NATIONAL MINI-PUBLIC REPORT:
ITALY

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REGROUP

REBUILDING GOVERNANCE AND
RESILIENCE OUT OF THE PANDEMIC

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Culminating more than a decade of crisis in Europe, the Covid-19 pandemic has opened an important window of opportunity for institutional and policy change, not only at the "reactive" level of emergency responses, but also to tackle more broadly the many socio-political challenges caused or exacerbated by Covid-19. Building on this premise, the Horizon Europe project REGROUP (*Rebuilding governance and resilience out of the pandemic*) aims to: 1) provide the European Union with a body of actionable advice on how to rebuild post-pandemic governance and public policies in an effective and democratic way; anchored to 2) a map of the socio-political dynamics and consequences of Covid-19; and 3) an empirically-informed normative evaluation of the pandemic.

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Contents

This report provides an overview of the Italian citizens' jury, which was held in the context of the Horizon Europe research project REGROUP. The report (1) discusses organisational matters, (2) provides a summary of the discussion contents, (3) presents the jurors' policy recommendations, (4) analyses the attitudinal participant surveys and includes (5) citizens' feedback and a (6) self-evaluation.

Organisational matters

The Italian citizens' jury on trust in political institutions and fake news ("Giuria Cittadina su Fiducia e Fake News") took place on two non-consecutive Saturdays, September 9 and September 23 2023. The organising committee consisted of the following members: Lorenzo Cicchi (EUI) and Daniele Caramani (EUI) as local scientific organizers, Martina Francesca (La Prossima Cultura) and Franca Feisel (EUI) as the two co-moderators of both sessions, Mia Saugman (EUI) for the logistics and as the main contact person for the participants before and after the sessions. In addition, Samuele Nannoni (Prossima Democrazia) and Andrea Gaiba (EUI) acted as note-takers to support the moderators during the subgroup sessions on both days.

On both days, three resource persons were present to support the participants in their work. On September 9, Riccardo Emilio Chesta (Associate Professor in Sociology, Politecnico di Milano), Paula Gori (coordinator of the European Digital Media Observatory project) and Virginia Fiume (co-president of EUMANS, a pan-European movement of citizens initiatives) provided input on the main topics of the citizens jury from the angle of their respective fields and engaged in a lively Q&A with the participants. On September 23, Riccardo Emilio Chesta (Associate Professor in Sociology, Politecnico di Milano), Lisa Ginsburg (European Digital Media Observatory project) and Anna Rubartelli (Immunologist at the policlinic San Martino in Genova) gave feedback on the participants' draft recommendations and provided their reflections on some of the questions that had arisen during the previous subgroup discussions.

The citizens' jury took place at the European University Institute (EUI) in Fiesole, with Day 1 being held at the Institute's Villa Schifanoia and Day 2 at the Badia Fiesolana. Due to their beauty and the history around them, both villas provided a somewhat solemn setting for the deliberations, which the participants seemed to have enjoyed. In both venues, a large room was available for the plenary sessions. For the subgroup sessions, half of the group would stay in the plenary room, while the other half would move to a

smaller room in the building.

The organisation Sortition Foundation, through its local partner *Prossima Democrazia*, was responsible for the recruitment of the participants. Out of 76 interested citizens recruited on the streets, the organisation randomly selected 22 participants with the objective to include a diverse set of citizens regarding several dimensions such as gender, age, education, geography and types of consumed news sources. Among the 22 selected participants, 17 confirmed their presence for the first session on September 9. Out of these 17 participants, 16 also joined for the second session on September 23 (one participant had to cancel on short notice due to health problems).

In our view, the objective of diversity has been relatively well captured even with the 17 (respectively 16) citizens present for the two sessions of the citizens' jury (see Table 1). The different age groups (18-24, 25-44, 45-64, 65+) were quite evenly represented. A slight majority of participants was aged 25-44 (36.4%), with a somewhat smaller proportion aged 45-64 (18.2%). The other two age groups made up roughly one quarter of the participants (22.7% each). In terms of educational levels, only citizens with a lower, upper or tertiary education level were present in the end. The participants covered a broad range of preferences regarding news consumption. Finally, while the selection had aimed for parity in terms of gender, slightly more women than men took part in the citizens' jury.

Table 1: Demographics of the Italian citizens' jury.

Age	
18-24	31%
25-44	37%
45-64	19%
65+	13%
Education	
Not primary	0%
Primary	0%
Lower secondary	6%
Upper secondary	56%
Tertiary	38%
Gender	
Male	50%
Female	50%

Content of the discussions

The citizens' jury consisted of two full days of exchanges and deliberations, starting at 9AM and concluding at 5PM. The first day was centred on getting to know each other, delving into the jury's topics and exchanging experiences and visions for the future. The second day focused on developing policy recommendations on the identified priority areas.

Day 1: Exchanging experiences

After an onboarding of the participants (bureaucratic requirements, administering of the pre-survey), the first day started with a welcome session: an overview of the Regroup project was provided, together with some information on the agenda and goals of the citizens' jury, its methodology and thematic outlook, including the role of the resource persons. A short ice breaker allowed participants to get to know each other and to create a welcoming and respectful environment for the activities of the day.

The first session was dedicated to analysing individual attitudes on the themes of the jury, through a "moving debate": participants could move in the space and position themselves based on their degree of agreement with each of the following statements:

- Did you feel competent to understand and process the information you received about Covid-19 throughout the height of the pandemic (2020-22)?

- Do you think the public authorities communicated the decisions in an effective way?

- Do you think the press and traditional media platforms dealt well with the new situation?

- Do you think that you have been confronted to fake news regularly during the pandemic?

- Do you think the role played by non-elected experts, such as scientists involved in making political decisions (e.g., regarding the lockdowns, curfews, closing borders, rolling out vaccines) was fair during the pandemic?

- Do you think society is now well-equipped to deal with pandemics in the long-term?

- Do you personally feel more confident to deal with and understand scenarios like the pandemic in the long-term?

This dynamic exercise allowed participants to express and explore different positions, at the same time acknowledging the diversity of perspectives represented in the room. In a safe and somewhat playful way, participants were exposed to this diversity. For instance, an interesting aspect that came to the fore was participants' different views on whether the multiplicity of information available at different stages of the Covid pandemic was a positive or a negative thing. One participant stressed the value of multiple information sources:

> *I had the opportunity to get information from various different sources, really very different, and this allowed me in the end to draw a personal conclusion, to convince myself of how things were and I think the multiplicity of sources of information is fundamental.*

By contrast, another participant perceived this multiplicity of information as rather overwhelming and confusing:

> *[...]in fact it was a particular period where there was a lot of emotion, everyone reacted a bit in their own way, but in my opinion the confusion that was created in the multiplicity of sources that were given to us, often also in contradiction by the public authority, created a bit of panic. Clearly, there had to be a reliance, which was not always easy in my opinion.*

In our opinion, this exercise was important for the participants to perceive this diversity as enriching instead of threatening.

After the moving debate, we delved into the main themes of the jury. The common video with Italian subtitles was screened, and each resource person provided a short contribution on the topics of their expertise. The resource persons present during Day 1 were Riccardo Emilio Chesta (Associate Professor in Sociology, Politecnico di Milano), Paula Gori (Coordinator of the European Digital Media Observatory) and Virginia Fiume (Co-President of the association EUMANS, a pan-European movement for popular initiatives). The intervention of Riccardo Emilio Chiesta focused on the sociological dynamics that the Covid-19 pandemic provoked in Italian and European societies. Paula Gori introduced and illustrated conceptual distinctions between fake news, disinformation and misinformation, as well as the different political approaches and legal means applicable to the regulation of each of the three. She also pointed to the delicate balance between countering disinformation and safeguarding freedom of expression. Virginia

Fiume, in turn, reminded of the various dynamics of collective political action and solidarity during the pandemic and presented several possibilities for more direct democratic participation at the European level.

The morning session ended with a word cloud (using Slido), which depicted how participants perceived the impact of Covid-19 pandemic on their trust in politics (see Figure 1). It clearly emerged that the pandemic had a fundamentally unsettling effect on participants' trust in politics, that they found themselves with a significant degree of uncertainty and that they perceived this as mirrored in an increasingly polarised society.

Figure 1: Word cloud – the impact of Covid-19 pandemic on trust.
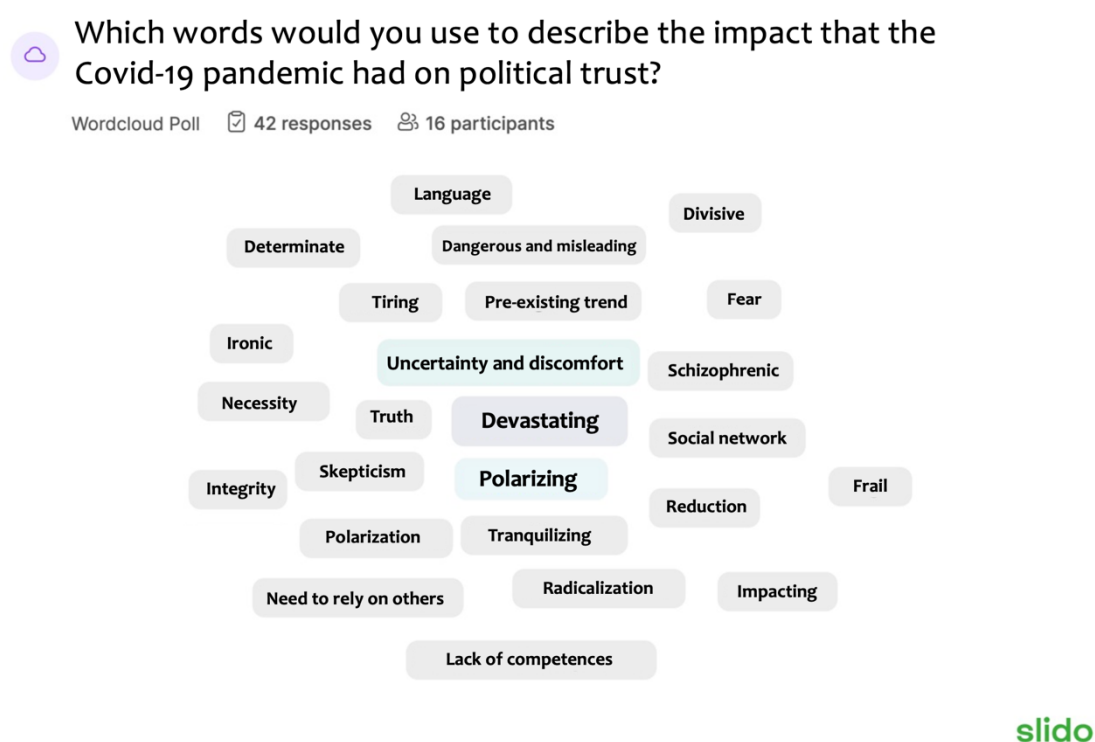
The afternoon session focused on two goals: vision building and agenda setting. Both were held in subgroups. We divided participants into 2 subgroups randomly.

The **vision building** exercise invited participants to imagine an ideal society that, in 2040 lives in a perfect state of trust, is prepared to face new pandemics and has confidence in science and politics. By asking how this society looks like, participants could set up ambitions and a vision that were meant to serve as a kind of roadmap for their developing policy recommendations.

Some of the contributions that emerged in Group 1 were referring to a society characterized by mutual care, dialogue and respect, in addition to a more equitable access to resources and healthcare; a society in which the relationship between citizens and

politics or institutions (including the European Union) is a closer one, and in which institutions are more able to collaborate. For example, one participant linked the issues of trust, equal treatment and representation in political institutions:

> *So when I thought about trust I thought that to have trust in authority I would like to be represented, that is, what gives me trust is the idea of being represented in my needs, having services, rights. Clearly this [...] has to concern everyone so I think that at the base there has to be an equal society [...].*

In Group 2, the vision of a society where all would be familiar with the scientific method emerged. The participants perceived this as an important basis for media and scientific literacy, so that each citizen is equipped with the tools to understand and scrutinise political decisions in the context of e.g. another pandemic or other forms of crises. Next to this vision of a highly educated society, the participants also emphasised that the individual rights of all citizens should be respected.

The vision exercise was the starting point for the **agenda setting session**. It was held in the same subgroups and guided by the question: "What big actions do we need to look at to realize this vision?".

Group 1 focused on "Role of non-elected experts in decision making" and "Trust in politics".

While discussing trust in politics, participants focused specifically on the need for politics to be closer to citizens and vice versa. Civic education, knowing how to interact with politicians and institutions and making it binding for parliament to examine popular petitions were some of the proposals that were put forward.

The discussion on the role of non-elected experts addressed the relationships between different roles (non-elected experts, institutional politics, citizens). Participants highlighted its complexity and the various tradeoffs that need to be taken into account when developing options to increase effectiveness and transparency in the role of non-elected experts. Plurality of experts, independence (regarding the financing of research and code of conduct), bridging technical knowledge with the needs of citizens were mentioned as the most important points.

The conversation on these two topics proved to be extremely lively and engaging, especially when dealing with the relationship between experts, citizens and politics. Even though, given the time constraints, many questions and points remained open, the group was able to formulate various proposals of policy areas.

Group 2 focused on scientific communication and disinformation. In the discussions around scientific communication, the discussions in the group started from the role of science itself in society. Some participants emphasised the importance of familiarising the broader public with the scientific method of reasoning, both in relation to better understanding scientific communication and in relation to acquiring the critical skills to debunk fake news. The topic of disinformation was approached from two different angles, that of 'education' and that of 'regulation'. It is interesting to note that, in this context, the more specific idea of an authority for the regulation of disinformation already came up.

It is also noteworthy that it took quite some time to explain the difference between the different exercises foreseen for the subgroups (I.e from 'ideal societies' to more concrete, but still broad and abstract 'fields of policy action') regarding the level of abstraction or precision that was aimed at. It was a challenge for the moderator to find a middle way between structuring and guiding the discussion within this indicated framework without artificially constraining the free and dynamic flow of the participants' discussions. In the end, however, the formulation of the action points to be voted on in the plenary went rather smoothly.

In the final plenary session, two ambassadors briefly shared the conclusions of the two subgroups. In total, twelve ideas were formulated in the subgroups (two on "Scientific Communication", two on "Disinformation", four on "The role of independent experts" and four on "Trust in political institutions"). The participants then prioritized these 12 proposals by voting through an online form, based on what they feel most important to discuss in the second day. The participants had to select one priority for each of the four thematic areas. The ranking was as follows:

Scientific communication:

    1. Investing in education and improving educational institutions (70.6%)

    2. Increase the presence of science in society (29.4%)

Disinformation:

    1. Regulation (through a verification body) to create more transparency (52.9%)

    2. Cultivating critical thinking and a culture of awareness (47.1%)

Role of non-elected experts:

1. **Rethinking the information flow between experts, politics and citizens (47.1%)**

2. Align the technical knowledge of experts with the needs of citizens (23.5%)

3. Independence of experts: financing independent research and a deontological code for researchers (17.6%)

4. Guarantee the plurality of expert voices, possibilities of "lobbying", team spirit (11.8%)

Trust in political institutions:

1. **Civic education, knowing how to interact with politicians and institutions, training on team work (47.1%)**

2. Making it binding for the parliament to examine popular petitions (23.5%)

2. Institutions and politicians that are closer to their citizens (23.5%)

4. Team spirit in institutions (5.9%)

Day 2: Deliberation and crafting recommendations

After some introductory remarks, the second session directly delved into the working group session. The subgroups remained the same as on Day 1. Each group dealt with one topic they had already explored and another topic which had been dealt with by the other group during the previous session. Thus, Group 1 (facilitated by Martina) was in charge of "scientific communication" and "the role of non-elected experts in democratic decision-making", while Group 2 (facilitated by Franca) discussed "disinformation" and "trust in political institutions".

Group 1 focused a lot on the role of non-elected experts, the topic that had already attracted most attention and controversial discussions during Day 1. Some key points that were discussed were the importance of transparency, in terms of e.g. funding, political affiliation, curriculum of experts. Participants explored different technical options to guarantee transparency and make information easily accessible to everyone, including those who are not familiar with the digital sphere. They also focused on transparency regarding political affiliation and the trade-off between transparency and privacy about personal political opinions, concluding that transparency would be especially relevant for people that hold key decision-making positions in the public or private sector. Diversity of perspectives, voices and sources of information was also mentioned as an important point. One participant contemplated that

So if politics can't be taken out, maybe you can have one [expert] from the right, one from the left, one from the centre bringing the information

The discussion on scientific communication was much smoother and focused mainly on education to critical thinking, allowing people to navigate the complexity of scientific information and be more autonomous in recognizing disinformation.

The discussions in Group 2 quickly came to centre around the proposal of one of the participants to establish a Commission, at the European political level, for the monitoring, classifying and potential sanctioning of fake news. There was a lot of controversy and disagreement around whether there should be such a Commission in the first place and to whom potential sanctions should apply (only to the 'authors' of fake news or also to the persons and platforms that disseminate them). Part of the group also called for focusing on civic education and digital literacy rather than on top-down sanctioning. Two draft recommendations, one on a Commission and another one on enhancing and reforming the education system, were formulated prior to the exchange with the resource persons.

The subsequent **session with the resource persons** was perceived as very helpful by the participants. Anna Rubartelli, an immunologist from the San Martino hospital in Genova, gave a critical account of how she as an 'expert' perceived the communication of facts and findings surrounding the Covid-19 virus on the part of political institutions, traditional media and social media. From a sociological perspective, Riccardo Emilio Chesta highlighted the importance of freedom of expression and pluralism (including media pluralism) as core political principles in European democracies and societies. Lisa Ginsburg from the European Digital Media Observatory provided feedback on the idea of establishing a European Commission for the classification of fake news. In reaction to some of the citizens' concerns that they do not want to establish a 'Ministry of Truth', she cautioned against an overly centralised approach in the fight against fake news and disinformation. As an example for a more decentralised approach, she pointed to the existence of various websites and platforms for debunking fake news that exist across EU Member States. She also cautioned against the sanctioning of fake news and disinformation per se, pointing to the fact that the boundaries of punishable offenses in this regard are already delineated by criminal law (i.e. in the case of hate speech). Moreover, she pointed out that an important question for the participants to address in the finalisation of their recommendations would be how and by whom the experts meant to sit on such Commission ought to be selected. The resource persons stayed for the lunch break, which allowed the citizens to engage in some further, more informal discussions with them.

The feedback of the resource persons left a lasting impression on the jurors, many of whom commented on how their perception of how to deal with disinformation in particular had changed as a result. In Group 2, the part of the group that had been sceptical towards the proposal of a centralised Commission, in particular of the sanctioning part, found themselves confirmed by the resource persons and were now in the majority. Accordingly, the draft recommendation was amended such that the foreseen Commission should certify and promote existing debunking websites across EU Member States, rather than itself classify fake news in a centralised way. The sanctioning capacity of the Commission was also removed, which faced disagreement from the one participant that had made the original proposal (but he accepted the majority decision of the group). Group 2's changed approach to the design and mandate of the Commission found support during the feedback session with Group 1. Moreover, the group specified that the expert-members of the Commission ought to come from various academic and political fields and from all EU Member States.

For Group 1, the input from resource persons was relevant especially to the conversation on education to critical thinking and basic scientific education, supporting the idea of providing citizens with tools to understand and deal with complexity. Feedback from Group 2 highlighted a high level of agreement with the proposals that were being developed by Group 1. After the group exchange, Group 1 refined the proposals already developed.

The fine-tuning of the recommendations in the afternoon proved more controversial and more challenging time-wise in Group 2 than in Group 1. While there were only minor disagreements and revision to be done on the education-focused recommendations of Group 2, the recommendation on the Commission, what it should do and how it should be composed continued to be hotly debated and led to a slight delay in keeping with the overall schedule of Day 2. There was some interesting cross-fertilisation between the groups in the feedback process. For instance, Group 1's reflections on the role of experts influenced their perspective on the draft recommendation of Group 2 to establish a Commission for regulating disinformation:

> *We too had addressed this topic because the idea had come up of having a guarantor body that could be a team of people, of experts who would be in charge of making a selection or in any case of guaranteeing more official, more authoritative information, but at the same time there was also here in the birth the problem of: "but who chooses who the experts are?" (Participant Group 1 in giving feedback to Group 2)*

Policy recommendations

During the final plenary session, participants presented the recommendations that the two subgroups had developed. They were then evaluated through an online form regarding their effectiveness, ease of implementation and potential risk of creating divisions. Finally, participants ranked the recommendations through the Slido app. Due to time constraints, we could not have a plenary discussion on the proposed recommendations and had to move to the ranking and evaluation of the recommendations by the participants straightaway. The results of the evaluation are presented in the following tables.

First, the participants were invited to establish their personal ranking of all recommendations, ranging from the one that they find most important to the one that they find least important. The results of the Slido ranking can be seen in the table below.

Table 2: Ranking of recommendations

Ranking	Policy recommendations	Points
1	Providing tools to encourage active participation and the development of critical thinking at all ages through various proposals in schools, the media and society, useful for understanding social and communication dynamics.	5.5
1	Ensure transparency in communication in the various media, regarding experts, making explicit their CVs, any sources of conflict of interest (e.g. funding, any public or private commitments) and sources of news.	5.5
3	Providing basic science education to all age groups through various proposals in schools, the media and society, also by promoting the training of science communicators.	5.3
4	The strengthening of dialogue with citizens by the institutions: (a) not necessarily through referendums but also through polls b) communicating the political and technical decisions taken in a popular, simple and comprehensible manner c) developing continuous active participation and communicating how this participation can be carried out.	4.9
5	We recommend reforming the system and training methods that can: a) Give citizens the tools to unmask fake news from a technical point of view (how to recognise reliable sources) b) Strengthen civic education and consequently the sensitivity to analysing news in its substance.	4.8
6	The inclusion of courses that provide the basics of the role and functioning of institutions on a national, international and European level in the training curriculum. We also recommend the streamlining of public services.	4.2

7	We recommend that: 1. A commission be created at the European level that: a.) develops a certification system, which provides for the development and promotion of websites or platforms for verifying false information b.) is composed of competent multidisciplinary experts from each member state, who are responsible for verifying information.	3.6
8	Ensuring the plurality of voices.	2.3

In addition, the participants were asked to evaluate each recommendation regarding its perceived effectiveness, feasibility and divisiveness. Where prompts were given on a qualitative scale (e.g. when evaluating effectiveness, participants could evaluate recommendations from 'very effective' to 'very ineffective'), they were scored from 1 to 5, with 5 corresponding to "very effective", "very feasible" or "not divisive at all". For divisiveness, a higher score corresponds to less divisiveness.

Table 3: Individual assessment of policy recommendations in terms of their effectiveness, efficiency, and polarizing effects.

Ran-king	Policy recommendations	Effec-tive-ness	Feasi-bility	Divisive-ness (in-verted)
1	Providing tools to encourage active participation and the development of critical thinking at all ages through various proposals in schools, the media and society, useful for understanding social and communication dynamics	4,25	3	3,266
1	Ensure transparency in communication in the various media, regarding experts, making explicit their CVs, any sources of conflict of interest (e.g. funding, any public or private commitments) and sources of news	4,1875	3,25	3,3125
3	Providing basic science education to all age groups through various proposals in schools, the media and society, also by promoting the training of science communicators	4,1875	2,8125	3,5
4	The strengthening of dialogue with citizens by the institutions: (a) not necessarily through referendums but also through polls b) communicating the political and technical decisions taken in a popular, simple and comprehensible manner c) developing continuous active participation and communicating how this participation can be carried out	4,3125	2,5	3,6875

5	We recommend reforming the system and training methods that can a) Give citizens the tools to unmask fake news from a technical point of view (how to recognise reliable sources) b) Strengthen civic education and consequently the sensitivity to analysing news in its substance	4,3125	2,9375	3,625
6	The inclusion of courses that provide the basics of the role and functioning of institutions on a national, international and European level in the training curriculum. We also recommend the streamlining of public services.	4,4375	3,1875	4,0625
7	We recommend that: 1. A commission be created at the European level that: a.) develops a certification system, which provides for the development and promotion of websites or platforms for verifying false information b.) is composed of competent multidisciplinary experts from each member state, who are responsible for verifying information.	3,8125	2,75	3,3125
8	Ensuring the plurality of voices	4,0625	3	3

Several interesting observations emerge from the results of the evaluation and ranking of the recommendations.

First, there does not seem to be a direct correlation between ranking and evaluation outcomes. For example, the recommendation with the highest partial and total scores during the evaluation is only sixth in the final ranking. Similarly, the recommendations with the highest ranking have comparable effectiveness scores to those of other proposals, while scoring higher on feasibility.

Overall, the partial scores of the individual proposals are fairly comparable, with the exception of the recommendation on the commission for countering fake news, which has lower scores (except for divisiveness). Similarly, the recommendation on the commission ranks second-to-last in the final ranking. This can arguably be attributed to the fact that the Commission and the nature of its tasks were a very controversial topic in the discussion.

Lastly, the recommendation that came last in the ranking was not developed in detail, but appears to be a sort of guiding principle, since the group did not go as far as discussing implementation possibilities or additional details.

Attitudinal study

To better understand the impact of deliberative democracy formats such as citizens' juries on the attitudes of participants, two attitudinal surveys (one at the beginning of the first session, and one at the end of the second session) were conducted. The survey included several general questions about the participants as well as questions through which we could capture the attitudes of citizens on the issues debated at the citizens' jury as well as whether their participation had an impact on individual attitudes.

Most importantly, the survey was interested in (1) whether citizens felt competent to recognise disinformation, (2) the level of trust citizens had vis-à-vis specific actors or organisations, (3) their trust towards governmental decision-making regarding future health crises, and (4) identifying the (dis)agreement with numerous statements on disinformation, the role of politicians and experts in policy-making, and political trust. The total N is 16 as the participant who was not able to participate to the second session, albeit having filled out the pre-session 1 survey, was removed from the dataset.

Concerning citizens' competence to recognise disinformation (see Table 4 below), ahead of the first session, nine of the participants stated that they would be 'sometimes' able to identify disinformation, while four stated that they would be able to do so 'often'. Two of them thought that they could always identify disinformation, and one thought they could never do so. After the second session, four citizens felt more competent (three from 'sometimes' to 'often', and one from 'often' to 'always'), while two citizens felt less competent to recognise disinformation (from 'always' to 'often'). Overall, the change is therefore positive (+2 in total).

Table 4: Participants' perception of their ability to recognise disinformation.

Before session 1	After session 2	Change T2 - T1
2	2	0
1	1	0
1	2	+1
2	2	0
1	2	+1
1	1	0
1	1	0
1	1	0
0	0	0
2	2	0
2	3	+1
1	1	0
1	1	0
1	2	+1

3	2	-1
3	2	-1
Total before session 1	Total after session 2	Overall change T2 – T1
23	25	+2

Note: the asked question was "Do you feel competent to recognise disinformation?".

When asked about their trust in different societal institutions and actors, the citizens showed a wide variety of trust depending on the specific institution/actor (see Table 5). While, before the first session, only one participant trusted 'social media companies', many trusted 'regional or local public authorities', almost all trusted the 'health and medical staff in our country', 'the European Union' and 'scientific experts'. Following the second sessions, some slight changes in trust emerged. While trust remained the same the European Union, it decreased for three actors (media, political parties, social media), while it increased for all remaining seven. In particular, the biggest increase was for the national government (+0.25), starting from a rather low level of trust but increasing substantially. Overall, it appears that participating to the citizens' jury has increased the diffused sentiment of trust.

Table 5: Participants' perception of how trustful various actors are.

Institution/actor	Before session 1	After session 2	Change
The media	0.38	0.31	Less
Political parties	0.13	0.06	Less
Regional or local public authorities	0.75	0.81	More
The police	0.69	0.75	More
Public administration in our country	0.56	0.69	More
Health and medical staff in our country	0.94	1.00	More
Scientific experts	0.81	1.00	More
Social media companies	0.06	1.00	Less
The national government	0.38	0.63	More
The national parliament	0.50	0.63	More
The European Union	0.88	0.88	Same

Note: the asked question was "How much trust do you have in certain institutions? For each of the following institutions, do you tend to trust it or tend not to trust it?"

Regarding the question about trust towards governmental decisions in case of future health crises, there were only minor changes in citizens' attitudes (see Table 6). Out of the 15 participants that provided responses in both survey waves, the majority of the them stated that they 'tend to trust' the government. While one participants' trust in the government decreased (from 2 to 1), it increased for three others (from 1 to 2). Overall, the level of trust towards governmental decisions in case of future health crises increased, but marginally (from 24 to 26 trust points).

In addition to these three questions, the survey also confronted the citizens' jurors with 14 different statement regarding disinformation, and the role of politicians, experts and citizens in political decision-making (see Table 6).

Table 6: Citizens' agreement with various statements.

Statement	Before session 1	After session 2	Change
(a) Disinformation is a major problem in our society	4.31	4.19	Less
(b) Scientific experts must play an active role to shape public policy	4.06	3.94	Less
(c) Information about the SARS-CoV-2 pandemic was well communicated by the government	2.60	2.93	More
(d) I would rather be represented by a citizen than by a specialised politician	2.56	2.38	Less
(e) Politicians should be like managers and fix what does not work in society	3.69	3.44	Less
(f) The leaders of my country should be more educated and skilled than ordinary citizens	4.13	4.06	Less
(g) Social problems should be addressed based on scientific evidence, not ideological preferences	4.06	3.94	Less
(h) The people, and not politicians, should make our most important policy decisions	2.63	2.31	Less
(i) Most citizens have all the competences required to make political decisions	1.81	1.81	Same
(j) Most citizens are capable of understanding the needs of people like me	2.25	2.47	More
(k) Politicians do not understand what is going on in society	3.27	3.40	More
(l) Scientific experts know best what is good for people	3.33	2.94	Less

(m) Decisions about science and technology should be based mainly on what the majority of people in a country think	1.67	2.06	More
(n) The government does enough to tackle disinformation	1.73	1.81	More

Note: the asked question was "To what extent to you agree with the following statements?".

Ahead of the first session, the participants agreed especially with the statements that "disinformation is a major problem in our society" (a), that "scientific experts must play an active role to shape public policy" (b), that (f) "The leaders of my country should be more educated and skilled than ordinary citizens" (f) and that "social problems should be addressed based on scientific evidence, not ideological preferences" (g). The participants were more skeptical whether "most citizens have all the competences required to make political decisions" (i), "Decisions about science and technology should be based mainly on what the majority of people in a country think" (m) and "the government does enough to tackle disinformation" (n).

Beyond these observations it is particularly interesting how the two sessions of the citizens' jury have affected the participants' attitudes. Some trends can be deduced from the participants' responses, yet somehow contradictory in certain regards. First of all, (c) the number of people who agree that "Information about the SARS-CoV-2 pandemic was well communicated by the government" (c) increased (+0.33). The number of people who believe that "Scientific experts know best what is good for people" (l) substantially decreased (-0.40, the sharpest decrease) and conversely the statement "Decisions about science and technology should be based mainly on what the majority of people in a country think" (m) saw the biggest increase (+0.40), yet with a very low baseline. This would hint that participating to the citizens' jury pushed people away from a technocratic vision of society, also confirmed by the decreased agreement (-0.25) with the statement "Politicians should be like managers and fix what does not work in society" (e). Finally, also the statement "The people, and not politicians, should make our most important policy decisions" saw a substantial decrease (-0.31), somehow in contrast with the increase of statement (m) discussed above.

Feedback from participants and resource persons

Overall, the feedback of the participants and resource persons was very positive. All of the participants appreciated the constructive and respectful setting of the discussion and, across both sessions, there was a positive atmosphere among the participants

– even if, at certain points, opinions strongly differed and discussions became very heated. As the word clouds shown in Figure 2 demonstrate, a large majority of citizens seemed to be content with both sessions. The first day of Citizens' Jury was perceived as stimulating, constructive, interesting and even inspiring. This a positive feedback which, in our opinion, highlights the high level of engagement of participants, the quality of the facilitated conversations and the relevance of the topics and trade-offs that were discussed. The terms voiced most frequently in reflecting on the first meeting were 'stimulating and 'interesting', as well as 'constructive', 'inspiring', 'creative', 'useful' and 'to deepen'. Instead, the terms used by the participants to describe the second meeting were more varied in kind: 'authentic', 'concrete participation', 'stimulating', 'wonderful experience', 'pleasant', 'constructive', 'stimulating', 'beautiful', 'enriching', 'European', 'point of encounter', 'welcome' and 'debates'. Among the few not unequivocally positive comments were 'challenging' and 'demanding' (Day 2).

14 of the 16 jurors present on Day 2 showed interest in participating in the transnational citizens' jury in Brussels in March 2024. 9 of the participants inscribed for the project's newsletter and 8 of them were willing to share their experience with the Italian citizens' jury with the consortium and beyond.

Figure 2: Word clouds compared, day 1 and 2.

Notes: Word clouds generated using Slido.

The feedback of the resource persons was positive, but as they only attended parts of the citizens' jury, they could mainly assess the sessions in which they were present. The resource persons appreciated the active participation of the jurors and had lively discussions. However, one resource person that was only present on Day 2 voiced that they did not feel sufficiently briefed as regards the nature of the event and the kind of intervention that was expected from them.

Self-evaluation

The organising team of the Italian citizens jury is overall very content with both the course and outcome of the two sessions. Given the contentious issues that were to be discussed by the participants, there were some initial concerns about potential conflicts that could arise from personal and at times potentially traumatising experiences from during the Covid-19 pandemic. However, while there were indeed significantly diverging views at different points of the process, the participants generally remained polite, constructive and respectful towards one another. One participant mentioned explicitly that the fact that it was possible to create such a 'peaceful' and constructive discussion climate is a very positive take-away for her. The participants were really active and engaged in the discussions throughout both days. The worry that the citizens might be very passive, get bored or exhausted by the discussions and would zoom out did not materialise, on the contrary. A question that remains is whether and to what extent this positive discussion climate, the participants' active engagement and the rather elaborate, complex and nuanced recommendations they formulated are linked to the on average rather high, arguably above-average level of education of the participants compared to the overall Italian population. This aspect points to the familiar self-selection bias regarding participatory democracy formats towards more educated people and, in turn, needs to be taken into account in evaluating such process and its outcomes.

In terms of the programme, the proposed framework worked very well, and was tweaked only slightly regarding the length of specific sessions and in light of the experiences of the 'pilot' citizens' jury in the Netherlands. The programme was dense, but it remained possible to largely stay within the set time frames without having to cut any major parts of the exercise. Time management proved much more challenging on Day 2 than on Day 1. Moreover, the duration of 10 minutes for a break often proved insufficient, so that time for sessions that had gone longer than expected had to be recuperated from the substantive part of the programme. Overall, communication with the participants was effective and balanced. Emails were sent at the right time, with clear and concise information and instructions. Consequently, few individual reminders were needed and there seemed to be no doubt about the format and execution of the mini publics.