



Can citizens be included in epidemic preparedness and response? Yes, and they demand to participate

More than 400 citizens were consulted on epidemic preparedness and response in late September across Europe. The citizens expressed a demand for more transparency and dialogue in both epidemic response and planning, while at the same time they provided policy-makers with thought-provoking insights with the other as; the Internet being the least trustworthy source of information yet the first source citizens consult.

Some of the thought-provoking results from the pan-European citizen consultation included vaccination and information channels. While half of the citizens found mandatory vaccination as an appropriate tool for public health authorities during epidemic threats, more than eight-of-ten answered that it should be mandatory for health care workers. This discrepancy is very interesting, and we will in the upcoming policy-workshop, go more into detail. As mentioned in the lead paragraph, an insight that policy-makers cannot overlook is that the citizen deems the internet as the least trusted information channel, and yet it is the one they consult first. Research has showed that even if this insight, information read online has a subconscious effect on decision-making.

96% were satisfied with the process

94% would like the process to be repeated on different or similar issues

81% would like public health authorities to collect more information from citizen during threats

Source: ASSET [Webtool](#)

Questions for the ASSET High Level Policy Forum:

1. Where will a similar process be relevant in European public health politics?
2. What is the most relevant input from citizens to policy-makers?
3. What is the most interesting finding?

Method

The Danish Board of Technology (DBT) was asked to develop and test a participatory and inclusive method for engaging citizens. The method should convince the EU that citizen participation can be done within a field normally dominated by technical experts.

In fact, epidemic response and planning has clear normative components, involving obvious conflicts and dilemmas, combined with a well-documented scientific knowledge base, and a need for political action in the crisis situation and fulfilling all conditions for citizen participation.

We decided to develop a multi-site method, where the citizens received the same information prior and during the consultations at the same time across Europe. Their votes were reported in real-time into a web-tool, where all the results can be seen and analyzed.