

Ombudsman: Citizens need to know more about expert groups' advice to Commission

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The European Ombudsman, **Emily O'Reilly**, welcomed the progress made so far during her inquiry but has asked the European Commission further to improve the transparency of its 800 plus expert groups by publishing comprehensive minutes of their meetings.

European Commission's Expert Groups

How many?



Composition?



Policy areas?



Research
and
Innovation



Information
Society



Internal
Market



Environment



Justice and
Home Affairs



Others



The European Ombudsman's recommendations

- 1 Greater transparency of expert group deliberations
- 2 Better conflict of interest policy
- 3 Link to Transparency Register
- 4 More balanced composition

Data source: Composition of the Commission's expert groups and the status of the register of expert groups, Directorate-General for Internal Policies, Policy Department D, Budgetary Affairs, European Parliament

The Ombudsman's strategic inquiry concluded that the Commission should publish meeting agendas and background documents in advance, while minutes should normally include the positions expressed by group members and be published in a timely manner. This will enable citizens to see more clearly how expert advice feeds into EU policy-making. An expert group's



deliberations may be kept confidential but only if objectively justified.

Emily O'Reilly stated: *"The European Commission is right to consult widely when it draws up proposals for policy and legislation, seeking the best possible expertise. Much progress has been made since we started our inquiry; however citizens have a right to know fully how expert advice feeds into EU decision-making. This entails knowing what input has been given and by whom, whether by national representatives, industry, civil society or others. Making this kind of information public will help ensure expert groups are viewed as legitimate."*

While the Commission has announced many important and welcome [steps \[Link\]](#) to improve the management of its expert groups during the course of this inquiry - such as making the selection procedure for expert group members more transparent and overhauling its conflict of interest policy - the Ombudsman has several suggestions to further build on this progress.

They include that the Commission draw up a definition of balance when it comes to expert group composition. This will ensure a rigorous internal approach to composing the groups as well as allow the public to see the reasoning behind the selection of a group's members. She also suggests that individual experts make annual declarations of interests and that documents on expert groups' - and their subgroups' - work be published systematically and in a timely manner.

The Ombudsman has asked the Commission to explain by 30 April 2016 how it intends to address her recommendations.

Background

The Ombudsman [opened \[Link\]](#) a strategic inquiry into the composition of expert groups in May 2014. She drew on the results of a subsequent public consultation to make a series of initial proposals to the Commission. The recommendations published today seek to address the remaining transparency concerns when it comes to public scrutiny of expert groups.

There are over 800 expert groups advising the European Commission. These groups can consist of individuals, organisations, Member State and other public authorities. The Commission may decide to use the experts' input when preparing legislative proposals or policy initiatives, as well as in relation to the implementation of legislation, programmes and policies or the preparation of delegated acts. The full recommendation can be found [here \[Link\]](#).