



The Conference on the Future of Europe

Lessons from France, Ireland and the United Kingdom

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Abbreviations

CFE	Conference on the Future of Europe
EESC	Economic, Social and Environmental Council

Executive summary

Citizens' Assemblies will be part of the Conference on the Future of Europe. France, Ireland and the United Kingdom held citizen assemblies on how the country should fight the climate crisis. Their mode of operation is similar and adoptable on the European level. They offer important lessons for the Conference on the Future of Europe and European citizens' assembly.

The French example illustrates that citizens' assemblies have an impact if they agree on concrete and actionable recommendations. To reach concrete and actionable recommendations, the example of Ireland underlines the importance of time – without sufficient time it becomes difficult to reach concrete conclusions. The example of the United Kingdom stresses the importance of citizens' assemblies' legitimacy and political clout. Without sufficient political backing from governments and parliaments, citizen assemblies and their recommendations stand only little chance to impact policy making.

Introduction

On 9 May 2021, the Conference on the Future of Europe (CFE) will start. The CFE will provide a new space for citizens to engage in the debate on the future of the EU. As a “citizen-focused, bottom-up exercise”, the CFE will organise a large number of events at European, national, regional and local levels. So-called European citizens' panels – composed of citizens from all walks of life – will be at the heart of this deliberative process.

This report examines the experience with citizens' assemblies on climate policies in France, Ireland and the United Kingdom. First, the article takes a look at the general mode of operation of the assemblies, before moving on to the analysis of the outcomes and political contexts of the three assemblies. Finally, the lessons that the CFE can learn from the Member States' Experience are summarized.

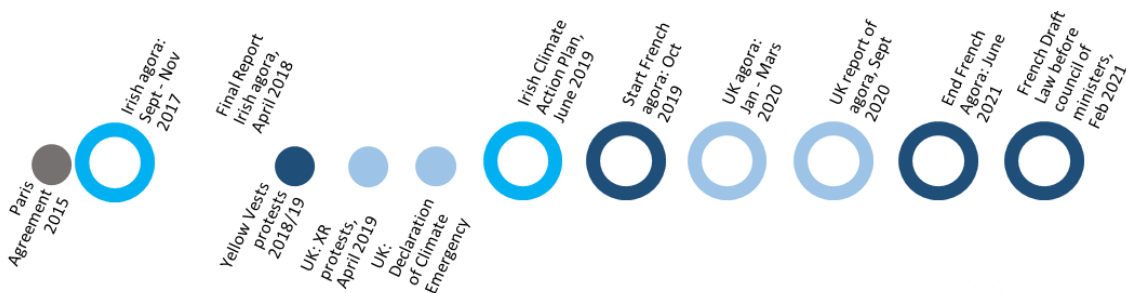


Figure 1: Timeline: assemblies in France, Ireland and the UK.

1 Similar Mode of Operation

Citizens' assemblies in surveyed states have similar modes of operation. They involve between 99 and 150 participants. Their key element is the random, but representative selection of participants that is executed in a two-step selection process conducted by an independent body. In the first step, random citizens are invited to the assembly, based on population registers of the municipalities.¹ Among those replying to the invitation, a representative group of participants is elected. The selection criteria vary slightly between the countries; usually, gender, age, education, place of residence and migration background are taken into account.

Concerning the procedure, all national citizens' assemblies include time for learning, deliberating and voting. All national assemblies emphasize balanced expert input. Often, citizens' assemblies are split into smaller groups to explore different sub-topics. The typical results of citizens' assemblies are non-binding recommendations, conclusions and a report.

Table 1: Overview on the citizens' assemblies in France, Ireland and UK.

		France ²	Ireland	United Kingdom ³
Composition		150 randomly selected members	99 randomly selected members + chairperson ⁴	108 randomly selected members
Working mode	Meetings	7 weekends over 5 month	2 weekends ⁵	6 weekends
	Agenda Settings	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Citizens' assembly free to set agenda - Expert input - three guarantors appointed to provide external perspective⁶ 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - work program agreed by assembly based on proposal by chairperson - steering group assists with planning and operational issues⁷ 	- sub-topics predefined
	Expert input	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - experts with differing positions - summaries of research by academics, international bodies and civil society - speakers and content proposed by Governance Committee. - assembly free to refuse to hear an expert, or to hear a person not considered⁸ 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - expert group comprised of academics/practitioners across a number of specific fields of interest - composition and focus of expert group may 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - specialists in different approaches to tackling climate change¹⁰ - speakers are informants (giving range of views and evidence) or advocates (giving their own view)¹¹

¹ Bürgerrat Demokratie, „Prima Klima durch Bürgerräte?“, https://www.buergerrat.de/aktuelles/prima-klima-durch-buerger-raete/?fbclid=IwAR3800oNS1lhJGu_CtkWuevkUgerBd0hF39hzXUuLUuksErV8xO9_N664aA, retrieved on 1st March 2021.

² Convention Citoyenne pour le Climat, <https://www.conventioncitoyennepourleclimat.fr/>, retrieved on 6th January 2021.

³ Climate Assembly UK The Path To Net Zero, <https://www.climateassembly.uk/>, retrieved on 6th January 2021.

⁴ Final Report on how the State can make Ireland a leader in tackling climate change, <https://2016-2018.citizensassembly.ie/en/How-the-State-can-make-Ireland-a-leader-in-tackling-climate-change/Final-Report-on-how-the-State-can-make-Ireland-a-leader-in-tackling-climate-change/>, retrieved on 7th January 2021.

⁵ The Citizens' Assembly, How the state can make Ireland a leader in tackling climate change, <https://2016-2018.citizensassembly.ie/en/How-the-State-can-make-Ireland-a-leader-in-tackling-climate-change/>, retrieved on 7th January 2021.

⁶ Convention Citoyenne pour le Climat, FAQ, <https://www.conventioncitoyennepourleclimat.fr/en/foire-aux-questions/>, retrieved on 1st March 2021.

⁷ The Citizens' Assembly, Rules & Procedures, <https://2016-2018.citizensassembly.ie/en/About-the-Citizens-Assembly/Background/Rules-Procedures/>, retrieved on 1st March 2021.

⁸ Convention Citoyenne pour le Climat, FAQ, <https://www.conventioncitoyennepourleclimat.fr/en/foire-aux-questions/>, retrieved on 1st March 2021.

¹⁰ Climate Assembly UK, Expert leads, <https://www.climateassembly.uk/detail/expertleads/index.html>, retrieved on 1st March 2021.

¹¹ Climate Assembly UK, Report, <https://www.climateassembly.uk/report/read/final-report.pdf>, retrieved on 1st March 2021.

			change during assembly ⁹	
Legal Base	Decided by president Macron		Resolution of the Irish Parliament (House of the Oireachtas) ¹²	6 Select Committees of the House of Commons called the assembly
Outcome	149 recommendations + report		13 recommendations + report ¹³	50 recommendations + report
Adoption by the assembly	Validation of the measures prepared by working groups in the plenary session (voting "yes": 95%) ¹⁴		Vote by assembly on all matters ¹⁵	2 forms of adoption: ¹⁶ - members drafted options themselves; - members voted on pre-prepared options
Follow-up in national politics	- Draft law: 96 of the recommendations are at least partly taken over ¹⁷		Climate action plan to reduce emissions ¹⁸	No referendum, no vote in parliament

2 Survey of the assemblies in France, Ireland and the UK

France, Ireland and the United Kingdom all held citizens' assemblies on climate policy questions. While the questions of the assemblies were relatively similar, the outcomes and political contexts of the assemblies differed significantly.

Table 2: Lead questions of the assemblies.

France	"How can greenhouse gas emissions be reduced by at least 40% compared to 1990 levels by 2030, while respecting social justice?"
Ireland	"How the State can make Ireland a leader in tackling climate change"
UK	"How should the UK meet its target of net zero greenhouse gas emissions by 2050?"

2.1 France: After Protests Against Higher Taxation on Fossil Fuels, the Assembly's Recommendations Find Their Place in a Draft Law

The French agora took place in the aftermath of the massive eight-month-long protests of the "Yellow Vests"¹⁹ against the planned higher taxation of fossil fuels. The assembly was the result of the conclusions of a Great National Debate, a proposal by the "Citizens' Vests" collective

⁹ The Citizens' Assembly, Rules & Procedures, <https://2016-2018.citizensassembly.ie/en/About-the-Citizens-Assembly/Background/Rules-Procedures/>, retrieved on 1st March 2021.

¹² The Citizens' Assembly, Citizens' Assembly 2016 - 2018, <https://www.citizensassembly.ie/en/previous-assemblies/citizens-assembly-2016-2018-/>, retrieved on 7th January 2021.

¹³ The Citizens' Assembly, How the State can make Ireland a leader in tackling climate change, Recommendations, <https://2016-2018.citizensassembly.ie/en/How-the-State-can-make-Ireland-a-leader-in-tackling-climate-change/Recommendations/>, retrieved on 7th January 2021.

¹⁴ Convention Citoyenne pour le Climat, Rapport final, <https://propositions.conventioncitoyennepourleclimat.fr/>, retrieved on 1st March 2021.

¹⁵ The Citizens' Assembly, Meetings, <https://2016-2018.citizensassembly.ie/en/About-the-Citizens-Assembly/Background/Meetings/>, retrieved on 1st March 2021.

¹⁶ Climate Assembly UK, Report, <https://www.climateassembly.uk/report/read/final-report.pdf>, retrieved on 1st March 2021.

¹⁷ LeMonde, „Que sont devenues les propositions de la convention pour le climat, qu'Emmanuel Macron s'était engagé à reprendre "sans filtre"?", https://www.lemonde.fr/planete/article/2021/02/10/climat-les-propositions-de-la-convention-citoyenne-ont-elles-ete-reprises-par-le-gouvernement_6069467_3244.html, retrieved on 22nd February 2021.

¹⁸ Bürgerrat Demokratie, <https://www.buergerrat.de/aktuelles/prima-klima-durch-buergerraete/>, retrieved on 6th January 2021.

¹⁹ SPIEGEL Politik „Protestbewegung in Frankreich- Was wurde aus ... den Gelbwesten?“, Tanja Kuchenbecker, 12.09.2020, <https://www.spiegel.de/politik/ausland/gelbwesten-in-frankreich-was-wurde-aus-der-protestbewegung-a-36c6946e-a3c4-49d8-abcc-31f2819ddcc8>, retrieved on 28th January 2021.

and the Economic, Social and Environmental Council (EESC).²⁰ During the assembly, the participants developed 149 recommendations to achieve a 40 percent reduction in the country's greenhouse gas emissions by 2030. Those recommendations can be grouped into five thematic areas: **transportation, consumption, housing, production and work, and food.**²¹

President Emmanuel Macron promised to take up the recommendations “with no filter”. While this expression might seem audacious, a new draft law “to fight against climate change and strengthen resilience to its effects” will be voted on in March. This draft law implements many of the assembly’s recommendations.²² 18 recommendations are adopted completely, 78 recommendations at least partly. 26 measures are not adopted. Three of these 26 recommendations have been rejected beforehand by president Macron. Among them is the recommendation to lower the speed limit from 130 to 110 km/h.²³ 15 recommendations are referred to the international level. A closer look at the recommendations that are partly adopted shows that in some cases the draft law doesn’t go as far when it comes to restrictions for companies, communities or individuals. Other recommendations are postponed, are reduced or are subject to exceptions.²⁴

Table 3: Exemplary Implementation of the Recommendations in the Draft Law.²⁵

Recommendations fully included in draft law	Recommendations not taken into draft law
By 2024, a carbon label will be posted on consumer products and services, calculated by an independent body	Ban advertising for the most polluting products
Raising public awareness of the climate emergency	Introduction of a mandatory clause inciting consumers to consume less in advertising and online sales.
Abolish tax advantages on diesel fuel and support the purchase of clean lorries	Reforming the car mileage allowance scale so that it depends on car emissions
Introducing an ecological bonus-malus on car insurance taxes	Reduce VAT on train tickets from 10% to 5.5%

The French ‘High Council on Climate’ has described the draft law as “not ambitious enough”. A reduction of greenhouse gases by 40 percent until 2030 would not be achievable with those measures. The proposed draft law would ban short-haul flights in France if a train alternative of no longer than two and a half hours exists. According to the council, this target is "far too low",

²⁰ Convention Citoyenne pour le Climat, <https://www.conventioncitoyennepourleclimat.fr/>, abgerufen am 06.01.2021.

²¹ Convention Citoyenne pour le Climat, <https://www.conventioncitoyennepourleclimat.fr/>, retrieved on 6th January 2021.

²² LeMonde, „Que sont devenues les propositions de la convention pour le climat, qu’Emmanuel Macron s’était engagé à reprendre “sans filtre”?”, https://www.lemonde.fr/planete/article/2021/02/10/climat-les-propositions-de-la-convention-citoyenne-ont-elles-ete-reprises-par-le-gouvernement_6069467_3244.html, retrieved on 22nd February 2021.

²³ Bürgerrat Demokratie, Aktuelles, „Macron will Referendum über Klimaschutz“, <https://www.buergerrat.de/aktuelles/macron-will-referendum-ueber-klimaschutz/>, abgerufen am 18.01.2021.

²⁴ LeMonde, „Que sont devenues les propositions de la convention pour le climat, qu’Emmanuel Macron s’était engagé à reprendre “sans filtre”?”, https://www.lemonde.fr/planete/article/2021/02/10/climat-les-propositions-de-la-convention-citoyenne-ont-elles-ete-reprises-par-le-gouvernement_6069467_3244.html, retrieved on 22nd February 2021.

²⁵ LeMonde, „Que sont devenues les propositions de la convention pour le climat, qu’Emmanuel Macron s’était engagé à reprendre “sans filtre”?”, https://www.lemonde.fr/planete/article/2021/02/10/climat-les-propositions-de-la-convention-citoyenne-ont-elles-ete-reprises-par-le-gouvernement_6069467_3244.html, retrieved on 22nd February 2021.

as it only affects around ten percent of national air traffic.²⁶ Initially, the Citizens' Assembly recommended to ban flights in France if a train alternative of no longer than four hours exists.²⁷

2.2 Ireland: Pioneer of Deliberative Democracy

Ireland is known for its pioneering role in deliberative democracy. Unlike in France, where the president of the Republic decided on its establishment²⁸, the citizens' agora in Ireland has a legislative base. It was approved by resolution of both Houses of the Oireachtas (Irish Parliament).²⁹

The citizens' assembly delivered 13 recommendations for tackling climate change.³⁰ The final report contains four subsections of recommendations: **Putting Climate Change Considerations at the Centre of Policy-Making, Energy Policy, Transport Policy and Agriculture and Land Use Policy**. 80% of the participants said they would be willing to pay higher taxes on carbon-intensive activities.³¹ 100% of the participants recommended that Ireland should take a leadership role in addressing climate change through mitigation measures, including, for example, retrofitting public buildings, having low-carbon public vehicles, as well as through adaptation measures including, for example, increasing the resilience of public land and infrastructure. Additionally, a tax on agricultural greenhouse gas emissions was suggested, as well as an expansion of public transport options with attention to rural areas.³²

An all-party parliamentary committee was established to support the implementation of the citizens' assembly's recommendations. The committee issued a set of recommendations. Also, a Climate and Biodiversity Emergency has been declared in this context.³³ In June 2019, the Department of the Environment, Climate and Communication published a Climate Action Plan containing 181 measures. The 2020 European Semester Country Report for Ireland states that Ireland has so far fallen short in tackling climate change. The report sees the Climate Action

²⁶ SPIEGEL Wirtschaft, Frankreichs Klimarat kritisiert geplantes Gesetzespaket zum Klimaschutz, <https://www.spiegel.de/wirtschaft/frankreichs-klimarat-kritisiert-geplantes-gesetzespaket-zum-klimaschutz-a-ec592184-32e9-44f5-a244-cb31e84410fd>, retrieved on 24th February 2021.

²⁷ Convention Citoyenne pour le Climat, Se déplacer, Les objectifs, <https://propositions.conventioncitoyennepourleclimat.fr/se-deplacer-2/>, retrieved on 24th February 2021.

²⁸ Convention Citoyenne pour le Climat, <https://www.conventioncitoyennepourleclimat.fr/>, retrieved on 6th January 2021.

²⁹ The Citizens' Assembly, Citizens' Assembly 2016 - 2018, <https://www.citizensassembly.ie/en/previous-assemblies/citizens-assembly-2016-2018/>, retrieved on 7th January 2021.

³⁰ Citizens' Assembly, How the State can make Ireland a leader in tackling climate change, Recommendations, <https://2016-2018.citizensassembly.ie/en/How-the-State-can-make-Ireland-a-leader-in-tackling-climate-change/Recommendations/>, retrieved on 7th January 2021.

³¹ Citizens' Assembly, How the State can make Ireland a leader in tackling climate change, Recommendations, <https://2016-2018.citizensassembly.ie/en/How-the-State-can-make-Ireland-a-leader-in-tackling-climate-change/Recommendations/>, retrieved on 7th January 2021.

³² Citizens' Assembly, How the State can make Ireland a leader in tackling climate change, Recommendations, <https://2016-2018.citizensassembly.ie/en/How-the-State-can-make-Ireland-a-leader-in-tackling-climate-change/Recommendations/>, retrieved on 7th January 2021.

³³ Government of Ireland, Department of Communications, Climate Action & Environment, "Climate Action Plan To Tackle Climate Breakdown", <https://assets.gov.ie/25419/c97cdecdf8c49ab976e773d4e11e515.pdf>, retrieved on 28th January 2021.

Plan as an important step, but warns that its success will depend on early, sustained implementation of policies and actions.³⁴ The recommendations on transport policy reached between 92 and 96 percent of consensus. In the following table they are compared with the measures taken in the Climate Action Plan.

Table 4: Transport: Comparison of Assembly's Recommendations and Government's Climate Action Plan.

Recommendation ³⁵	Measures in the Climate Action Plan (not exhaustive) ³⁶
"the number of bus lanes, cycling lanes and park and ride facilities should be greatly increased in the next five years, and much greater priority should be given to these modes over private car use."	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Establish a "Park and Ride Development Office" and develop overall Park and Ride Implementation Plan, including the provision of multimodal facilities (e.g. EV charging/bicycle parking) • Undertake an expansion of cycling infrastructure through the establishment of a "Cycling Project Office" within the National Transport Authority and develop an implementation plan • Develop and implement cycle network plans for all major cities
"the State should immediately take many steps to support the transition to electric vehicles."	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Develop the EV charging network necessary to support the growth of EVs to at least 800,000 by 2030 and set a target for the supply of infrastructure to stay sufficiently ahead of demand • Introduce legislation to ban the sale of new fossil fuel cars from 2030 and to stop the granting of NCTs from 2045. • All future procurement processes for public buses will include evaluation of procuring only fully electric buses.
"the State should prioritize the expansion of public transport spending over new road infrastructure spending at a ratio of no less than 2-to-1 to facilitate the broader availability and uptake of public transport options with attention to rural areas."	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Transition the urban Public Service Obligation public bus fleet to Low-Emission Vehicles • Set a road map for more Low-Emission Vehicles in public sector fleets • Increase public bus network capacity and usage • Add additional capacity to Luas (tram) network

The Irish recommendations are less concrete than the French ones. This might be due to the fact that the Irish assembly on climate change took place on two weekends, while the French agora took place on seven weekends over the course of eight months. As a result, there might have been more time and opportunity to substantiate the demands. It should not be forgotten, however, that the Irish agora on climate change was one of five assemblies on different topics.

2.3 UK: Criticism of the Design, No Concrete Government Response

The citizens' agora in the UK took place in spring 2020. Beforehand, the UK parliament declared a climate emergency in May 2019 following the protests of Extinction Rebellion in 2019 that included demands for citizens' assemblies. The assembly had 10 subsections: **Underpinning**

³⁴ European Commission, Representation in Ireland, https://ec.europa.eu/ireland/news/key-eu-policy-areas/environment_en, retrieved on 24th February 2021

³⁵ The Citizens' Assembly, Final Report on how the State can make Ireland a leader in tackling climate change, <https://2016-2018.citizensassembly.ie/en/How-the-State-can-make-Ireland-a-leader-in-tackling-climate-change/Final-Report-on-how-the-State-can-make-Ireland-a-leader-in-tackling-climate-change/Climate-Change-Report-Final.pdf>, retrieved on 24th February 2021.

³⁶ Climate Action Plan 2019, <https://assets.gov.ie/10207/c8f59b1734af460fa310ddb20e01388.pdf>, retrieved on 24th February 2021.

Principles, How we Travel on Land, How we Travel by Air, In the Home, What We Eat and How We Use the Land, What we Buy, Where Our Electricity Comes From, Greenhouse Gas Removals, Covid-19, Recovery and the Path to Net Zero, Additional Recommendations.

The assembly faces criticism on the free deliberation of the participants and the legitimacy of the results. The parliamentary committees formulated the framing question. Furthermore, the assembly's outcome was partly predetermined: The members were asked for their opinion on policy options sometimes developed beforehand by experts. In these cases, the participants did not have the chance to include their own policy options. Concerning the outcome, critics find it problematic that some proposals were only voted on by the subgroups. This procedure raises concerns about the legitimacy of those proposals.³⁷

Compared to France and Ireland, the assembly stands on less solid ground. The assembly was commissioned by a group of committees in parliament and is a purely informative body.³⁸ Additionally, the funding of the UK citizens' assembly amounted to only 10% of its French counterpart.³⁹ The House of Commons contributed less than a quarter (£120,000) of the assembly's budget while the Esmée Fairbairn Foundation and the European Climate Foundation's UK program each added £200,000 of additional funding.⁴⁰

The impact of the assembly has been relatively small so far. After the report of the assembly was published, the Chairs of the six commissioning Select Committees wrote a letter to the Prime Minister, in which they urge him to act on the recommendations of the assembly.⁴¹ As of today, there is no official response of the government or the Prime Minister to the report. However, the government issued a response to the Committee on Climate Change's 2020 Progress Report to parliament. This report mentions the assembly as follows:⁴²

This statement, which is not even a response to the assembly, doesn't give any concrete clues on how or if at all the assembly's recommendations will be implemented in the future.

³⁷ Carnegie Europe, „Getting Climate Citizens' Assemblies Right“, Claire Mellier, Rich Wilson, November 05, 2020, <https://carnegieeurope.eu/2020/11/05/getting-climate-citizens-assemblies-right-pub-83133>, retrieved on 27th January 2021.

³⁸ Carnegie Europe, „Getting Climate Citizens' Assemblies Right“, Claire Mellier, Rich Wilson, November 05, 2020, <https://carnegieeurope.eu/2020/11/05/getting-climate-citizens-assemblies-right-pub-83133>, retrieved on 27th January 2021.

³⁹ Carnegie Europe, „Getting Climate Citizens' Assemblies Right“, Claire Mellier, Rich Wilson, November 05, 2020, <https://carnegieeurope.eu/2020/11/05/getting-climate-citizens-assemblies-right-pub-83133>, retrieved on 27th January 2021.

⁴⁰ Climate Assembly UK, Budget, <https://www.climateassembly.uk/detail/budget/index.html>, retrieved on 1st March 2021.

⁴¹ Climate Assembly UK, The Path to Net Zero, <https://www.climateassembly.uk/news/uk-path-net-zero-must-be-under-pinned-education-choice-fairness-and-political-consensus-urges-climate-assembly/>, retrieved on 3rd March 2021.

⁴² Committee on Climate Change's 2020 progress report: government response, https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/928005/government-response-to-ccc-progress-report-2020.pdf, retrieved on 3rd March 2021.

3 Lessons for a European Assembly within the CFE

How can the CFE become an occasion to closely involve EU citizens in the debates on the future of Europe? And what results can citizens' participation bring? As seen above, this goal of involvement is achievable with the mechanism of citizens' assemblies. The mode of operation is quite uniform and adoptable on the European level. Citizens' assemblies serve various objectives. Ideally, they can bring forward policies to mitigate the climate crisis and strengthen democracy by involving citizens in the political debate.

- ▶ **Climate crisis:** The comparison of the French protests against higher taxation on fossil fuels and the Irish assembly recommending such a higher tax on fossil fuels suggests that citizens' assemblies can be a good tool to legitimize and push through partly unpopular but needed measures.
- ▶ **Democracy:** When talking about citizens' assemblies and democracy, it is important to keep in mind that citizens' assemblies are selected, not elected bodies. While they can be precious advisory bodies and a political tool, they cannot replace parliaments. Nevertheless, citizens' assemblies can strengthen democracies. In France, not only the citizens drawn by lot participated in the political process. The citizens' agora generated a national debate. A week after the citizens' agora's vote, 70 percent of French citizens had heard of the agora and about 62 percent agreed with most of the recommendations.⁴³

The citizens' assemblies examined above highlight how a European citizens' agora can be a success.

- ▶ **The agora needs time and resources:** The French recommendations are very concrete and target specific measures. In the aftermath, it is possible to compare to which extent the measures are implemented.
- ▶ **The agora has to be taken seriously:** The role of an agora is not clearly defined. While the Irish agora is a permanent body of participative democracy, the UK agora "only" informed parliament. The French agora is a non-permanent body with political importance, as the president promised to enact its recommendations "with no filter". In France, the agora and its results are widely discussed in the media, while attention for the UK agora is rather small.

⁴³ Carnegie Europe, „Getting Climate Citizens' Assemblies Right“, <https://carnegieeurope.eu/2020/11/05/getting-climate-citizens-assemblies-right-pub-83133>, Claire Mellier, Rich Wilson, November 05, 2020, retrieved on 27th January 2021.

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