting people from all over Europe because you learn so much from others. It was also the first time for me seeing the EU really reaching out to citizens. It was a very nice experience."*

Nelson, Poland, *"The working group was the aspect I liked the most: we could express ourselves, share our opinion, debate on the topic and even if we disagreed, the atmosphere was always positive. If I have one moment to remember it will be the testimonies during the first session - it was very emotional."*

Petra, Czech Republic, *"I really enjoyed everyone's different opinion - even if we disagree it forced me to listen people and take their opinions into account. I became more educated, and I really enjoyed the process and meeting new people from all round the EU. I quite liked the group session, those funny moments were the most appreciated."*

Sybel, Luxembourg, *"If I have one moment to remember after these three sessions, it will be the handover of the recommendations by Camille and Gemma to Ana Gallego Torres. This moment symbolises all the work and the collective effort realised to reach a consensus over these 21 recommendations. I am proud of what we accomplished, it was not easy, sometimes we disagreed but everyone came with a will to bring his/her point of view to feed the discussion. This experience shows that citizens can get involved and bring relevant ideas to politicians"*
