



CEESEU-DIGIT

Central and Eastern Europe Sustainable Energy Union's **D**esign and **I**mplementation of regional **G**overnment **I**nitiatives for a just energy **T**ransition

D4.2 Engagement Recommendations

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Background of the CEESEU-DIGIT Project

The Central and Eastern European Sustainable Energy Union's Design and Implementation of regional Government Initiatives for a just energy Transition (CEESEU-DIGIT) aims to build the capacity of public administrators in Central and Eastern Europe to develop Energy and Climate Action Plans (ECAPs) that not only promote increased energy efficiency, sustainable energy, reduced carbon emissions and improved climate change adaptability, helping the region to contribute towards meeting the EU's climate goals, but also plans that follow the intent of the Commission to "leave no-one behind" in the process of the just transition to energy security and the goal of a climate-neutral Europe. To ensure a clear understanding among partners, the project's Advisory Board, and the EC that an ECAP includes sufficient and well-targeted attention to the social justice components of the clean energy transition, the term ECAP+ is used in the project.

CEESEU-DIGIT's primary objective is to build capacity in 6 carbon intensive regions in 6 countries in the CEE for holistic regional ECAPs aligned with NCEP national targets supporting the Green Deal, and will involve marginalised and vulnerable groups, especially energy-poor households. A second objective is to assist municipalities to formulate, fund, and implement their ECAPs aligned with regional ones. At both levels, extensive capacity building will be extended to assist with building ECAPs.

Drawing municipalities into energy regions will help cross-pollinate ideas, share knowledge and tasks, and apply for financing. Public-sector capacity building (WP2, WP3) will help (a) formulate a holistic ECAP with energy provisions and carbon footprint reduction while improving climate-sensitive social goods - mobility, parks, playgrounds, clean air and water, biodiversity conservation; (b) address energy poverty - heating/cooling, adequate ventilation/lighting, domestic hot water, cooking; (c), attend to constituents and act on behalf of their needs; (d) understand financing options and how to apply for these; and (e) work with the private sector to mute opposition to the CET and to encourage and incorporate funding of ECAP initiatives by business (WP5). A just Clean Energy Transition (CET) needs to maximise support, minimise opposition, and overcome apathy, requiring social science/social psychology theory to be applied (WP3). Non-public sector stakeholders (key players, context setters, the crowd, and subjects) will each be targeted by specific social and conventional media outreach (WP6). Dissemination will be (a) upward to national levels, the CoM, and the EU for use in energy transition planning (WP5, WP6); (b) across a broader CEE geography via the Central and Eastern Europeans Sustainable Energy Union (CEESEN), a recently established NGO, to have by the end-of-project 2500 members using its online platform to share best practices, lessons learnt, and ideas that can advance the EU's climate goals (WP6).

As a result of implementing the CEESEU-DIGIT project, it is anticipated that several important longer-term impacts will be achieved, a selection among which include:

- 6 high-quality ECAP+s formulated that align GHG reduction targets with 2030 goals and address the special needs of energy-poor, elderly, and minority communities, to include people with disabilities;
- Public/private participation of 900 people in ECAP+ planning meetings to voice their concerns;
- 18 Regional Work Groups are formalised to provide ongoing input into ECAP+ implementation and a longer-term, holistic vision for a just transition;
- At least 66 public sector employees are capacitated to develop regional ECAP+s including mapping of stakeholders and collection of baseline data, and to utilise participatory governance structures to ensure involvement of all stakeholders, especially groups that are often marginalised (energy poor, ethnic minorities, migrants, elderly, people with disabilities, Roma, etc.);
- At least 200 people from civil society and vulnerable groups are capacitated to advocate on behalf of their interests in relation to energy policy/transition;
- Regional/municipal governments designate 7% of their budget to energy transition activities.

Relevance of this Deliverable

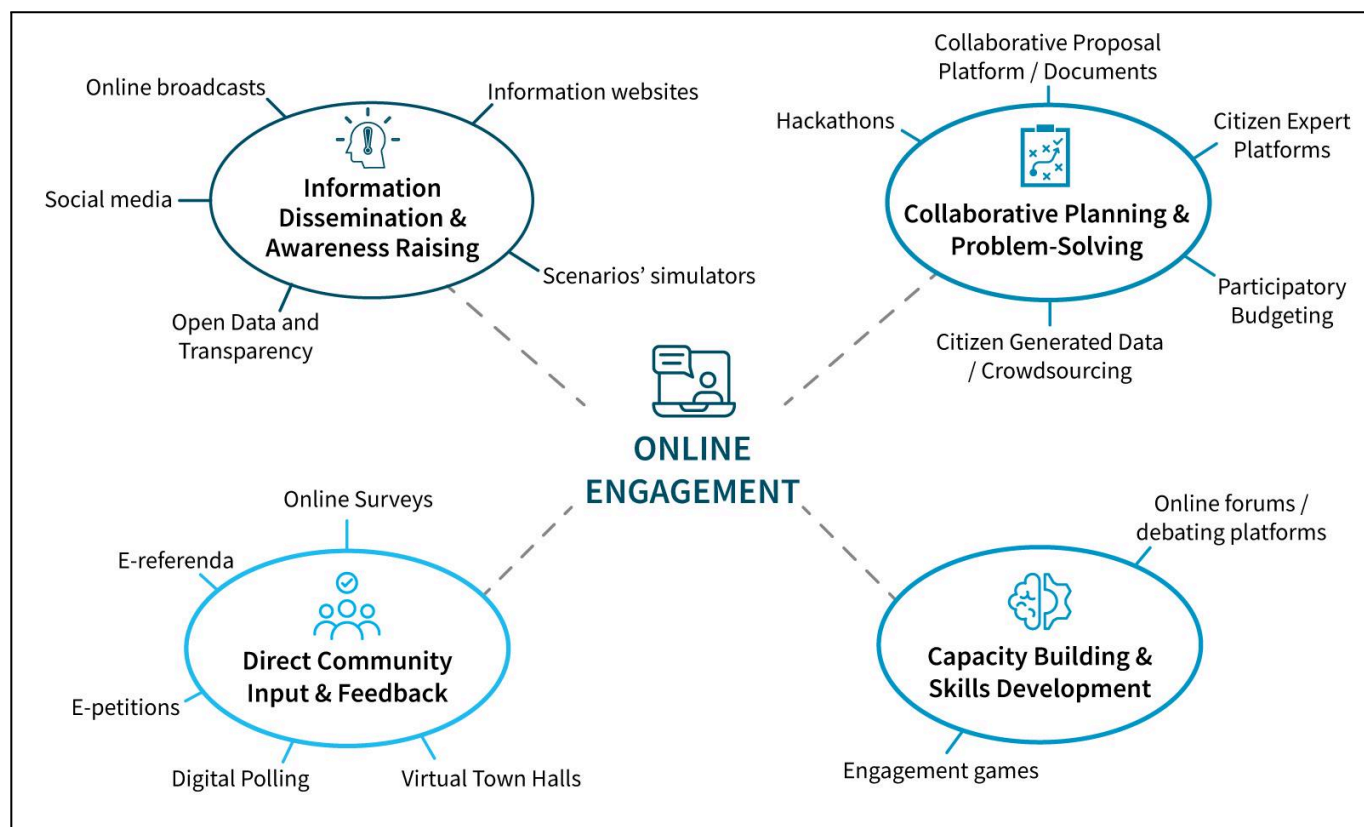
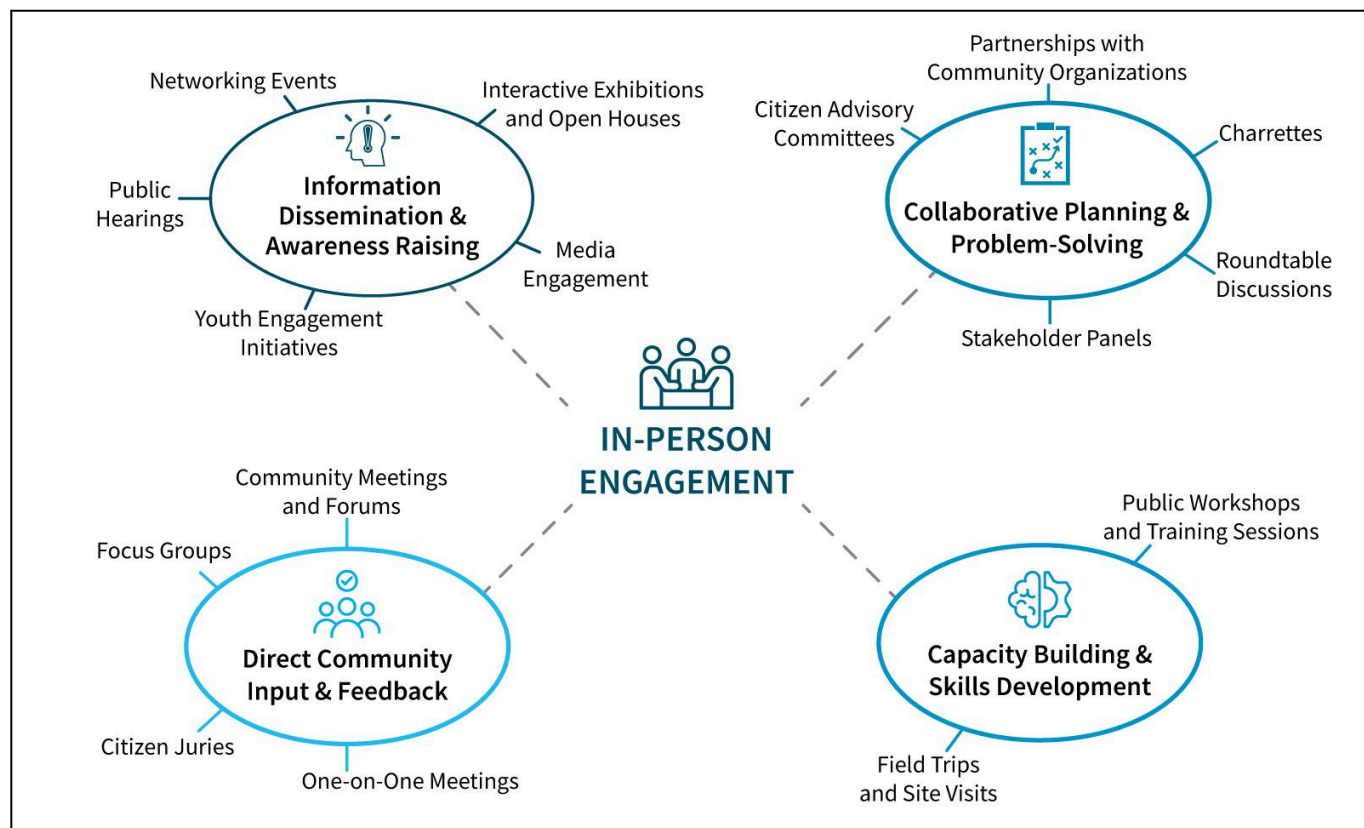
This Deliverable was originally intended to be a copy in English following on from a research component that identified multiple and potentially utilisable in-person and online engagement methods, a document subsequently shared with partners during the Steering Committee meeting held in Estonia in May 2024.

However, the DIGIT team believes that there is more information that is beneficial to include. First, the project managers asked partners to consider each engagement method's applicability and utility in their regions under tasks T4.4.1 and T4.4.2; this survey is included as a section in this Deliverable. Second, the project managers polled partners with a short survey that assessed the administrative complexity, available resources, and community interests for public engagement in their local regions. Information derived from this survey is also included in this Deliverable. And as stipulated in the Project Agreement, we examine if there are discernible differences across the three two-country regions involved in the project - the Baltic States as represented by Estonia and Latvia, the Visegrad States as represented by Poland and the Czech Republic, and the Western Balkans as represented by Slovenia and Croatia.

This Deliverable's stated intention is for the Engagement Methods to be translated into partner languages for onward distribution under T4.4.3 with public sector stakeholders in each of the participating regions. This process is underway at the time of writing this Deliverable, and will be further discussed in the project's final report.

Engagement Methods

The engagement methods identified are separated into in-person and online, with the infographic below indicating the categorisation into the four primary objectives into which each method falls. There are crossover subordinate objectives embedded in several of the methods, but these are not shown in the graphics as this would serve only to crowd the visualisations and render them less useful.



To broaden yet still rapidly assess the objectives and outcomes of each method, refer to the table below.

Type	Method	Outcomes
In person	Public Workshops and Training Sessions	Build capacity, increase awareness, foster skills development
In person	Community Meetings and Forums	Direct feedback, increased transparency, stronger community ties
In person	Focus Groups	Detailed qualitative data, varied perspectives, and targeted insights provide deeper understanding of stakeholder perspectives and motivations
In person	Roundtable Discussions	Encourages equal participation, in-depth dialogue, and collaborative problem-solving
In person	Stakeholder Panels	Continuous engagement, diverse perspectives, sustained dialogue
In person	Interactive Exhibitions and Open Houses	Visual and hands-on engagement, immediate feedback, and increased public awareness
In person	Charrettes	Integrative solutions, collaborative planning, and innovative ideas. Encourages active participation and fosters a sense of ownership among stakeholders
In person	Citizen Advisory Committees	Expert insights, ongoing stakeholder engagement, and informed decision-making. Provides dedicated channels for specific stakeholder groups, fosters deeper engagement and collaboration
In person	Citizen Juries	Diverse perspectives from a representative cross-section of the community, informed decision-making as jurors receive balanced information and engage in facilitated discussions, resulting in informed “verdicts” (i.e., recommendations), and enhanced public trust
In person	One-on-One Meetings	Personal attention, detailed feedback, stronger relationships
In person	Field Trips and Site Visits	Real-world understanding, practical insights, and tangible engagement
In person	Public Hearings	Official record of public input, formal process, and transparency

Type	Method	Outcomes
In person	Networking Events	Relationship building, idea sharing, community building
In person	Partnerships with Community Organizations	Taps into existing networks and trust, enhances outreach and inclusivity
In person	Media Engagement	Increases public awareness and transparency, allows for wider dissemination of information
In person	Youth Engagement Initiatives	Ensures the voices of future generations are heard, promotes civic engagement and leadership skills
Online	Online Surveys	An efficient and quick way to collect data from a wide array and large number of people and allows for statistical analysis for data-driven insights
Online	E-referenda	Increases voter participation; the electronic system allows real-time results which could contribute to transparency and satisfaction.
Online	Digital Polling	Quick real-time feedback on issues, broad reach (not limited to those who raise their voice), and cost-effectiveness
Online	E-petitions	Empowerment of citizens, visibility of issues, and potential for policy impact
Online	Participatory Budgeting	Increased transparency, community involvement, and better resource allocation
Online	Citizen Generated Data / Crowdsourcing	Large data sets, diverse perspectives, and enhanced community engagement
Online	Collaborative Proposal Platform / Documents	Collective intelligence for complex problems, diverse input, and increased civic engagement
Online	Hackathons	Innovation, community building, and rapid prototyping of solutions
Online	Engagement Games	Increased participation, educational value, and enhanced understanding of complex issues
Online	Online Broadcasts	Transparency, real-time access, and increased public awareness
Online	Information Websites	Easy access to information, transparency, and public education

Type	Method	Outcomes
Online	Social Media	Broad and casual reach, real-time interaction, and feedback opportunities
Online	Virtual Town Halls	Direct interaction, accessibility, diverse input, and immediate feedback
Online	Open Data and Transparency	Increases transparency and trust, empowers residents to participate in informed decision-making
Online	Online Forums / Debating Platforms	Inclusive participation, diverse viewpoints, and informed decision-making
Online	Citizen Expert Platforms	Leverages expert knowledge, informed input, and enhanced policy quality
Online	Scenario Simulators	Enhanced understanding of policy impacts, informed decision-making, and public education

In-Person Methods

1. Public Workshops and Training Sessions

- **Description:** Organised sessions that provide information and hands-on experience on specific topics.
- **Benefits:** Build capacity, increase awareness, and foster skills development.
- **Challenges:** Low turnout, participants may be passive/inattentive/uninterested, presentations off-target due to participants' knowledge gap, possibility of language deficiencies.
- **Mitigation of challenges:** Assess participants' skill levels in advance and tailor content accordingly, provide materials for different levels, and offer follow-up sessions; implement extensive outreach and promotion, schedule sessions at convenient times, and offer incentives for participation; use interactive activities, break into small groups, and employ engaging facilitators.
- **Example:** Hosting a workshop on sustainable energy practices for local business owners.

2. Community Meetings and Forums

- **Description:** Open meetings where residents/community members can learn about municipal plans, voice concerns, and provide feedback, and discuss and provide input on municipal planning concepts.
- **Benefits:** Direct feedback, increased transparency, and stronger community ties.
- **Challenges:** Can be time-consuming and difficult to ensure diverse representation.
- **Mitigation of challenges:** Use various channels such as social media, local newspapers, community bulletin boards, and flyers to reach a wider audience, offer refreshments, door prizes, or other incentives to encourage attendance, and schedule meetings at times and places that are convenient for most community members; establish ground rules for respectful communication and behaviour at the beginning of the meeting, provide a clear and structured agenda to maintain

focus and ensure that all topics are covered, employ skilled facilitators to guide discussions and encourage participation from all attendees, incorporate interactive elements such as Q&A sessions, small group discussions, and hands-on activities to keep participants engaged; use simple, jargon-free language and visual aids to enhance understanding - do not simply read from wordy slides; utilise facilitated dialogue techniques to manage differing viewpoints and find common ground.

- **Example:** A town hall meeting to discuss upcoming infrastructure projects.

3. Focus Groups

- **Description:** Small, diverse groups of stakeholders brought together to discuss specific issues in-depth.
- **Benefits:** Detailed qualitative data, varied perspectives, and targeted insights provide deeper understanding of stakeholder perspectives and motivations.
- **Challenges:** Requires careful recruitment and moderation, may not be representative of the broader population.
- **Mitigation of challenges:** Use targeted recruitment strategies to ensure a diverse and representative sample of participants; design clear and focused questions to elicit detailed and relevant responses, use probing techniques to delve deeper into participants' responses and obtain rich data; the moderator should encourage dissenting opinions and reassure participants that all viewpoints are valuable; emphasise the confidentiality of the discussion to encourage openness, allow participants to provide anonymous input through written notes or surveys to reduce conformity pressure.
- **Example:** Conducting focus groups to gather opinions on new public transportation initiatives.



4. Roundtable Discussions

- **Description:** Meetings where stakeholders discuss issues on equal footing, often facilitated by a moderator.
- **Benefits:** Encourages equal participation, in-depth dialogue, and collaborative problem-solving.
- **Challenges:** Some participants may dominate the conversation requiring careful and sympathetic moderation, differing opinions may lead to impasse or dissolve into open conflict, discussions may veer off-topic, and participants may come unprepared and unresponsive.

- **Mitigation of challenges:** Use skilled moderators to ensure balanced participation, set ground rules for equal speaking time, and who will establish clear guidelines for respectful communication, use conflict resolution techniques, and mediate when necessary; develop a clear agenda, use a facilitator to keep discussions on track, and regularly summarise key points.
- **Example:** A roundtable with local business leaders and environmental groups to discuss waste management strategies, methane capture from the organic wastestream..

5. Stakeholder Panels

- **Description:** Panels of representatives from various stakeholder groups who regularly meet to provide input on projects.
- **Benefits:** Continuous engagement, diverse perspectives, and sustained dialogue.
- **Challenges:** Stakeholders may have conflicting interests, key stakeholders might be un- or under-represented, commitment and participation levels can hugely vary.
- **Mitigation of challenges:** Conduct thorough stakeholder analysis, actively recruit diverse members, and ensure inclusive participation; clearly define common goals, employ negotiation and mediation techniques, and ensure transparent decision-making processes; set clear expectations for participation, provide incentives for engagement, and regularly follow up with members.
- **Example:** Forming a stakeholder panel to oversee the development of a new community district heating system..

6. Interactive Exhibitions and Open Houses

- **Description:** Events where projects are showcased and stakeholders can interact with displays and project team members.
- **Benefits:** Visual and hands-on engagement, immediate feedback, and increased public awareness.
- **Challenges:** Low attendance, passive observation, no meaningful feedback, expensive to set up.
- **Mitigation of challenges:** Use diverse marketing channels - social media, local newspapers, community boards, and emails to promote the event, partner with local organisations and influencers to help spread the word, schedule the event at times that are convenient for the target audience, such as weekends or evenings; incorporate hands-on activities, interactive displays, and multimedia presentations to engage visitors, offer guided tours or walk-throughs to provide context and encourage interaction; set up feedback stations where visitors can leave comments or complete surveys; use interactive methods such as digital kiosks or feedback walls where visitors can quickly and easily share their thoughts; seek sponsorships from local businesses, organisations, or regional/national government bodies, prioritise key activities and allocate budget accordingly to ensure the most critical aspects are well-funded.
- **Example:** An open house displaying plans for a new city district, with interactive maps and models.

7. Charrettes

- **Description:** Intensive, multi-day design workshops that engage stakeholders in the planning process.
- **Benefits:** Integrative solutions, collaborative planning, and innovative ideas. Encourages active participation and fosters a sense of ownership among stakeholders.
- **Challenges:** Requires careful planning and facilitation as some attendees will try to dominate, may not be suitable for all topics or audiences, and may not include a representative cross-section of stakeholders.

- **Mitigation of challenges:** Identify and invite a wide range of stakeholders, including underrepresented groups, use skilled facilitators to manage discussions and ensure all voices are heard; distribute background materials and pre-work assignments to participants in advance, utilise time management techniques to keep discussions focused and on track; include subject matter experts who can explain technical details in an accessible manner, and who can use visual aids, such as diagrams and maps, to help illustrate complex concepts; teach consensus-building techniques to find common ground and achieve mutually acceptable solutions.
- **Example:** A charrette for redesigning a city centre to make it more pedestrian-friendly. In the charrette, people are involved in several small groups, each generating ideas one after the other until everyone has had the opportunity to contribute fully. Each group then passes the generated ideas to the next group to rework, refine, and ultimately prioritise the ideas produced.
- [Additional information on charrettes](#)

8. Citizen Advisory Committees

Description: Committees composed of key stakeholders who provide ongoing advice and feedback on municipal projects.

Benefits: Expert insights, ongoing stakeholder engagement, and informed decision-making. Provides dedicated channels for specific stakeholder groups, fosters deeper engagement and collaboration.

Challenges: Requires careful selection and representation, potential for bias or limited reach.

Mitigation of challenges: Actively recruit members from various demographics, backgrounds, and sectors of the community, implement an application process that encourages diverse participation and screens for a variety of perspectives; maintain regular and transparent communication about meeting schedules, agendas, and expectations, offer flexible meeting times (hybrid as necessary) to accommodate members' schedules, ensure that committee members feel their contributions are valued and impactful by incorporating their feedback into decision-making processes; use skilled facilitators to guide discussions and manage conflicts constructively, provide training for committee members on conflict resolution and collaborative decision-making; when consensus is difficult, use structured voting mechanisms to make decisions while acknowledging minority opinions; implement feedback mechanisms for members to share their experiences and suggestions for improvement, produce impact reports that highlight the committee's contributions and influence on decision-making processes.

Example: An advisory committee for guiding the implementation of a local climate mitigation action plan.



9. Citizen Juries

Description: A temporary group of randomly selected citizens who deliberate on a specific issue or challenge facing their community. They are typically facilitated by a neutral moderator and receive presentations from experts and stakeholders before reaching a consensus-based recommendation.

Benefits: Diverse perspectives from a representative cross-section of the community, informed decision-making as jurors receive balanced information and engage in facilitated discussions, resulting in informed “verdicts” (i.e., recommendations), and enhanced public trust.

Challenges: Participating in a citizen jury requires a significant time commitment from jurors, while ensuring a truly representative and diverse jury can be challenging. Recommendations from citizen juries may not always be readily implemented by authorities.

Mitigation of challenges: Apply stratified sampling to ensure representation from various demographic groups (e.g., age, gender, ethnicity, socioeconomic status), offer incentives, such as stipends or honorariums, to encourage participation from this broad range of individuals, clearly communicate the importance and impact of jurors’ participation; arrange briefings from experts who can explain complex topics in plain language, employ visual aids, infographics, and summaries to help jurors understand complex information, include interactive Q&A sessions where jurors can ask questions and clarify their understanding; use structured deliberative processes to ensure all voices are heard and considered, employ techniques such as facilitated discussion, prioritisation exercises, and voting mechanisms to help reach consensus, ensure that minority views are documented and considered in the final recommendations, conduct impact assessments to evaluate the outcomes of the jury’s recommendations, prepare and share reports on how the jury’s input has influenced decision-making and policy..

Example: A municipality is considering a major renovation project for a large public high school. To gather public input and ensure the project aligns with community needs and priorities, the Council decides to convene a citizen jury. The jury is composed of randomly selected parents, students, teachers, staff, and residents from the surrounding neighbourhood. It hears presentations from architects, engineers, educators, and community leaders on various aspects of the renovation project, including potential designs, costs, and the impact on the school community. Jurors also have the opportunity to ask questions and express their concerns or suggestions. After a period of deliberation, the jury reaches a consensus-based recommendation on the renovation project. This recommendation might include specific priorities for the project, such as improving accessibility, creating modern learning spaces, and incorporating sustainability features. The Municipality carefully considers the jury’s recommendations alongside other factors, such as budget constraints and technical feasibility, when making their final decision about the renovation project.

[Additional information on citizens juries](#)

10. One-on-One Meetings

- **Description:** Personalised meetings with individual influential stakeholders to discuss specific concerns or ideas.
- **Benefits:** Personal attention, detailed feedback, and stronger relationships.
- **Challenges:** Stakeholders may be disengaged or uninterested in the meeting, may attempt power dynamics to bully; a misalignment of goals and expectations may exist, combined with resistance to proposed changes or new initiatives; respondents may feel that their time can better be spent elsewhere as their views will anyway be ignored.

- **Mitigation of challenges:** Tailor the meeting agenda to address the specific interests and concerns of the stakeholder, clearly communicate the purpose and expected outcomes of the meeting beforehand, emphasise the value and mutual benefits of the meeting; approach the meeting as a partnership, highlighting mutual goals and interests, employ active listening techniques to ensure the stakeholder feels heard and respected, be well-prepared with data, insights, and potential solutions to address respondents' concerns; at the commencement of the meeting, request a briefing from the stakeholder to understand their goals, expectations, and aspirations; discuss and agree on confidentiality terms before the meeting, build trust through transparent communication and by demonstrating respect for the stakeholder's position, acknowledge respondents' concerns and demonstrate empathy, establish a feedback loop to confirm understanding and clarify any ambiguities, be prepared to present evidence and case studies that highlight the benefits of the proposed changes and suggest the possibility of implementing changes in incremental steps to ease the transition.
- **Example:** Scheduling individual meetings with local business owners to discuss the impact of new regulations.

11. Field Trips and Site Visits

- **Description:** Organised visits to project sites or relevant locations to see issues and solutions firsthand.
- **Benefits:** Real-world understanding, practical insights, and tangible engagement.
- **Challenges:** Logistics, costs, safety, adverse weather conditions, accessibility if people with disabilities are included, possible cultural differences and language barriers, participants' engagement and active participation.
- **Mitigation of challenges:** Ensure risks are recognised and a risk management strategy created; create a realistic schedule that allows ample time for each activity and build-in flexibility in the schedule to accommodate unexpected delays/changes; set clear objectives before the visit, hold debrief sessions to discuss the visit and lessons learned, best practices observed, and Distribute feedback forms or conduct a survey to gather participants' input.
- **Example:** A site visit to a neighbouring city's renewable energy community for stakeholders to understand its operations and financial costs/benefits.

12. Public Hearings

- **Description:** Formal meetings where stakeholders can present their views and be on public record.
- **Benefits:** Official record of public input, formal process, and transparency.
- **Challenges:** Rowdiness or overcrowding engender logistical issues and safety concerns, off-topic digressions and directional changes, opportunities for spreading mis-/disinformation.
- **Mitigation of challenges:** Implement a pre-registration system to manage the number of attendees, hire professional crowd control measures, such as barriers and security personnel, to ensure safety and order; conduct targeted outreach to underrepresented groups to encourage their participation, consider simultaneous translation (perhaps on a screen or to mobile phones) where language issues might exist; have a conflict resolution plan in place to address disputes quickly and effectively and employ a facilitator recognised for their objectiveness/neutrality to manage the discussion and mediate conflicts; use a timekeeper to ensure that the meeting adheres to schedule and a moderator to address the agenda items, guide the discussion, and keep it on track; prepare factual information and data to counter misinformation and be prepared to challenge disinformation; follow up online with participants after the hearing to gather additional

feedback and address any unresolved issues; make recordings and minutes available to the public to ensure transparency.

- **Example:** A public hearing on proposed bicycle lanes.

13. Networking Events

- **Description:** Informal events that bring stakeholders together to build relationships and discuss ideas.
- **Benefits:** Relationship building, idea sharing, and community building.
- **Challenges:** Low attendance, unenthusiastic and/or apathetic attendees who are reluctant to mingle, language barriers.
- **Mitigation of challenges:** Offer incentives such as refreshments and door prizes to attract attendees; incorporate structured ice-breaker activities to encourage introductions and conversations; provide tools such as name tags with conversation starters, a networking app, or a matchmaking service, and encourage the use of voice-activated Google (or other) translation apps if needed; include facilitated networking sessions where a host guides discussions and connections; mix different event formats (presentations, roundtables, open networking) to maintain interest; distribute surveys to gather feedback and understand the event's impact, send follow-up emails thanking participants and providing event highlights.
- **Example:** An after-work networking event for local entrepreneurs and municipal energy and climate staff.

14. Partnerships with Community Organizations

- **Description:** Collaborating with existing community groups and NGOs to leverage their expertise and reach specific demographics.
- **Benefits:** Taps into existing networks and trust, enhances outreach and inclusivity.
- **Challenges:** Requires careful communication and coordination, potential for competing interests, agendas, or misaligned objectives.
- **Mitigation of challenges:** Create a shared vision and set of goals that inspire and motivate all partners, establish a clear agreement outlining the shared objectives and individual roles of each partner, maintain regular and open communication to ensure alignment and address any differences early; adopt inclusive practices that accommodate different organisational cultural norms and communication styles, strive for mutual full disclosure for the partnership's duration.
- **Example:** When tackling energy poverty issues, partner with retiree, pension, and social welfare organisations.

15. Media Engagement

- **Description:** Utilising local media outlets to share information, updates, and opportunities for public input.
- **Benefits:** Increases public awareness and transparency, allows for wider dissemination of information.
- **Challenges:** Requires effective communication strategies and media relations skills, potential for misrepresentation or bias.
- **Mitigation of challenges:** To preempt misinformation, prepare clear, concise, and factual messages to ensure accurate reporting, provide media training to spokespersons to handle interviews and press conferences effectively, distribute fact sheets and press kits with key information to ensure journalists have accurate data; proactively engage to build positive relationships and to provide positive stories to preempt negative media coverage, develop a crisis management plan to address and mitigate negative coverage swiftly, regularly monitor media

coverage to identify and address any negative stories promptly; identify and highlight compelling human-interest stories and impactful outcomes, organise media events, such as press conferences, site visits, and interviews to attract media attention; engage with a diverse range of media outlets to ensure balanced coverage, back up all claims with solid evidence and data to counteract biased reporting; conduct mock interviews and press conferences to prepare spokespersons for real interactions, train spokespeople to stay calm under pressure and to handle difficult questions diplomatically, learn techniques for deflecting and redirecting questions back to key messages, use simple, clear language that is accessible to a broad audience and analogies or examples to explain complex concepts in an easily understandable way; provide a glossary of terms and acronyms used in communications to help journalists and the public understand technical terminology/language.

- **Example:** Inviting local, regional, and national mainstream media to visit a newly renovated micro-urban area, illustrating cost savings to tenants while adhering to the principles of the just transition.

16. Youth Engagement Initiatives

- **Description:** Implementing programs and activities specifically designed to involve young people in decision-making processes.
- **Benefits:** Ensures the voices of future generations are heard, promotes civic engagement and leadership skills.
- **Challenges:** Requires tailored approaches and communication strategies to resonate with young people; potential disinterest.
- **Mitigation of challenges:** Ensure that the content and activities are relevant and appealing to the youth demographic, offer incentives such as certificates, rewards, or recognition to encourage participation, utilise youth ambassadors to promote the initiatives and encourage their peers to join; attempt to involve youth in longer-term projects that provide ongoing opportunities for involvement in which there are opportunities for mentorship programs where older participants mentor younger (or newer) ones to sustain interest; incorporate interactive and hands-on activities that keep participants engaged; regularly gather feedback from participants to tailor activities to their interests and preferences, create open communication channels where youth can express their thoughts and concerns freely; ensure that programs are inclusive and cater to the diverse needs of all participants and be culturally and gender sensitive/aware of different backgrounds and experiences.
- **Example:** Pairing small teams (duo, trio) of young people with elderly residents to cover physical infirmities that contribute to energy poverty (such as cutting, storing, and loading firewood).



Online Methods

1. Online Surveys

- **Description:** Utilising surveys to gather quantitative data and opinions from a wide audience.
- **Benefits:** An efficient and quick way to collect data from a wide range and large number of people and allows for statistical analysis for data-driven insights.
- **Challenges:** Requires careful design and question wording to avoid bias; may not capture the full range of perspectives, depending on the response rate/people who choose to respond.
- **Mitigation of challenges:** Design clear and unbiased surveys through careful preparation using adequate survey methods. To avoid bias, use neutral language that does not transmit the values of the survey-creator; Incentivise participation by a wide and large audience by delivering the survey to various groups of citizens and providing monetary compensation. Refrain from collecting data that may disincentivise completing the survey unless it is necessary for the survey purpose, and keep the questions as simple as possible.
- **Example:** The European Commission often conducts online surveys through Eurobarometer, including topics about climate change. The results can have an effect on prompting representatives to action and raising public awareness about issues.

2. E-referenda

- **Description:** Platforms enabling citizens to vote on specific issues or policy proposals electronically.
- **Benefits:** Increases voter participation; the electronic system allows real-time results which could contribute to transparency and satisfaction.
- **Challenges:** Limited representation in areas with large digital divides, cyber security concerns, and potential voter fraud.
- **Mitigation of challenges:** Accessibility should be ensured to mitigate implications through digital divides. Prepare guideline documents and videos to explain the process of voting and hotlines that can help voters via email, telephone, or in-person if in need; Consult a cybersecurity expert to overcome cybersecurity and voter fraud concerns. Aim to utilise existing systems rather than build new ones to minimise the development cost.
- **Example:** Switzerland conducted an e-referendum in June 2021 on a law to reduce greenhouse gas emissions, allowing citizens to directly vote on climate policies. Although the referendum was rejected by a vote of 51.59% to 48.41%, the turnout was 59.68%, with more than a majority of citizens participating in decision-making for climate policy.

3. Digital Polling

- **Description:** Real-time tools used to gather public opinion on various topics or proposals. This can be combined with in-person public hearings or panels.
- **Benefits:** Quick real-time feedback on issues, broad reach (not limited to those who raise their voice), and cost-effectiveness.
- **Challenges:** Question design, low response rates from the audience, inability to address all opinions in a timely manner, and sample bias.
- **Mitigation of challenges:** Questions should be carefully designed beforehand to collect accurate and useful responses. Several patterns of questions should be prepared to select from, dependent on how the audience is responding; Tools that have a simple design, allow anonymous responses, and do not require registration can increase participation. For in-person events, project a QR code to access the poll for easier participation, and for online events, have

QR codes alongside a URL sent in a text format; Announce how many opinions or questions will be addressed within the event to prevent dissatisfaction and have a dedicated staff that sorts through the responses to select relevant and informative ones; Sample biases should be mitigated through representative sampling methods if possible (which may be a tradeoff with increasing participation through anonymity).

- **Example:** “e-Democracia” by Brazil provides tools to take polls and surveys within virtual communities, combined with other tools such as discussion forums.

4. E-petitions

- **Description:** Online platforms that allow citizens to create and sign petitions to influence government action.
- **Benefits:** Empowerment of citizens, visibility of issues, and potential for policy impact.
- **Challenges:** Oversaturation of petitions, verification of signatures, and maintaining momentum.
- **Mitigation of challenges:** Signature thresholds should be implemented based on population size and participation rates in past petition attempts. The threshold should be discussed among teams to make it realistically collectible but also seriously considered by lawmakers; The verification of signatures should reflect the existing identification system, from e-ID verification, email addresses, to full name and registered address; The momentum of the petition organisers and petition signers can be maintained by providing clear follow-up actions and reaching out with decisions or updates. Decide on actions, who is in charge of the actions, and a timeline, when designing an e-petition tool.
- **Example:** The European Citizens' Initiative is an e-petition website in the EU that allows citizens to raise issues. The high signature threshold and low recognition has been scrutinised and should be learned from when applying a similar initiative in regional governance.

5. Participatory Budgeting

- **Description:** Digital tools that enable citizens to have a direct say in how public funds are allocated.
- **Benefits:** Increased transparency, community involvement, and better resource allocation.
- **Challenges:** Complexity of budget information, potential manipulation by interest groups, and logistical difficulties.
- **Mitigation of challenges:** The budget information should be clear and understandable so that valuable feedback from citizens can be received. Avoid any technical terms and adhere to common budgetary layouts for easy understanding; To prevent manipulation that does not align with goals, aim to ensure transparency. Identify commenters or have citizens agree that they are not participating as a representative of a specific group (they should be commenting as citizens for the public good); Digital tools and smart designs can overcome logistical difficulties and increase efficiency.
- **Example:** A participatory budgeting initiative in Paris, France, called “Madame Mayor, I Have an Idea”, has seen high levels of engagement by enabling online participation. It has been used to allocate funds to green projects, such as urban gardens and renewable energy installations.

6. Citizen Generated Data / Crowdsourcing

- **Description:** Collecting data from the public to inform decision-making and policy development.
- **Benefits:** Large data sets, diverse perspectives, and enhanced community engagement.
- **Challenges:** Varying data quality, privacy concerns, and data integration challenges.
- **Mitigation of challenges:** Data validation methods, depending on the type of data, should be used to ensure a level of data quality. Validation methods include having standard operating

procedures for citizens to follow, asking other citizens to validate the submitted data, participant training and testing, automated outlier identification systems, and expert reviews; Privacy concerns should be dealt with by protecting personal information during collection; Having standardised formats across datasets and sectors can help overcome challenges related to data integration, such as unified codes for regions.

- **Example:** A digital crowdsourcing initiative in Iceland, “Better Reykjavik”, has allowed citizens to inform policymakers about local issues and suggest improvements.



7. Collaborative Proposal Platform / Documents

- **Description:** Tools for collective creation and editing of policy documents or proposals by citizens.
- **Benefits:** Collective intelligence for complex problems, diverse input, and increased civic engagement.
- **Challenges:** Coordination difficulties, varying levels of expertise, and potential for conflict.
- **Mitigation of challenges:** Assume citizens with diverse backgrounds and skills will be participating when planning. Create clear guidelines free of technical language that will increase confidence in citizens to collaborate. Having an expert moderator can facilitate valuable insight, avoid conflict, and ensure respectful discourse.
- **Example:** A Spanish direct democracy platform, “Plaza Prodemos”, perceives citizen proposals to be a core part of its initiative, in which if a proposal receives 10 percent or more support from registered people, then it is developed and put to a final vote by citizens.

8. Hackathons

- **Description:** Events where citizens and developers collaborate to solve public sector challenges using digital tools.
- **Benefits:** Innovation, community building, and rapid prototyping of solutions.
- **Challenges:** Limited duration, varied skill levels, and responsibility and sustainability of projects.
- **Mitigation of challenges:** To prevent the limited duration from affecting the event outcome, provide clear goals and manage the outcome through advisory experts or checkpoints; If the skill levels are expected to vary significantly, then consider holding a workshop before the hackathon to enhance the participants’ skills; Supporting post-event project development that will make the prototype an actual solution should be designed before the hackathon is held to clarify accountability and the timeline.
- **Example:** The city of Helsinki hosted an online hackathon, “InnovaCity Helsinki”, concerning urban mobility in 2020.

9. Engagement Games

- **Description:** Gamified platforms that engage citizens in policy-making through interactive and educational games.

- **Benefits:** Increased participation, educational value, and enhanced understanding of complex issues.
- **Challenges:** Development costs, varying engagement levels, and potential for trivialising issues.
- **Mitigation of challenges:** It should be evaluated whether the expected benefit from the game will pay off for the estimated cost. Carefully plan and design meaningful and relevant games that will match the interests of the target population; Involve stakeholders in development and ask citizens for feedback on the game for improvements; While gamification could increase participation, it should be careful not to simplify or trivialise policy issues overly.
- **Example:** Climate Action Simulation is an online (or in-person) role-playing game to develop solutions for climate change that bring together different stakeholders. “Glasgow Green Map” in Scotland enables citizens to propose climate adaptation projects using an interactive mapping game.

10. Online Broadcasts

- **Description:** Live streaming tools for government meetings, briefings, and events to ensure transparency.
- **Benefits:** Transparency, real-time access, and increased public awareness.
- **Challenges:** Accessibility issues, technical difficulties, and potential for low viewership.
- **Mitigation of challenges:** Access from various devices and environments should be considered to prevent accessibility issues. Additional solutions should be considered in regions with a high percentage of the population lacking internet access, such as free-rental computers or tablets in public spaces and archiving recorded meetings; Technical support should be provided through how-to's, email, telephone, etc.; To overcome low viewership, the broadcasts should be promoted widely and coupled with other solutions, such as platforms where citizens can participate with their opinion.
- **Example:** Many local and national assemblies are broadcast across Europe, regardless of their specificity to climate policy.

11. Information Websites

- **Description:** Websites providing comprehensive information about government activities, services, and policies.
- **Benefits:** Easy access to information, transparency, and public education.
- **Challenges:** Information overload, maintenance, and ensuring accuracy.
- **Mitigation of challenges:** Websites with a large amount of information should have an effective sitemap or search function that makes navigating the website easy and less time-consuming. Information should be organised from the citizens' (users') perspective and not how the organisers understand it; To ensure trust and reliability, information should be updated regularly to be accurate and relevant, as well as an insistence on fact-checking information before publishing it.
- **Example:** Many regional and local governments have climate plan websites; “CPH 2025 Climate Plan” by Copenhagen is an example of a comprehensive and easy-to-navigate information website.

12. Social Media

- **Description:** Using social media platforms to communicate with and engage the public.
- **Benefits:** Broad and casual reach, real-time interaction, and feedback opportunities.
- **Challenges:** Misinformation, managing negative feedback, and changing platform algorithms to reach target audiences.

- **Mitigation of challenges:** Content should be rigorously verified to avoid including false information before publishing. Engagement, such as comments and reposts, should be monitored to prevent unintended spreading by third-actors. However, valid criticism should be taken seriously and engage constructively to increase the legitimacy and reliability of the account; Depending on the social media goals, it is necessary to adapt to platform algorithm changes to maintain engagement and outreach to a broad base of citizens. Utilise holidays, events, trends, and hashtags to broaden the audience.
- **Example:** Many local and national assemblies are engaged on social media across Europe, regardless of its specificity to climate policy. For example, the “Gemeente Amsterdam” account by Amsterdam City, the Netherlands, posts about the city’s climate policies regularly.

13. Virtual Town Halls

- **Description:** Online meetings where government officials interact with citizens in real-time.
- **Benefits:** Direct interaction, accessibility, diverse input, and immediate feedback.
- **Challenges:** Technical issues, ensuring participation, volume of feedback, and managing discussions.
- **Mitigation of challenges:** Provide technical support through guidelines, emails, and telephones to answer questions or concerns from citizens. Have staff in charge of technical aspects and avoid handling technical aspects by government officials or those who will speak publicly; Promote the event widely to ensure participation from diverse citizens; Assume non-constructive opinions and sceptics and prepare responses beforehand to effectively address them; Have staff in charge of sorting through comments to prioritise constructive feedback and facilitate discussions; Use skilled moderators to engage in concerns while avoiding conflict.
- **Example:** “Parlement et Citoyens” by France hosts online town hall meetings that engage citizens to discuss policy issues, among other participatory elements such as proposal scrutinization by citizens.

14. Open Data and Transparency

- **Description:** Making municipal data and information readily available online in an accessible format to foster public understanding and accountability.
- **Benefits:** Increases transparency and trust, empowers residents to participate in informed decision-making.
- **Challenges:** Requires technical expertise and resources to manage data effectively, ensuring accessibility and data literacy while complying with GDPR.
- **Mitigation of challenges:** Ensure compliance with GDPR regulations, use open-source software and tools to reduce costs and enhance sustainability; implement data validation and cleaning processes to ensure high data quality; develop user-friendly interfaces and dashboards for accessing the data, offer training programs and workshops to educate users on how to access and interpret the data; build a community of users and contributors who can help sustain the initiative; secure support from community leaders to champion the open data initiative, communicate the benefits of open data to all stakeholders to build buy-in and support, highlight success stories and case studies to demonstrate the positive impact of open data.
- **Example:** Build a centralised platform where users can access various datasets related to energy production, consumption, efficiency, emissions, renewable energy generation, energy infrastructure, and climate impacts. Create an interactive interface that allows for geographic visualisation of data layers. Provide tools for creating custom visualisations, charts, and graphs to better understand energy trends and patterns from household to district level, extrapolating to municipal, regional, and national scopes with appropriate caveats.



15. Online Forums / Debating Platforms

- **Description:** Platforms for structured online discussions and debates on policy issues.
- **Benefits:** Inclusive participation, diverse viewpoints, and informed decision-making.
- **Challenges:** Ensuring respectful dialogue, preventing misinformation, and moderation needs.
- **Mitigation of challenges:** Community guidelines should be enforced regardless of the discussion format (text-based, virtual meeting, etc.). Guidelines from other platform services can be referred to as a foundation but should be arranged as necessary. Personnel should be allocated to enforce the guidelines, such as by warning or suspending accounts that repeatedly violate the guidelines; Provide fact-checking tools to manage misinformation; Use trained moderators, especially if the meeting is in real-time through audio or video, to prevent conflicts.
- **Example:** “Mein Berlin” in Berlin, Germany, and “PartecipaMi” in Milan, Italy, are some examples of government-run online platforms that enable citizens to discuss policy ideas amongst themselves and be considered by lawmakers.

16. Citizen Expert Platforms

- **Description:** Platforms that connect citizens with expertise to contribute to policy discussions.
- **Benefits:** Leverages expert knowledge, informed input, and enhanced policy quality.
- **Challenges:** Identifying genuine experts, ensuring relevance, and managing contributions.
- **Mitigation of challenges:** If feasible, verify expert credentials to engage with genuine experts; Curate relevant topics and policy issues to receive expert opinion to avoid derailed discussions. Policymakers should be unafraid to ask experts questions, as much information will be highly technical; Incentivise experts to continuously contribute by engaging in constructive discussions, facilitate conversations effectively, and actually reflect expert opinion in policy documents.
- **Example:** Citizens’ assemblies such as “Munich Citizens’ Assembly” invite experts or informed citizens to provide their knowledge to improve policy.

17. Scenario Simulators

- **Description:** Interactive tools that allow users to explore the outcomes of different policy scenarios.
- **Benefits:** Enhanced understanding of policy impacts, informed decision-making, and public education.
- **Challenges:** Tools can be technical and complex, ensuring data accuracy, and user engagement.
- **Mitigation of challenges:** Simulator tools should have a simplified interface with few technical terms. When technical terms are necessary, include an explanation that is easy to access. With

environmental information that is often difficult to grasp, use examples and visual information to convey the impact; Use reliable data to ensure data accuracy and audit the results given by simulators before releasing it to the public; Promote usage to increase engagement through media outlets, partner websites, and regional dissemination tools.

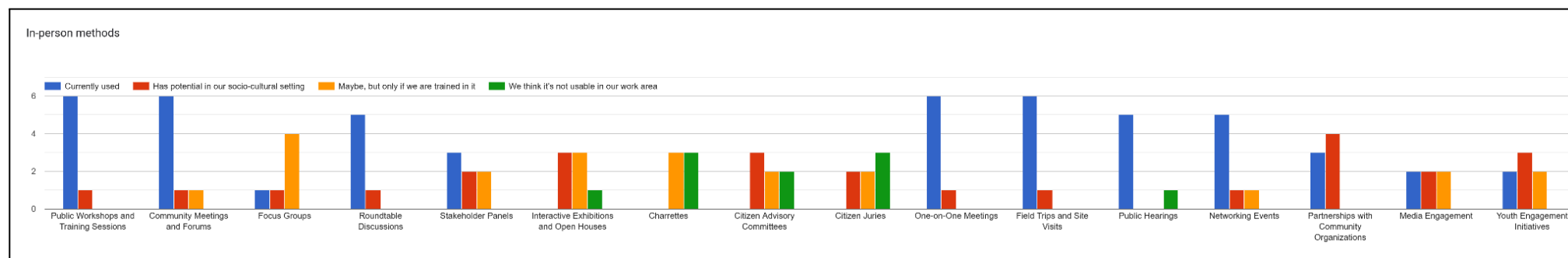
- **Example:** Oslo, Norway, and Finspång, Sweden, have experimented with scenario simulators utilising digital technology regarding the sector of urban planning and local energy planning, respectively.



Survey of Engagement Methods' Utility in Partner Regions

In-Person Methods

A summary of partners' assessment of the utility of the in-person methods is in the below chart. Multiple answers were possible for each method, hence they do not always sum to 6 - the number of partners in the project - across the 4 choices (currently used, has potential in our socio-cultural setting, maybe but only if we are trained in it, we think it's not usable in our work area). The chart provides a snapshot of where additional capacitation of partners might be relevant should future project funding be awarded to the partner consortium. For example, it's solely a Croatian partner that implements focus group discussions, which is a standard method used worldwide in qualitative survey methods.

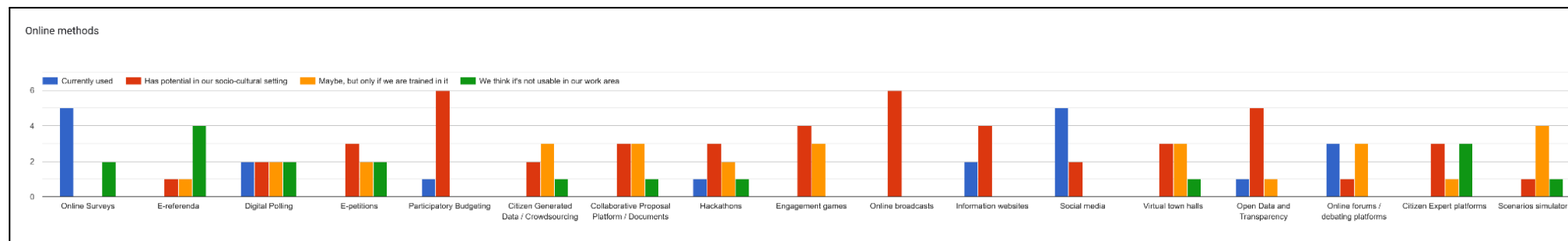


In relation to the 2-country pairings, there are no patterns among the pairings for public workshops, community meetings, roundtables, and shareholder panels. For interactive exhibitions/open houses, both Western Balkans partners see a potential in the method, as does Estonia, with the other three partners conceding that the method may have potential but that they require training. Conversely, neither Western Balkans partner as well as Latvia thinks that charrettes are implementable in their work areas, while the other three partners again noting the method's potential but with a training requirement. In regard to public hearings, only the Polish partner stated that the method is not usable in their work area, which might be more a reflection of the prevailing political environment rather than a resistant socio-cultural context.

Notably, this small survey of course cannot be considered statistically representative of the CEE countries involved in the project. Instead it demonstrates one missing component within most partners's staffing: whether regional energy agencies or energy consultancies, partners have a limited range of knowledge and capabilities in the social sciences, focusing instead on the technical aspects of the energy transition. And at the core of outreach - whether in-person or online - exists a need for social science approaches and an ability of the leads to stimulate, encourage, and support public participation. This aspect is perhaps particularly emphasised in the media engagement category, where both the Polish and Czech partners express the need for training to be able to competently implement the method.

On-Line Methods

As with the in-person methods, a summary of partners' assessment of the utility of the in-person methods is in the below chart.



Strikingly, given the ease of offering these, the paired Visegrad partners (PL and CZ) contend that online surveys are not functional in their work areas. The contrast between the two is, in fact, at the extremes of the project's work regions, with PL having the largest (by population) and CZ the smallest. Furthermore, the Polish partner registers as having used the method, yet finding it not useful. Partners in the other two pairings (Baltics and Western Balkans) do not report having encountered resistance to the use of online surveys. Conversely for e-referenda, the Baltics think they are not usable, while there is a split opinion within the other two country pairings. Indeed, there is generally little consensus within the 2-country pairings, one example being the e-petitions method, which HR thinks has potential in their socio-cultural setting while neighbouring (but perhaps more central European than Western Balkan in attitudes) while SI registers the method as not usable. However, for the citizen expert platform method, both Western Balkan countries concur that there is potential in the method while the other 2-country pairings have differing opinions towards its utility.

In regard to participatory budgeting, only PL currently uses this method, while all other partners think that it has potential in their regions. To help meet this potential, DIGIT's Polish partner will offer a brief presentation on how, and how efficaciously, it functions in their work region during the project's final meeting.

Local Landscapes for Public Engagement in Partner Regions

This survey aims to assess the administrative complexity, available resources, and community interests for public engagement in partners' local regions.

To summarise the overall findings:

- The step rated the most complex when organizing a public engagement activity is “reporting and follow-up to stakeholders and the public”.
- The majority (67%) answered that it is difficult to obtain resources to organize engagement activities.
- There are low expectations for citizens to be active in joining environmental planning activities, which is not unexpected as this remains the prevailing condition for public participation in policy options across most, if not all, of the formerly communist states of Central and Eastern Europe.
- The most burdensome aspect of reporting activities was “coordinating within the region”, followed by “too many tasks for reporting” and “requested information is too technical or specialized”.
- Partners state the difficulty in inconsistent methodology for data collection and coordinating small municipalities (HR), outdated engagement methods and difficulty in gathering new participants in events (PL), and country-specific cultures that limit participation in such events (CZ).

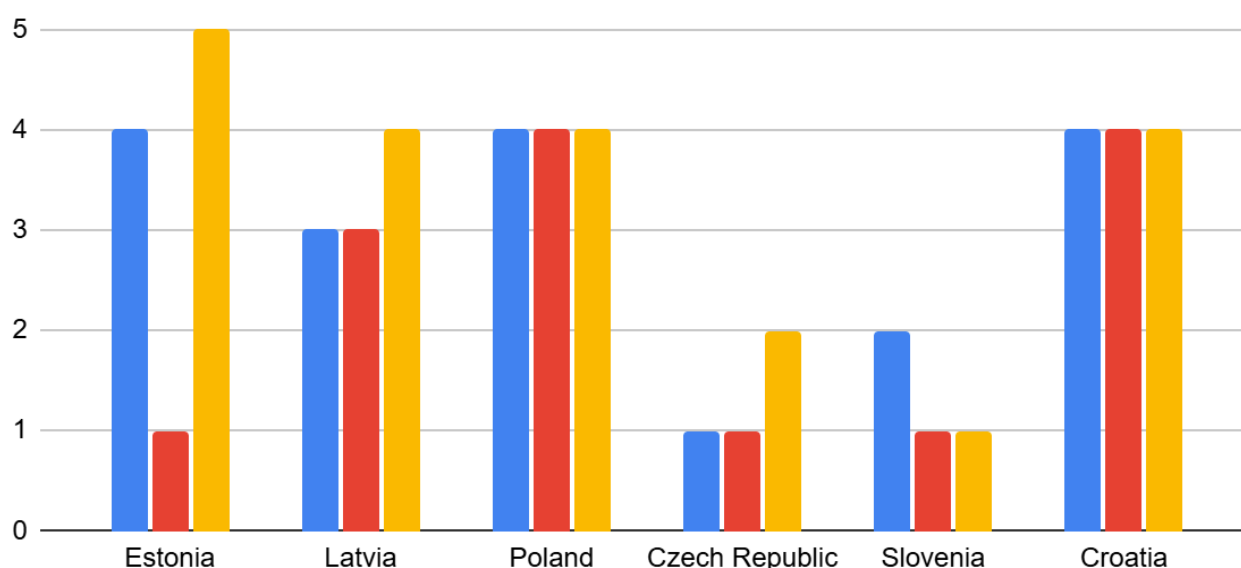
Organisational Complexities

The first set of three questions queried partners on how easy or, conversely, difficult it is to set up, implement, and report on public engagement activities in their regions.

Results are shown in the chart below. There is no obvious difference among the three 2-country groupings, but demonstrably CZ and SI show lower barriers, i.e., less complexity, bureaucracy, or general difficulty in setting up public engagement activities. This, one can conjecture, could be because those two countries have a cultural affinity aligned more with Central than with Eastern Europe, whereby countries in the East were more subject to centralised planning and citizens' disengagement. However, it is also incumbent to note that the regions may very well not represent the entire Member State in which they exist - for example, Ida-Virumaa in Estonia is often a statistical outlier in many measures, from unemployment rates to facility in the Estonian language (this county is where the USSR settled many non-Estonians for working in oil shale mining and energy production, in nuclear research, and in other industries). Unlike the other five DIGIT partner regions, Ida-Virumaa had already developed and adopted a regional Energy and Climate Action Plan (ECAP) before the project began. This pre-existing plan significantly shaped how local administrators and stakeholders in Ida-Virumaa responded with their already-established perspective when Estonian project partners sought to shape and enhance it into an ECAP+.

Complexity

- Approval for public engagement activities about environmental planning
- Implementation, logistics, bureaucratic barriers to using public spaces or online tools
- Reporting and follow-up to stakeholders and the public in general



1 = Very simple (minimal bureaucracy, easy to organize) - 5 = Very complex (highly bureaucratic, lengthy approval process)

Resource Availability for Financing Public Engagements

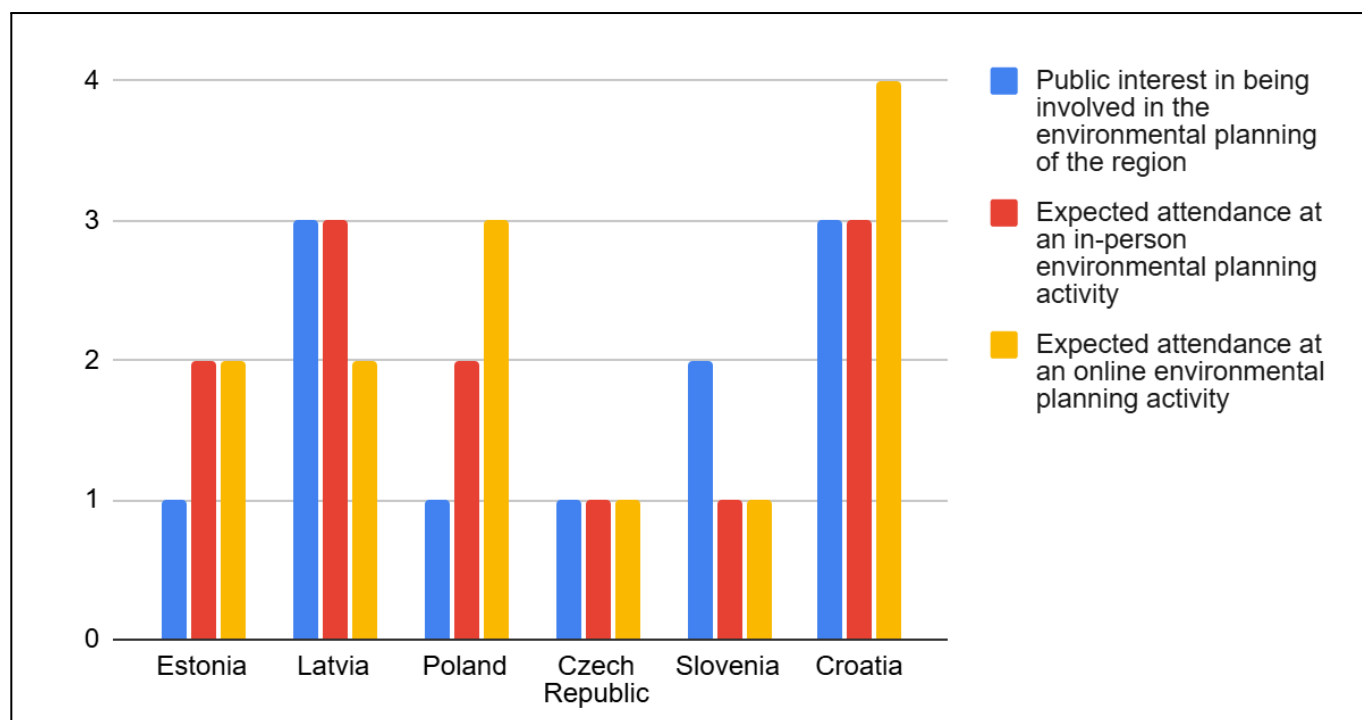
Partners assessed the availability of monetary resources to finance public engagement activities. The regions demonstrate heterogeneity rather than any pattern, ranging from “none” to “access is easy”.

	Available financial resources (grants or funds) for public engagement activities on environmental planning
Estonia	There are no available resources.
Latvia	There are resources, but they are not easy to access.
Poland	There are resources, but they are not easy to access.
Czech Republic	It is usually possible to fund these activities as part of other more complex projects where public communication or involvement is part of the required output.
Slovenia	There are no available resources.
Croatia	There are resources, which are easy to access.

Assessment of Public Interest in Environmental Planning

Partners considered the magnitude of public interest in engaging in environmental planning in their regions, and results are shown in the below chart. For “involvement”, the y-axis ranges from 1 to 3, where 1 = not at all interested and 5 = highly motivated. Results suggest that environmental concerns remain lagging in the six project countries, behind other matters (a previous questionnaire as documented in Deliverable D4.3 indicates these concerns might be primarily economic ones). Expected attendance at activities, whether in-person or online, are modest, but in the case of CZ, it’s important to keep in mind that the region has only a small population, which is the opposite case in PL. For

attendance, 1 = 0-10 people, 2 = 11-25, 3 = 26-50, 4 = 51-75. It can be surmised from the below chart that people in the HR region are the most motivated within the six countries of DIGIT, but as SI shows a general lack of interest, this cannot be extrapolated to the Western Balkans more generally.



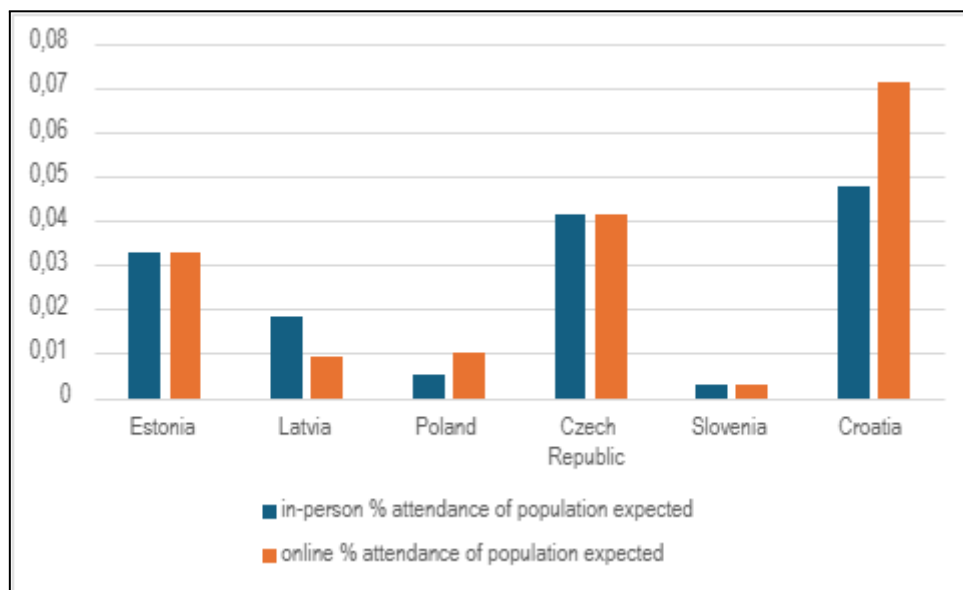
Of course the above chart can be somewhat misleading as the populations of the municipalities directly involved in DIGIT vary by a factor of 20. The table below is more indicative, then, of the prevalence of interest in a just, green transition among stakeholders - though even this is likely not truly indicative since there may well be interest, but no time or mental space to attend meetings (whether in-person or online), or as in the case of the Russian-speakers in EE, a cultural barrier because of the Soviet-era top-down edicts that then prevailed, a continuing dissuasive factor in understanding and acting upon the fact that Estonia is now an inclusive democracy, one which genuinely seeks people's opinions.

This below table uses the range highs to estimate the interest of the general public in engaging with municipalities as they work to create energy and climate action plans.

	population estimate, direct DIGIT municipalities	in-person % attendance of population expected	online % attendance of population expected
Estonia	76 510	0,0327	0,0327
Latvia	273 835	0,0183	0,0091
Poland	499 725	0,0050	0,0100
Czech Republic	24 273	0,0412	0,0412
Slovenia	329 753	0,0030	0,0030
Croatia	104 937	0,0476	0,0715

The chart below uses the above table's numbers to offer greater clarity. Croatians are the most interested in attending meetings, while neighbouring Slovenians appear least interested. Czechs appear

to be more interested than Poles, but by using the high end of the range (10 in the 0-10 range), the chart may be misleading if only a single person attends.



Upstream Reporting Burdens

The final question in this mini-survey focuses on reporting and is multiple choice, as shown below. It might at first glance be considered tangential to the theme of this deliverable, but nonetheless it is germane as it involves engaging with decision makers at higher levels.

8. What are the **burdens when reporting** upstream from your region (to national bodies or supra-national bodies such as the CoM)? *

Select all that apply.

- ☐ Language barriers (such as translation of documents)
- ☐ Unclear or confusing instructions
- ☐ Too many tasks. Reporting is often too time-consuming.
- ☐ The reporting format does not align with the local context.
- ☐ The requested information is too technical or specialized.
- ☐ Coordination within your region to obtain information.
- ☐ GDPR is causing confusion and delays, impeding reporting requirements
- ☐ Other...

Please add if you have any comments about your response to Question 8.

Long answer text

The table below shows the responses. There are no discernible patterns in the three 2-country groupings with perhaps the sole exception on the Baltic States, which both consider that a barrier exists precluding effective reporting as the required information for inclusion in reports is too technical/specialised for small municipalities or regional agglomerations of these.

	What are the burdens when reporting upstream from your region (to national bodies or supra-national bodies such as the CoM)?	Any additional comments about your response to the previous question.
Estonia	Coordination within the region to obtain information. The requested information is too technical or specialized. GDPR is causing confusion and delays, impeding reporting requirements. We do not have obligatory reporting from local to national level.	
Latvia	The requested information is too technical or specialized. The reporting format does not align with the local context. Too many tasks. Reporting is often too time-consuming.	
Poland	Too many tasks. Reporting is often too time-consuming. Unclear or confusing instructions. Coordination within the region to obtain information. There is no data that might be reported as it is not collected for several reasons (e.g., no political interest or due to concerns that data collection might result in political problems)	<p>There are no innovative approaches towards the engagement methods (30 year old methods are not sufficient for the new targets); such events have to be promoted to attract new attendees and include an attractant, such as prizes to be won; most of the people who actually attend this kind of event are already informed, the rest are not interested and it is difficult to make them interested in this matter.</p> <p>Even though there is a requirement within many applications to coordinate social engagement activities (like educational campaigns) - those actions are seldom developed in a satisfactory way or at a satisfactory level - it would be useful if some kind of good example or specific requirements for these actions could be met by the municipalities (stop printing more fliers that nobody will read or having meetings that nobody will attend). The dedicated budget could thereby be spent in a more efficient way.</p> <p>Reporting is in danger of losing its purpose (i.e., informing about specific problems) and become the problem itself for those units that have to report something - it makes the reports decline in quality and purpose.</p>
Czech Republic	Coordination within the region to obtain information. The reporting format does not align with the local context.	

	What are the burdens when reporting upstream from your region (to national bodies or supra-national bodies such as the CoM)?	Any additional comments about your response to the previous question.
Slovenia	No experiences in the regional context. For the mandatory local energy plans there are no problems with reporting to the responsible Ministry.	In Slovenia there are no energy and climate plans on a regional level, except one regional SECAP (joint SECAP) but for another region. So we have no experience with the regional context.
Croatia	Language barriers (such as translation of documents). The requested information is too technical or specialized, with too many tasks. Reporting is often too time-consuming. Coordination within the region to obtain information. GDPR is causing confusion and delays, impeding reporting requirements	<p>Croatia's local government structure is highly fragmented, with numerous small municipalities that often lack the administrative and technical capacity to efficiently collect and report environmental data. This fragmentation leads to inefficiencies and challenges in service delivery, including environmental reporting.</p> <p>The CoM framework requires signatories to develop and submit Sustainable Energy and Climate Action Plans (SECAPs), which involve detailed data collection and analysis. For smaller municipalities with limited resources, meeting these comprehensive reporting standards can be particularly challenging.</p> <p>Many local authorities in Croatia struggle with inadequate financial resources and a shortage of technical staff, hindering their ability to effectively gather and report necessary environmental data. This scarcity of resources can delay reporting processes and affect the quality of the data submitted.</p> <p>Ensuring consistent and accurate data across diverse municipalities is a significant challenge. Variations in data collection methodologies and reporting standards can lead to inconsistencies, making it difficult to aggregate and analyze data at the national, regional or local level.</p>

To summarise, the responses highlight several common challenges faced by local and regional authorities across DIGIT regions when it comes to data collection and reporting in the context of energy and climate action plans. Key issues include:

- **Engagement difficulties:** Traditional public engagement methods are ineffective, and there's a need for innovative approaches to attract and involve more stakeholders in decision making.
- **Technical complexity:** Information requests are often too technical or specialized for local authorities to understand and provide the necessary data.
- **Reporting requirements:** Reporting formats may not align with local contexts, and the sheer volume of tasks and time constraints make reporting a significant burden.
- **Data availability and collection:** Some regions lack the infrastructure or political will to collect necessary data, leading to gaps in reporting.

- **Coordination challenges:** Obtaining information across regional entities is often difficult, hindering data aggregation.
- **Regulatory and process obstacles:** GDPR and unclear instructions create confusion and delays.
- **Resource constraints:** Smaller municipalities often struggle with limited financial and technical resources, hindering their reporting capabilities.
- **Data inconsistencies:** Variations in data collection methods lead to inconsistencies, making data analysis challenging.
- **Lack of regional level plans:** Some countries lack regional energy and climate plans, making reporting at this level difficult as data aggregation is not well understood.

These are well-known problems that are not raised for the first time and are likely not unique to Central and Eastern Europe, but they are worth repeating. As noted in the peer-reviewed article arising from DIGIT's precursor project (available at <https://doi.org/10.4337/eej.2025.0003>), it is likely to be more effective were regional energy agencies contracted to assume the burden of energy and climate action planning and reporting rather than assuming that small municipalities will be capable of taking on these tasks, even after capacitation. Concomitantly, the array of data expected to fulfill reporting obligations could be standardised to simplify reporting requirements, which is already an initiative of the Covenant of Mayors in regard to SECAPs, and it may be justifiable for CINEA to offer leadership in this regard. Finally, while GDPR was promulgated nine years ago at the time of writing this Deliverable, for some people there is still considerable uncertainty surrounding data that can be shared, and in such locales this severely impedes data collection efforts. Even if data can be understood to be shareable by people in charge of it, the level of aggregation that is offered is often too coarse to be of utility for reporting requirements. There may not be any way to contend with this issue that is not ad hoc and subject to interpretation and restrictions on sharing without CINEA or another agency within the Commission explicitly stipulating what can and what must not be shared, with a parallel exercise to ensure that reporting requirements become commensurate with acquirable data.