



Innovative and Inclusive Democratic Spaces for Deliberation and Participation
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D4.1.: Comprehensive assessment of the engagements of hard to reach groups and vulnerable populations in participatory and deliberative processes

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Summary

This report investigates strategies to enhance the inclusivity of vulnerable and hard-to-reach populations in democratic participatory processes. By examining methods, tools, and formats through literature reviews, expert interviews, and case studies, the study identifies effective approaches for engaging individuals with cognitive and linguistic barriers at each stage of participation. Key findings emphasise the need for inclusive design, starting from recruitment through to follow-up, with targeted strategies for outreach, accessible communication, and empathetic facilitation. Traditional recruitment methods, like sortition, often fail to engage marginalised groups; in contrast, direct outreach via trusted community organisations and incentives are more effective. Additionally, providing information in clear, simplified formats—such as visual aids, easy-read documents, and digital applications for real-time language adaptation—helps reduce cognitive barriers and fosters meaningful engagement.

Limitations of the study include the challenges of addressing intersecting vulnerabilities and the lack of extensive longitudinal data on the sustained impact of inclusive participatory processes. Nevertheless, the report makes significant contributions by offering a structured framework for inclusive engagement and flexible facilitation that can improve inclusive



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participation in democratic processes. Future research should explore long-term strategies for sustained engagement and evaluate digital tools for language simplification and multilingual accessibility in participatory processes, particularly within the EU's diverse sociolinguistic context. Overall, this study underscores the necessity of adaptive, ethically grounded approaches to foster inclusive democratic participation and ensure that the results of participatory processes reflect the diverse needs and experiences of all societal groups.

Plain Language Summary

This report looks at ways to make it easier for people from vulnerable groups to take part in public decision-making processes.

These groups are people with learning difficulties, language barriers, or economic problems.

The report reviews other past research, talks with experts and studies real-life examples to identify ways to help people from these groups participate at each step of the process.

The report finds that traditional methods often do not reach marginalised groups. For example, selecting participants randomly. Instead, working directly with trusted community groups and providing incentives like transportation support helps bring more people into the conversation. It also recommends making information easier to understand by using:

- simple language,
- visual aids,
- and digital tools that can adapt language in real-time.

The report notes some challenges such as the need for ongoing support and limited data on how long these efforts keep people engaged. But the report offers a structured way of including diverse voices in democratic decision-making.

Future research should look at ways to keep people involved over the long term and test digital tools that can simplify language and work across different languages.

These are important diverse places like the EU.

Overall, this study shows the need of flexible, respectful approaches to make sure that democratic decision-making includes everyone's experiences and needs.

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Acronyms	
AAIT	ActionAid International Italia ETS
AI	Artificial Intelligence
ANFFAS	Associazione Nazionale Famiglie Di Persone Con Disabilità Intellettive e Disturbi del Neurosviluppo
BOO	Sindicatura de Greuges de Barcelona
CIB	Fundación Cibervoluntarios
D	Deliverable
DOA	Description of action
FG	Focus group
GDPR	General Data Protection Regulation
iDEM	Innovative and Inclusive Democratic Spaces for Deliberation and Participation
IMPD	Institut Municipal de Persones amb Discapacitat
M	Month
NEXUS	Nexus Institut für Kooperationsmanagement und Interdisziplinäre Forschung GMBH
NLP	Natural Language Processing
PIM	Plena Inclusión Madrid
PM	Personal month
T	Task
UPF	Universitat Pompeu Fabra
UCD	User Centred Design
UX	User Experience
WP	Work Package

1. Introduction

1.1. Background and context of the task

Engaging vulnerable populations in participatory and deliberative processes represents a critical aspect of fostering democratic governance, equity, and social justice. To be effective, democratic governance needs the inclusion of diverse, if not all, segments of society in decision-making processes to ensure that policies and interventions reflect the needs of diverse groups, including those often marginalised due to socio-economic status, disability, ethnicity, migration, or limited literacy. (Schlosberg et al., 2017).

As reported by various researchers, the benefits of inclusion are significant. When vulnerable populations are actively involved, the resulting policies are more reflective of diverse societal needs, leading to more sustainable and socially just outcomes (Willis et al., 2022; De Freitas & Martin, 2015). Moreover, their participation helps to enhance the legitimacy of the processes and outcomes, as decisions made with broad-based participation are generally perceived as more legitimate and just (Ayers, 2011). Engaging these groups provides them with an opportunity to express their lived experiences and contributes to a more inclusive and representative governance structure (Moll et al., 2020). Participatory processes that engage marginalised communities, such as deliberative mini-publics or citizens' juries, lead to more effective and equitable policy outcomes, especially in areas like healthcare, climate adaptation, and urban planning (Street et al., 2014; Reed et al., 2016). Therefore, fostering the engagement of these groups is not only a matter of justice but also contributes to more sustainable, inclusive governance structures that better serve society as a whole.

However, there are also substantial challenges in engaging these groups. Common barriers include limited literacy, language differences, and social isolation, which hinder effective participation (Holroyd-Leduc et al., 2016). The design of participatory processes is also often not inclusive, neglecting the need for accessible tools and techniques that accommodate the specific needs of vulnerable populations (De Freitas & Martin, 2015). For example, individuals with reading or comprehension difficulties or migrants who face language and cultural barriers require tailored engagement strategies that go beyond conventional deliberative formats (Reed et al., 2016). These barriers challenging inclusion of such groups, with a specific focus on individuals with cognitive disabilities, have been extensively studied in the context of D1.2.¹ The importance of overcoming these challenges cannot be overstated. The exclusion of vulnerable groups may undermine the quality of participatory processes, for instance, by perpetuating inequalities, resulting in biased outcomes that may fail to address their specific needs effectively (Ayers, 2011).

One of the challenges of including vulnerable populations in participatory processes lies in the high diversity of the groups and needs representing those populations. Vulnerable groups are broadly defined as populations that face significant barriers to social, economic, and civic inclusion. Schlosberg et al. (2017) describe vulnerable groups as those disadvantaged due to

¹ D1.2 An annotation scheme for the linguistic difficulties and for simplification strategies

systemic issues such as poverty, racial or ethnic marginalisation, and lack of access to critical resources, which often results in exclusion from decision-making processes (Castillo et al., 2020). Richardson et al. (2025) further expand on this definition by highlighting that vulnerable groups are composed of individuals who face "multiple disadvantages and have complex needs," necessitating a range of tailored services that consider their specific life circumstances.

Vulnerable groups are often overlapping with "hard-to-reach" or "easy to ignore" groups (Lightbody, 2017). While both groups (vulnerable groups and hard to reach groups) generally experience marginalization and socioeconomic challenges, their primary distinction lies in the focus on vulnerability versus accessibility. In the context of deliberative and participatory democracy, "hard-to-reach" or "easy to ignore" groups refer to populations or subgroups that are less likely to participate in democratic processes due to barriers such as socio-economic disadvantages, marginalisation, or lack of trust in political systems. These groups are often characterised by low levels of engagement, limited access to information, or feelings of alienation from mainstream decision-making processes. According to Alonso and Dejaeghere (2023:3), "these groups may include people disadvantaged by race, ethnicity, gender identity, age, disability, sexual orientation, religion, citizenship status, socioeconomic background, parental status, limited language proficiency, rural origin, renters, homeless, impoverished people, or other identities and lived experiences".

So far, the inclusion of vulnerable groups in participatory processes have left several blind spots in terms of how best to include which vulnerable group at different stages of the process. As reminded by (Gherghina et al., 2021, p. 633): "research has mostly focused on the recruitment stage and found random selection of participants as the best way to prevent exclusion. Less attention has been paid to the two following stages of deliberation: the event itself and its outcome."

1.2. Objective of the task

The Innovative and Inclusive Democratic Spaces for Deliberation and Participation (iDEM) project aims to develop solutions to remove language barriers that hinder the participation of individuals with communication difficulties who are marginalised in democratic processes due to the inherent complexity of the language used in documents, debates, and discourses.

The project is exploring the limitations of the current marginalisation of deliberative processes, particularly related to the lack of linguistic skills in various social groups such as people with cognitive disabilities, migrants, and senior citizens. It is using a user-centred design (UCD/UX) approach to develop technological solutions that aim to create more accessible and inclusive democratic spaces. The iDEM project implements natural language processing (NLP) technologies to facilitate reading, comprehension, and simplification of information, to promote equitable democratic participation.

The main objective of the task T4.1.² is to carry out a comprehensive assessment of the engagements of hard to reach groups and vulnerable populations in participatory and deliberative processes, especially the ones encountering communication problems. While the primary focus of this deliverable is on individuals with cognitive disabilities, migrants and elderly people, as they are the main target groups of our pilot studies, other target groups, where specific efforts can be required in the context of deliberative and participatory processes (such as children) have been considered.

Based on a literature review and on various semi-structured qualitative interviews with experts in the field of participation, this deliverable aims to address the following research question: *What kinds of techniques, formats and tools can be used to support the inclusion of hard to reach groups and vulnerable populations at different stages of participatory processes?* Through a comprehensive assessment, the report seeks to contribute to more inclusive participatory frameworks that truly represent the voices of vulnerable populations, leading to more equitable and effective policy outcomes.

Relying on Schweizer et al. (2022: 34) we differentiate "formats," "methods," and "tools" to clarify participation processes. "Formats" refer to structured frameworks that organise citizens or stakeholders in decision-making processes through a series of steps, from preparation to follow-up. These formats are implemented using various "methods" (e.g., group discussions, voting), which allow participants to engage and contribute. However, methods alone are typically insufficient to facilitate full participation. Finally, "tools" are the specific resources or instruments (like software or physical materials) that support methods and formats, either online or offline.

1.3. Link with the other tasks and WPs

This task is strongly related to various tasks from WP1. *Theoretical Foundations: Power Structures, Inequalities, Intersectionality in Deliberative and Participatory Democratic Spaces; WP4. User engagement, piloting and monitoring innovative deliberative and participatory processes; and WP6. Ethical Principles and Procedures.*

Within WP1³, this task is related to T1.2⁴ as investigates the accessibility barriers faced by individuals with communication difficulties, including those with cognitive disabilities, in participatory and democratic processes. T1.2. and T4.1. follows similar methodologies and are highly interrelated, as T1.2 mainly focuses on the barriers and problems and T4.1. analyses the solutions to overcome those barriers, in forms of techniques, methods and formats enhancing inclusivity and accessibility in participatory processes. In addition, the results of D4.1. will feed

² T4.1 Comprehensive assessment of the engagements of hard to reach groups and vulnerable populations in participatory and deliberative processes

³ WP1 Theoretical Foundations: Power Structures, Inequalities, Intersectionality in Deliberative & Participatory Democratic Spaces

⁴ T1.2. Report on barriers, strategies, and support to increase inclusion

into T1.1⁵ where effective accessibility of people with cognitive disabilities will be analysed from a theoretical perspective.

Within WP4⁶ this task is related to T4.2.⁷ where the focus will be on inclusive facilitation and moderation techniques. In this sense, T4.2. will therefore take stock on D4.1., where the question of inclusive moderation and facilitation has been addressed. In addition to that, T4.3. *Solution ideation*, and consequently T4.4. *Prototyping of our solution (design/prototype)* and T4.5. *Pilots Implementation* will rely on the learning from D4.1. in order to build and implement the methodology for piloting the case studies. This deliverable will be especially relevant for T4.3. as the methods and recommendations as well as some of the recommended participatory formats will be used for the three iDEM pilots based on their specific needs and target groups.

Within WP6⁸, D4.1. profited from the ethical procedures (See Annex 1), which were established for the WP1 and WP4, in T6.1. *Ethics Protocols and Monitoring*, in regards to the interviews with different experts, stakeholders and facilitators, and the focus groups. This concluded in the production of a protocol for conducting research with individuals with language barriers, including cognitive disabled people, approved with respect to its ethical implications and data protection as part of the WP6. The overall ethical protocol that was established for the project can be found in the D6.1.

This deliverable is structured as follows. In section 2, we will introduce the methodology we used to collect and analyse the data for preparing this deliverable. This deliverable relies on semi-structured interviews carried out with experts as well as on a research of both grey and scientific literature. The data collected were then analysed in a qualitative way. Section 3 will report on the results of our qualitative analysis. This section will be divided into 2 parts. The first part will report on various methods and techniques that can be used to enhance participation of vulnerable groups at different stages of a participatory process. In a second part, it will introduce various participatory formats, in forms of factsheets, which have been already tested with vulnerable groups. These formats aim to inspire the design and implementation of the project's pilots. Finally, the conclusion will summarise the results of this deliverable and identify several issues that need to be addressed in future research.

2. Methodology

This section reports on the methodology used in the context of T4.1. The analysis and results of these processes are presented in section 3. The collection of the various data was carried out in a cooperative way, involving all partners in the task (Nexus, CIB, PIM, ANFFAS, IMPD, BOO, AAIT). Nexus, as task leader, was responsible for the development and implementation of the data

⁵ T1.1. Develop the theoretical foundations for democratic deliberative innovations to remove barriers to access for marginalised people with cognitive disabilities

⁶ WP4 User Engagement, Piloting, & Monitoring Deliberative & Participatory Democracy

⁷ T4.2. Enhancing the production of inclusiveness by facilitators,

⁸ WP6 Ethical Principles & Procedures

collection strategy, including the search and collection of the relevant documents, the definition of the interview guidelines and the analysis of the data.

As previously stated, this deliverable relies on different qualitative data collection methods (literature analysis, and expert interviews) in order to collect and analyse potential solutions enhancing the inclusion of vulnerable groups in participatory and deliberative processes.

2.1. Literature research and Internet research

This section introduces the process that was implemented to collect information from the literature review, as described in the following section. It also establishes an approach for transdisciplinary cooperation of the different partners concerning the interpretation of literature.

2.1.1. Step 1: Definition of the research framework for the explorative research

As a first step, the research team discussed and agreed on the framework and the methodology for the literature research. As defined in the proposal, the general focus was on tools, techniques, and recommendations on how to engage citizens with reading, writing and comprehension difficulties, as well as migrants. In addition to that, the research team also looked at various inclusive participatory formats, which have been already tested, and at best and - when possible - worst practices.

For the exploratory research, we defined a list of keywords that were related to the description of T4.1. We included both the terms and their commonly used variations in scientific discourse. A full list of the keywords used in the search can be found in Table 1 (Research Table) below. It was then decided to use these keywords to carry out a search query with both Scopus⁹ and Web of Knowledge¹⁰. Additional literature would complete the list of final items to be analysed.

Moreover, it was determined that Zotero¹¹ would serve as the main repository for the documents used in this analysis. Its ability to store documents in primary folders allows different partners to access and analyse them separately. The consortium uses a shared folder for important documents, making them easily accessible.

2.1.2. Step 2: Retrieving and selecting the documents to be analysed

Using the defined keywords, searches were conducted on the platforms *Scopus* and *WEB of Science*, resulting in the collection of 367 articles from Scopus and 30 articles from WEB of Science. All retrieved texts were then collected in the open-source reference management software *Zotero*.

⁹ <https://www.scopus.com/>

¹⁰ <https://www.webofknowledge.com/>

¹¹ <https://www.zotero.org/>

Search engine	Searched in	Search query
Scopus	TITLE-ABS-KEY	Democra* AND (particip* OR deliberat*) AND (citizen* OR stakeholder*) AND (inclusive* OR inclusion*) AND (marginalise* OR vulnerab* OR hard-to-reach*) AND (tools* OR formats* OR techniques*)
WEB of Science	Title, Abstract, Keyword Plus	Democra* AND (particip* OR deliberat*) AND (citizen* OR stakeholder*) AND (inclusive* OR inclusion*) AND (marginalise* OR vulnerab* OR hard-to-reach*) AND (tools* OR formats* OR techniques*)

Table 1. Library Search Expressions Table

Next, the partners defined criteria for the selection of articles as part of the final corpus to be analysed. Articles were removed according to the following exclusion criteria:

- a. Content or focus was deemed to be too theoretical in nature.
- b. Texts in which the central focus was not on the inclusion of vulnerable or hard-to-reach groups.
- c. Texts written in a language not covered within the consortium.

Following this first analysis of the gathered material, 318 articles were deemed outside of the scope of the study and removed. From the 49 selected articles we selected those articles for an extensive thematic analysis, which explicitly thematized solutions for inclusive participation. This research was completed by research on Google and Google Scholar. This complementary research was especially relevant in order to identify grey literature focusing on participatory formats and best practices.

Subsequently, a structure was developed for organising the resultant articles into sub-groups within each task according to the structure proposed by the consortium.

The sub-categories for T4.1 can be found below:

- Accessible formats by design
- Best & worst cases
- Digital tools & solutions
- Enhancing inclusivity of formats
- Research projects

The articles were then sorted in Zotero according to the defined sub-categories. When possible, effort was made to ensure that an article was sorted into the sub-category to which it

most closely corresponds, although some articles were applicable across several sub-categories as well as several Tasks.

2.1.3. Step 3: Analysis of the selected articles and documents

Nexus created a detailed plan and Excel sheet to facilitate the organisation of the requisite work for the bibliography review. The gathered texts were distributed among the partners within the consortium for further analysis and summary of the content relevant to the central objectives of T4.1. Partners were also given the opportunity to further determine the relevancy of their assigned articles to the task and removed articles deemed irrelevant according to the selection criteria defined above.

As a result of the analysis, a table with different kinds of solutions, best practices and inclusive formats was established. The analysis concentrated on the following categories: Types of processes and formats, stages of the processes, actors involved, and their roles during specific stages of the processes, tools, techniques and instruments enhancing inclusiveness, impacts, role of online and offline participatory processes.

2.2. Experts interviews

In addition to the literature analysis, the research team carried out semi-structured interviews with experts in the field of participatory and deliberative democracy. In this task, Nexus was responsible for defining the methodology and coordinating the work of the other contributors. Nexus developed a first draft of the guidelines for the expert interviews (see annex 2), which was subsequently reviewed and improved by the other partners involved in this task. Nexus also carried out a search for experts, which was then completed by the other partners. Finally, each partner involved in this task was expected to conduct at least one interview with one expert, as well as to transcribe and translate it into English and to send it to Nexus, which carried out the analysis of the data. In this section, we will describe the process behind the collective effort and analyse the information from the experts.

2.2.1. Identification and Recruitment of the experts

In a first step, the entire group of partners identified the potential experts that might be interviewed in the context of this task. Experts were identified/chosen for their in-depth knowledge of or experience with inclusivity vulnerable groups in participatory and deliberative processes. To achieve this, an Excel sheet was shared by all the partners included in the task, where each member had to fill in an or several expert(s) they knew about (either from their own organisation or from other institutions or organisations) and provide information on their expertise and background. In addition, internet research was carried out in order to find further experts beyond the networks of the partners involved in the project. We also used the snow-ball effect technique, asking experts at the end of the interview if they could recommend further experts to reach out.

The experts were selected mainly on the basis of their diversity in background (scholar or practitioner), expertise (design, facilitation, moderation of various citizen participations with various kinds of vulnerable groups), geographical location (Spain, Italy, France, Germany, etc.). The aim was to obtain a great diversity of knowledge and viewpoint on our topic of research. The recruitment happened generally per mail, where experts were introduced to the project and asked if they would agree on being interviewed. The interviews took place between July and September 2024. It is worth noting that the recruitment started in the beginning of the summer, which made it difficult to reach out to the experts. In case the experts agreed on an interview, it took place generally online.

In total 22 interviews were carried out. The table below provides an overview of the experts, who have been interviewed for this task. The average duration of an interview was one hour. It is important to note that these interviews (esp. the ones marked with *) were also used in the context of T1.2.

	Position / the institution of the expert	Area of expertise
1	Missions Publiques*	Participatory and deliberative democracy
2	Federation for Innovation in Democracy	Participatory and deliberative democracy
3	Technical University of Berlin*	Deliberation with people with migration background
4	University of Coimbra	Expert in citizen participation processes
5	University of Stirling*	Expert in citizen participation and learning disabilities
6	University College of Cork*	Expert in citizen participation with children
7	Polytechnic University of Milan	Deliberative democracy
8	ActionAid	Theories and techniques of deliberative democracy
9	Urban Ecology Department of the Barcelona City Council*	Participatory and deliberative democracy

10	Particitiz	Public participation and citizens panels in multilingual environment
11	Alas Foundation*	Adult disabilities, cognitive disabilities
12	DINCAT	Social psychologist with expertise with people with disabilities
13	International Observatory on Participatory Democracy	Local government and participatory democracy expert
14	Geographer-traveller	Public policy and experience with disabilities
15	Sociolab	Participation in urban planning and people with cognitive and physical disabilities
16	Es geht LOS	Public participation expert
17	Nexus*	Background citizen participation, psychology and inclusion
18	ANFASS	Expert in Inclusion and participation
19	Facilitator in an association	Participation with people with disabilities, transition to working life
20	anonymous	Participation with people with disabilities and social integration
21	Barcelona Municipal employment services	Work with people with disabilities, education and facilitation.
22	Barcelona municipality	Feminisms, LGTBI, Prevention, AND COEXISTENCE

Table 2. Experts profiles Table

2.2.2. Data collection and analysis

The interviews were carried out in a semi-structured manner, relying therefore on an interview guideline. The first draft of this guideline was defined by Nexus and collectively discussed and improved, together with the partners involved in this task. Once finalised, the guideline, like all other documents, went through the ethical committee for review (see [annex 1](#): ethical procedures). Before carrying out the interviews, we organised an online introductory meeting to ensure methodological consistency across all partners involved.

The guidelines helped define a high-level, thematic script for implementation of the semi-structured interviews, guiding the interviewers through the questions but at the same time allowing deviation from the questions depending on the context, expert and the course of discussion. The interview guidelines (available in [annex 2](#)) aimed to gather insights into techniques, methods and formats used to enhance inclusivity of vulnerable groups in participatory processes. Following main topics were addressed:

- Tools, techniques, and formats to include vulnerable groups in deliberative processes are mentioned by the interviewees
- Kinds of adaptations of processes to be able to include vulnerable groups in deliberative processes
- Problems and limitations of including vulnerable groups in deliberative and participatory processes
- Use of technologies to enhance inclusivity of vulnerable groups in participatory processes

The methodology defined towards interviewing experts was to establish semi-structured questions. Those were created to gather insights related to every part of a participatory process and establish with the experts possible problems and solutions, as well as gather insights into potential best and worst practices.

Once the interviews were concluded, the data and information collected from the experts by the various partners involved in the task were uploaded to a dedicated folder in the secure cloud storage system provided by Nexus. Only the partner responsible for conducting the interview and Nexus have access to the complete data set pertaining to the participants, in accordance with the General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) that the project adheres to.

The various interviews were analysed through a coding system which includes types of techniques, methods and tools, and noting the steps of the participatory process where these solutions appeared.

3. Results

The output of this task will be reported in two parts. The first part will describe deliberative and participatory processes, where different stages of the processes will address tools, techniques, and recommendations on how to engage vulnerable groups in deliberative and participatory processes. In a second part, a collection of suitable formats which can be used for the piloting of the cases will be described in form factsheets.

3.1. Description of the stages

Participatory processes are typically structured into several distinct, yet interlinked, stages. While specific participatory processes may be designed in different ways, depending on various

factors - such as the goal, the participants, the context or the timeframe to name but a few - they generally all follow a similar path involving different critical stages, including design and preparation of the process, recruitment of the participant and promotion of the event, providing information, deliberation leading to an outcome, publication of the results and follow-up. In the next subsections will well report on how inclusion of vulnerable groups can be enhanced during these different stages.

3.1.1. Preparation stage (Before deliberation)

Before initiating the deliberation phase, several preliminary stages must be carried out by the organisers to ensure a well-structured and inclusive process. In the preparation stage, organisers define the issue or problem and establish a methodology tailored to suit the process's objectives. Next, in the recruitment stage, they promote the event and recruit participants, inviting them to engage in the deliberation process. Finally, organisers provide participants and experts with all the necessary information and brief them on how to engage during the process.

3.1.1.1. Designing and preparing the process

In this stage, organisers set the foundation of the process. Firstly, they design the process, by framing the issue and defining the methodology, with an emphasis on creating inclusive processes tailored to the participant's respective personal needs. Secondly, they need to take all the logistical and material aspects into account.

Including the target groups in the process design

Vulnerable groups should participate in the design phase of a participatory process to ensure the inclusivity of the process from the very beginning. Including the respective target groups in the process design so make sure that their specific expectations, needs and barriers are taken into account (Berghs et al., 2017). Their early involvement helps tailor the project's goals, methods, and resources to be accessible and relevant, fostering empowerment and reducing the risk of exclusion during later stages.

In their pilot project aiming at designing a citizens' panel to make schools more inclusive, Norwich and Webster (2024) highlight the need to involve both young people with special needs and disabilities and their parents or carers into the process. Vulnerable groups are seen not only as participants but also as active co-designers who consciously shape the outcomes, thereby facilitating the development of truly inclusive participatory processes (Hodson et al., 2023).

Experts interviewed also pointed out how important it is to involve the vulnerable groups in the process design, for instance to let them have a say in the design of the questions that will be discussed but also in deciding which experts should be invited to speak (Interview 5). The establishment of an advisory team consisting of target group members, who advise about how

the process should be adapted, was also seen as a viable approach to make the process more accessible.

"We formed a young advisory team... they helped us to decide on crucial criteria like what should the age of Assembly members be, what should the types of activities be like... They helped ensure that the assembly was as accessible as it was in terms of being able to engage seven-year-olds and seventeen-year-olds within the same space." (Interview 6)

Including the target group in the design of the process can also contribute to choosing a topic which is better aligned with the interests of the participants. According to several experts, the selection of the topic is very important and should be relevant for the participants involved in order to enable them to provide a meaningful contribution. To some experts however, the topic should not only focus on the vulnerabilities or barriers experienced by the target groups. "We can not limit the discussion to disability-related issues. People with disabilities have opinions about all sorts of topics, from transportation to housing. They need to be part of those conversations as well." (Interview 22).

In designing participatory processes, a critical point was on the decision whether the target group is homogeneous or mixed, involving both vulnerable and non-vulnerable participants. For homogeneous groups, a focused, tailored approach can address specific needs, like simplified language, flexible timelines, or additional support mechanisms, which increases engagement and reduces barriers (McDonald & Raymaker, 2013). In contrast, mixed groups require balancing diverse communication needs, creating spaces where power dynamics do not overshadow vulnerable voices, and ensuring that all participants feel equally valued and heard. Research highlights that without careful preparation, mixed-group settings can inadvertently marginalised vulnerable participants, undermining their empowerment and limiting genuine inclusion (Cornwall, 2008).

Interview 6 reported on the case of two climate assemblies in Scotland and Ireland with different designs. In Scotland, both groups worked in parallel but were integrated, fostering a sense of intergenerational equity. This approach allowed children to contribute on equal footing with adults, influencing the recommendations and policy discourse. In contrast, the Irish approach kept the two processes distinct, with limited direct interaction. Children presented their recommendations to adults, who endorsed them in their reports. This model still achieved endorsement of the children's ideas, but without the continuous, interactive dialogue seen in Scotland. When addressing vulnerable and non-vulnerable groups in the very same deliberation process, another participant moreover suggested exclusively involving vulnerable citizens in a preparatory phase. Homogeneous groups allow vulnerable participants to share experiences, learn about their rights, and discuss their specific needs without the pressures of a multi-stakeholder setting (Interview 8).

Ensuring participant empowerment from the outset

Foreseeing an initial empowerment phase can help vulnerable participants become familiar with the process and learn about their rights and their participation's political significance (Interview 8). Such an approach would help participants build confidence before getting fully

involved in the deliberative setting. Empowerment initiatives, such as rights-based training and awareness sessions, would also strengthen participants' confidence in expressing their respective opinions and help to understand their specific role in decision-making processes (Interview 12). The interviewee 14 noted that many families may not believe in the capabilities of their relatives with disabilities, which leads to overprotection and limits their autonomy. It is essential to involve families in the empowerment process while ensuring that they do not overshadow the voices of people with disabilities.

In this stage, facilitators can analyse the participants' specific necessities, map out accommodation needs, and establish a framework that encourages active engagement (Interview 15). This also involves assessing the participants' respective personal backgrounds and potential support needs to enable an inclusive process from the outset, thereby ensuring that individuals feel informed and at ease when participating.

Adapting the timeframe

Interviewees highlighted the necessity of extended preparation time to ensure inclusivity. For example, Interview 5 noted that the process spanned a full year, during which organizers conducted individual assessments to address communication needs and fostered trust-building workshops. This preparatory work enabled participants, especially those with learning disabilities, to better understand and engage in the citizen jury process. Additionally, the same expert stressed the importance of contingency plans or back-up strategies, such as slowing down deliberation or arranging extra workshops, to maintain inclusivity when participants encountered difficulties with the material (Interview 5). Interviewee 22 clearly argues in favour of a long-term process with several events. It would not be enough to involve people in a one-off event. Long-term and regular engagement is key to making participation part of vulnerable groups' everyday lives and enable trustful relationships not only among the participants themselves but also between participants and facilitators (Interview 5).

Preparing the organisation of the event(s)

Experts also stress the necessity of providing the infrastructural resources required to cater to vulnerable citizens' specific needs. This may include a fully accessible location, personal support, or an adequate means of transportation (Interview 2).

The choice of location is crucial when organising citizen deliberations with vulnerable groups because it influences both participation levels and the quality of engagement. Research highlights that accessible and welcoming environments help foster a sense of belonging and reduce barriers for marginalised communities. For instance, Esau (2007) argues that the physical space of a deliberation can either empower or alienate participants, especially if they face socio-economic disadvantages, which often impact their mobility and comfort in different settings. Therefore, organisers should prioritise locations that are physically accessible, centrally located, and familiar to the target group to encourage attendance and minimise logistical challenges (Lub & Uytterlinde, 2012). Furthermore, the setting should be culturally sensitive and inclusive, which may involve choosing venues in familiar environments such as within community centres rather than government buildings, where vulnerable participants

may feel out of place (Strange, 1972). Mitlin (2021) also emphasises that the design and arrangement of the space can support open dialogue, recommending circular seating and private spaces where participants feel safe to express their views.

Moreover, additional human resources are essential in organising citizen deliberations with vulnerable groups, as they ensure the process is both accessible and supportive for participants. Human resources may involve: skilled facilitators helping to create an inclusive environment where participants feel safe to share their perspectives technical or logistical support personnel for managing various accessibility needs, including transportation arrangements and on-site assistance for individuals with physical limitations or technological support when it comes to using online tools, interpreters and cultural liaisons, when working with linguistically or culturally diverse groups. Interview 10 also referred for instance to inclusivity teams, where trained individuals help vulnerable participants navigate challenges and feel comfortable, ensuring a supportive and inclusive environment.

3.1.1.2. Recruiting participants

Truly inclusive participatory processes depend heavily on recruitment efforts with a significant outreach to marginalised or vulnerable groups. Recruitment strategies should therefore always try to address those who feel politically disengaged or who believe they have nothing to contribute.

Tailored recruitment strategies

Inclusive recruitment requires strategies that reach beyond conventional methods. For instance, our interviewees affirmed that the established approach of participant sortition often fails to reach the most vulnerable citizens

"Traditional methods like sortition just don't work for people with learning disabilities. Many aren't registered to vote, have unstable housing, or their support workers act as gatekeepers, deciding for them that they couldn't participate." (Interview 5)

Interview 6 highlighted additional recruitment difficulties when working with children, as random selection lacks adequate datasets for representativeness, necessitating close collaboration with schools and gatekeepers. Effective recruitment also involves addressing potential barriers for participants, such as logistical support for transport, childcare, or the presence of a support person (Interview 2).

As reported by Alonso Toucido and Dejaeghere (2023), direct engagement with community centres, schools, and associations may be ideal as these organisations are often trusted by vulnerable groups and can therefore aid in crafting a more inclusive recruitment process (cf. also Interview 9). Personalised recruitment, including door-to-door outreach or individual engagement, was further noted as essential for building trust and helping participants feel valued and reassured about their role in the process (Interview 10).

"You need to ask people: 'What would be an impediment for you to come?' and help them address those barriers—whether it's transport, child care, or needing a buddy for support." (Interview 2)

In a citizen assembly on homelessness in Deschutes County in the State of Oregon, the organisers employed a dual recruitment strategy to ensure the inclusion of vulnerable groups: Out of 12,750 invitations, 12,500 were sent to randomly selected residential addresses, while the remaining 250 were distributed directly to people experiencing homelessness through local service organisations. Additionally, the organisers collaborated with the Central Oregon Youth Action Board (YAB), a group of young people with firsthand experience of homelessness, who not only took part in shaping the assembly's content but also participated in presenting the assembly's recommendations alongside local officials. (Bürgerrat, 2024).

Offering incentives

Incentives play a crucial role in encouraging vulnerable groups to participate in participatory processes, as they address both practical barriers and motivational needs. Material incentives, such as stipends or travel reimbursements, can make participation feasible for individuals facing financial or logistical challenges. Providing financial compensation, for instance in the form of an allowance, can help alleviate the economic burden that participation might otherwise impose and acknowledge the time and effort of participants, making engagement more accessible (interview 1). Beyond financial incentives, practical support like child care, meals can also reduce barriers to participation, particularly for those with limited resources.. Non-material incentives, such as opportunities for skill-building and social recognition, as well as the recognition of a day-off by the employer can also be motivating.

3.1.1.3. Informing on the event

Vulnerable populations may have varied literacy levels, language needs, and levels of trust in institutional processes, which can all impact their understanding and willingness to participate. When informing vulnerable groups about a deliberative event, several factors must be carefully considered to foster accessibility and engagement. Communication should be clear, straightforward, and tailored to the specific needs of the target group to avoid potential misunderstandings. Using simple language, visual aids, and culturally relevant materials can help reduce cognitive barriers and ease comprehension (Rowe & Frewer, 2005). One interviewee emphasised the importance of providing clear, distraction-free information tailored to participants' needs, such as using straightforward sentences with capitalised key actions to ensure clarity (Interview 12). This approach facilitates a better grasp of the subject matter, thereby enhancing participants' confidence and their capacity to engage meaningfully in subsequent stages.

The use of simplification techniques, such as colour-coded agendas, easy-to-read documents, and pre-meeting summaries, is crucial for enhancing accessibility and comprehension (Interview 11). Additionally, scripts can be simplified and revised collaboratively with participants, potentially rephrasing unclear concepts in order to facilitate their understanding of the topics of discussion (Interview 12). However, Interview 18 warned against the challenge for the facilitators of simplifying the various documents without losing their original meaning.

Here again, addressing the target group as immediately as possible is essential; organisers should consider providing all necessary information through trusted channels such as

community organisations, social workers, or local advocates who have built up trustful relationships with the citizens to be reached (Interview 5).

3.1.1.4. Briefing experts and participants

Our interviewees repeatedly highlighted the importance of briefing and even training both experts and participants before setting up a deliberative event.

Briefing participants

As previously stated, inclusive participatory processes should include the target groups in its preparation. Training can help participants, particularly those with limited experience in civic engagement and participatory processes, build confidence, feel valued, and participate more meaningfully. This includes offering training sessions or guidance on how to use digital tools (e.g., Zoom) and providing clear instructions on how to participate effectively. Interviewee 8 mentioned for instance role-playing games designed to train participants in using online platforms, which can help build confidence and digital literacy. Empowerment initiatives, such as rights-based training and awareness sessions, can also help participants feel more confident in expressing their opinions and understanding their role in decision-making processes (Interview 12).

Engaging with participants beforehand allows facilitators to introduce the topic, review any presentations or documents together, and provide further explanations if required. This pre-engagement helps participants to better understand the process's objectives and reduces cognitive barriers (Interview 11). Experts also emphasise the importance of clarifying expectations and outlining the dynamics of a deliberative process to ensure that participants feel confident and prepared to engage.

Briefing experts

For experts and facilitators, training is equally crucial; it helps them communicate complex information in accessible terms, as well as sensitively engage with individuals who may have different socio-economic, cultural, or linguistic backgrounds.

One interviewee affirmed that experts ought to be provided with specific guidelines on how to communicate effectively with participants affected by learning disabilities, e.g., by applying simplified language and visuals. Experts would also benefit from facilitators' guidance in areas they might not be familiar with, e.g., ethics or safeguarding principles (Interview 5).

A preparatory training might teach facilitators to remain patient, observant, and attentive to people who communicate in varied ways (Interview 8) and to better understand the different communication needs of participants and to ensure that everyone has the opportunity to speak (Interview 9). The facilitator's ability to observe and assess participants' needs in real time can significantly improve the inclusiveness of the process (Interview 19). According to interviewee 13, facilitators need to know how to manage discussions, handle group dynamics, and make sure that vulnerable individuals feel safe and confident to express their opinions.

This includes creating a trusting and safe space where participants feel valued, even if they are not experts on the topic being discussed.

3.1.2. Implementation stage (During deliberation)

During the deliberative event, participants are provided with all the pertinent information through various communication methods such as printed handouts, Q&A sessions with experts, presentations, and audio or video content. This allows participants to ask informed questions and deepen their understanding of the issue. In the following stage, participants engage in a dialogue in order to debate and critically assess the information gathered. This format typically occurs in small groups and is guided by specific questions crafted by the organisers. Its core aims are to enable consensus and to generate recommendations.

3.1.2.1. Providing information on the topic

Providing clear and accessible information to vulnerable groups before a deliberation is essential to create a foundation of understanding and provide a shared baseline of knowledge among participants.

Ensuring that information is simplified, jargon-free, and available in multiple formats allows these individuals to engage fully with the material and form informed opinions. Various methods, such as simplified presentations and explanations, have been employed to make complex information easier to understand. For example, in the Scottish Climate Assembly, simplified online presentations and YouTube clips were used (Interview 2).

Adapting materials to cognitive and literacy levels enhances accessibility for individuals with varying capacities. Simplifying complex content, especially for those with lower literacy levels, helps bridge knowledge gaps. Suggested methods include using simplified language or applications that translate complex texts into more accessible forms, such as iDEM, which adapts texts in real time to suit participant needs (Interview 8). While providing real-time text simplifications can help ensure that participants follow and contribute meaningfully to discussions, these tools require careful integration to avoid misunderstandings or oversimplification of content (Interview 14; Interview 18).

Adapting the process of information delivery has been used as another key strategy; some deliberative sessions would begin with informal discussions, allowing participants to share their perspectives and thoughts about a topic before experts would provide further context. This approach has turned out to be helpful for experts to gauge participants' understanding levels as well as to elucidate more complex aspects if necessary (Interview 10).

Additionally, more unconventional methods such as “living libraries” or personal testimonies can be used to make abstract topics more relatable (Interview 2). Such alternative types of methods may also enable more casual interactions between experts and participants. One interviewee suggested making the process as personally relatable as possible so as to keep participants engaged from the very outset (Interview 9). Expert 10 also suggested relying on “experts carousels”, where, instead of lengthy presentations, experts spend time rotating

between small groups, where they provide five-minute overviews and engage in question-and-answer sessions. This makes complex topics more accessible by allowing participants to ask questions in a smaller, more approachable setting.

Having participants with disabilities sharing their personal challenges in accessing public spaces or services, often has a lasting effect on the whole group, helping others to understand the importance of accessibility and inclusivity, especially in mixed groups comprising both vulnerable and non-vulnerable populations (Interview 1). This kind of personal intervention may therefore strengthen the whole group's motivation for consensus-oriented deliberation.

3.1.2.2. Deliberation

The deliberation represents the central stage of the process and can benefit from a range of adaptations that make the process more inclusive and considerate of diverse communication styles.

Moderated small group discussions

Experts recommended holding deliberations in small groups rather than in large ones. Small group discussions foster an intimate setting where participants feel more at ease to share their views (Interview 4). Small group settings offer a less intimidating environment for vulnerable individuals to weigh and discuss options before making decisions. Small groups allow facilitators to create a supportive environment, where participants feel valued and safe to speak openly. They also enable facilitators to manage discussions more effectively, preventing any one person from dominating the debate and ensuring that all voices are heard (Interview 10), an important factor for marginalised groups who may not have the same confidence or experience in public discussions.

Moderation is equally essential, as it provides structure and guidance, keeping discussions focused and accessible. Moderators skilled in working with diverse groups can create an atmosphere of trust, encouraging honest dialogue and ensuring that complex issues are discussed in terms that everyone can understand (Carpini, Cook, & Jacobs, 2004). Overall, moderated small groups offer a space where vulnerable groups can engage without fear, enabling a more balanced deliberation that captures the diversity of experiences and insights they bring to the table (Clifford 2012).

Effective moderation hinges on understanding participants' varied needs and creating an inclusive environment where everyone can participate meaningfully. Moderators play a critical role in small group discussions including vulnerable individuals, where it may not always be advisable to leave full autonomy to the group (Interview 1). They set and explain the rules of discussion, ensure that everyone has a chance to speak, and make sure that every participant, especially those belonging to vulnerable groups, feels confident and at ease (Interview 1; Interview 21).

They also ought to show empathy and a deep understanding of the individual challenges faced by vulnerable participants and show a capacity to manage emotional and psychological issues (Interview 10). This includes recognizing and addressing both visible and invisible barriers to

participation, such as cognitive disabilities, language barriers, or emotional discomfort (Interview 14).

Another requirement was that facilitators ought to act in an empathetic and non-judgemental way (Interview 9). Empathy is important to ensure an awareness of the different ways participants might communicate and ensure that everyone feels confident to contribute. Facilitators behaving in a non-judgemental way help create a safe space where participants feel comfortable expressing themselves without fear of judgement.

Several experts emphasised face-to-face interactions as a key format for fostering inclusivity, particularly for people with disabilities. Interview 4 advanced for instance that empathy can be better achieved in in-person settings rather than online, where screen-mediated interactions can create emotional distance and disengagement. While online participation tools like Zoom have opened up new avenues for participation, they can also pose challenges for participants who are not familiar with technology (Interview 12).

The crucial role of moderation techniques

Experts also refer to various moderation techniques to be used in deliberative processes. For instance, when a question is posed, the moderator can ask participants to write down their answers as bullet points, either independently or with assistance. In the first round, participants read out their responses, allowing them to express their own thoughts before being influenced by others' contributions. Visualisations, like drawings and simplified presentations, may help to clarify more complex topics, while prepared handouts, booklets or glossaries ensure participants can refer back to key terms and concepts independently (Interview 11). Another expert stressed the importance of repeating the instructions and the content of discussion : "Repetition is crucial when working with vulnerable groups. We often need to repeat instructions and information to make sure participants are fully understanding and comfortable with the process." (Interview 20).

The interviewees emphasised the importance of cultivating this group dynamic, noting that a strong sense of belonging enhanced participants' ability to work together and develop balanced recommendations (Interview 8). This approach underscores the value of prioritising interpersonal connections, which can often be overlooked in processes heavily focused on rational decision-making. For that, techniques such as icebreakers and role-playing games helped participants connect across social divides, creating an inclusive environment that fostered mutual respect and collaboration (Interview 7).

Adaptation and flexibility

Tailored deliberation structures were also implemented, such as extending discussion time and using sensory-based workshops for individuals with profound disabilities, allowing them and their caregivers to engage meaningfully (Interview 5).

One interviewee (Interview 9) suggested slowing down the pace of participative processes, so that participants with disabilities have the opportunity to communicate without feeling rushed

(Interview 20). Short, intensive sessions may overwhelm participants, making it harder for them to stay focused or contribute effectively. The recommendation is to provide ample time for participants to ask questions, process information, and express their views (Interview 22).

Slowing down discussions improves the deliberative quality by encouraging reflection, careful listening, and reducing the influence of dominant voices, thereby fostering a more thoughtful dialogue (Interview 6). Interviewee 2 for instance cited examples from Belgium's multilingual deliberative processes, where the use of translation required participants to listen carefully and reflect more before responding. "Slowing down the discussion improves the deliberative quality because it forces participants to listen and think carefully before responding". According to interview 21, providing regular breaks, implementing varied formats, and ensuring that discussions are relevant to the participants' lives can help mitigate fatigue among participants.

Experts referred to several tools that can be used during deliberation in order to ease communication between participants. Interview 5 referred for instance to Talking Mats, which is an effective communication tool that utilises visual aids, such as symbols or pictures, to assist individuals with cognitive disabilities in expressing their opinions and preferences in an organised manner. In order to support the inclusion of vulnerable groups in the discussion, the buddy system was presented as an interesting strategy. Used for instance in the deliberative committees of Brussel, it allows participants to bring trusted individuals who could assist with translation or provide emotional support, making vulnerable individuals feel more comfortable and engaged (Interview 2). Finally, Interview 20 referred to Choice Boards, which can be used to help people with learning disabilities to make decisions and contribute to avoiding paternalism by prioritizing the individual's autonomy in decision-making. The board presents different options visually, which empowers participants by giving them the ability to make choices about their actions (e.g., what to eat or what activity to engage in).

The role of supporting persons

As in the case of the recruitment stage, enhancing inclusivity during the deliberation generally requires the support of specific persons, such as family, buddies or caregivers. Afsahi (2020) also highlighted the importance of the role that may be played by caregivers by supporting or, in some cases, even contributing in place of those with disabilities, especially in translating the communication from other participants, experts, and written material into more easily understandable language for people with cognitive disabilities and the other way around. Despite the crucial role of supporting actors, some experts raised the issue of representation in participatory processes, particularly for people with disabilities. Interview 4 for instance stressed that representation through family members or community leaders may not always reflect the true needs or voices of vulnerable individuals. For example, family members may have their own biases or taboos, particularly on sensitive issues, and community leaders may not represent all viewpoints within a group.

3.1.3. Follow-up stage (After deliberation)

When a participatory process involving vulnerable groups concludes, it is crucial to handle the publication and dissemination of outcomes with an emphasis on inclusivity and accessibility. The communication of these outcomes to various stakeholders including public authorities, community organisations, but also the wider community is the final step necessary to ensure that vulnerable groups are effectively represented and that the process yields meaningful impacts.

3.1.3.1. Providing clear, transparent, and effective outcomes

Providing clear, transparent, and effective outcomes from a participatory process not only strengthens the legitimacy of participatory processes but also fosters an inclusive culture where vulnerable groups feel their perspectives have been valued. By involving participants in reviewing and communicating the outcomes, organisers ensure that the findings accurately reflect participants' perspectives. This engagement helps to validate the results and generates trust in the process.

Results should be communicated in a format which is cognitively and intellectually accessible to all stakeholders not only for the sake of "technical" transparency, but also in order to show citizens that their participation made an actual difference. Depending on the respective target groups, outcomes should be refined and presented in different multimedia formats, both offline and online. As in previous stages, methods such as simplified language or applications that translate complex texts into more accessible forms (such as the IDEM services) can contribute to simplifying the outcomes (Interview 8). Finally, before being published the results should be reviewed with the participants and undergo some predefined ethical considerations (for instance in terms of data protection) to avoid any negative impact on participants.

Participants' confidence may also be increased by publishing clear explanations about how decisions were made and to which extent vulnerable groups' contributions were reflected in the final recommendations (Rojas-Rozo et al. 2024). Transparency in reporting makes participants understand that their voices were heard, thereby increasing their motivation for future engagement. Dissemination of outcomes must also be sensitive to vulnerable groups' respective socio-cultural situatedness. In some cases, collaborating with community leaders or advocacy organisations may help tailor the communication approach to participants' preferences and expectations.

Quoting the example of climate assemblies with children and adolescents, Reid (2024: 22) likewise suggests that recommendations should be presented in a format which meets the target group's cognitive needs. This implies choosing place, time and format which are more suited to the target groups, well preparing the participants ahead of the presentation, and managing their expectations.

Other than that, feedback loops and accountability mechanisms are further means to reinforce transparency. This may include briefing participants on how their input has been put to use (Glaas, Hjerpe, Wihlborg 2022). For instance, one interviewee mentioned that following the

Scottish Climate Assembly, Scotland's Deputy First Minister had recorded a child-friendly video explaining what actions were taken as a result of their participation and that in Ireland, following the Irish Climate Assembly, a reunion event had been held where the minister would provide updates directly to the children involved (Interview 6). This practice of ongoing accountability reassures participants that their contributions have genuine purpose and impact, thus enabling participants' sustained trust in the process.

3.1.3.2. Fostering long-term engagement opportunities

Inclusion should not end once the outcomes are published. Ensuring ongoing engagement opportunities allows vulnerable groups to remain involved as their recommendations are implemented. Quoting the case of marginalised neighbourhoods in Colombia, Van Holstein (2018) argues that participants may get frustrated when they feel that their participation is restricted to fleshing out a predetermined agenda. Morrison-Saunders and Arts (2024), also stress the importance of keeping participants engaged in the follow-up stage, showing how this may run the gamut from receiving regular updates to actually co-producing the follow-up.

One interviewee stressed the importance of promoting long-term engagement among the participants, as some of them would continue to act as activists for their specific group interests, participating in other research and advocacy initiatives (Interview 5). Long-term engagement may also support participants with weaker social ties who may find it hard to cope with a sudden cessation of structured social interaction. The Research Voice report, which reports on a project, where a citizen jury were implemented with individual with learning disabilities, recommends establishing connections that extend beyond the formal end of the project, potentially through continued support from community organisations or follow-up events that encourage participants to remain involved in civic or community life (Scottish Learning Disabilities Observatory, 2021).

Having vulnerable groups' contributions acknowledged publicly can also foster their empowerment and a sense of belonging. This may happen by highlighting individual stories or contributions that shaped the process, e. g., by organising citizen exhibitions. Such acknowledgment can encourage sustained forms of engagement, thereby reinforcing a proper sense of agency among participants.

3.2. List of main recommendations

In this section, we summarise the main recommendations, including tools and methods, which have been identified in our empirical research. These tools and recommendations are structured along the various stages defined in the previous section.

3.2.1. Preparation stage (Before deliberation)

Designing and Preparing the Process

- **Advisory teams with target group representation:** Set up advisory teams composed of vulnerable group members to inform process design, question selection, and expert choice.
- **Preliminary empowerment phase:** Carry out empowerment sessions, including rights-based training and awareness activities, trust-building activities, individual support assessment, to generate confidence and understanding among participants.
- **Participant inclusion in process design:** Involve vulnerable groups in the design stage to address their expectations, needs, and potential barriers
- **Homogeneous vs. mixed group design:** Decide whether to create homogeneous (homogeneous vulnerable groups only) or mixed settings, carefully balancing different needs.
- **Flexible timelines and contingency Plans:** Build flexibility into the timeline to accommodate additional workshops or slowed-down sessions for those needing extra support.
- **Personalised support assessment:** Identify individual support needs, such as transportation and communication aids, to ensure inclusivity from the outset.
- **Create an inclusive environment:** Set up accessible and comfortable spaces with seating arrangements that encourage open dialogue and minimise power dynamics.

Recruiting Participants

- **Tailored recruitment strategies:** Use specific outreach methods, such as partnerships with community organisations, door-to-door outreach, and individual engagement, to connect with vulnerable groups.
- **Incentives:** Offer material incentives (stipends, transportation reimbursement) and non-material incentives (skill-building, social recognition) to motivate participation.
- **Trusted communication channels:** Use familiar and trusted community organisations or advocates to reach participants, especially those with limited engagement in civic processes.

Informing on the Event

- **Simplification techniques for information:** Provide colour-coded agendas, easy-to-read documents, and simplified scripts to enhance understanding and accessibility.
- **Avoid oversimplification:** It is important to find a balance between making the information more accessible through simplification without losing the original meaning of the information. .
- **Trusted communication channels:** Use trusted intermediaries such as community advocates or social workers to deliver information and encourage engagement.

Preparing the Organization of the Event(s)

- **Accessible and inclusive location:** Select a physically and culturally accessible venue, such as community centres, to foster comfort and a sense of belonging.
- **Human resources for support:** Engage skilled facilitators, interpreters, logistical support staff, and inclusivity teams to assist vulnerable participants.
- **Long-term and regular Engagement:** Schedule multiple engagement events over time to build trust, familiarity, and consistency for vulnerable participants.
- **Flexible timelines:** Incorporate flexibility to adjust the pace of events, arrange extra sessions, and provide long-term engagement as necessary to maintain inclusivity.

3.2.2. Implementation Stage (During the deliberation)*Providing Information on the Topic*

- **Multiple communication methods:** Use printed handouts, Q&A sessions with experts, presentations, and audio/video content to provide information.
- **Simplified presentations and explanations:** Employ simplified presentations, such as online videos or YouTube clips, to make complex topics more understandable.
- **Adapted Information delivery:** Begin sessions with informal discussions to assess participants' understanding before expert presentations.
- **Tailor information to cognitive levels:** Adapt materials to meet different cognitive and literacy needs to bridge knowledge gaps.
- **Focus on relatability:** Make content personally relatable to keep participants engaged and improve understanding. Use formats such as "living libraries" (personal testimonies) to make the topics more relatable.
- **Encourage casual interactions with experts:** Allow informal interaction between experts and participants, which can foster engagement and ease understanding. Use for instance "experts carousels" (experts rotate between groups, giving short overviews) to make the exchange of information more engaging.

Deliberation

- **Moderated small group discussions:** Use small group formats with skilled facilitators to manage discussions and create a safe environment for vulnerable individuals.
- **Moderation Techniques:** Techniques such as writing responses as bullet points before sharing, using visual aids, drawings, and simplified presentations to help clarify complex topics.
- **Prepared handouts and glossaries:** Provide reference materials like glossaries or booklets with key terms for participants to consult independently.
- **Icebreakers and role-playing games:** Facilitate activities that build interpersonal connections and create an inclusive, collaborative environment.
- **Communication Tools:** Use tools like Talking Mats or Choice Boards to assist participants in expressing preferences and opinions.
- **Buddy System:** Allow participants to bring trusted individuals for translation, emotional support, or assistance, enhancing comfort and engagement.

- **Build a sense of belonging:** Prioritise interpersonal connections over purely rational decision-making, fostering mutual respect and collaboration.
- **Empathy in moderation:** Moderators should demonstrate empathy and understanding of individual challenges, addressing visible and invisible participation barriers.
- **Adapt the deliberation pace:** Slow down discussions to allow for thoughtful reflection, careful listening, and to reduce the impact of dominant voices.
- **Provide ample time for reflection:** Avoid short, intensive sessions; allow participants sufficient time to process information and express their views.

3.2.3. Follow-up stage (After deliberation)

Providing Clear, Transparent, and effective Outcomes

- **Multiple formats for outcome presentation:** Provide outcomes in various formats (e.g., videos, visuals, written summaries) to ensure accessibility for diverse audiences.
- **Transparency and Accessibility:** Ensure all outcomes are communicated in accessible language and formats to bridge knowledge gaps and improve understanding.
- **Collaborative outcome review:** Involve participants in reviewing and validating the outcomes to ensure that the results accurately reflect their perspectives.
- **Clear explanation of decision-making process:** Publish detailed explanations of how decisions were made, highlighting where contributions from vulnerable groups impacted the final recommendations.
- **Socio-cultural contextualization:** Partner with community leaders or organisations familiar with the specific socio-cultural contexts of vulnerable groups to tailor communication to their norms.
- **Participant empowerment through recognition:** Recognize and publicly acknowledge individual contributions to validate participants' efforts and encourage future engagement.
- **Ongoing feedback:** Reinforce transparency by keeping participants informed about how their input is being used, building confidence in future participatory efforts.

Fostering Long-Term Engagement Opportunities

- **Follow-Up Events:** Organise follow-up gatherings or events to update participants and encourage continued involvement.
- **Continuous engagement channels:** Provide platforms for ongoing involvement in future research or advocacy projects, enabling participants to act as self-advocates.
- **Long-term inclusion beyond project end:** Encourage continued engagement opportunities to keep vulnerable groups involved as their recommendations are implemented.
- **Support against social isolation:** Offer structured long-term engagement, particularly for socially isolated participants who benefit from continued interaction.

3.3. List of participatory formats

In this section, we will provide a collection of suitable formats which can be used for the piloting of the cases. These factsheets aim to summarise the main characteristics of several formats, in order to provide an overview of the reader on how to structure the participatory process. In a tabular view, each format will be outlined by a short descriptive text and presented according to specific description criteria. These formats have been mainly selected on the basis of previous experiences or because they are especially well suited for the inclusion of one or several marginalised groups. These factsheets present typical participation formats and stress how they have been adapted for specific target groups.

3.3.1. Citizen jury

Name of the Format	Citizens' Jury
Level of participation	Consultation
Short description of the method	A citizens' jury is a participatory method, taking the form of a deliberative mini-public, where a group of randomly selected citizens is brought together to deliberate on a specific issue or policy. Over a set period, usually several days, the jury members hear from experts, review evidence, and engage in discussions to form an informed opinion or set of recommendations. The goal is to gather insights and decisions from ordinary citizens, providing a democratic, grassroots perspective to inform policy or decision-making.
Group size	approx. 10 to 25
Duration	3 to 5 days, depending on the complexity of the issue being discussed and the depth of deliberation required. However, the process need to be longer depending on the
Expected output	Set of recommendations, conclusions, or a decision on the issue being deliberated.

Name of the Format	Citizens' Jury
Short description of the process	<p>The citizens' jury process typically follows these main steps:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1) Selection of Jurors: A group of citizens is randomly selected to represent a broad cross-section of the population, ensuring diversity in age, gender, ethnicity, socioeconomic background, etc. 2) Briefing and Orientation: Jurors are introduced to the issue at hand. This includes understanding the process, the topic they will be deliberating on, and their role in making recommendations. 3) Information: Jurors hear from a range of experts, stakeholders, or witnesses who present evidence, viewpoints, and data related to the issue. This helps jurors gain a well-rounded understanding of the subject. 4) Deliberation: The jurors engage in structured discussions, reflecting on the evidence presented. They debate, share perspectives, and work towards building a consensus or identifying key points of agreement and disagreement. 5) Recommendations: After deliberation, the jurors collectively draft their recommendations or conclusions, which are informed by their discussions and the evidence they've reviewed. 6) Presentation of Findings: The final recommendations are presented to decision-makers, such as government bodies, institutions, or organisations, who use these insights to inform policy or decisions.
Consideration when using the format with vulnerable groups:	<p>In order to carry out this format with vulnerable groups, the project Research Voice, which implemented a citizens' jury with people with learning disabilities, suggested some adaptation of the format: :</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1) <i>Recruitment:</i> It might be preferable not (only) to rely on sortition (not chance of reaching them out) but on directly contacting organizations working with the target group. 2) <i>Agenda setting:</i> It might be advisable to let them draft, or contribute to, the agenda of the process, in order to make them discuss topics which are more relevant to them. 3) <i>More meetings and time</i> to process the information provided during the briefing and to familiarise themselves with the concepts being discussed. The extra time helped participants develop essential skills, such as asking relevant questions and improving listening abilities, before the main deliberation. 4) <i>Inclusive communication tools</i> were used to facilitate better understanding and engagement.

Name of the Format	Citizens' Jury
	5) <i>Trained facilitators</i> helped participants navigate the deliberation process, ensuring that people with learning disabilities could engage meaningfully in the discussion and decision-making.
References and resources	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - https://participedia.net/method/155 - https://involve.org.uk/resource/citizens-jury - https://jefferson-center.org/about-us/how-we-work/ - https://www.slido.ac.uk/inclusive-research/research-voices-project/about-the-project/

3.3.2. Image guided exchange of experience

Name of the Format	Image guided exchange of experience
Level of participation	Information, consultation
Short description of the method	The method uses associative images to motivate participants on specific topics that affect them or their environment. Photographs are used to stimulate discussions in which personal experiences and perspectives on issues such as the living environment or work situation can be shared. This visual approach facilitates the exchange and makes the discussions more accessible, especially for groups such as children or illiterate people. The method can be carried out as a variant of a focus group or as part of a gallery walk and also enables more complex procedures such as citizens' exhibitions, in which qualitative interviews are combined with visual elements. The aim is to explore relevant social issues and incorporate the voices of the participants.
Group size	Up to 25 participants
Duration	2 – 5 hours
Expected output	Insights into the opinions, wishes and ideas of participants on target group-specific problems and issues.

Name of the Format	Image guided exchange of experience
Short description of the process	<p>Phase I: Welcome by the moderator with an introduction to the key question(s) or objective of the image-led exchange of experiences. The participants introduce themselves.</p> <p>Phase II: Viewing of the pictures by the participants and accompanying or subsequent discussion about them. Open-ended, informal moderation by a central moderator or several distributed moderators. Writing down the comments and, if necessary, ideas. Documentation of the topics and focal points discussed on posters or display boards and summary at the end of the event.</p> <p>Phase III: Possibly send an overview of the topics and focal points discussed to the participants as a picture or document. Analysis of the written results.</p>
Consideration when using the format with vulnerable groups:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Due to its associative, low-threshold character, it is suitable for many target groups, including those that are difficult to reach: people who are not involved, local residents, children, and vulnerable groups. - Maybe the needs of e.g. visually impaired people must be specifically taken into account, e.g. through audio commentary or guides. If explanatory or accompanying texts are used, a corresponding audio contribution would also provide useful support for people with reading difficulties. - Visual and symbolic language can differ in different cultures and could therefore be interpreted differently (e.g. connection between colour and emotion, symbolism of happiness/unhappiness, meaning of animals).
References and resources	www.berlin.de/ba-mitte/politik-und-verwaltung/service-und-organisationseinheiten/sozialraumorientierte-planungskoordination/buero-fuer-buergerbeteiligung/2019_04_01-methodenhandbuch_bezirk-mitte_korrigiert.pdf&ved=2ahUKEwi7kv6hnfgjAxWDh_0HHYmYEPOQFnoECB4OAO&usg=AOvVaw00xP_b6krGSVkod3Mj0gjd

3.3.3. Neighbourhood walk

Name of the Format	Neighbourhood walk
Level of participation	Consultation, Information

Name of the Format	Neighbourhood walk
Short description of the method	A neighbourhood walk is a participatory method in which citizens, decision-makers and other interested parties explore a particular area to better understand the local community and its needs. These informal walks provide a space for discussion and discovery of an area's strengths and weaknesses. Problems are often identified and suggestions for improvement are developed to enhance the quality of life. This method is particularly suitable for engaging with communities that are difficult to involve in formal participation processes. The district walk promotes co-design through low-threshold participation and enables needs-based further development of the social space. Target groups can vary, but there is often a special focus on children and young people. Dialogues on local issues strengthen the exchange between residents and decision-makers.
Group size	Up to 15 participants (per group)
Duration	1 - 3 h
Expected output	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Reflection on a specific topic and collection of ideas • Feedback on planned or already implemented processes or projects • Activation of specific groups of people
Short description of the process	<p>1. Introduction: Define the goal/objective and the area of the walk. Determine a specific route with any designated stops where participants can meet specific members of the community. Inform the community members about the planned walk and coordinate a date and meeting point. Explain the context and purpose of the walk and present some questions or topics that will guide the observations and discussions. Define a code of behaviour and rules of respect for the walk. Prepare moderation cards with questions on a selected topic, which can also include personal experiences of the participants. Each participant receives a question card to encourage dialogue.</p> <p>2. Walk: The walk follows a predetermined route and can be accompanied by a representative of the community/target group from the neighbourhood in question. At pre-selected sample locations, the participants can get a precise picture of the situation on site and, if necessary, exchange ideas with members of the neighbourhood. There should be enough time for the participants to talk to the local people. During the walk, the observations and discussions should focus on the questions defined in the previous section.</p> <p>3. Discussion: After the walk, the participants talk to each other about their observations and interactions on site. They share their</p>

Name of the Format	Neighbourhood walk
	experiences and feelings with the other participants. Although this is a rather informal format, this exchange among the participants can be moderated and thus directed or focussed on the overarching key questions if necessary. The topics and focal points discussed are documented and, if necessary, supplemented with additional material gathered by the participants during the walk. The results of the discussion are documented. Finally, the documentation can serve as a basis for further discussions, e.g. with stakeholders, and can be sent to the participants afterwards.
Consideration when using the format with vulnerable groups:	For people with limited mobility, barrier-free accessibility and freedom of movement would have to be ensured in advance for the urban area in question. For discussions with neighbourhood residents, linguistic communication (e.g. through an interpreter or translation app) should be ensured for participants with limited language skills. For participants with a visual impairment, additional sources of information (e.g. audio) should be made available to provide information about the visual experience. Language communication for participants with cognitive impairments could be supported by accompanying persons during discussions with local residents if necessary.
References and resources	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • https://www.sozialraum.de/stadtteilbegehung.php • https://participation.digital/advice/neighbourhoodwalk/ • https://participatory.tools/tools/walkthrough/ • Bazuń, D., & Kwiatkowski, M. (2022). Exploratory walk and local cohesion—the concept and application. <i>Mobilities</i>, 17(4), 565-584.

3.3.4. Citizen exhibition

Name of the Format	Citizens' exhibition
Level of participation	Information, consultation
Short description of the method	The Citizens' Exhibition involves various interest groups by presenting their perspectives, opinions and suggestions, opinions, experiences and ideas on a relevant topic through a curated exhibition. Representative individual people linked with the topic of the exhibition are interviewed, photographed and portrayed on posters. The exhibition will be published on site and/or online.(Böhm et al, 2008).

Name of the Format	Citizens' exhibition
Group size	more than 50 participants
Duration	3-6 months in total
Expected output	On-site and online exhibition ; perspectives and recommendations from various interest groups
Short description of the process	<p>According to Böhm et al., (2008), this process follows eight steps:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1) Choice and Concretion of a Topic: The process begins with selecting a socially relevant topic, often in collaboration with stakeholders. This ensures that the theme reflects a real issue affecting a community or group. 2) Selection of Interview Partners: Using qualitative research methods, participants are chosen to represent diverse perspectives related to the topic. 3) Conducting Interviews: Semi-structured interviews are carried out to explore the interviewees' experiences, perceptions, and positions on the topic. Participants provide verbal consent for their words and photographs to be publicly used. 4) Making Photographs: Parallel to the interviews, the interviewees are photographed, either during the interview or separately. Sometimes, participants themselves take photos, offering deeper involvement in the process. 5) Interview Analysis: The interviews are analyzed using qualitative methods like Grounded Theory or Content Analysis. Key excerpts are selected and edited into texts that will be displayed alongside visual materials. 6) Preparation of the Exhibition: Texts and images are curated into an exhibition format. The design should be accessible and placed in a central, relevant location to attract the affected community and promote dialogue. 7) Exhibition Opening: The exhibition's opening is a public event and serves as a forum where participants, politicians, and other stakeholders engage in discussions. 8) Follow-up of the Participatory Process: The exhibition often initiates further public discourse, encouraging the formation of stakeholder groups to follow up on the issues raised and propose actionable reforms.

Name of the Format	Citizens' exhibition
Consideration when using the format with vulnerable groups:	<p>This format is particularly effective in fostering inclusive participation and giving voice to marginalized or vulnerable groups, such as prostitution or migration, making their experiences visible to a broader audience. Following components make this format especially interesting for vulnerable groups:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Community-Driven Content: Citizens, often from diverse or underrepresented groups, are invited to contribute materials such as personal stories, photos, artifacts, or multimedia that reflect their experiences or views on a given issue. 2. Facilitated Co-Creation: Participants work together, often with facilitators or curators, to design how their contributions will be displayed. 3. Engagement and Dialogue: The exhibition serves as a platform for the wider community to engage with the content, fostering dialogue on the themes presented. It can be used for raising awareness, education, or generating collective understanding on social or community issues. 4. Empowerment through Representation: It empowers participants by giving them ownership of the narrative, allowing them to share their stories and perspectives in a public space, often influencing public opinion or policy.
References and resources	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Böhm, B., Legewie, H., & Dienel, H. L. (2008, May). The citizens' exhibition: A combination of socio-scientific, participative and artistic elements. In <i>Forum Qualitative Sozialforschung/Forum: Qualitative Social Research</i> (Vol. 9, No. 2). - https://www.quartiersmanagement-berlin.de/nachrichtenarchiv/broschuere-zur-buergerausstellung-nachbarschaft-und-prostitution-veroeffentlicht.html

3.3.5. Living library

Name of the Format	Living Library
Level of participation	Information
Short description of the method	<p>A Living Library is a participatory format designed to foster dialogue, understanding, and challenge stereotypes by allowing individuals (referred to as "living books") to share their personal stories and experiences with other participants (referred to as "readers") in one-on-one or small group conversations. In this setting, people can "borrow" a living book for a set period and engage in open,</p>

	<p>respectful dialogue on topics related to the person's life experience, such as race, religion, disability, or other aspects of identity. The Living Library aims to break down barriers, encourage empathy, and create connections between people with diverse life experiences. The organizers of the events are called the librarians and are responsible for the smooth functioning of the event. He/she ensures that the rules of conversation are respected, contributes to the good atmosphere of the event and makes the participants – especially the books – comfortable.</p>
Group size	approx. 20-200 (depending on the number of “books”)
Duration	2-5 hours
Expected output	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Reflection on one's own understanding of roles and culture - Critically questioning and breaking down stereotypes and prejudices - Acquiring social competence in dealing with people with different role concepts and from other cultural backgrounds
Short description of the process	<p>The focus living library typically follows these main steps:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1) Define the purpose and objectives: Clearly outline the goals of the Living Library event, such as fostering empathy, challenging stereotypes, or promoting dialogue around specific social issues. 2) Recruit the “books”: The "living books" should be willing to share personal stories that relate to themes such as race, disability, gender, religion, or other marginalised experiences, and open to engaging in meaningful conversations and answering questions about their life experiences. 3) Brief the “books”: Provide a training or briefing session for the living books to help them understand the format and expectations, think about how they will present their story and how to handle sensitive or difficult questions from readers. 4) Lending the “books”: Online in advance and/or at the reception, the participants can inform themselves about the book titles available. The librarians support the selection and reserve an interview. 5) Conversation In the reading room: the participant sits down at a table with the "living book" for a 30-minute conversation. Personal and critical questions are permitted, provided that the rules of the conversation are observed. The "living book" can ask counter-questions and, if necessary, leave questions unanswered. If the book

	<p>agrees, several “readers” can participate in the conversation.</p> <p>6) Discussion and reflection: If appropriate participants can be brought together for a closing session in order to discuss and reflect on the event, and for instance, learn how the event impacted them or identify areas for improvement.</p>
<p>Consideration when using the format with vulnerable groups:</p>	<p>Living Library is especially appropriate to interact with vulnerable groups (Orosz et al., 2026; Lobban et al., 2023) as it provides accessible, safe, and interactive spaces for storytelling, allowing participants to share their experiences in a way that promotes empathy and understanding. Following components make this format especially interesting for vulnerable groups:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Personal Storytelling: The living books are real people who share personal narratives that challenge common prejudices or misconceptions. - Interactive Dialogue: Readers can ask questions and engage in direct conversation, creating an opportunity for mutual understanding. - Safe and Respectful Space: The format is designed to promote open, non-judgmental discussions, fostering empathy and reducing prejudice. It is necessary to choose a venue that supports a calm, quiet, and respectful atmosphere for conversations. - Volunteers or staff should be available to step in if a participant feels uncomfortable or if any issues arise during the discussions.
<p>References and resources</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • https://www.coe.int/en/web/youth/living-library • https://rm.coe.int/16807023dd • Lobban F, Marshall P, Barbrook J, Collins G, Foster S, Glossop Z, Inkster C, Jebb P, Johnston R, Khan H, Lodge C, Machin K, Michalak E, Powell S, Rycroft-Malone J, Slade M, Whittaker L, Jones SH. Designing a library of lived experience for mental health (LoLEM): protocol for integrating a realist synthesis and experience based codesign approach. <i>BMJ Open</i>. 2023 Mar 8;13(3):e068548. doi: 10.1136/bmjopen-2022-068548. PMID: 36889824; PMCID: PMC10008385. • Orosz, G., Bánki, E., Bóthe, B., Tóth-Király, I., & Tropp, L. R. (2016). Don't judge a living book by its cover: effectiveness of the living library intervention in reducing prejudice toward Roma and LGBT people. <i>Journal of Applied Social Psychology</i>, 46(9), 510-517.

3.3.6. Focus group

Name of the Format	Focus group
Level of participation	Consultation
Short description of the method	A focus group is a qualitative research method where a small group of participants are brought together to discuss a specific topic or issue. The group is guided by a moderator who facilitates discussion, asks questions, and encourages participants to share their views, experiences, and opinions. Focus groups are especially valuable for gaining qualitative insights into attitudes, perceptions, and experiences of the target group.
Group size	approx. 8-15
Duration	2-4 hours
Expected output	Report on the issues having been addressed during the event
Short description of the process	<p>The focus group process typically follows these main steps:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1) Define the purpose and objectives: Clearly outline the research goals and the specific questions you want to address. This will guide the overall structure and focus of the discussion. 2) Recruit Participants: Select participants based on the purpose of the research. Recruitment can be done through invitations, advertisements, or other outreach methods. 3) Prepare a structured discussion guideline with questions that encourage in-depth responses and encourage natural flow and interaction between participants. 4) Conduct the focus group: a moderator facilitates the discussion, guiding participants through the prepared questions while encouraging interaction. The moderator also ensures that everyone gets a chance to speak and that the conversation stays on track. The moderator encourages participants to discuss their views openly, reacting to each other's statements. 5) Document the findings based on the analysis of the notes or recording of the session. The documentation should take the form of a small report summarising the key findings of the session.

Consideration when using the format with vulnerable groups:	<p>In order to carry out this format with vulnerable groups, some adaptation of the process can be made. These adaptations are based on the experiences of the IDEM project itself (see D1.2.) and the project (Dialogpflege 2030 carried out in Berlin):</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - <i>Pre-Focus Group Preparation:</i> Conduct preliminary sessions or tutorials to familiarise participants with the process; Use relatable examples to clarify discussion topics - <i>Adapted Support Materials:</i> Offer easy-read documents, visual aids (like colour indicators for comprehension), and simplified language throughout; Utilise physical (paper) materials alongside digital tools, depending on participant preferences. - <i>Time Management:</i> Allocate extra time for each activity, allowing participants to read, listen, understand, and respond at their own pace. Encourage slower-paced discussion for complex topics; Schedule regular breaks to prevent fatigue, especially during extended sessions.
References and resources	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • https://participedia.net/method/4777 • https://www.involve.org.uk/resources/methods/focus-groups • https://www.epa.gov/international-cooperation/public-participation-guide-focus-groups • Parker, Andrew, and Jonathan Tritter. "Focus group method and methodology: current practice and recent debate." <i>International Journal of Research & Method in Education</i> 29.1 (2006): 23-37.

3.3.7. World Café

Name of the Format	World Café
Level of participation	Information, consultation
Short description of the method	<p>A World Café is a structured conversational process that facilitates open dialogue and the sharing of ideas within a group of people. It is designed to foster collaborative dialogue on pre-defined issues and generate new ideas or solutions through collective intelligence. Participants move between small groups at different tables, discussing predefined topics in rounds, with each table hosted by a facilitator.</p>
Group size	Depending on the number of tables (up to approx. 10 people pro table)
Duration	2 to 4 hours .

Expected output	Collection of opinions, perspectives and ideas on a topic, which can be summarized in form of a report
Short description of the process	<p>The world café typically follows these main steps:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1) Preparation of the world café by defining the purpose of the event, formulating the specific questions and topics to be discussed at each table, and by creating a comfortable, café-like environment. 2) Facilitate the world café: Organize participants into groups to discuss the questions at their tables for a set period (usually 20-30 minutes). After each round, participants move to a different table, and the host (one person stays behind) summarizes the previous discussion to the new group. 3) Discussion of the results: In the end, participants share their insights with the larger group, using visual aids such as flipcharts or graphic recordings to summarize the main themes and patterns that emerged.
Consideration when using the format with vulnerable groups:	<p>World café format can be appropriate to engage vulnerable groups in participatory processes (Bumble and Carter, 2020). Following components make this format especially interesting for vulnerable groups:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - <i>Small group discussions:</i> Participants sit at café-style tables and discuss a specific topic for a set period, enabling them to change tables and meet other participants. - <i>Informal and Inclusive Atmosphere:</i> The setup is intentionally relaxed and casual to encourage open, creative conversations without hierarchy, making it accessible for everyone involved. <p>As explained by McGrath et al. (2023), who examined the implementation of such formats with people from minority communities in England, involving the participants in “co-developing the focus of sessions, recruiting community members and co-facilitating sessions is crucial to this success”.</p>
References and resources	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Bumble, J. L., & Carter, E. W. (2020). The World Cafe as a methodology for examining disability issues: Review and recommendations. <i>International Review of Research in Developmental Disabilities</i>, 58, 107-155. - McGrath, C., Kennedy, MR., Gibson, A. et al. World Cafés as a participatory approach to understanding research agendas in primary care with underserved communities: reflections, challenges and lessons learned. <i>Res Involv Engagem</i> 9, 101 (2023). https://doi.org/10.1186/s40900-023-00509-3 - https://www.involve.org.uk/resource/world-cafe - https://participedia.net/method/the-world-cafe

3.3.8. LEGO® Serious Play

Name of the Format	LEGO® Serious Play
Level of participation	Ideation, consultation
Short description of the method	LEGO Serious Play (LSP) is an innovative method that uses playful building with LEGO bricks to solve complex problems in teams. In moderated workshops, participants visualise their thoughts through 3D models, which promotes communication and creativity. This technique activates different regions of the brain and enables deeper insights. LSP is used in companies for strategy development, team building and conflict resolution and ensures that all voices are heard and everyone actively participates in the process.
Group size	2 – 12 Participants (per group)
Duration	1 to 4 hours .
Expected output	<p>By using LEGO bricks, participants can make their thoughts and ideas visual and tangible, which leads to active participation by all. The method allows to integrate different perspectives and promotes understanding of complex issues by improving communication and stimulating creativity.</p> <p>This process encourages the participants to contribute their point of view and fosters a sense of ownership of the shared results. In addition, the format reduces the fear of the 'blank page' as the focus is on the creative process, not on a perfect end product. This creates an open atmosphere in which all voices are heard, which increases the likelihood that the ideas developed will actually be realised.</p>
Short description of the process	<p>Introduction: The facilitator introduces the basic principles and objectives of the method. It is explained that there are no wrong answers and that each participant can build their own models.</p> <p>Task setting: An open, challenging question is presented that encourages participants to express their thoughts by building 3D models.</p> <p>Modelling: Participants use Lego bricks to create their individual responses. As they build, they develop a story about their model, which deepens understanding.</p> <p>Presentation and reflection: Each participant presents their model and explains its meaning. The group then discusses the different models to gain shared insights and develop new ideas.</p> <p>Summary: The workshop ends with a reflection on the concepts developed and possible next steps.</p>

<p>Consideration when using the format with vulnerable groups:</p>	<p>Although building with Lego bricks may require a certain amount of dexterity, as well as skills of association and interpretation, the building process itself fits well for people with visual, hearing and mobility impairments. If necessary, the schedule (time-management) would have to be adjusted. Also, there are no language barriers. During step 4 “presentation and reflection” support via i.e. translation or audio-tools may be helpful.</p> <p>Risk of Stigmatisation: Inviting members of vulnerable groups to participate using a ‘playful’ method must not convey that they are not trusted to participate using a conventional or ‘serious’ method.</p> <p>In contrast to conventional meetings, where often only a few people dominate, Lego serious play enables equal time for each participant to develop answers and ideas, active participation of everyone in brainstorming and decision-making processes and reduction of hierarchies, as everyone has a voice.</p>
<p>References and resources</p>	<p>https://www.connectedurbantwins.de/wissenstransfer/cut-akademie/lego-serious-play-eine-co-kreative-methode-zur-beteiligung/</p> <p>https://www.lego.com/de-de/themes/serious-play/background?consent-modal=show&age-gate=grown_up</p> <p>https://www.neu-innovation.de/ideenkultur/spielen-fuer-grosse-mit-lego-serious-play/</p> <p>https://organisationsberatung.net/lego-serious-play/</p> <p>https://www.strategicplay.de/was-ist-lego-serious-play/</p> <p>https://www.serious-playscape.de/workshops</p>

4. Conclusions

This report set out to examine how to make democratic participatory processes more inclusive for vulnerable and hard-to-reach groups. Specifically, the study focused on identifying and evaluating practical methods, tools, and techniques to support the engagement of individuals with diverse cognitive and linguistic barriers. Through an extensive review of academic literature, insights from expert interviews, and analysis of participatory methods tested in previous case studies, the report presents a structured framework and actionable recommendations to increase inclusivity across the various stages of participation, from recruitment to follow-up

4.1. Key Findings

The study's findings underscore the importance of designing participatory processes that consider accessibility from the outset. An inclusive design approach means engaging vulnerable groups at the very start of the process to ensure their unique needs are reflected in both methodology and format. A vital insight is that the typical recruitment strategies, such as random selection or sortition, often overlook or inadequately reach these populations. Instead, outreach strategies that work directly with community organisations and trusted intermediaries — such as social workers or local advocates — prove to be more effective for recruiting marginalised groups who may feel disconnected from or distrustful of institutionalised political processes. Personalised recruitment that includes clear incentives, such as travel reimbursements or stipends, was also found to increase motivation and accessibility for individuals who may face financial or logistical barriers to participation.

Another core finding is the need for clear, accessible, and simplified communication throughout the participatory process. Vulnerable groups often have varied literacy levels and different cognitive needs, requiring communication to be adapted with simplified language, visual aids, and culturally sensitive materials. For example, tools like colour-coded agendas, easy-to-read documents, and digital applications that offer real-time language simplification can make information more comprehensible and reduce cognitive barriers. Furthermore, providing information in multiple formats — such as audio, video, and written summaries — ensures that participants can engage with the content in a manner that best suits their abilities and preferences.

4.2. Limitations

While this report provides detailed recommendations, several limitations must be acknowledged to interpret the findings accurately. First, defining and addressing the diverse needs within vulnerable populations remains challenging. As stated in the introduction, vulnerable groups are far from homogenous, encompassing individuals with varying cognitive disabilities, language proficiency levels, socio-economic statuses, and cultural backgrounds. Moreover, the intersecting identities of some participants introduce unique challenges highlighting the need for ongoing adaptation and flexibility in participatory process design. The lack of extensive data on participatory engagement with vulnerable groups in the follow-up stage is another limitation. While this report outlines effective practices for fostering initial engagement, limited evidence exists on how well these practices sustain engagement over time and whether the recommendations made by participants are consistently implemented and evaluated. This gap indicates an area for future research to determine how to ensure long-lasting, meaningful and inclusive engagement, even beyond the deliberation itself.

4.3. Broader Contributions

Despite these limitations, this report makes significant contributions to understanding how democratic processes can become more inclusive, particularly for those who have traditionally been marginalised. The emphasis on ethical, empathetic facilitation and flexible, responsive formats marks a shift toward more participant-centred engagement practices. Facilitators play a critical role in these processes, both by structuring discussions in ways that value diverse contributions and by creating an environment where participants feel safe and respected.

Flexible facilitation techniques, such as allowing extended time for deliberation or using moderated small groups, enable participants to engage thoughtfully, reduce intimidation, and empower individuals to share their perspectives.

In the broader context of democratic governance, these recommendations provide a structured approach for organisations and policymakers to incorporate marginalised voices more effectively. By adopting a combination of traditional and innovative participatory methods — such as focus groups integrated with digital tools or living libraries that foster personal storytelling — the report presents a roadmap for creating adaptable frameworks that accommodate the complex needs of vulnerable populations. This approach not only broadens representation within participatory processes but also supports more equitable and just policy outcomes that better reflect the diverse needs of society.

4.4. Future Research Directions

Building on these findings, future research should focus on understanding how to sustain engagement among vulnerable groups beyond initial participatory events. Longitudinal studies that assess the impact and longevity of participatory outcomes are necessary to determine the practical effectiveness of these recommendations in real-world applications. Such studies could explore, for instance, the potential of recurring engagements — like follow-up sessions or regular feedback opportunities — as a way to maintain participant involvement and ensure that policy recommendations continue to align with the changing needs of vulnerable populations. Additionally, further exploration of an intersectional approach could yield more nuanced strategies to address overlapping vulnerabilities, such as combining cognitive and socio-economic barriers, which can present critical challenges in participatory settings.

Another promising area for future research is the development and assessment of digital tools that simplify language and enhance inclusivity in multilingual, diverse contexts. Advanced tools — such as those using real-time translation and language simplification powered by natural language processing — could offer transformative potential for democratic participation by overcoming language barriers and making information more accessible to a broader audience. Such innovations would be especially relevant in a multicultural and multilingual EU setting, where language remains a significant barrier to effective communication and understanding in participatory processes.

In conclusion, this study underscores the critical need for ongoing innovation, ethical commitment, and flexibility to create democratic spaces that are genuinely inclusive. By addressing the structural and practical barriers to participation faced by vulnerable populations, the report offers a foundation for more representative, equitable, and impactful participatory processes that honour the voices and experiences of all citizens.

5. Literature

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Annexes

Annex 1: Protocol Form

-Protocol Form

Instructions

- Please complete the form by providing information for all relevant items.
- Do not delete the instructions in blue, or any section. Write “not applicable” if an item or a question does not apply to your project.
- Please avoid using discipline-specific jargon (if you must, define it clearly) or provide extensive details. If you are reusing material that you have already written (e.g., your application to the funding body), please do not copy-paste entire sections but rather choose carefully what is relevant for the ethics review.
- You may read the guide on our website or contact CIREP if you have any doubts.
- Submit the completed form and supporting materials (questionnaires, interview scripts, etc.) via email to secretaria.cirep@upf.edu.

Section 1. General Information

Application Number	348
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1a. Project Title

iDEM – Innovative and Inclusive Spaces for Deliberation and Participation (WP1 and WP4)

1b. Project Description

Please provide a summary of the project of approximately 300 words.

Deliberative and participatory processes currently lack full legitimacy due to the exclusion and marginalisation of several vulnerable communities from democratic spaces. iDEM will address this issue in the context of marginalisation and exclusion of people who need support to fully be able to read, write and comprehend language (around six million individuals in the EU and over 90 million people globally). iDEM will lay the theoretical foundations for the analysis of current marginalisation from deliberative processes of diverse under-represented groups due to language skills and propose, implement, and evaluate inclusive deliberative and participatory spaces. It will adopt a user-centred approach for making participatory processes more accessible and inclusive, developing advanced natural language processing technologies and artificial intelligence to empower under-represented groups with tools to facilitate communication and dialog in democratic spaces. iDEM will co-create the next-generation multilingual models aimed at (1) detecting possible sources of problems in understanding messages and biases for several European languages and audiences, (2) automatically adapting texts in those languages to be accessible and unbiased for these audiences, (3) providing AI tools for enhancing the

controllable generation of messages and discourses. iDEM will innovate democratic spaces with customised, user-centric technology enhancing the participation and representation of marginalised groups by providing unbiased and inclusive technology. To do so, iDEM will also build on the results of relevant past projects, and seek collaboration with related projects and relevant centres for democracy in Europe.

Keywords: vulnerable groups; text simplification; natural language processing; inclusion; intersectionality; AI; political participation; deliberation; participative technology development.

1c. Research Team (Note that students cannot serve as principal investigator [PI].)

PI Full Name:	Dr. Thomas Blanchet & Prof. Horacio Saggion
Department (or institution, if not UPF):	Nexus Institute for Cooperation Management and Interdisciplinary Research
Applicant Full Name (if different from PI):	M.A. Volkan Sayman
Other Research Team Members (names and affiliations):	Owen Wooden (NEXUS), Dr. Carina Brumme (NEXUS), Eleonora Severa (ANFFAS), Lian Muños (Cibervoluntarios), Inès Dinant (Cibervoluntarios), Claudia Mazzanti (Action Aid Italy), Almudena Rascón Alcaina (Plena Inclusión Madrid) Laura Trujillo (IMPD) Alba Mestres (IMPD)
Have you completed the online ethics training?	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Pending

1d. Funding

Is your research project funded?	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/> Pending
What is the source of funding?	<input type="checkbox"/> UPF <input type="checkbox"/> Local or autonomic. Please specify: <input type="checkbox"/> State. Please specify: <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> European. Please specify: HORIZON Europe, Call “Stand up for democracy“, Action Grant Budget-Based <input type="checkbox"/> Other. Please specify:
Does the funding agency require an ethics certificate?	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No

1e. Project Timeline

Estimated Start Date: 01.05.2024	Project Duration: until 31.12.2026
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Section 2. Objectives

Summarise the objectives, rationale, and motivation for the project.

The iDEM project aims at developing text simplification tools for people with cognitive disabilities in order to assist them during deliberative processes. The development of these tools will be carried on a knowledge base which will be informed by a set of interviews with stakeholders, facilitators and experts, focus groups and literature research. These tools will be tested in three pilots and iteratively optimised. As the lead partner for WP4 “User Engagement”, Nexus is responsible for defining an approach to user engagement, piloting and monitoring of innovative deliberative and participatory processes for the project. The stakeholder and facilitator interviews are part of WP4.1 “Comprehensive assessment of the engagements of hard to reach groups and vulnerable

populations in participatory and deliberative processes” and WP4.2 “Enhancing the production of inclusiveness by facilitators (analysis/research)” respectively.

The focus group and the expert interview are part of WP 1.2 “Identify accessibility barriers to democratic participation for people with cognitive disabilities and their marginalisation of democratic spaces”.

In the scope of WP4 nexus and its project partners will accomplish the following objectives:

- WP 4.1:
 - Assessment of the engagement of hard to reach groups and vulnerable populations in participatory and deliberative processes . This involves the analysis of :
 - (i) scientific and grey literature review and internet research will identify
 - and examine best (and worst) practices, techniques and formats on how to engage these groups in deliberative processes.
 - (ii) The outcome will be a report with two parts:
 - First part: a description of the different stages of the participatory process and corresponding tools, techniques and formats recommending on how to engage citizens with reading, writing and comprehension difficulties
 - Second part: a collection of suitable formats which can be used for piloting cases (as factsheets).
- WP 4.2:
 - Digital civic participation is not only done through the technical infrastructure. Tools and services need to be administered, for example by inserting project related texts, moderating discussions, etc. All these various steps need to be inclusive. Facilitators will be consulted with regard to addressing disadvantaged people during all related activities. Methods will include
 - (i) a set of facilitator interviewees and
 - (ii) qualitative text analysis.

In the scope of WP 1.2 Nexus and its project partners will accomplish the following objectives:

- Accessibility barriers and the needs of people with cognitive disabilities will be researched by carrying out the following steps:
 - (i) Through literature review and internet research, democratic participation processes are examined: Types, Stages, Actors, and Roles, and their Potential Impact on Improving the Participation of People with Cognitive Disabilities,
 - (ii) Expert interviews to investigate further relevant topics would be covered, like the transferability of research results throughout all European countries and languages,
 - (iii) Focus groups with people with cognitive disabilities will be conducted to gather information on the needs and requirements

- (iv) Analysis & knowledge transfer will be carried out to categorise currently used tools and services.

Section 3. General Methodology

3a. New Data Collection and Analysis

Provide a brief but informative description of all the research methods that will be used to collect (e.g., interviews, tests, surveys, ethnography, recordings, etc.) and analyse the data. Include copies of the research materials when you submit your application (if available).

We will use the following methods to gather data:

- **Semi-structured interviews:**

The interviews should provide iDEM with insights into typical barriers/challenges, solutions, and already existing tools and formats to address the needs of people with cognitive disabilities in processes of political participation. The interviews mainly take place online with the help of a video-chat software (Zoom (NEXUS)) or at a predefined location. The interviews will be structured by a questionnaire, which is attached to our application. The interviews will be recorded (only voice) with the help of an audio recorder or the in-built voice recording function of the video chat software. The audio recording will be transcribed and after that, deleted. Personal data necessary to conduct and analyse the interview (including personal data gathered in the pre-questionnaire) will be stored in pseudonymized form and it will be fully anonymized 18 months after the interviews. All personal data gathered from potential interviewees will be deleted immediately after the decision against conducting an interview with the potential interviewee has been made. All necessary information concerning their data storage, data protection, rights and informed consent will be provided to the potential participants in an accessible form.

- **Focus group:**

We will carry out at least three focus groups, two in Spain (Madrid and Barcelona) and one in Italy (Emilia-Romagna Region). The focus groups aim is to provide insights into typical barriers/challenges and strategies to address the needs of people with cognitive disabilities in processes of political participation.

The specific added value of conducting a focus group is that participants have the opportunity to engage in group discussions, which may lead to more refined views as compared to single person interviews. The focus group will be structured by a moderation plan, which is attached to our application. The focus group will not be recorded. Personal data will be stored in pseudonymized form and fully anonymized 18 months after the interview. Notes will be taken during the session to sum up the main points made by the participants. All necessary information concerning data storage, data protection, rights and informed consent will be provided to the potential participants in an accessible form.

Data will be analysed with the help of a computer software (likely Maxqda or Atlas.ti). The coding of the interviews and the notes from the focus group will be conducted using a coding scheme with categories deduced from the structure of the deliverables the interviews and focus group are dedicated to.

3b. Secondary Data Collection and Analysis

Describe the data that will be used. Identify the data source(s) and confirm that the researchers are allowed to access and use the data for the purposes of the project. Describe how the data will be analysed.

No secondary analysis or data collection planned.

3c. Methodological Aspects

Describe the methods not directly related to new or secondary data collection and analysis here.

None planned to be used in this project.

Section 4. Participants

Indicate the expected number of participants. Please explain how the number of participants was established.

Interviews:

We expect to conduct between 15 to 25 interviews in total.

We will conduct interviews with three different groups: stakeholders, facilitators and experts.

We will at least have 5 interviewees from each group.

Having completed the five interviews for each group, we will assess which aspects of our research questions (mainly barriers, solutions, formats, tools, moderation techniques) need further explanatory data. Based on this assessment, we will contact and interview more experts, facilitators and stakeholders, should we consider that their expertise and professional experiences would add further explanatory value to answer the research questions.

Focus Groups:

In line with methodological standards, we plan to conduct the focus group with 5 to 7 participants per focus group. We consider that a small number of participants shall provide a space for communicative exchange within the focus group.

List the exclusion and inclusion criteria. If you plan to recruit vulnerable participant populations,¹² justify the need to include these populations.

Note: When participants under 18 and over 65 are recruited, researchers need to ensure that participants (and their legal guardians or representatives) understand the consequences of their participation.

Exclusion criteria for focus groups:

- Potential participants are aged under 18 or over 65 years.

Exclusion criteria for interviews:

- Potential participants are aged under 18 years

Inclusion criteria valid for *all* interviews:

- Intersections of the following criteria: age, gender, migration experience, educational status, languages spoken, type of assistive technology used in everyday life, type of human care needed in everyday life.

¹² Persons who, due to their situation, may not completely understand the possible consequences associated with their participation in the research project. Minors under 14 are always considered vulnerable.

Inclusion criteria for stakeholder interviews:

- professional and long-standing experiences with advocating for the rights of people with cognitive disabilities, e.g. in political participation and deliberation
- professional and long-standing experiences with organising and researching deliberative and/or participative processes in which people with cognitive disabilities play a major role
- professional and long-standing experiences with moderating deliberative and/or participative processes in which people with cognitive disabilities take part

Inclusion criteria for expert interviews:

- Long-standing and professional experience in organising, convening, moderating or researching participative and deliberative processes with people with cognitive disabilities.
- Long-standing and professional experiences with researching or coping with barriers of people with cognitive disabilities in participative and deliberative processes.
- Long-standing and professional experiences with the usage of tools, formats and techniques to assist people with cognitive disabilities in taking part in participative and deliberative processes.

Inclusion criteria for facilitator interviews:

- professional and long-standing experiences with facilitating deliberative and/or participative processes in which people with cognitive disabilities take part
- professional and long-standing experiences with training or educating facilitators in how to meet the needs of people with cognitive disabilities in deliberative and participative processes

Inclusion criteria valid for all focus groups:

- Intersections of the following criteria: age, gender, migration experience, educational status, languages spoken, type of assistive technology used in everyday life and the type of human care needed in everyday life.

Justification for including people older than 65 for the interviews:

- To limit the age of interviewees to 65 or less would be a needless restriction for the sampling of the interviewees. It could be the case that some experts, stakeholders or moderators with expertise concerning the topics of vulnerability, inclusion and artificial intelligence are older than 65 years. Given that potential interviewees are older than 65 but still understand the consequences of their participation, we argue that it is justified and important for the project's success to include them. In case a participant demonstrates an inability to participate, we will not conduct an interview.

Justification for including people from vulnerable groups in the focus group:

- The project's topic is substantially related to the social situation of vulnerable groups. The general idea which frames the overall project aims is that the involvement of future users (i.e. people with cognitive disabilities, vulnerable groups and the elderly) in the development of technology is necessary. This is even more the case when developing a technology supposed to be used by people with cognitive disabilities. Only by their involvement can we learn about the challenges they face in the social situations at question.
- A second important argument for including vulnerable people in a focus group is that the project aims at developing a technology which assists people with cognitive disabilities in processes of political discussions in small groups. We therefore assume that the focus

group could deliver insights into communicative dynamics of vulnerable people engaged in group discussions.

Describe the sampling and recruitment procedures (how will participants be identified and approached?; is there any possibility of undue influence or coercion?; if so, how has it been addressed?; etc.).

Interviews:

Prospective participants of the interviews will be selected via research on publicly available webpages and through personal contacts from within the consortium. All potential participants will be included in a list with information on their professional background and publicly available contact details. If there is the need to store personal data - gathered on publicly available webpages without restriction of access (e.g. webpages of universities or NGOs) - we will only collect personal data for the purpose of contacting potential interviewees, if the terms and conditions of the webpage allow us to do so. If it is obvious that direct personal identifiers (such as names, mail addresses, etc) have been shared on publicly accessible webpages without the consent of the data subjects, we will certainly not collect this personal data. Participants of the interviews will be selected according to the abovementioned inclusion and exclusion criteria. We shall then contact the prospective candidates and we will provide informational material, including an easy-to-read version, on the project in order to secure their informed participation in our interviews.

Focus Groups:

The participation of people with cognitive disabilities sometimes requires the consent of their legal guardians, who usually work within the facilities that offer assisted living (in a special form of housing or as outpatients in assisted living communities). They are usually run by charitable/social welfare organisations such as AWO, DRK as well as Diakonie and Caritas [in Germany] under church sponsorship. Such organisations are multipliers that can be approached for recruitment. There are also assisted housing projects run by relatives' interest groups and inclusive housing projects.

To maximise the use of the results the focus groups will be executed by project partners in Italy and Spain, having access to 'door-openers' who will connect them to potential participants (or if applicable, to their legal guardians). The recruitment process will be carried out operatively by each partner organisation and under the guidance, supervision and with support of the Nexus Institute.

To counter the possibility of undue influence or coercion we, and our partners, will take special care of choosing only facilities, organisations and individuals as 'door-openers' who or which can ensure a high level of quality regarding the treatment of people with cognitive disabilities (particularly active promotion of self-determined living and working).

An exclusion criterion for facilities is the cooperation with so-called workshops for people with cognitive disabilities, which are mainly active in the area of product manufacturing and services and which offer little or no occupational therapy.

As we will not directly gather health data, the sampling of participants will not be determined on the basis of the diagnosed medicinal diseases. However, we will ask for types of assistive technology used in everyday life and the type of human care needed in everyday life. Based on this, it is possible to infer special categories of data, that is, health data related to diseases or disabilities. We will implement specific measures to secure all personal data (deletion, pseudonymization, encryption).

We will choose participants with the aim of creating a stratified sample according to the following criteria: age, gender, migration experience, educational status, languages spoken, type of assistive technology used in everyday life and the type of human care needed in everyday life. To be able to base the sampling process on these criteria, after having informed all potential participants about the project and the focus groups, all those addressees willing to take part in the focus groups will receive a pre-questionnaire. The pre-questionnaire will be accessible in easy language and it will ask potential participants to provide data on the intersections of criteria which follow: contact details (full name, phone number and mail address of the potential participants and if applicable, the same for her or his legal guardian); aged under 18 or over 65 (yes/no); gender (categorical scale with gender categories); migratory background (yes/no); level of education (categorical scale with educational levels); languages spoken (free text field); type of assistive technology used in everyday life (free text field) and the type of human care needed in everyday life (free text field). As soon as having collected a sample with a sufficient degree of diversity concerning the intersectional criteria mentioned above, the local organising team in Italy and Spain will compose a focus group out of the sample and invite the selected participants.

All these points will be summed up chronologically, translated and presented in a guide for our project partners in Italy and Spain in order to ensure an ethically justified recruitment and sampling process. We will be in constant and close contact to our partners throughout the whole recruitment and sampling process (especially with respect to organising a preliminary and preparatory meeting for potential participants and their legal guardians; moderation training for our local partners; obtaining consent (see also further down); protection of personal data).

[Describe when and how consent will be obtained. Confirm that all the relevant information \(as listed in the guide\) has been included in the information sheet and consent form. If obtaining consent is unfeasible, please justify your decision.](#)

Interviews:

All relevant information will be summarised in the information sheet and consent form. Consent will be obtained once a potential interviewee is identified by each partner. Each participant will receive the data processing and protection information sheet and consent form and a sheet summing up the objectives of the project (also in easy language). Consent to the audio recording will in any case be obtained before the interview takes place.

Focus Groups:

All relevant information is listed in the information sheet and consent form. The research team will ask the potential cooperation facilities/housing projects for authorization to carry out the focus group. It is important that the potential cooperation facilities/housing projects receive all relevant information right from the start - about the project objectives, procedures, etc. There are guidelines for this.

It is necessary to explain the aim of the project, the focus groups, the planned schedule and finally, the content of the information sheet and consent form as early as possible. This will simplify the accessibility of our project for legal guardians or other 'door-openers' who (within the scope of our inclusion criteria) approach people with cognitive disabilities who are potentially interested in participating. At the same time, it prevents them from finding out in the middle of the process that it is not suitable for them after all.

We will adapt the format to each participant's specific needs. We, and our project partners, will rely on the legal guardians/caregivers for planning and adapting the focus group to participant needs. It would be an added value to meet participants before conducting the focus group, if possible, in a separate meeting.

To reduce further complexity, we will have moderators with local language skills working with us in the design, recruitment and organisation of the focus groups. Based on this early inclusion of legal guardians into the organisational process of the focus group, the obtaining of an informed consent can be assured.

Consent (signature) must be obtained before the participants are involved in the focus group and on the basis of accessible information about the scope and aims of the project, the aims of the focus group and the data protection & consent form. In case a potential participant is not able to give consent by him- or herself, we will not include the person as a participant of the focus groups. We will provide accessible, translated and easy language versions of the consent and information sheets as well as of the project description.

All these points will be summed up chronologically, translated and presented in a guide for our project partners in Italy and Spain in order to ensure an ethically justified recruitment process. We will be in constant and close contact to our partners throughout the whole recruitment process (providing easy language informational material about the project and the focus group, collecting contact data of potential participants, organising a preliminary and preparatory meeting for potential participants and their legal guardians as well as moderation training for our local partners, obtaining consent, data protection) to provide a close consultation at every point of the process.

Section 5. Personal Data Processing

Instructions

- **Skip section 5** if you have completed or will complete a DPIA as part of your application.
- Please see the protocol form guide before you complete this form. It contains text that you can use to complete this section. You may copy and paste the relevant options from among those included.
- Read the descriptions below carefully before you fill out section 5.
-

Personal data: Any information that relates to an identified or identifiable living individual. To determine whether a person is identifiable one must consider the foreseeable technological evolution and the possible combination with other data by the researcher or third parties. Personal data includes both identifying data (first and last names, home address, etc.) and any other type of data that, on its own or combined with other types of data, can be used to identify persons (image; voice; physiological, economic, cultural, social data, etc.).

Special categories of personal data: personal data revealing racial or ethnic origin, political opinions, religious or philosophical beliefs, trade union membership; genetic data; biometric data; or data concerning health, a person's sex life or sexual orientation.

Indicate the types of personal data that will be processed.

Interviews:

Personal data:

full name;
email address;
aged under 18 or over 65 (yes/no);

gender (categorical scale with gender categories);
 migratory experience (yes/no);
 level of education (categorical scale with educational levels);
 languages spoken (free text field);
 type of assistive technology used in everyday life (free text field);
 type of human care needed in everyday life (free text field);
 voice (audio recording).

Special categories of data:

health data (may be inferred on the base of two questions in the pre-questionnaire)

Focus Groups:

Personal data of participant:

full name;
 aged under 18 or over 65 (yes/no);
 phone number;
 email address;
 gender (categorical scale with gender categories);
 migration experience (yes/no);
 level of education (categorical scale with educational levels);
 languages spoken (free text field);
 type of assistive technology used in everyday life (free text field);
 type of human care needed in everyday life (free text field).

Special categories of data:

health data (may be inferred on the base of two questions in the pre-questionnaire)

Legal guardians of participants (if applicable):

full name;
 phone number;
 mail address.

[Describe the security measures that will be implemented.](#)

Interviews:

The following principles apply to the handling of personal data:

- Contact data collected for the initiation and scheduling of interviews (telephone number, email, postal address) will be used by all partners Nexus exclusively for the stated purposes. We will only save the data for those who unambiguously agree to participate and will delete the data of all those who clearly reject participation immediately after the rejection of those who will not participate after one month. If a potential interviewee does not answer our request for an interview within one month, we will count this as a rejection and immediately delete all personal data. However, a frozen (blocked) copy of the contact data (emails) of individuals who declined participation will be retained solely to avoid sending duplicate invitations. The list of frozen contact data will be deleted as soon as the list of all participants of interviews finally is clear. AllThe data is stored in a secure folder in the Nexus cloud and is only accessible to iDEM project staff.
- In order to compose a sufficiently diverse sample of interviewees, we will ask potential participants of expert, stakeholder and facilitator interviews for some information about themselves

prior to the interview and send them a pre-questionnaire to do so. In the questionnaire, potential interviewees will be asked to provide information on the following points: full name; mail address; aged under 18 or over 65 (yes/no); gender (categorical scale with gender categories); migratory background (yes/no); level of education (categorical scale with educational levels); languages spoken (free text field); type of assistive technology used in everyday life (free text field); type of human care needed in everyday life (free text field); voice (audio recording).

- All personal data gathered from potential interviewees will be deleted immediately after the decision against conducting an interview with the potential interviewee has been made.

- All project partners carrying out interviews will upload the audio recordings immediately after the interview to a cloud service provided by the Nexus Institute which is GDPR compliant. After the upload they will delete the recording on their local devices (audio recorders and computers). The same applies to all personal data which was gathered prior to the interview (contact details and the data gathered by the pre-questionnaire). It will be uploaded to the Nexus Institute's cloud. After that, the project partner's delete all local files containing personal data. To ensure that this process guarantees the privacy of participants, esp. with respect to the handling of their personal data, all partner organizations involved (and mentioned as applicants) will sign a non-disclosure agreement (document is attached).

- In a next step, the Nexus Institute will be in charge of pseudonymization immediately after a set of recordings and personal data for an interviewee has been uploaded to the cloud. Nexus will produce a transcription of the interview and after that, delete the recording. All remaining personal data is stored in pseudonymized and encrypted form for 18 months after the interview's date. For the purpose of pseudonymization, IDs are assigned to the interviewees and the key is stored separately. The key is stored in a physically secure location and is only accessible to Nexus project staff. The key and all personal data will be deleted 18 months after the interview has been conducted. After deletion of the key and all personal data, interviews are stored in anonymized form until the end of the project period (12/2026).

- Everyone listed as a member of the "Researcher Team" in section 1 c) will have access to the password securing the transcriptions of the interviews.

- As required by law, backups are made and archived for our systems. These are kept protected from unauthorised access for a specified period of time. Once the retention period has expired, the data will be permanently deleted.

Focus Groups:

The following principles apply to the handling of personal data:

- In order to compose a sufficiently diverse sample of interviewees, we will ask potential participants focus groups for some information about themselves prior to the focus group and send them a pre-questionnaire to do so. In the questionnaire, potential participants will be asked to provide information (if applicable, with the help of their legal guardians) on the following points: full name; mail address; aged under 18 or over 65 (yes/no); gender (categorical scale with gender categories); migration experience (yes/no); level of education (categorical scale with educational levels); languages spoken (free text field); type of assistive technology used in everyday life (free text field); type of human care needed in everyday life (free text field).

- All project partners carrying out focus groups will upload the notes they have taken for documentation purposes immediately after the interview to a cloud service provided by the Nexus Institute. They will delete the notes on their local devices. The same applies to all personal data

which was gathered prior to the interview (contact details and the data gathered by the pre-questionnaire). It will be uploaded to the Nexus Institute's cloud. After that, the project partner's delete all local files containing personal data.

- The Nexus Institute will be in charge of pseudonymization immediately after a set of notes and personal data for all participants of one focus group have been uploaded to the cloud. Personal data is stored in pseudonymized form for 18 months after the interview's date. For the purpose of pseudonymization, IDs are assigned to the interviewees and the key is stored separately in encrypted form. The key is stored in a physically secure location and is only accessible to Nexus project staff. They key and all personal data will be deleted 18 months after the focus group will have taken place. After deletion of the key and all personal data, notes are stored in anonymized form until the end of the project period (12/2026).

- Everyone listed as a member of the "Researcher Team" in section 1 c) will have access to the password securing the transcriptions of the interviews.

- As required by law, backups are made and archived for our systems. These are kept protected from unauthorised access for a specified period of time. Once the retention period has expired, the data will be permanently deleted.

[Describe who will have access to personal data. If applicable, indicate the plans for sharing personal data with non-UPF members.](#)

Interviews:

All interviews will be carried out by iDEM project staff, either online (Zoom (Nexus) or at a predefined location. All personal data gathered to organise the interview (name, email address, etc) will be stored in a dedicated and sufficiently secured file by the project partner doing the interview. Immediately after the interview will have taken place, all personal data, including the audio file, will be uploaded to the Nexus cloud, all local files will be deleted and Nexus will pseudonymise all personal data uploaded to the cloud. For the purpose of pseudonymization IDs are assigned to the interviewees and their personal data. The documents with personal data and the document with the IDs and the names of the participants ("key") are stored separately. The key is stored in a physically secure location in encrypted form and is only accessible to Nexus project staff. They key and all documents containing personal information will be deleted 18 months after the focus group has been conducted. Everyone listed as member of the "Researcher Team" in section 1 c) will have access to the password securing the transcriptions of the interviews.

Focus Groups:

The focus group will be carried out by suitable members of the project consortium being involved in one of the pilots which will take place beginning in 2025 in Spain (2) and Italy (1). These locally rooted consortium members serve as 'door-openers' to potential participants with vulnerabilities. All personal data gathered to organise the interview (name, email address, pre-questionnaire) will be stored in a dedicated and sufficiently secured file on the consortium member's hardware devices. After the focus group will have taken place, all personal data and the notes will be uploaded to the Nexus Institute's cloud by our local consortium members who carried out the focus group. All files with personal data saved locally by our consortium members will be deleted after the upload.. Nexus will pseudonymise all remaining personal data uploaded to the cloud. For the purpose of pseudonymization IDs are assigned to the participants and their personal data. The documents with personal data and the document with the IDs and the names of the participants ("key") are stored separately. The key is stored in a physically secure location in encrypted form and is only accessible to Nexus' project staff. Their key and personal data will be

deleted 18 months after the focus group has been conducted. - Everyone listed as a member of the “Researcher Team” in section 1 c) will have access to the password securing the transcriptions of the interviews.

Discuss the personal data preservation period and any plans for future reuse after the completion of the current project.

Personal data will be saved in pseudonymized form for 18 months after the interview/focus group. Any withdrawal of consent to the processing of personal data shall take place within this period. After 18 months all pseudonymized personal data will be anonymized.

Discuss whether personal data will be published or otherwise disseminated. If so, confirm that the consent form explicitly allows participants to consent to this type of dissemination (even if this involves dissemination of data after anonymization).

No personal data is planned to be disseminated at any point in time.

Section 6. Other Ethical Considerations

Please provide a clear and concise statement of the ethical issues raised by the research activity not discussed above and how you intend to deal with them. Potential conflicts of interests between the PI’s involvement in non-academic activities and the research project should be discussed if applicable.

Participating in this study does not entail any specific risks greater than those ordinarily encountered in daily life. Potential benefits of participating in the study are the chance to contribute to the enhancement of research outputs about barriers to participation with respect to people with cognitive disabilities, the possibility to co-develop a natural language processing application to support people with cognitive disabilities in participatory and deliberative processes thus benefiting directly from the above mentioned research.

We will provide participants of the focus group and the interviews with links to our media dissemination channels where we will post updates on the results of our research in accessible form.

Section 7. References

Signature

PI

Date

Potential Reviewers *(optional)*

Suggest UPF reviewers who may be able to review your project

Annex 2: IDEM Project: Interview Guidelines for semi-structured interviews for T.4.1.

Task 4.1.: Comprehensive assessment of the engagements of hard to reach groups and vulnerable populations in participatory and deliberative processes

Materials Needed to Conduct the Interview:

- Signed data protection & ethics form
- Audio recorder
- Questionnaire

Instructions: Please remember that the interviews are semi-structured. This means that the questions here are expected to guide you through the interview with the expert but that you are free to deviate from the questions depending on the context, expert, and course of the discussion. Therefore, you are free to skip and/or add some questions depending on the situation and what the expert explains. If needed, do not hesitate to ask for more details/information during the interview if you think it is interesting/beneficial for the task. We expect the interview to last around 30–45 minutes, but depending on the expert and discussion, they can be shorter or longer.

1. Preparation and Introduction

- Reminder about data and privacy protection and the rules applying to it (anonymity, data stored on a protected server, etc.), including permission to record the interview.
- Recording starts
- Thank you for your time and availability
- Brief Introduction to the IDEM Project:
 - Project funded by the European Commission's Horizon Europe programme.
 - Overall aim: research on inclusion of vulnerable people in citizen participation processes and development of assistive technologies to enhance inclusion in such contexts.
 - Work Package and Task: This interview is being held in the context of Work Package 4.
 - Goal of the interview: exploratory interviews to explore a new field and gather knowledge on that field, focusing on barriers. Explanation of why we asked for the interview (stress the expertise of the person).
- Presentation of Interviewee:
 - Can you please tell us a bit about yourself, your professional background?
 - If not mentioned: How is your work/professional occupation related/linked to people with cognitive disabilities or more broadly with vulnerable groups or with people with language barriers? Can you please specify what kind of barriers it is?
 - If not mentioned: Do you have personal experience with organizing, conducting, researching, or evaluating participative processes with people with cognitive disabilities or people with language barriers?

2. Solutions: Formats, Techniques, and Tools

2.1 Identifying Accessibility Barriers in Participatory Processes

- Have you already experienced or heard about situations in which vulnerable groups experienced accessibility barriers during a participatory process? (e.g., situations related to linguistic barriers, complex concepts, access to information about events, overcomplexity, need to interact with a legal guardian, etc.) Please describe.
- More specifically, can you remember and describe specific situations in which people with cognitive disabilities experienced barriers (especially language barriers)?

2.2 Specific Participative Formats to Reduce Barriers for Vulnerable Groups

- Which kinds of (or specific) participatory formats would you use to include vulnerable groups (such as minority groups, elderly people, people with cognitive disabilities, etc.) in a participatory process? Feel free to refer to different formats based on the specific target group.
- How would you adapt a participatory process to enhance the inclusion of vulnerable groups? At which stage of the process (recruitment, information, deliberation, etc.) would an adaptation be required to enhance inclusivity for these target groups?

- Can you give examples of modifications/adaptations of participative formats that reduce barriers for vulnerable groups, particularly people with cognitive disabilities?
- Do you think online participation is better suited than in-person events to include vulnerable groups in a participatory process?

2.3 Tools and Techniques to Improve Inclusivity

- Are you aware of or have you used specific tools or techniques (e.g., videos, pictures, translators, sortitions, etc.) to enhance the inclusion of vulnerable groups?
- Are you aware of or have you used tools or techniques that reduce risks associated with participative formats for people with cognitive disabilities (such as exclusion, paternalism, token participation, etc.)? If yes, please elaborate.
- At which stages of the participatory process are these tools or techniques usually implemented? (Recruitment, deliberation, information, decision stages, etc.)

2.4 Social Techniques to Enhance Inclusivity

- Can you think of specific moderation techniques that support the inclusion of vulnerable groups in participatory processes?
- Are there examples of organizational modifications (e.g., easy-to-read documents, more time for specific tasks, etc.) that enhance the inclusion of vulnerable groups?
- What needs to be taken into account from the facilitator/moderator perspective to maximize the inclusion of vulnerable groups (or people with cognitive disabilities) in participatory processes?

3. Examples for Technology-Aided Assistance for Vulnerable Groups

- Can you share experiences/examples of technological tools used to enhance the inclusion of vulnerable groups?
- Can you share experiences/examples of technological tools used to enhance the inclusion of people with cognitive disabilities?

4. Transferability of Solutions Across Linguistic and National Borders in Europe

- Which formats, tools, and techniques mentioned above can be transferred to other languages/countries in Europe?
- How could this transfer be accomplished?
- Which formats, tools, and techniques cannot be transferred to other languages/countries in Europe?
- Why can this transfer not be accomplished?

5. Expected Potentials and Limits of Technological Assistance for People with Cognitive Disabilities

5.1 Thought Experiment on Technological Devices

Imagine that a group of researchers wants to develop a device (e.g., chatbot/an app) that translates speech to other languages and simplifies text.

- What do you think are the potentials of such a device for assisting vulnerable groups in participative processes?
- What are the risks of such a device (e.g., chatbot/app) for assisting vulnerable groups in participative processes?
- Can you think of structural limitations of deploying technological tools to assist vulnerable groups? To which problems can they be a solution?

5.2 Experiences from Similar/Comparable Projects

- Do you know of any projects that developed or implemented tools for technological assistance to enhance the participation of vulnerable groups?

6. Closing

- Are there any other points you would like to add that have not been addressed here?
- Do you know other people/experts we should reach out to?