

# Deliberative committees

## **Name of the organisation**

Parlement de la Région de Bruxelles-Capitale

## **Website of the organisation**

[Parlement de la Région de Bruxelles-Capitale](#)

## **Location of the organisation**

Rue du Lombard 69, 1005 Brussels, Belgium

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## **Good practice aspect(s)/themes of youth work**

- Participation of young people in decision making
- Active citizenship/activism

## **Good practice category**

A practice of processes and methods

## **Good practice aim & purpose**

In order to respond to the 'democratic fatigue syndrome' (David Van Reybrouck) and to bridge the gap between representatives and represented, the Brussels Parliament decided in 2019 to open its doors to all inhabitants of the Brussels Region. Adopting the conclusions of a first panel, it decided to include the deliberative committees in its rules of procedure and immediately involved experts in participation in defining the terms of application of this new process. As youth were identified as one of the main target groups, organisations such as Plan, Unicef, the Forum des Jeunes and the General Delegate for Children's Rights were contacted.

Involving 45 citizens (including 12 aged between 16 and 29) chosen by lot and 15 parliamentarians, the deliberative committees are a new space for dialogue aimed at elaborating, together and on an equal footing, recommendations on a particular theme. The topic addressed by each deliberative committee comes either from a citizen's proposal supported by a minimum of 1,000 Brussels residents over the age of 16 ("citizen's suggestion" mechanism) or from a request from one or more political groups. The conditions for participation are therefore broader than those for voting: the public is wider, including foreigners and minors.

## **Good practice description**

When the Parliament decides to set up a deliberative committee, an initial draw is made of 10,000 people over 16 years of age residing in the Region. A letter is sent to them inviting them to register by filling in a form in which they are asked to specify their gender, age, place of residence, language and level of education. On the basis of these answers, a second draw is made to obtain a sample of 45 people representative of the Brussels population (particularly in terms of age). In addition, 15 parliamentarians whose work includes the issue in question are invited to participate.

Under the supervision of a support committee (comprising experts in citizen participation and specialists in the topic under discussion) and facilitated by an external operator selected in particular on the basis of its ability to manage mixed assemblies, the deliberative committees take place in different phases:

- an information phase, aimed at informing the participants about both the deliberative process and the topic under discussion;
- a deliberation phase aimed at generating proposals for recommendations;
- a recommendation phase, aimed at improving these proposals and adopting recommendations by all participants;
- a presentation phase.

The parliamentarians then ensure that the recommendations adopted are followed up and report, after 6 to 9 months, on the progress of this follow-up in a report presented and debated in public session, in the presence of the participants in the deliberative committee. This monitoring makes it possible to strengthen public support for the process by ensuring that the recommendations are useful.

Inclusion and information of the widest possible audience is ensured. Inclusion is the guiding principle of the process, from the drawing of lots to the follow-up, whether it be through a telephone assistance service, the presence of a person dedicated to the well-being of each person, the setting up of a buddy system, or the simultaneous translation in the two official languages and translation of the main documents into the five other most widely spoken languages of the Region. As for information, it is provided at key moments through the traditional means of communication and through the [democratie.brussels](https://democratie.brussels) platform, dedicated to citizen participation in the Brussels Parliament. The challenge is to ensure that all inhabitants of Brussels can use this tool.

In addition to these various measures, specific actions are aimed specifically at young people. A section of the public contract to recruit the external operator is specifically dedicated to young people, to giving them access to information, building their confidence and supporting them throughout the process. Following the initial draw, a specific letter is sent to them and an information session is organised, to which their parents are also invited. The young participants are also invited to a short meeting before each phase of the deliberative commission, to help them feel at ease. A Whatsapp group is dedicated to them so that they can exchange their impressions. Throughout the process, one person constantly monitors their well-being and their effective participation.

### **Good practice result & concrete effects**

The four deliberative commissions set up to date have given 180 Brussels residents, with a wide range of profiles (in terms of gender, education, residence, language and age), the opportunity to participate.

The recommendations adopted are each time followed up by the Parliament. Within 6 or 9 months, a report is drawn up, and indicate how the recommendations are being implemented or why they are not. It is sent to all the participants concerned. Parliamentarians are then invited to a meeting to present the report and they discuss it with citizens. It is clear that these recommendations are a definite aid to decision-making and all political actors are taking them on board.

The process also gives the citizens a more direct contact with the parliamentarians. It allows them to understand the decision-making mechanisms, taking into account the interests involved, the institutional realities, the competences....

As the process is relatively recent, it is still too early to fully assess its effects, but we are constantly trying to improve it. As far as young people are concerned, we are currently looking at developing new information channels, such as schools. The challenge is to ensure that participation becomes a reflex for new generations.

### **Good practice chapter of the European Charter on Local Youth Work**

Organisation and practice