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# PREPARATION FOR PARTICIPATION

How can parliaments better oversee executive action in times of crisis?

*A TOOLKIT*

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# CONTEXT

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**This proposed policy was created by international parliamentarians and experts in a policy design sprint led by the Open European Dialogue and APROPOS.**



When a crisis like a pandemic happens, parliaments need to mobilize as many resources for crisis management as they can to ensure that decision making processes in times of crisis are time-efficient as well as being democratically legitimate and inclusive.

COVID has taught us all many lessons. Parliamentarians and experts alike recognized that we need to improve our crisis response as a result. Members of Parliaments from around Europe came together with a group of international experts to design a proposed policy prototype for crisis response.

The policy tries to answer the question of how Parliaments can better oversee executive action in times of crisis.

It aims to make decision making in times of crisis - usually the prerogative of the executive - more collaborative and inclusive through better involvement of a broader range of parliamentary voices and the mobilization of citizen and civil society in crisis response.

## **Crowd-sourcing solutions to the crisis**

This policy would see the establishment of a crisis protocol that activates both a special crisis committee and a dedicated citizen engagement platform when a crisis hits. The committee and citizen platform would work together to crowd-source expertise and solutions and provide a space for inclusive deliberation in times of crisis.

This protocol aims to create a space for exchange on both challenges and solutions and provide a framework through which to co-create solutions to crises as well as activate transnational cooperation and better collaboration between the executive and opposition in times of crisis.

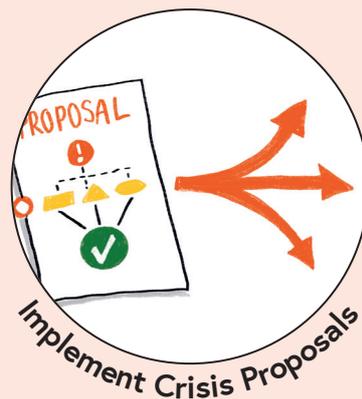
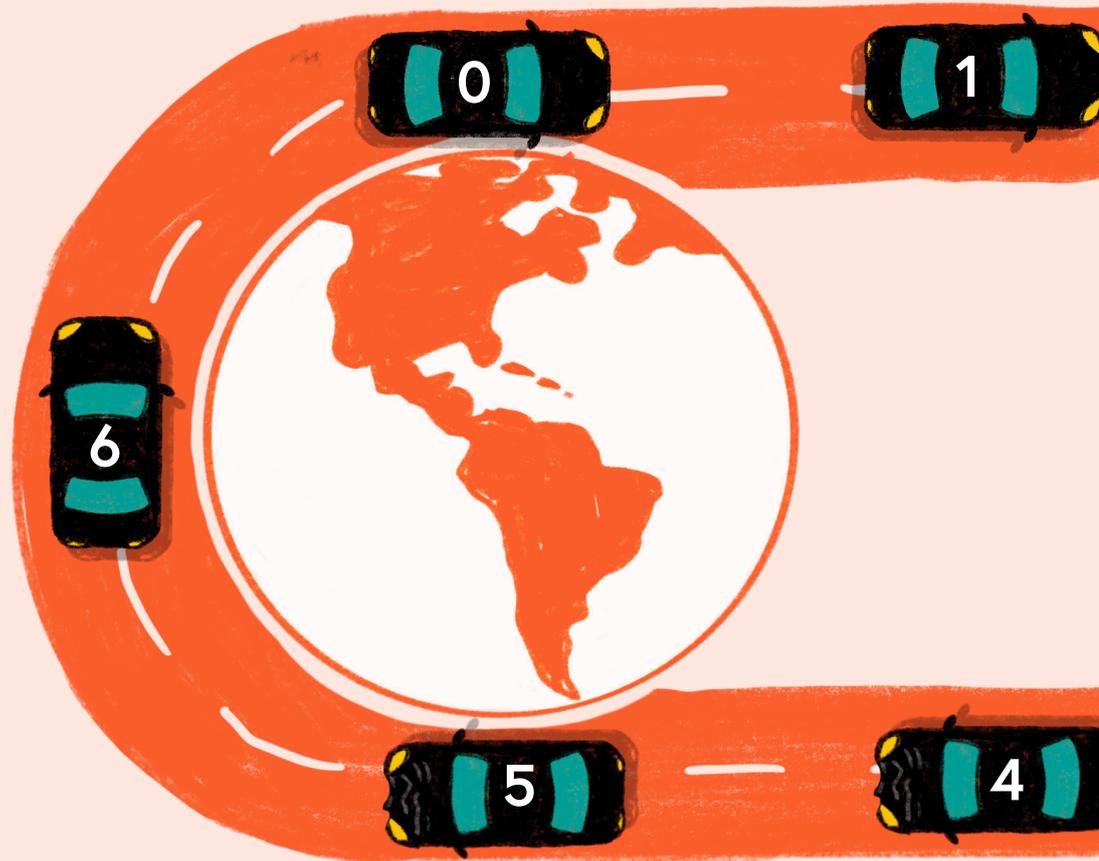
P<sup>2</sup> - Preparation for Participation aims to be an effective and efficient crisis management tool for parliaments. One that would allow for the rapid mobilisation and pooling of the necessary resources to manage a crisis - be these intellectual, monetary or political.

The content does not represent the views of the Open European Dialogue or its partners, nor those of APROPOS. It is based on the individual contributions of the policymakers and experts who participated in the policy design sprint.

# PROCESS OVERVIEW

Parliaments work together across Europe to: establish crisis committees; develop crisis protocols; and create tools that allow for citizens to learn about the crisis and share their opinions.

The goal is to make effective decisions based on both the work of the crisis committee and the informed opinions of citizens.



ee Activation



n Platform



# STEP 0 Evaluate, Legitimize, Campaign

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Engage in a dialogue with citizens, experts, executive and opposition to assess the management of the past crisis and raise awareness of the need for better parliamentary oversight and citizen participation in crisis response.



## HOW

Start with implementing and exemplifying small specific initiatives to showcase the benefits of an inclusive decision making approach.

Communicate about benefits of citizen participation in politics.

Showcase drawbacks of not involving parliament and citizens in crisis.

Learn from previous crisis: use the evaluation of the current crisis to assess and define in which ways this improved protocol would help bettering the democratic management of crisis.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

Do not just send information but engage people in a dialogue.

Once the importance of a new crisis protocol is clarified through consultations, a campaign will be launched that clearly and explicitly communicates the purpose and urgency of this improved crisis management tool and the important role played by citizens.

Involve citizens, MPs, experts that can explain why this is so important.

Involve the executive: make sure the benefits of this platform to the executive are clear and ensure its buy-in to the platform.

Elaborate and explain how this helps in mobilizing resources for crisis response. Strengthening Parliament's interaction with citizens would give weight to its oversight and crisis management response.

# STEP 1 Create Protocol for Crisis Committee Activation

Parliaments need to establish permanent, readily available processes for the rapid activation of special crisis committees, through which, MPs and citizens can work together to overcome the crisis.



## HOW

Use existing structures and committees - think of establishing a sub-committee. Use existing parliamentary structures and networks, such as OED, to coordinate exchanges.

Establish a mechanism and clear guidelines explaining what kind of situations constitute a crisis and who decides when to activate these special parliamentary committees.

Establish a protocol for the dialogue and exchange across Europe of these crisis committee.

Elect members in advance at the beginning of each legislature; include appropriate levels of governance to be included in the committee. This will depend on a country by country basis and may require the inclusion of regional representatives.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

Keep in mind that a permanent mental "state of crisis" may be detrimental to good decision-making, so best to have a permanent protocol that can be easily activated when needed.

Establish timeframe for their activity: crisis are composed of different phases - the immediate urgency, followed by the management of the mid-term impact of the crisis. Define at what point and why this committee should come into being, and whether its powers change according to the concurrent phase of the crisis.

Establish what rules govern the parliamentary crisis committee: composition should balance members of the executive and opposition parties; the scope of its powers will be pre-defined as well as the way it interacts with the citizen platform and the timeframe within which this committee is active.

There are existing protocols in parliaments that determine the governance of such "special committees" - these can be used as a blueprint and adapted if needed.

The protocol for the crisis committee should be linked to the state of emergency so as to create a coherent framework.

To ensure fair political representation, a member of the opposition should chair the committee.

Choose whether such a special committee is an additional actor or substitutes for the parliamentary plenary, both options are possible and each country can choose which procedure makes most sense.

## STEP 2 Create Citizen Participation Platform

Activate an investigation across Europe's Parliaments to pool know-how, explore existing tools for citizen participation and collaborate in the creation of a potentially European wide citizen participation platform.

### HOW

Use existing parliamentary and other European networks; explore and use existing tools and structures such as CONSUL, ECI, and IPEX to avoid silos or duplication of structures. Open access tools, such as CONSUL, or a platform modeled around the EU's European Citizens Initiative, should be preferred in order to reduce costs.

Make the citizens engagement platform a communication platform to encourage better exchange between parliament and citizens around key issues.

Involve citizens and civil society in the designing and evaluation phase of the platform (also offline).

Ensure accessibility - trainings and information-sharing need to be provided in order for citizens and civil society to have the necessary information available and tools to engage meaningfully.

Implement the "Keep it Simple, Stupid!" (KISS approach) in order to not overwhelm citizens with information.

### RECOMMENDATIONS

Full transparency and information exchange should be offered by Parliaments in order to motivate both a wide range of experts as well as citizens into participating.



The sharing of know-how across Parliaments, probably organized through the exchange between respective crisis committees, should allow for discussion around both the technical challenges on both the tool and its outcome - i.e. how to best work with platforms for citizen participation in times of crisis as well as, eventually, the content of the crisis response policies being generated through the platform.

Explore effectiveness and design of tools and networks that already exist for parliamentary information sharing and communication.

Ensure representativeness through complementary citizen panels that are consulted in addition to the broader platform consultations. Keep representativeness of citizens who engage with the platform in check.

Establish a research working group on discovering or developing best practices of rapid response mechanisms that include citizens.

Citizens that are actively part of the process will be reimbursed for the time they invested.

Use and Learn: Set up citizen platform outside of immediate crisis, use it for other types of consultations as well, like on climate action (a chronic crisis) to work out kinks.

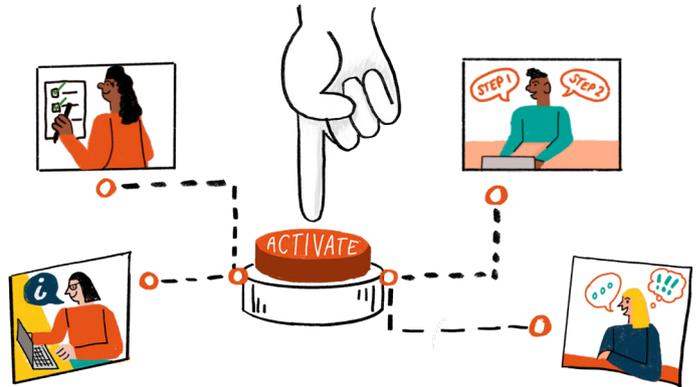
**CRISIS OCCURS!!!**

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# STEP 3 **Activate Crisis Committee & Participation Platform**

Once there is agreement that we are in crisis, the platform and committee are activated to involve citizens and parliament in crisis response.



## HOW

Together, the crisis committee and citizen platform will provide a dedicated space with a mandate for stakeholder engagement and crowd-sourcing collaborative solutions and more inclusive deliberation in times of crisis.

Work on the pull factor! Create clear incentives for people to join the platform and be engaged. Advertise broadly to attract citizen participation – involve and activate third parties to ensure they act as disseminators of the call to action (e.g., media & civil society organizations).

NO anonymous participation, gaining access through digital ID process and ensuring only citizens can participate.

The committee should provide the adequate moderation and insights to help citizens formulate feasible proposals and act as a mediator between citizens and the executive or broader parliamentary plenaries.

It is fundamental that citizens be provided with the correct education, trainings and logistical assistance in order to embrace the process. It is important for citizens to understand the outcome of their engagement and be able to accept that citizen input itself will be divided, and hence not every solution that is advocated for will be successfully picked up.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

Clarify and clearly communicate the various bodies that interact in the decision-making process.

Look at how this committee interacts with other committees and decide on when and how it incorporates the voices of experts / advisory board / citizens.

Make sure through moderation and good framing that people can give and receive the information they need in a transparent and accessible way, so that the platform contributes to counter-polarization.

Work on incentive structures to citizens.

Appeal to citizen interest and clarify the time investment that is required for the platform, as well as the purpose and impact of the platform.

In addition to the online platform, public consultations can be held ad-hoc.

# STEP 4 Consult & Interact with Platform

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MPs and their staff interact with the platform and consult proposals. They follow debates which the crisis committee translates into a pathway to handling the crisis.



## HOW

The committee acts as a filter between citizens' contributions and plenary and can invite citizens to the parliamentary sessions to discuss the different proposals - this approach could be integrated through the use of petitions.

MPs and their staff interact with the platform and consult proposals. They can follow debates which the crisis committee can translate into a pathway to handling the crisis.

Established rules will be clearly communicated with regards to how the crisis committee and citizen platform interact with each other, the executive and any other third parties - including potentially an ad-hoc expert advisory board - and what powers each actor has in the process.

Committee will evaluate suggestion from the citizen platform and submit proposals to the parliamentary agenda.

Make an explicit commitment to bring citizen proposals to the agenda, even though this is not a commitment to implement all proposals. The committee will evaluate suggestions from the citizen platform, mediate these and submit these proposals to plenary or the executive.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

Representation of different parties and minority rights is imperative.

Decide how to handle the risk of a very small – non representative group of people – engaging with the platform.

Use moderation to mitigate certain voices having disproportionate power.

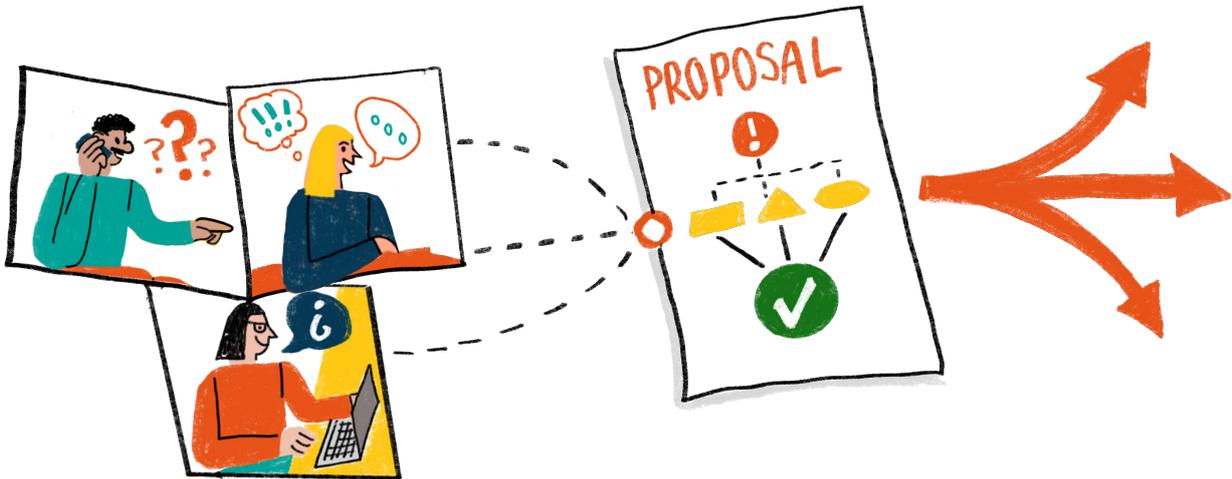
Incrementally increase the power of citizen platform (instead of plenary) as the concept is proved successful, start with small and specific consultations, then scale up.

Seek out and use existing parliamentary rules on the involvement of citizens and experts and use these as a blueprint.

# STEP 5 Implement Crisis Proposals

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The resulting crisis management proposal is implemented and is comprehensive of citizens' feedback.



## HOW

Interacting with citizens would give more weight to parliament's oversight of crisis management, hence strengthening the ability of both citizens and parliament to be active players in crisis management and have their voices heard.

Parliaments follow lawmaking procedures compliant with their national practices to implement proposal, but this time, they integrate the outcomes and insights from the previous consultations with citizens.

The proposals can move through a committee that evaluates proposals, revises them and passes them on to plenary or onto the executive.

Citizens will be informed at each stage of the process, including if and when a proposal will be actioned; and if not, why not.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

Keep in mind multi-level constituencies; they might work differently and require a different kind of coordination.

Adapt proposals to different territorial or political setups in the implementation phase of the chosen proposal.

## STEP 6 Evaluation & Adaptation

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The Committee oversees the evaluation of the new crisis protocol, including the effectiveness of the citizen participation tool, as well as the resulting policies.



### HOW

Once a proposal has been implemented and evaluated, parliamentary procedures can be adapted according to the evaluation results. This should be a circular process allowing for learnings and adaptation after each crisis (so step 6 would coincide with step 0).

Involve citizens and other stakeholders in evaluation, make reporting completely transparent and actively share outcomes through the citizen platform.

Crisis committees across Europe come together to share lessons learned.

The format of the evaluation's results ought to be easy to digest and visible, it should not come in the form of a highly technical report.

### RECOMMENDATIONS

In the evaluation keep in mind the various phases of the crisis and how the new protocol and citizen engagement tool is used in these different phases - the immediate urgency phase and the mid-term crisis management.

The report should concentrate in particular on the use that citizens made of the platform.

Transparency and accessibility: reports should be shared as widely as possible, through the existing citizen platform but also utilizing other existing platforms & networks - like on CONSUL.

It is crucial to make sure that representation of different parties and minorities is respected also in the evaluation phase.

## BACK TO STEP 0!

