



Innovative and Inclusive Democratic Spaces for Deliberation and Participation

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D7.5 Plan for evaluation of iDEM hop-on project

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Summary

This deliverable contains the Evaluation Plan for Use Case 4 and its related project activities. The evaluation will be carried out internally by the Lead Partner of Use Case 4, Inspire Malta. The Evaluation Plan outlines the evaluation criteria, including ethical standards, timeline and delivery dates, adherence to a Participatory Action Research (PAR) approach, and high scientific standards. The Evaluation plan describes the procedures and protocols that will be followed to implement and ensure adherence to the evaluation criteria. Moreover, the plan also states the evaluators for each of the criteria which include the Principle Investigator of Use Case 4 and the project team, but also involves other parties such as the Human Resources Department, the Chief Executive Officer, or the Data Protection Officer at Inspire Foundation. Finally, the Evaluation Plan outlines the timeline for evaluation measures.

Plain Language Summary

This document is the Evaluation Plan for Use Case 4 and its related project tasks. The evaluation will be done internally by the Lead Partner for Use Case 4, Inspire Malta. The plan



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explains how the evaluation will be carried out, including the criteria used, ethical guidelines, schedule, and deadlines. It follows a Participatory Action Research (PAR) approach, a method that includes persons with disabilities, and aims for high scientific standards.

The plan also describes the steps and rules that will be followed to meet the evaluation criteria. It lists who will be responsible for each part of the evaluation—mainly the Principal Investigator and the project team, along with others such as the HR Department, CEO, and Data Protection Officer at Inspire Foundation. Lastly, the plan includes a timeline for the evaluation activities.

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Acronyms	
CEO	Chief Executive Officer
iDEM	Horizon Europe project “Innovative and Inclusive Democratic Spaces for Deliberation and Participation”
iDEM hop-on	Horizon Widera Scheme project “Innovative and Inclusive Democratic Spaces for Deliberation and Participation”
E.T.S.	Entity of the Third Sector
EU	European Union
HE	Horizon Europe
HR	Human Resources
PAR	Participatory Action Research
PI	Principal Investigator
POMA	Protection of Minors Act

1. Introduction and outline

Evaluation by an external third party will be carried out for the iDEM project and the original Use Cases 1 to 3. However, Use Case 4 being part of the hop-on project has a different timeline and, most importantly, follows a different methodology than the other use cases. Hence, the evaluation of Use Case 4 will be carried out separately from the evaluation of the other use cases. An internal evaluation of the progress and outcomes related to the iDEM hop-on project will be carried out regularly during the project (process evaluation) and at the end of the project (summative evaluation) to ensure a) adherence to ethical guidelines and procedures, b) adherence to timeline and delivery dates, c) adherence to a Participatory Action Research (PAR) approach involving persons with lived experience in the design, planning, conducting, and analysis of the experimental research,, d) high scientific standard of empirical data collection and data analysis.

This evaluation plan for the iDEM hop-on project and Use Case 4 will guide the internal evaluation of the project and states the evaluation criteria (What will be evaluated?), the evaluation procedures and protocols (How will it be evaluated?), and a timeline for the evaluation (When will it be evaluated?). The evaluation will be carried out by the project PI in collaboration with the project team members. If viable, other evaluators of the PI's entity or external evaluators will be included. To ensure transparency, all documentation pertaining to the evaluation of the project will be made available to the research consortium, specifically the leader of WP7, as well as to the European Commission upon request.

2. Evaluation criteria

2.1. Ethical standards

2.1.1 Adherence to the iDEM project's ethical conduct guidelines

In accordance with all partners on the iDEM project, the iDEM hop-on and Use Case 4 will closely adhere to the code of ethics laid out by ActionAid International Italia E.T.S. in the sixth approved version dated 19/03/2022. The ethical principles laid out therein that are deemed important for the iDEM hop-on project are the following:

1) Compliance with laws and regulations

Any activities with relation to iDEM and iDEM hop-on will be carried out in absolute compliance with national and international laws and regulations. The PI, the project team, and their entity (Inspire Malta) are responsible for informing themselves of the applicable laws and regulations that apply to the performance of their duties. Any relations with Public

Administration, the Supervisory Authorities, political and trade union organisations, national, EU and international public institutions, or with public officials or public servants will be guided by transparency, integrity, professional competence, and full cooperation.

2) Honesty and integrity

Honesty and moral integrity, values of fairness and good faith, as well as cooperation, loyalty and mutual respect will underlie all activities carried out with relation to iDEM and iDEM hop-on.

3) Transparency and completeness of the information

All information published or shared internally in relation to iDEM and iDEM hop-on will be complete, transparent, understandable and accurate. This is specifically relevant with regards to the community of persons with intellectual disabilities and/or language difficulties who are involved in or will benefit from the project outcomes.

4) Protection of the name and image of the project

All activities carried out with relation to iDEM and iDEM hop-on will respect the integrity and prestige of the name and image of the project and will be carried out in such a way that does not harm the project's integrity, name, and image. Activities will adhere to the principles set out in the ethical guidelines and will be carried out with full respect of the name and image of the project.

5) Responsibility to the general public

All activities with relation to iDEM and iDEM hop-on will be carried out in full awareness of the project's role in economic and social development, and in the general well-being of the public of local, national, and international communities. Within the iDEM hop-on, the project team dedicates itself to promoting and supporting initiatives with cultural and social value, to implement the inclusion of the public into the project's activities and to promote the accountability of public institutions.

6) Ethics

The project team of the iDEM hop-on project will follow the principles of efficiency wherever possible and feasible, and to reject any collusive or abusive behaviour that would harm third parties. Any activities within the project will be carried out in accordance with strict measures against corruption and favouritism. Moreover, the project team is committed to not support illegal immigration during the execution of activities, to fight poverty, protect the rights of women, trans, and non-binary individuals, and to integrate and welcome migrants.

7) Promotion of respect for the dignity of people and gender equality

The project team of the iDEM hop-on in accordance with the policies of its entity, Inspire Malta, respects, promotes, and advocates for the fundamental rights of people by protecting moral integrity and guaranteeing equal opportunities.

All project activities and all internal and external relations will be carried out in full support of equality and equity condemning all forms of discrimination against personal dignity, the private life or rights of individual persons based on political or trade union opinions, religion, gender, ethnicity, nationality, sexual orientation, health or disability, or any other intimate characteristics of a person.

In line with Inspire Malta's strict policies and adherence to Malta's Protection of Minors Act (POMA), all forms of abuse, ill treatment, neglect, or violence against minors are vehemently condemned and all individuals working in or with the project team need to undergo POMA clearance prior to the start of any project-related activities. Moreover, any forms of abuse, or ill treatment against adolescents, women, and vulnerable persons are vehemently condemned. The project team actively promotes any actions that aim to remove or prevent environmental and social conditions that may increase risk.

Any form of physical, psychological, or verbal harassment or violence against women and vulnerable persons related to the iDEM hop-on project's activities is rejected and will be prosecuted.

Within the iDEM project, any authority will be exercised with fairness and in consideration of the personal and professional dignity of colleagues. Privacy of personal and private information of the project team will be respected at all times. The Human Resources (HR) Department at Inspire Malta is responsible for the overseeing of hierarchical relationships within the organisation and the adherence to employee privacy guidelines. The HR department will also be responsible for resolving any violations or issues against these principles within the iDEM hop-on team.

8) Diligence and spirit of cooperation

Each member of the iDEM hop-on project team will carry out their activities with the diligence required by the nature of the tasks and functions exercised, with maximum commitment in the achievement of the objectives assigned, and taking on the responsibility necessary in accordance with the job carried out. The team members will commit themselves to learning as much as possible about their jobs and staying updated.

The iDEM hop-on project team will fully cooperate and collaborate with the other project partners in the research consortium and any third parties involved in the iDEM or iDEM hop-on project.

9) Traceability of the activities carried out

The iDEM hop-on project team will keep adequate records of all activities carried out in relation to the iDEM and iDEM hop-on project in full transparency of the reasons behind the activities. The reasoning of the activities and their characteristics can be checked at any time. An internal project folder has been set up to keep records of the project-related activities with limited access to the persons directly involved in the project in accordance with Data Protection Regulations.

10) Conflicts of interest

All project-related activities will be carried out without real or potential conflict of interest and in full accordance with the goals and interests of the iDEM and iDEM hop-on projects. Any potential conflict of interest that may arise during the project will need to be immediately reported to the PI, Inspire's HR Department, and/or Inspire's Chief Executive Officer (CEO).

11) Criminal proceedings

The volition of parties who have to answer to the legal authorities may not be influenced in any form or in any way in order to persuade them not to make declarations or state facts that are untrue.

12) Well-being of employees

The iDEM hop-on project will be carried out in accordance with Inspire Malta's policies and regulations on the well-being of its employees, employee rights and benefits, and efforts to enhance employee's work-life balance.

13) Safety in the workplace and workers' health

In accordance with Inspire Malta's policies, the prevailing laws and regulations on health and safety for employees, visitors to the premises, and the environment as well as on hygiene in the workplace, efficient risk-prevention, and developments in this area will be observed. Inspire's HR department is responsible for the risk assessment of workplaces and to provide any measures necessary to reduce or prevent any risks towards health and safety.

14) Protection of the environment

The iDEM hop-on project team will strictly adhere to any national and international guidelines and regulations regarding environmental safety and protection and will undertake any adequate means to reduce or prevent any risk towards the environment.

15) Accounting and financial records

The Financial Executive of the iDEM hop-on project is responsible for keeping adequate financial records and to report all financial transactions to the project consortium and the European Commission in accordance with iDEM's reporting requirements and as stated in the project's Grant Agreement. All members of the project team are committed to support full transparency of all financial decisions and transactions and to conduct all project-related activities frugally and with economic efficiency. Records of all financial activities related to the iDEM hop-on project will be kept in diligent form in accordance with the national and international regulations.

Use Case 4 involves the participation in research of human participants with and without mental disabilities. Hence, the following ethical principles stated in the Declaration of Helsinki will be closely observed in accordance with ethical conduct guidelines noted in iDEM's WP6 documentation:

16) Informed consent and asset

Participation of individuals in any research activities carried out in relation to the iDEM hop-on project is entirely voluntary, and their free and unbiased consent must be obtained prior to any sort of data collection. Informed consent must include a detailed description of the research, an explanation of the handling, processing, and publication of data, and the information that withdrawal from the research project is possible at any given time without any disadvantages towards the (potential) participant. Information of the potential participant or their caregiver must take place in a way and form that they understand and the project team will take any measures necessary to relate information about the research project in an understandable way for each potential participant. This is especially relevant considering that participants involve persons with mental disabilities.

If a potential participant is not able to give informed consent due to an intellectual disability, in addition to obtaining informed consent from their legal guardian, assent must be ascertained from the (potential) participant taking into account any preferences and values expressed by the (potential) participant. The (potential) participant's dissent must be respected and any sign of dissent or distress during the ongoing experimental research will immediately be respected and taken as withdrawal of assent.

17) Risk, burdens, and benefit

All research methods, paradigms, and procedures used in relation to the iDEM hop-on project are non-invasive and have been proven to have no lasting adverse effects on the participants. The research team commits itself to prevent or reduce any identified burdens connected to the research with any means necessary. Any risks or burdens will be assessed together with persons with lived experience and members of the participants' population. Identified risks and burdens will be monitored and documented throughout the project.

Risks and burdens will be carefully weighed against the interests and benefits for the participants and the target population.

18) Selection of participants

Participants will be selected based on the principles of voluntary participation and equality/equity. Gender balancing will be aimed for; however, in accordance with the EU's principles on non-discrimination, gender is not a binary concept but includes non-binary and trans-gender identities. Since equal numbers of individuals for all gender dimensions cannot be guaranteed, exact gender balancing might not be feasible.

Any reason for exclusion of participants must be strictly scientifically necessary and must be documented in the research plan including the scientific reasoning for exclusion from participation. Exclusion from participation based on political opinion, religion, gender, health or disability, nationality, or ethnicity is deemed discriminatory if not scientifically necessary and will be rejected.

2.1.2 Adherence to ethical guidelines specific to Use Case 4

The quantitative research approach taken in Use Case 4 makes it necessary to control for potential covariates and moderators that can influence the measured outcome irrespective of the independent predictors to safeguard the scientific principle guiding the inferences drawn from the experimental research. These covariates and moderators include measures of cognitive functioning (e.g., intelligence, working memory capacity, language skills) as well as medical diagnoses related to cognitive-linguistic processes (e.g., intellectual disability, autism spectrum disorder, dyslexia, psychosis). Because information on cognitive and medical characteristics of individuals is particularly sensitive information, the assessment, diagnosis, analysis, storage, and dissemination of such results requires additional ethical considerations. These specific ethics criteria for the diagnostics and assessments planned for Use Case 4 will be determined and collated by the iDEM hop-on project team and will be submitted for evaluation to the ethics committee of the Faculty for Social Wellbeing of the University of Malta and documented as deliverable D6.8 due on 31st August 2025.

2.1.3 Data Protection Regulations

The iDEM hop-on project team will strictly adhere to the organisational, local, national, and international Data Protection Regulations for handling, managing, and storing personal data both with regards to employees working on the project as well as with regards to

participants and their guardians. The HR Department at Inspire Malta is responsible for the protection of personal data of Inspire's employees which includes the project team.

The PI will be responsible for adequate handling, managing, and storage of all participant data related to the iDEM hop-on project. Data of human participants will be kept confidential with access strictly limited to project personnel involved in data collection and analysis. All personnel with access to participants' data must sign a Confidentiality Agreement prior to involvement in data collection, management, or analysis. Participant data will only be published in anonymized form without any possibility to relate data to an individual's identity. Data Protection Regulations for sensitive data such as cognitive and medical information of an individual will be outlined in Deliverable D6.8 and will undergo ethical approval by the ethics committee of the Faculty for Social Wellbeing of the University of Malta.

Methods and periods for data storage will strictly follow local, national, and international laws and regulations and will be guided by the Data Protection Officer (DPO) of Inspire Malta (Angelito Sciberras, dpo@inspire.org.mt).

2.2. Timeline and delivery dates

2.2.1 Adherence to project timeline

The project team of the iDEM hop-on project commits to taking all adequate means to ensure that project-related activities are carried out at the time points and within the time periods outlined in the project proposal and the project's Gantt chart and are in accordance with the overall project's progress and timeline. The project team guarantees full collaboration and transparency with all members of the research consortium to ensure coordination of research activities in a smooth and efficient manner. Any identified risks or external circumstances that lead or might lead to a delay in the project's progress need to be communicated, mitigated with adequate means, and documented throughout the project.

2.2.2 Adherence to delivery dates

The iDEM hop-on project team commits to taking all adequate means to ensure punctual delivery of activities, milestones, and deliverables as scheduled in the project proposal and the project's Gantt chart. Any identified risks or external circumstances that lead or might lead to a delay in the delivery need to be communicated, mitigated with adequate means, and documented throughout the project.

2.3. Adherence to PAR approach

The involvement of the target community of persons with disabilities and language and communication difficulties in research conducted in their interest is deemed of utmost importance to ensure autonomy, decision-making, and equal participation for persons with disabilities in all aspects of life including scientific research. The iDEM hop-on project team commits to involve persons with lived experience in all stages of the experimental procedure (planning, design, piloting, conducting, data analysis, distribution of project outcomes) in accordance with a Participatory Action Research (PAR) approach (e.g., Cornish et al., 2023).

2.4. High scientific standard of empirical data collection and analysis

The Declaration of Helsinki states that “[...] research involving human participants must have a scientifically sound and rigorous design and execution that are likely to produce reliable, valid, and valuable knowledge and avoid research waste. The research must conform to generally accepted scientific principles, be based on a thorough knowledge of the scientific literature, other relevant sources of information, and adequate laboratory [...]”. The iDEM hop-on project team commits to take all adequate measures to ensure adherence to these principles. The research background, hypotheses, design, aims, methods, procedures, anticipated benefits, potential risks and burdens, provisions to protect privacy and confidentiality, incentives for participants, and any other relevant aspects of the research will be collated in a research plan prior to the start of any data collection.

Special attention will be paid towards balancing adherence to a PAR approach and ensuring high scientific standards of the research conducted in the iDEM hop-on project. Decisions on the experimental design will be informed by a PAR approach involving persons with lived experience in the design and piloting of the experimental protocol to ensure accessibility, understanding, and comfort for the participants. However, any measures taken to implement a PAR approach will be carefully weighed against the current state-of-the-art in scientific research to ensure high quality of the obtained data.

3. Evaluation procedures and protocols

3.1 Ethical standards

All members of the iDEM project team will undergo a briefing of ethical principles to adhere to and the procedure in case of (suspected) misconduct and will sign a declaration to commit to the conduct of ethics. Signed declarations will be saved internally to keep

adequate records of internal ethical briefing. Supervision of ethical conduct of all team members will be carried out by the PI including self-evaluation. Any breaches of ethical conduct will be documented and reported. Breaches ethical conduct committed by iDEM hop-on team members shall be reported to the PI, breaches committed by the PI shall be reported to Inspire's HR department or Inspire's Chief Executive Officer. A brief revision of ethical principles and procedures in case of (suspected) misconduct will be carried out during each of the internal project team meetings to ensure awareness of ethical conduct throughout the project. In preparation of the team meetings, the PI will briefly evaluate the ethical conduct of each team member and of herself. These revisions and any discussions pertaining to them will be documented in the meeting protocols.

Prior to any data collection, the iDEM hop-on team will provide ethical guidelines for the assessment of cognitive functions in people with disabilities and the collection of sensitive data such as disability diagnoses based on best practices in the Psychology and Disability research communities (e.g., British Psychological Society, 2018; Good, 2020; Oats, 2020), national and EU policies and guidelines on General Data Protection (e.g., Regulation (EU) 2016/679; Malta Data Protection Act (<https://idpc.org.mt/wp-content/uploads/2020/07/CAP-586.pdf>), and considerations and recommendations of the service users collected during focus groups with persons with lived experience. These will be collated in Deliverable D6.8 and will be submitted for evaluation to the ethics committee of the Faculty for Social Wellbeing of the University of Malta.

A research conduct protocol will be developed and disseminated to all members of the research team to ensure a standardised procedure when conducting experimental research involving human participants. The protocol will incorporate the principles of equal opportunities, informed consent and assent, considerations on selection of participants, adherence to the specific ethical criteria with regards to cognitive-functional assessments and diagnostics, as well as Data Protection Regulations. All members of the research team will be trained in the research protocol and supervision will be carried out by the PI to ensure adherence to the protocol.

3.2 Timeline and delivery dates

The iDEM hop-on team will conduct internal project team meetings once a month to discuss progress on the project, adherence to the project timeline and the status of the deliverables, and to identify any external factors that impede or might impede the timeliness of delivery or the progress of the project and discuss ways to mitigate these factors. Meeting reports as outcomes of these internal project meetings will document the progress, timeliness of deliverables, as well as any risks or external factors that might hinder adherence to the project timeline. The reports will be saved internally and made

available to the project partners or the funding authority upon request to ensure full transparency in the proceedings of the iDEM hop-on project. In accordance with transparency and full cooperation with the project partners, any impeding delays on the project's progress or the delivery of an action, milestone, or deliverable will be immediately communicated to the project consortium via adequate channels.

3.3 Adherence to PAR approach

Persons with lived experience will be involved in the experimental planning, design, conducting, analysis, and publication of the results via focus groups. During the focus groups, participants will be presented with the experimental method, design, paradigm, and research situation developed by the project team based on highest scientific standards and considerations, and feedback will be collected from them. Presentations and explanations need to be provided bilingually (Maltese and English), in Easy Language, and in different modalities (visually, auditorily, and in text form). Feedback from participants will be collected with different means and communication devices will be used to ensure successful communication with non-verbal participants. A protocol for each focus group will be created to document characteristics of the attendees, and the materials and procedures used in each focus group.

3.4 High scientific standard of empirical data collection and analysis

Prior to any empirical data collection, a research plan containing the research background including a literature review, hypotheses, design, aims, methods, anticipated benefits, potential risks and burdens, provisions to protect privacy and confidentiality, incentives for participants, and any other relevant aspects of the research will be created. The research plan also includes planned data analysis and statistical analysis procedures. The research plan will be pre-registered on the Center for Open Science's website (<https://www.cos.io/initiatives/prereg>) and published prior to the start of the data collection to ensure full transparency. The research plan will guide experimental design, data collection, and analysis and any deviation from the research plan as well as the reasoning for the deviation will be documented and reported.

A research conduct protocol will be developed and disseminated to all members of the research team to ensure a standardised procedure when conducting experimental research involving human participants and when analysing the results. Adherence to the protocol will ensure objectivity through standardisation.

The experimental research conducted including the pre-registered research plan and any deviations from it, along with all collected data, data processing pipelines and statistical

analysis procedures will be published under an Open Access license in an international peer-reviewed journal via deliverable D4.5 due on 31/10/2026.

4. Summative evaluation

A final evaluation report will be created at the end of the project summarising the evaluation efforts and drawing conclusions on the quality of the research project and recommendations derived from the evaluation for future research projects. The summative evaluation report will be shared and discussed with Inspire's Research and Innovation Council.

Table 1 shows a summarised evaluation plan containing evaluation criteria, methods, intervals and evaluators.

Criterion	Methods	Interval	Evaluator
Ethical standards	Signed declarations of adherence to ethical conduct guide	Once during onboarding of team members	PI
	Project team meeting reports	Monthly	PI, internal project team
	Documentation and report on ethical misconduct (if applicable)	At every occurrence (if applicable)	PI, Inspire HR department, Inspire CEO
	Training and supervision on research conduct protocol	Once before start of the data collection	PI
	Summative evaluation report	Once at the end of the project	PI, internal project team, Inspire R&I Council
Timeline and delivery dates	Project team meeting reports	Monthly	PI, internal project team

	Summative evaluation report	Once at the end of the project	PI, internal project team, Inspire R&I Council
Adherence to PAR approach	Protocols on focus groups	After each focus group	PI, internal project team
	Summative evaluation report	Once at the end of the project	PI, internal project team, Inspire R&I Council
High scientific standard of empirical data collection and analysis	Research plan	Once before start of the data collection	PI, internal project team
	Training and supervision on research conduct protocol	Once before start of the data collection	PI
	Open Access publication on conducted empirical research	Once during the project	External reviewers of the journal
	Summative evaluation report	Once at the end of the project	PI, internal project team, Inspire R&I Council

Table 1: Evaluation plan (summary)

5. Evaluation timeline

1 st Mar 2025	iDEM hop-on project start
31 st May 2025	Evaluation plan finalised and submitted as Deliverable D7.5
31 st Aug 2025	Ethical principles for assessment and diagnostics established and submitted as Deliverable D6.8
Sept 2025	Ethical conduct guide finalised; project team established and briefed on ethical principles; start of monthly internal project team meetings
Nov 2025	Research plan pre-registered, research conduct protocol finalised

Jul – Nov 2025	Focus groups conducted involving persons with lived experience in accordance with PAR approach
Dec 2025	Start of experimental data collection
31 st Oct 2026	Experimental research including pre-registered research plan, deviations, data set, data and statistical analysis pipelines collated and submitted as Deliverable D4.5
31 st Dec 2026	iDEM hop-on project end
Jan 2027	Summative evaluation report finalised

6. References

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