



To Understand, To Enter, To Participate.

Citizens' Recommendations to Make Neighbourhood Houses and Neighbourhood Civic Assemblies More Accessible



An initiative by



Innovative and Inclusive Democratic Spaces for Deliberation and Participation. This document is part of a project that has received funding from the European Union's Horizon Europe research and innovation programme under grant agreement No. 101132431.

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Citizens' Recommendations to Make Neighbourhood Houses and Neighbourhood Civic Assemblies More Accessible



21 February 2026 - 9 May 2026

Scipione dal Ferro Neighbourhood House, Bologna

Citizens' Recommendations to Make Neighbourhood Houses and Neighbourhood Civic Assemblies More Accessible

- 1 Ensure Inclusive Participation in Public Life
- 2 Ensure Everyone Can Understand What Is Being Said
- 3 Set Up a Direct and Accessible Communication Channel with the City Council
- 4 Share Clear Information Across Multiple Channels
- 5 Organise Accessible Transport to Take Part
- 6 Make Peer Language Support Possible
- 7 Create Informal and Accessible Spaces for Active Listening
- 8 Provide Clear Directions for Reaching Events
- 9 Allow People to Take Part in Events Remotely or via Streaming
- 10 Simplify Access to Public Services
- 11 Strengthen Local Support Networks
- 12 Create Direct Communication Channels Before and After Meetings

Key. ● Knowing What Happens in the Neighbourhood Houses ● Getting In and Moving Around
● Taking Part in Meetings and Speaking ● Talking with the City Council

The recommendations are listed in order of the priorities expressed by participants

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- 13** Create Accessible Digital Spaces for the Most Important Initiatives
- 14** Create Simple Maps and Other Information Materials to Find Your Way Around
- 15** Install Understandable Signage That Makes It Easier to Get Around
- 16** Adapt Spaces and Furniture to Ensure Accessibility for Everyone
- 17** Diversify Ways of Listening and Communicating During Meetings
- 18** Provide Effective Audio and Video Equipment
- 19** Provide Dedicated Seats for People with Hearing and Visual Impairments
- 20** Appoint Contact Persons to Support Participants
- 21** Involve Local Networks in Organising Meetings
- 22** Organise Regular Training on Inclusion and Accessibility
- 23** Create Easy-to-Read Reports After Each Meeting
- 24** Establish Inclusive Rules for Public Meetings

Key. ● Knowing What Happens in the Neighbourhood Houses ● Getting In and Moving Around
● Taking Part in Meetings and Speaking ● Talking with the City Council

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The iDEM Project



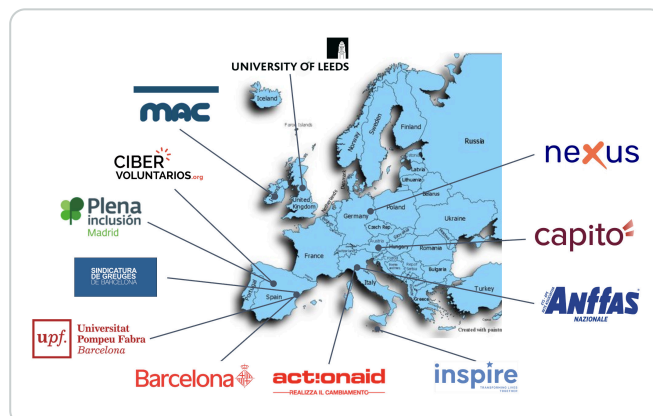
The Problem and Our Response

Every day we come across complex texts that make information hard to understand and can limit the exercise of fundamental rights. These difficulties particularly affect people with intellectual disabilities, with an international background or with limited language skills, who risk being excluded from decision-making processes and public services.



iDEM (Innovative and Inclusive Democratic Spaces for Deliberation and Participation) was created to address this challenge. It is a project funded by the European Union under the Horizon Europe research programme that brings together 12 European partners, coordinated by Universitat Pompeu Fabra in Barcelona.

iDEM studies how natural language processing and artificial intelligence can simplify complex texts and make information more accessible. One of the main solutions is an application that turns documents and messages into versions that are easier to read and understand, fostering truly inclusive democratic processes in which everyone can get informed, take part and make an informed contribution.



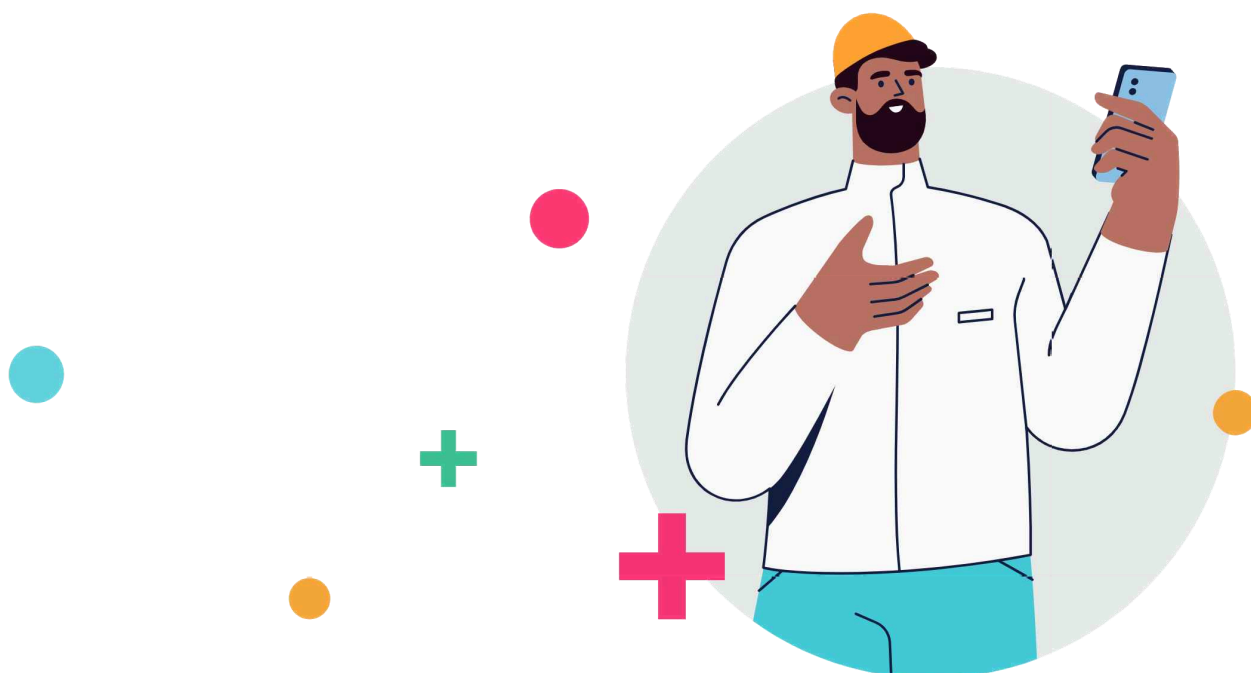
The Use Cases and the Recommendations

Through use cases in four European countries, the iDEM project has tested different scenarios for participation and deliberation. Bologna hosted the second use case, promoted by ActionAid Italia, Anffas Nazionale, Anffas Bologna and Cooperativa Sociale Bologna Integrazione, with the support of the City of Bologna.

The different objectives of the iDEM project use cases:

- + to involve people in the process of developing the simplification tool;
- + to provide an accessible physical and digital space for those who usually risk exclusion;
- + to send the outcomes of the processes to the local authorities involved.

This document contains the recommendations of the use case held in Bologna between February and May 2026, which complement the findings of analyses, research and interviews with experts carried out during the project. The activities share the same goal: to give a voice and a leading role to everyone, strengthen trust in institutions and promote better public decisions.



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The Deliberative Process in Bologna





Collaboration with the Local Community

In this phase, the specific objectives of the use case were defined:

- + Create an inclusive deliberative space, accessible to people with different communication abilities and digital skills.
- + Test the iDEM simplification tool, gathering feedback from participants to improve its prototype.
- + Draw up shared recommendations for the City Council through a process of discussion and consensus-building.

To achieve these objectives, the methods, the necessary resources, the strategies for involving participants and the distribution of tasks among the organisations promoting the use case were then defined. Dialogue with the City of Bologna made it possible to identify some of the discussion topics for the deliberative process.

The People Involved and the Accessibility of the Process

From the outset, the priority was to involve everyone interested in the planned activities, as their participation was essential to achieve the objectives set.

Thanks to Anffas Nazionale, Anffas Bologna and Cooperativa Sociale Bologna Integrazione, it was possible to ensure the participation of 28 people with intellectual disabilities and neurodevelopmental disorders, involved in their many initiatives supporting people with disabilities. ActionAid Italia then took care of involving seven people with different linguistic backgrounds through an open call circulated with the help of local organisations and the Office of the Rights, Cooperation and New Citizenship Unit of the City of Bologna.

Training sessions and presentations in accessible formats were then prepared, with ways of involvement that took participants' suggestions into account, and the support needed to ensure in-person participation was organised.

In addition, an accessible digital space was set up, based on the open-source software Decidim, where people were then able to interact, contribute to drafting proposals or retrieve the material presented during the meetings.

Finally, those who agreed to take part were invited to fill in a questionnaire to assess their reading and writing skills, their digital skills and their trust in public institutions.

The Path to the Result

The 35 people involved took part in a process made up of six meetings, held between February and May 2026.

The deliberative process was based on the goal of making democratic participation more inclusive and accessible, by involving people with intellectual disabilities and people with an international background in drawing up proposals to improve the accessibility of Bologna's Neighbourhood Houses and their Civic Assemblies.



21 February. Preliminary Information

Participants learned about iDEM, the aims of the process and the main features of the app developed within the project. During the meeting, the prototype was tested and initial suggestions were gathered to improve its accessibility and usability.



7 March. Training Meeting

Participants learned more about how the Neighbourhood Houses and Civic Assemblies work through a discussion with Erika Capasso, the Mayor's Delegate for Neighbourhood Houses and New Citizenship, among other portfolios. The meeting made it possible to gather questions and reflections on the main obstacles to participation and to the accessibility of services.



21 March. Dialogue and Discussion (Part I)

The meeting focused on drawing up the first concrete proposals using the Open Space Technology (OST) method. Divided into small working groups, participants formulated the first recommendations. The ideas focused on communication, the accessibility of spaces, participation in meetings and dialogue with the City Council.



11 April. Dialogue and Discussion (Part II)

Through a game-based activity, "What happens if?", 24 critical and realistic scenarios were addressed, to which participants responded with solutions, thus adding to the recommendations that emerged in the first deliberation meeting. The groups' conclusions were shared and discussed in plenary.





18 April. Dialogue and Discussion (Part III)

The recommendations from the previous meetings were reviewed and refined, also testing the text simplification features of the iDEM app. The participants then presented their proposals directly to Erika Capasso and Roberta Toschi, the Mayor's Delegate for Disability, in a discussion session.



9 May. Consensus Session on the Recommendations

Participants validated and prioritised the final recommendations through a vote. The process ended with a moment dedicated to presenting the work done to the Mayor's Delegates Capasso and Toschi, with the proposal to organise a formal meeting to hand over the recommendations to the City Administration.



A Process Built Together

The recommendations in this document are the result of a deliberative process designed according to a model of participation and co-construction of proposals. During the process, participants formulated more than twenty proposals to make the Civic Assemblies of the Neighbourhood Houses, public decision-making processes and dialogue with the City Council more accessible. One of the central points of the discussion was understanding together how political participation can stop being a privilege.

During the six meetings of the Bologna use case, participants were able to count on the help of moderators, facilitators or support staff who accompanied the groups and took care of any specific needs, so that everyone could take part on equal terms.

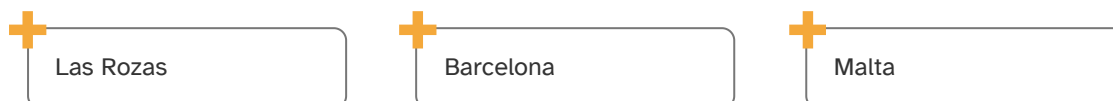
Each meeting was organised to build, step by step, solutions to the problems that participants face every day and to draw up recommendations addressed to the City Council. All stages of the process were shared with participants; plenary sessions and the rotation of group work allowed the proposals to be widely shared, giving everyone the chance to express themselves.

To ensure that all the proposals reached the City Administration, at the last meeting participants voted on the priority recommendations, that is, those considered a priority for bringing about concrete change in the lives of all people who face language barriers.



Next Steps

The process carried out in Bologna is only one part of the iDEM project. The joint work with the pilots in Las Rozas (near Madrid), Barcelona and Malta is a concrete step towards improving the iDEM digital simplification tool.



The use cases supported the drafting of recommendations addressed to different policy-makers, with the aim of encouraging innovation in democratic spaces and processes. The outcomes of these processes aim to help build a more inclusive, legitimate, trustworthy, effective and, ultimately, higher-quality democracy.

The iDEM Project aims to contribute to an innovative and inclusive democracy that fosters the deliberation and participation of everyone. To this end, the project is developing:

- + Guidelines for accurately identifying text difficulties and producing texts that are easy to read and understand, as well as an open-access text corpus to train natural language processing algorithms dedicated to producing easy-to-read and easy-to-understand texts.
- + Recommendations and knowledge on how to make deliberation spaces more accessible and inclusive.
- + Improved communication between citizens and democratic institutions to enable fairer participation for everyone.
- + A free, open-source iDEM service that will give all citizens the opportunity to participate effectively, meaningfully and without discrimination in deliberative and participatory democratic spaces, by simplifying complex texts in several languages.
- + A robust, multilingual, adaptable, unbiased and inclusive AI tool, compatible with civic participation platforms, capable of identifying linguistic difficulties and translating them into easy-to-understand language.

The iDEM tool can have a direct impact on citizens, as it could be used on numerous participatory platforms and could also prove useful for the democratic institutions of the European Union.



An Invitation to Action

The recommendations are part of a broader process to which iDEM aims to contribute, which is why we are launching an appeal to improve the accessibility of deliberative processes, services, events and spaces.



Technology companies and teams wishing to combine innovation and social impact.



Social organisations, civic movements and communities already working to defend accessibility and civic participation.



Media wishing to address the right to understand from a holistic perspective.



Public institutions and officials seeking reference points to develop policies that strengthen democratic innovation.

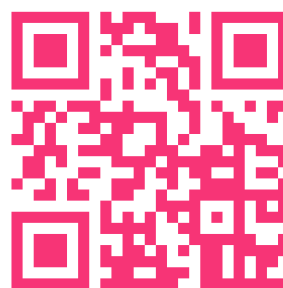
The recommendations of the people who took part in the Bologna use case complement those that the iDEM project itself addresses to governments and public administrations, including examples and resources for putting them into practice.



Download the **iDEM Recommendations to improve accessibility in democratic processes**



More information on **our website**
idemproject.eu/it



Citizens' Recommendations to Make Neighbourhood Houses and Neighbourhood Civic Assemblies More Accessible

Knowing What Happens in the Neighbourhood Houses

4

Share Clear Information Across Multiple Channels

Share information on all social media channels and on digital and physical noticeboards in the neighbourhood, with short, clear messages in plain, accessible language, using bullet points, images and colours to highlight the most important information, and a contact (email and telephone) for requesting information or support.

13

Create Accessible Digital Spaces for the Most Important Initiatives

For the most important initiatives, always create a dedicated, easy-to-consult, multilingual section with text-to-speech on the website of the City Council or the Neighbourhood Houses. The section should explain the subject of the initiative in simple terms and include useful further materials, contacts for information and a space for sending feedback, making comments and adding proposals.

23

Create Easy-to-Read Reports After Each Meeting

After each public meeting, send out a simple report with the points discussed and contacts for sending feedback, requesting further information or suggesting new participants to involve.

Getting In and Moving Around the Neighbourhood Houses

5

Organise Accessible Transport to Take Part

For events, especially the most important ones, provide free, accessible shuttles, sharing services or partner taxis to get there and back.

8

Provide Clear Directions for Reaching Events

In the communications for every event, always state how to reach the venue (public transport line, stop, times) and the contact of a reference person to ask for help, overcome obstacles or get more information.

9

Allow People to Take Part in Events Remotely or via Streaming

Give people the opportunity to follow events via live streaming as an alternative to attending in person, and post the recording on YouTube or other dedicated, free digital channels.

14

Create Simple Maps and Other Information Materials to Find Your Way Around

Provide clear leaflets and maps (paper and digital) with symbols, photos and drawings to help people find their way around the spaces and easily locate the café, toilets, rooms and green areas.

15

Install Understandable Signage That Makes It Easier to Get Around

Put up clear signage with appropriate symbols in event venues so that people can easily find the meeting room, the toilets, the café and the other spaces and services in the building.

16

Adapt Spaces and Furniture to Ensure Accessibility for Everyone

Ensure the architectural accessibility of venues and adapt furniture to accommodate everyone, for example with ramps, lifts, toilets, power sockets, suitable flooring, spaces for wheelchairs and shelves to put things on; where possible, also sliding doors and tactile paths for blind people.

Taking Part in Meetings and Speaking

2

Ensure Everyone Can Understand What Is Being Said

Provide, also on request, facilitators, cultural mediators, re-speaking or Italian Sign Language (LIS) interpreters during public meetings. With the help of cultural mediators or specific language facilitators, make sure that everyone can understand what is said during the meeting and that any speakers understand and take into account the questions asked.

6

Make Peer Language Support Possible

Allow people who speak several languages to make themselves known at the entrance, so that they can support participants with an international background or with communication difficulties.

12

Create Direct Communication Channels Before and After Meetings

Exchange contacts to open a direct communication channel (e.g. mailing list, WhatsApp group, etc.) to stay informed before, during and after meetings.

17

Diversify Ways of Listening and Communicating During Meetings

Use small-group working sessions and diversify interactions, including non-verbal ways of contributing (sticky notes, cards with symbols or other written communication tools), to make participation easier.

18

Provide Effective Audio and Video Equipment

Always make sure that meetings have effective sound systems and suitable visual boards to help everyone understand.

19

Provide Dedicated Seats for People with Hearing and Visual Impairments

Reserve, also on request, strategically placed seats at meeting venues for people who have difficulty seeing and hearing what is said.

20

Appoint Contact Persons to Support Participants

Provide a contact person during meetings whom others can turn to for support, clarification or to make proposals.

21

Involve Local Networks in Organising Meetings

When organising meetings, work with local associations, reception centres, personal support centres or other organisations that provide assistance, in order to promote the meeting, reach people and solve any logistical problems.

22

Organise Regular Training on Inclusion and Accessibility

Organise training courses for Neighbourhood House staff and other public officials on how to ensure accessibility and inclusion in meetings and public spaces.

24

Establish Inclusive Rules for Public Meetings

Organise opportunities for participation, setting rules that encourage the involvement of all age groups, ensure gender balance and that critical issues are heard, and take into account people's free time and public holidays.

Talking with the City Council

1

Ensure Inclusive Participation in Public Life

Promote the opportunity for people with disabilities or an international background to take part in public life, always ensuring they are represented in participatory processes and in public assemblies organised by the City Council or the Neighbourhood Houses. To make this possible, the City Council should share with the Neighbourhood Houses a list of the associations, reception centres and personal support centres operating locally, in order to establish a direct communication channel and thus encourage the participation of people with disabilities or an international background.

3

Set Up a Direct and Accessible Communication Channel with the City Council

Create a direct communication channel with the City Council – an app or website – that is simple and multilingual, with text-to-speech, icons, images and Augmentative and Alternative Communication (AAC); a channel where all the information and documents needed to access a service, a call for applications or a project are easy to find, and where people can also leave opinions, report issues and vote on or prioritise public policies.

10

Simplify Access to Public Services

Introduce simpler procedures so that people with disabilities and with an international background can use services directly, without long waiting times, with enough staff to help people fill in the necessary documents and simple ways to make appointments.

7

Create Informal and Accessible Spaces for Active Listening

Create institutional places where a relationship of trust can be built between the administration and people with disabilities or an international background; spaces run by trained, patient staff able to help people access information and services and to communicate in several languages and in creative, less institutional ways, also with the support of cultural mediators.

11

Strengthen Local Support Networks

Provide skills and resources to the organisations that help people access services or calls for applications by organising training courses, and ensure that these organisations can pass on useful information and opportunities to participate.



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