



The Ostbelgien Model

What is this initiative?

The Parliament of Ostbelgien (PDG), a regional parliament in Belgium, voted to establish a permanent Citizens' Council on 25 February 2019. The role of the Citizens' Council is to set the agenda for ad-hoc and temporary citizens' panels (akin to citizens' assemblies) that then submit recommendations to the Parliament.

The model combines a permanent Citizens' Council with temporary citizens' panels. This helps ensure that the executive and legislature could be held accountable for acting on the recommendations of a citizens' panel. The permanent Citizens' Council constitutes the third fundamental democratic institution of Ostbelgien together with the parliament and the executive.

How does it work?

The decree adopting the Ostbelgien Model created two new citizens' bodies within the PDG: the Citizens' Council and citizens' panels.

- **Citizens' Council:** The 24-person body in charge of setting the agenda for the Citizens' Panels. The Citizen Council comprises former Citizen Assembly participants, randomly selected by the Permanent Secretary (a PDG employee in charge of facilitating the Citizens' Council process and managing the budget). The restriction of membership in the Citizen Council to those who have participated in a citizens' panel before is to ensure participants have experience of the deliberative and participatory process.
- **Citizens' panel:** A citizens' panel is convened for each new policy area selected by the Citizen Council. Citizens' panel participants are recruited through a random selection process of citizens who do not hold public office and are over the age of sixteen. Participation in a citizens' panel is not compulsory and comprises only those who wish to participate. The size of a citizens' panel is determined by the Citizens' Council.

The Citizens' Council and citizens' panels conduct the deliberative and participatory policy-making process through four steps:

Topic Selection

- The Citizens' Council initiates a call for topic proposals. Any citizen can submit a topic for consideration.
- The Citizens' Council determines the composition and reporting timescale for each Citizens' Panel, which is then convened by the Permanent Secretary.

Deliberation

- The Permanent Secretary provides the new Citizens' Panel with relevant information, invites experts to deliver presentations on the topic of the panel, and selects an external moderator to lead the discussion.



Policy Recommendations

- The citizens' panel compiles and agrees a set of policy recommendations which it discusses at an open meeting of a relevant parliamentary committee.

Implementation.

- The recommendations of the Citizens' Council and citizens' panel are not legally binding, and it is up to the legislature and relevant minister from the executive to implement the findings.
- The Citizens' Council and Permanent Secretary are in charge of monitoring the implementation of recommendations. To assist with this monitoring function, the Parliament is obliged to have two debates on the recommendations within one year of the report of the citizens' panel.

Impact

The first Citizens' Council and citizens' panel (akin to a citizens' assembly and known as Bürgerdialog) was held on 25 September 2019. There have so far been six Citizens' Councils convening citizens' panels covering issues, such as, care, inclusive education and housing.

Tangible examples of policy change and impact resulting from these deliberative processes include:

- A ban on smartphones in schools. A citizens' assembly proposed a partial ban in 2022, and a subsequent group argued for a total ban, which went into effect in 2025
- Easing eligibility requirements for low-income housing; including residents' family members on the boards of assisted-living facilities
- New funding to encourage young people to take up professions such as nursing, which is facing a shortage in the region

The Ostbelgien Model provides compelling examples of improved Democratic Wellbeing, through increased engagement between democratic institutions and the public. This model provides ongoing and meaningful opportunities for the public in the region to have an influence over the decisions that affect their lives.

Where to find out more?

[Bürgerdialog in Ostbelgien \(official Citizens' Dialogue website\)](#)

[Permanent Citizen Dialogue in Ostbelgien – G1000](#)

[SPICe briefing](#)

[Researcher 5-year review of model](#)