

POLICY WHITE PAPER

**Upscaling citizen engagement
for climate resilience**

**ROADMAP FOR POLICY
TRANSFORMATIONAL CHANGE**



Funded by
the European Union



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1. Executive Summary

Climate change demands comprehensive adaptation strategies that are not only effective but also equitable and socially accepted. Meaningful citizen and stakeholder engagement is the cornerstone of such strategies, promising to harness local knowledge, build public trust and ensure just adaptation outcomes. However, despite strong European Union (EU) policy support and many inspiring local initiatives, engagement in climate adaptation across Europe remains fragmented, often reduced to tokenistic exercises that struggle to achieve their potential.

This Adaptation AGORA policy white paper addresses the critical gap between high-level ambition and on-the-ground implementation. It argues that to move from isolated successes to a new standard of climate governance, Europe must adopt a holistic approach to scaling engagement. This requires moving beyond replicating successful pilots (scaling out) to simultaneously impacting laws and policies (scaling up), shifting cultural values toward participation (scaling deep), and strengthening the internal capacities and means for action of the organizations responsible for implementation (scaling in and down). Without this multi-dimensional strategy that builds systemic enabling conditions, engagement practices risk reinforcing inequalities, fostering public distrust and undermining long-term adaptation goals.

To catalyse this transformation, this white paper presents a strategic roadmap developed from a comprehensive analysis of current research, policies and practices. It builds on a synthesis of evidence from academic literature, EU policy instruments, EU-level documents, participatory practices, and empirical insights from the Adaptation AGORA project. The roadmap is structured around four interconnected pillars, which collectively address the institutional, financial, cultural and practical challenges hindering the scaling of stakeholder and citizen engagement:

1. Institutionalizing engagement: Embedding citizen and stakeholder engagement as a formal, standardised component of climate adaptation governance across all levels and sectors. This includes strengthening EU leadership,

establishing clear legal mandates, mainstreaming engagement into socio-economic sectors, and embedding principles of climate justice into policy frameworks.

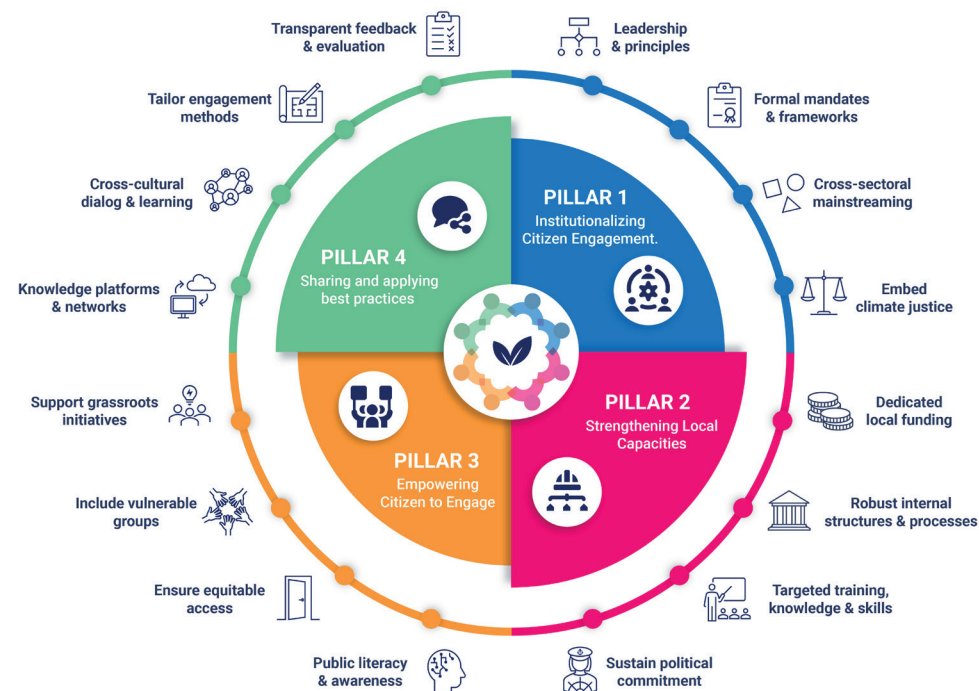
2. Strengthening local capacity: Empowering local authorities, as the primary actors involved in adaptation, with the dedicated funding, robust internal structures, targeted training and sustained political commitment necessary to design and implement high-quality and effective engagement processes.

3. Empowering citizens and stakeholders: Ensuring all members of society, particularly vulnerable and marginalized groups, have the awareness, opportunity, and capacity to participate meaningfully. This involves enhancing climate literacy, removing practical barriers to participation, and actively supporting community-led adaptation and citizen action initiatives.

4. Sharing and applying knowledge and best practices: Fostering a culture of continuous learning and improvement by strengthening knowledge exchange platforms, facilitating

cross-cultural dialogue, promoting the use of diverse and context-tailored methodologies and ensuring transparency through robust feedback and evaluation mechanisms.

This roadmap provides 16 actionable policy and governance recommendations for European, national, regional and local actors. These recommendations are grounded in the Adaptation AGORA project's theoretical and practical insights from systematic analysis of engagement contexts and pilot activities, ensuring they are both evidence-based and relevant to real-world challenges. Pillars and recommendations were refined and validated through interaction with the target audience during several major European events (Grenoble Biennale of Cities in Transition 2025, European Climate Change Adaptation Conference 2025, European Urban Resilience Forum 2025). The roadmap is not intended to be a one-size-fits-all blueprint framework. It provides a flexible guidance and directions to support policymakers and practitioners, and to empower civil society to collectively build a climate resilient and democratic Europe.



2. The imperative for scaling citizen and stakeholder engagement practices for climate adaptation

Climate change presents a complex and evolving challenge to Europe, demanding not only ambitious mitigation efforts but also comprehensive adaptation strategies¹. The unavoidable impacts of a changing climate, from extreme weather events to altered ecosystems, necessitate a proactive and collective societal response². To develop adaptation strategies that are both effective and just, it is imperative to move beyond traditional governance models and embrace meaningful citizen and stakeholder engagement that considers diverse values, voices and principles of justice and equity^{3,4}. However, while inspiring initiatives exist, they often remain isolated measures and pilots. The Adaptation AGORA EU-funded project developed this policy white paper and its roadmap to move towards identifying the systemic enabling conditions necessary to transform isolated successes into a new standard for climate adaptation governance across Europe.

2.1 The role of citizen and stakeholder engagement: Promise and pitfalls for effective adaptation

Citizen and stakeholder engagement is fundamental to successful climate adaptation, promising more effective, equitable, and resilient outcomes by identifying, prioritizing and implementing solutions through the mobilization of diverse actors and knowledge systems. However, evidence shows that engagement efforts are frequently undermined by procedural and structural barriers, limiting their scope and impact. Consistent with the definition proposed by Reed in 2008⁵, we refer to citizen and stakeholder engagement as a process through which individuals,

groups or organizations are involved in taking an active role in making decisions that affect them.

The promise of successful engagement: The core benefits, supported by extensive research⁶⁻¹², are manifold:

- Increased knowledge, learning and understanding: Public engagement through deliberative processes can facilitate understanding of climate change impacts and adaptation solutions, thus increasing social acceptance.
- More effective and relevant solutions: Engagement harnesses invaluable local, traditional, and lived-experience knowledge, ensuring adaptation measures are tailored to specific contexts and vulnerabilities. It can also help to identify the most appropriate (and desirable) forms of adaptation new solutions, and their viability.
- Enhanced legitimacy, equity and ownership: By promoting inclusivity and representing marginalized voices, co-developed adaptation plans are perceived as more equitable. This enhances legitimacy, increases public trust and fosters a sense of shared ownership.
- Increased adaptive capacity and resilience: Collaborative processes build trust between communities and institutions, strengthen local governance and mobilize the collective action necessary to respond to long-term climate challenges.
- Navigating complexity: Engagement provides a crucial platform for navigating complex trade-offs, addressing power dynamics and addressing potential conflicts before they hinder adaptation action.

Risks of engagement practices: However, while the benefits of engagement are clear, the risks associated with its poor implementation are equally significant and often underestimated by policymakers. Citizen and

stakeholder engagement is not a neutral process and when conducted without the necessary resources, capacity and supportive structures it can become counterproductive¹³.

Attention should be paid at the process level, where unclear objectives, inadequate facilitation, poor inclusion of participants inputs or the exclusion of key voices can lead to undemocratic outcomes by reinforcing power inequalities, marginalizing minority voices and creating distrust among participants¹⁴.

More importantly, these procedural barriers often result from deeper structural barriers. Indeed, engagement initiatives could fail to achieve their objectives because the surrounding institutional and governance systems are not designed to support them¹⁵. Local authorities lack dedicated resources, training and mandates, leaving practitioners with responsibility but no capacity¹⁶.

Thus, even well-intentioned engagement risks becoming a tokenistic “box-ticking” exercise and causing tangible harm. This is particularly true when the timing appears politically motivated, for instance, when conducted too close to an election period, which may make the effort appear to be a political manoeuvre. Such processes undermine immediate adaptation goals, reinforcing social inequalities and creating long-term public fatigue and distrust over institutions, especially when initial promises about how input will be used are not transparently fulfilled^{17,18}.

To effectively scale engagement and move from promise to practice, policy must shift from simply encouraging participation to strategically and systematically building institutional and social enabling conditions that allow engagement practices to unfold their potential to promote societal resilience¹⁹.

2.2 The European policy landscape: Current state of engagement in climate adaptation

The latest European policies and regulations have shown an increased recognition of the crucial role of stakeholder and citizen engagement in climate adaptation and resilience, drawing on the experience from local and regional implementation in the last few decades.

Building upon the foundations of the Rio Declaration (1992) and the Aarhus Convention (1998), global policy frameworks have increasingly strengthened the role of public participation over different levels of decision making. Multiple global frameworks, such as the Sustainable Development Goals (2015–2030), Paris Agreement (2015) or Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction (2015–2030) and the scientific content of the Working Group II contributions to the IPCC Sixth Assessment Report ¹, underscore the necessity of inclusive and multi-stakeholder participation for achieving effective and just global climate action and sustainable development ²⁰.

The EU is making tangible progress in fostering participatory and deliberative democracy, creating mechanisms that are increasingly applied to systemic challenges like climate change. This includes establishing citizen consultations, dialogues and direct participation in EU policymaking (e.g. European Citizens' Initiative, Have Your Say portal). These democratic principles were significantly strengthened by the groundbreaking Conference on the Future of Europe in 2021 and 2022, which prominently featured European Citizens' panels and the launch in 2021 of the Competence Centre on Participatory and Deliberative Democracy that provides tools, resources and methodologies to build best practices across different levels of governance in the EU.

Furthermore, EU adaptation policy frameworks, notably the EU Adaptation Strategy (2021), provide a foundational mandate and active support for broad societal involvement. Recently, public participation has been boosted by the Adaptation to Climate Change Mission ²¹ which requires participating ~150 regions and communities to ensure citizen involvement at all stages of adaptation planning and in co-creating innovative solutions. To that end, the Mission Implementation Platform ([MIP4Adapt](#)) and the associated EU-funded projects (e.g. [Adaptation AGORA](#), [CLIMAS](#), [REGILIENCE](#), [ARSINOE](#), [IMPETUS](#), [Pathways2Resilience](#), etc.) provide substantial research, resources and support specifically designed to facilitate engagement activities ²².

The current policy landscape successfully promotes why engagement is important but often lacks detail on how it can be systemically integrated, resulting in an uneven and fragmented implementation of these frameworks at national, regional, and local levels. While individual national governments and regional and local authorities across Europe have developed exemplary engagement practices for climate adaptation (e.g. Ireland's Citizens' Assemblies, Belgium Citizens' Council, French Citizens' Convention for Climate, Participation Observatory in the Emilia-Romagna region, Italy), they often remain isolated best practices rather than mainstream, standardised approaches ¹⁵.

This disconnect between high-level policy ambition and on-the-ground implementation highlights a critical gap that we are trying to address in this policy white paper ²⁰. While best practices are constantly developing, there is a lack of a coherent and strategic framework to guide their systematic scaling across diverse European contexts.



2.3 A framework for scaling: Dimensions to consider for the scaling of engagement practices

Citizen and stakeholder engagement is increasingly promoted in public policy debates. This approach is presented as a means of developing innovative and effective solutions to meet complex societal needs such as adapting to climate change. As with any social innovation, demonstrating success in isolated contexts is only the first step and the critical challenge now lies in its scaling. To build this roadmap we adopted a multi-dimensional framework for scaling social innovations, adapted from the work of Moore et al, 2015²³ and Sánchez Rodríguez et al., 2021²⁴ (Figure 1). This approach moves beyond simple replication of successful initiatives to consider the institutional, cultural and organizational changes necessary for engagement to become truly embedded in adaptation policies and actions. It allows for a holistic analysis of the different types of interventions required and provides a structured lens through which to organize our policy recommendations along five interconnected dimensions:

- **Scaling up – Impacting law and policy:** This dimension refers to the process of influencing social structures such as formal rules, regulations and policies at different levels of governance, to allow good practices to be adopted more extensively. It is about creating the official mandates and institutional authorization for engagement to take place systemically.

- **Scaling out – Impacting greater numbers:** This dimension refers to the horizontal spread of engagement practices to reach more communities and geographical areas. This means spreading or repeating successful local engagement models or approaches to new localities or expanding engagement within a single area to involve a broader and more diverse population.

- **Scaling deep – Impacting cultural roots:** This dimension addresses the fundamental shifts in values, informal norms and beliefs that underpin behavioural changes. In this context, it involves fostering a culture where participation is considered as a component of democratic governance, fostering trust, justice and equity into collective approaches to adaptation.

- **Scaling in – Strengthening organizational capacities:** This dimension focuses on improving the internal capacity of the organizations responsible for engagement that are primarily local and regional authorities. It involves building the necessary institutional structures, functions, processes, skills and resources to allow these organizations

to implement the good practices it is trying to promote.

- **Scaling down – Providing the means for action:** This dimension refers to ensuring that changes in laws, policies or norms, have the necessary means to implement the envisaged good practices and processes on the ground. It involves ensuring that strategies and resources are tailored to and effectively reach the local actors and individual level.

We have therefore considered these five interconnected dimensions of scaling to define the roadmap's pillars and recommendations, leading to an overall strategy that targets not only the breadth of engagement, but also its depth, institutional support and local feasibility.

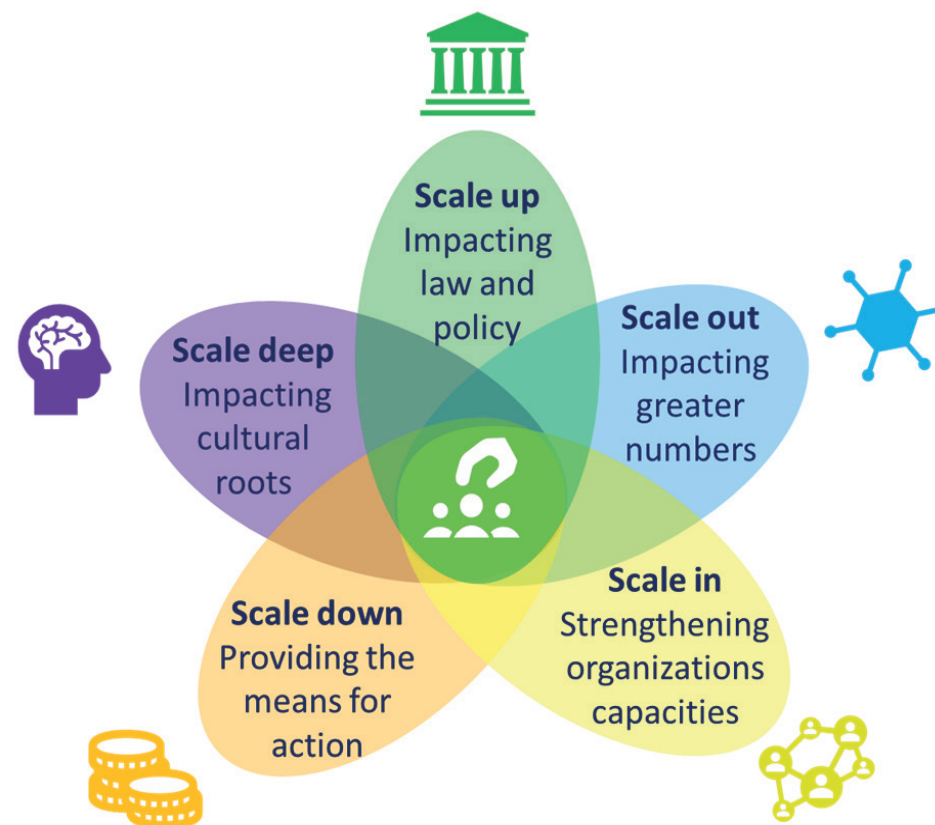


Figure 1. Dimensions to consider for the scaling of engagement practices. Adapted from Moore et al. (2015) and Sánchez Rodríguez et al. (2021).

3. Policy white paper aim and scope

The primary aim of this policy white paper is to catalyse transformational change by providing strategic guidance to foster the scaling of meaningful citizen and stakeholder engagement in climate adaptation governance and policy across Europe.

Core objectives and approach

Drawing on evidence and insights generated through the Adaptation AGORA project and a comprehensive analysis of policies and practices across Europe, we designed a roadmap that fosters enabling conditions supporting policymakers and practitioners to implement engagement processes by:

- Addressing systemic challenges by targeting coherent areas of strategic intervention.
- Proposing a set of actionable policy and governance recommendations leading actions at European, national, regional, and local levels.
- Guiding the development of supportive institutional structures, funding mechanisms and capacity-building initiatives that are prerequisites for effective engagement.

This document contributes to the evolving field of climate and democracy governance by offering a shared understanding of future challenges and a foundation for action. Its focus is on the governance and policy structures required to support, sustain and scale meaningful engagement. It does not provide a technical manual of specific engagement methods but rather addresses the systemic environment in which those methods can succeed.

This roadmap is not a rigid, one-size-fits-all blueprint, but can serve as a flexible strategic framework. It provides directions while encouraging the adaptation of

recommendations to the unique historical trajectories, local specificities and current priorities of diverse European contexts.

Intended audience and relevance

This roadmap is dedicated to all actors who have an instrumental role in creating these enabling conditions. This includes policymakers at all levels who design the rules and allocate resources; practitioners who need to advocate for supportive conditions to do their work effectively; and researchers, civil society organisations (CSOs) and other stakeholders who contribute to building a more participatory climate governance landscape.

We envision this roadmap as a valuable resource to:

- Create a shared understanding and common strategic direction for diverse actors.
- Offer concrete ideas for policy design, legislation, funding programs, and strategies that foster meaningful engagement.
- Provide clear arguments for dedicating resources to capacity building, institutional reforms, and long-term engagement support.
- Provide support for advocacy, for identifying research gaps and for holding institutions accountable for following best practices.



4. Roadmap development

The roadmap development process was designed to be evidence-based, structured, and iterative, ensuring that the final output is both grounded in research and relevant to the practical needs of policymakers and practitioners. The development followed three distinct phases: (1) Research evidence and lessons learned synthesis, (2) Strategic pillars and recommendations identification and framing, and (3) Iterative refinement and validation. The detailed methodology is provided in the appendix.

Phase 1: Research evidence synthesis

The initial phase focused on building a comprehensive evidence base by systematically synthesizing knowledge from multiple sources grounded in the current state of science, policy, and practice. The primary inputs included:

- **A systematic review of academic literature** focusing on barriers and enablers for effective stakeholder and citizen engagement in climate adaptation (as seen in Adaptation AGORA deliverable 4.1²⁵).
- **An analysis of European adaptation policy instruments and participatory practices** at the EU and national (in Spanish and German context) levels to identify gaps, strengths, and weaknesses (as seen in Adaptation AGORA deliverable 4.2^{26,27}).
- **Empirical lessons learned** gathered from engagement practices conducted within the Adaptation AGORA project, employing surveys, semi-structured interviews, and focus groups with diverse participants^{28–31}.
- **A comprehensive review of EU-level documents, guidance materials, roadmaps, guidelines, and reports** to align the roadmap with current European strategic priorities, guidelines and legal frameworks.

The output of this phase was a rich repository of key challenges, successful approaches, contextual factors and policy ideas that formed the raw material for the roadmap.

Phase 2: Strategic pillars and recommendations identification and framing

The second phase focused on structuring the synthesized insights into a coherent and logical roadmap. To move beyond a simple list of recommendations, a conceptual model was adopted.

- **The social innovation scaling framework** was adopted as a guiding lens ensuring that the multiple and interconnected dimensions of scaling were covered by the roadmap.
- **Building on the framework, strategic policy areas fostering engagement practice scaling** from phase 1 insights have been identified. This analytical process revealed four overarching strategic pillars addressing identified challenges and scaling dimensions.
- **Recommendation revision** based on an initial list of potential recommendations refined through a process of consolidation resulting in four distinct, high-level recommendations per pillar. Each of the 16 recommendations has been formulated using a comprehensive structure defining the rationale and challenges addressed, the expected benefits, a set of implementation mechanisms and actors to be involved.

This structure was chosen to make each recommendation more transparent, robust, and directly usable for policy and planning processes.

Phase 3: Iterative refinement and validation through stakeholder engagement

The drafted pillars and recommendations were then refined and validated through direct engagement with

the target audience through a series of interactions at major European events:

- **Grenoble Biennale of Cities in Transition 2025:** This event served as an early opportunity to present the concepts of the roadmap to 12 local practitioners and policymakers. The feedback gathered helped to validate the key challenges faced by cities implementing engagement practices for adaptation.
- **European Climate Change Adaptation Conference 2025:** An interactive workshop session was designed specifically to engage researchers, practitioners and policymakers in a deep dive on the roadmap. 33 participants worked in groups, one for each pillar, to validate the recommendations and identify concrete implementation mechanisms and actions. This feedback was crucial to provide practice-oriented recommendations.
- **European Urban Resilience Forum 2025:** Within a session organized by the Pathways2Resilience project and ICLEI Europe focused on bridging the science-practice gap, the roadmap was presented to 15 regional and local practitioners. We aimed to explore how expert knowledge and frameworks, like this roadmap, can be effectively translated for regional and local governments. Feedback from this session directly informed how the roadmap should be framed to increase its usability and relevance.

The insights from these three events were systematically collected and used to iteratively refine the descriptions, actions, and framing of the roadmap, ensuring the final version is not only evidence-based but also co-designed with its target audience.

5.The roadmap: Four strategic pillars for scaling citizen and stakeholder engagement in climate adaptation

5.1 The context for action: Key challenges to scaling engagement

To effectively scale citizen and stakeholder engagement, it is crucial to first acknowledge the current context in which engagement practices occur and the complex and interconnected challenges that hinder its mainstreaming and meaningful implementation. According to research undertaken within the Adaptation AGORA project ^{26,31} and in particular the systematic literature review ^{15,25} these challenges can be broadly categorized into two groups: common cross-cutting challenges and contextual disparities across European Regions.

5.1.1. Common cross-cutting challenges

Practitioners and policymakers consistently face a set of common challenges (C) inherent in the practice of engagement itself:

• **C.1 – Lack of inclusivity, especially in the engagement of vulnerable and marginalized groups:** These groups often face a combination of practical challenges to engage (literacy, financial, digital, language...) associated with deeper systemic barriers including power imbalances, historical distrust of authorities, and the priority of immediate daily-life struggles over climate concerns (see Box 1). Moreover, vulnerability is a moving concept, the groups considered vulnerable can vary significantly depending on the specific context. There is a lack of

inclusion strategies for these groups, including the younger generations.

• **C.2 – Accessibility of engagement formats and consideration of participants needs:** Many engagement processes fail to consider the diverse needs, constraints, and socioeconomic realities of their participants. This may lead to accessibility issues related to e.g., channels for participation (e.g., in-person vs. online), timing, location, and language, which can exclude important segments of affected actors and communities. The availability of compensation incentives and resources can also make a difference.

• **C.3 – Engagement process design and management complexities:** The process of co-production itself is inherently complex. Facilitators often lack experience and training, leading to challenges in managing diverse expectations, navigating different ways of working, and defining clear roles and responsibilities. The use of technical and scientific language can create barriers, and a failure to involve participants early enough in the process can undermine ownership and trust from the outset.

• **C.4 – Lack of transparency, trust and impact evaluation:** There is a growing participants' fatigue and public disillusionment due to the lack of clear and transparent feedback on how citizen inputs influence decisions. This absence of robust monitoring and evaluation (M&E) undermines trust and the perceived impacts of participation.

5.1.2.Contextual disparities across European Regions

Beyond cross-cutting challenges, to navigate the significant regional and local differences any effective strategy to scale engagement must be sensitive to the following contextual factors:

• **C.5 – Diverse engagement cultures and perceptions:** Public receptiveness and attitudes to engagement is not uniform. It is shaped by region's democratic habits, historical experiences with social movements, and the level of public trust in authorities and institutions. These factors are often compounded with a lack of awareness about engagement opportunities. Member States and regions adopt different combinations of political representation and participation resulting in important differences in the adopted engagement practices.

• **C.6 – Perceptions of climate risk:** Awareness level and perceived urgency of climate change adaptation vary significantly among localities. Motivation to engage is often lower in regions that are less affected, a challenge that must be combined with the different levels of climate literacy. This is exacerbated by the pervasive issue of mis/disinformation, which can undermine public understanding and trust in adaptation measures.

• **C.7 – Uneven political will, stability and power imbalance:** The success of engagement is highly dependent on the political will of local and regional authorities to share power and support participatory decision-making. This commitment is often restricted by short-term political agenda and priorities, elected representatives' fear of losing power, facing opposition and damaging reputations.

These issues are rooted in deeper systemic challenges, including fundamental power imbalances, historical distrust of and in authorities, and an underestimation of local knowledge, which can disrupt the long-term, trust-based efforts required for effective engagement.

• **C.8 – Unequal local authority capacities and resources:** Meaningful engagement is resource-intensive and local authorities face significant inequalities in financial resources, access to skilled staff, and administrative capacities. Furthermore, institutional silos and bureaucratic burdens often hinder coordinated and cross-departmental action.

• **C.9 – Fragmented policy and regulatory support:** Across Europe, there is a lack of clear legal mandates or standardized guidelines for citizen engagement in climate adaptation. This leaves such processes voluntary, *ad-hoc* and often dependent on individual champions rather than being systemically embedded in governance structures.

Box 1. Gender and intersectionality issues

One issue that cuts across all the above is gender. Gender inequalities are crucial to consider in the design of adaptation policies, as they shape how climate change is experienced and impacts different segments of the population. Social norms create gender inequalities in access to resources, employment, and power, which influence the level of exposure and vulnerability to the impacts of climate change. For instance, in many regions where women are primarily responsible for collecting water and food, their exposure and vulnerability to droughts is increased. Another example that was identified during Adaptation AGORA participatory sessions is the increased vulnerability of elderly women and single mothers in (peri)urban areas during heat waves, due to their lower incomes (salaries or pensions) compared to men, which can exacerbate energy poverty and reduce access to means of protection from the heat (such as air conditioners, although these are a maladaptive solution to extreme heat as they expel hot air outside, consume a lot of energy and are high emitters of greenhouse gases). Gender identity also intersects with other structural inequalities based on race, social class, (dis)ability, religion, sexual orientation, age, and income, influencing how climate change and its impacts are experienced, as well as vulnerability and response and adaptation capacities. Globally, mitigation and adaptation strategies have yet failed to consistently and comprehensively include gender inequalities, which reinforces the need for engaging these populations in designing and implementing adaptation strategies that are fitted to their needs, inclusive, and substantive.

Figure 2. Pillars and recommendations of the policy roadmap from scaling citizen and stakeholder engagement in climate adaptation.



5.2 Strategic pillars and associated policy recommendations

The policy roadmap is displayed visually in Figure 2. In the following subsections, each pillar and its associated recommendations will be presented.

5.2.1. Pillar 1: Institutionalizing citizen and stakeholder engagement in public and private actions across scales and sectors.

Citizen and stakeholder engagement need to transform from sporadic or voluntary initiatives to a systematic, embedded and standardized process within the formal structures and processes of climate adaptation governance across Europe. This pillar addresses this critical need by transitioning citizen engagement into a core component of governance and action.

Therefore, this pillar focuses on creating the necessary institutional architecture to make meaningful engagement a standard, recognized, and integral part of policy making, planning, and implementation. It establishes formal mandates and policy frameworks to institutionalize citizen engagement (Scaling up – Figure 3). It requires engagement to be mainstreamed across all societal sectors, including a greater variety of actors and private organizations (Scaling out). This pillar also embeds the core principles of just resilience into these frameworks, shifting the underlying norms and values of governance (Scaling deep) and providing local authorities with the formal legitimacy and funding needed to implement engagement activities on the ground (Scaling down).

This requires strong leadership and coherent mechanisms at the EU level to guide and support these efforts across Member States.

It also means establishing clear legal and policy frameworks to integrate participation into existing democratic mechanisms (e.g. electoral and representative democracy) and extending engagement practices beyond public administration into diverse socio-economic sectors.

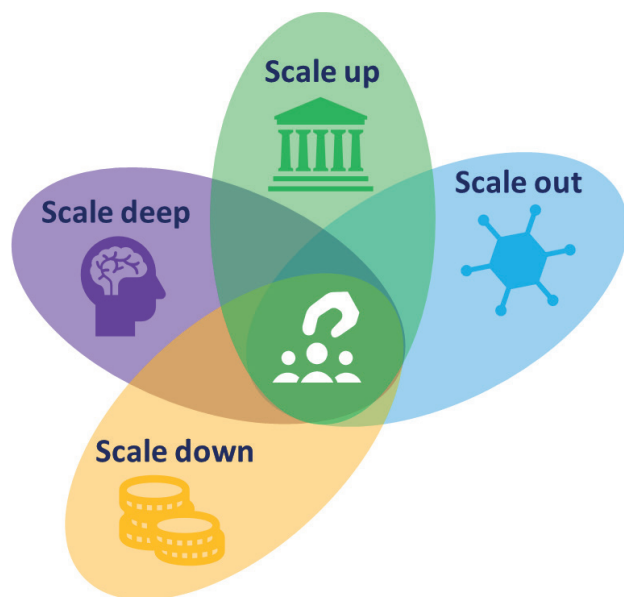


Figure 3. Scaling directions addressed by citizen and stakeholder engagement institutionalization.

Recommendation 1.A: Strengthen EU leadership and culture of citizen engagement

• **Main objective:** Provide the high-level political, cultural and institutional framework to drive and support the broader institutionalisation of participatory democratic practices and mechanisms across Europe. Policies should focus on strengthening EU leadership in citizen engagement by developing clear guiding principles and enhancing the visibility, accessibility, representativeness, and responsiveness of EU-level engagement mechanisms, ensuring effective communication and monitoring of how citizen inputs influence EU outcomes. These strengthened democratic tools must then be effectively and systematically leveraged for the complex challenges of climate adaptation.

• Expected benefits:

- Stronger political signal reinforcing the importance of engagement in the context of existing representative institutions;
- Greater coherence in engagement practices across EU policies;
- Increased citizen trust in EU institutions and climate policies;
- Improved quality and relevance of EU-level adaptation strategies;
- Potential for positive influence on national engagement practices;
- Better connection between citizens and EU decision-making.

• **Rationale/Challenges:** The EU plays a critical role in setting the agenda, providing resources, and establishing norms for climate action, including the mainstreaming of citizen engagement. Strengthening EU-level mechanisms and demonstrating leadership can inspire and support action at national and local levels. Calls for improved EU participatory mechanisms,

better communication, and clear monitoring of results have emerged strongly.

• Examples of implementation actions and mechanisms:

- Develop and adopt an EU Charter for Citizen engagement in EU Affairs, to provide shared principles.
- Enhance existing EU digital participation platforms (e.g. 'Have Your Say') for better user-friendliness, accessibility (multilingualism), interactivity, and transparent feedback loops on how input is used.
- Formalize and potentially expand the use of representative European citizens' panels and assemblies on climate adaptation topics, ensuring robust methodologies, expert input, clear mandates, and transparent institutional responses to recommendations.
- Improve communication strategies to raise awareness of EU engagement opportunities among diverse publics.
- Establish clear mechanisms within EU institutions to monitor and publicly report on the uptake and influence of citizen contributions from various participatory processes.
- Ensure EU funding programs (e.g. Horizon Europe, LIFE) continue and potentially increase support for innovative engagement projects and the mainstreaming of Citizen engagement mechanisms (e.g. observatories).

• Key actors involved:

- EU level: European Commission (Secretariat-General, DG CLIMA, JRC), European Parliament, Council of the EU, Committee of the Regions, European Economic and Social Committee (EESC), EU agencies (EEA), EU-level CSO networks. National level: National governments (as participants in EU processes).

Recommendation 1.B: Establish formal mandates and frameworks for citizen engagement in the adaptation cycle

• **Main objective:** Increase consistency and quality of engagement across Europe by creating the necessary formal structures and requirements for engagement to become a standard part of adaptation governance. Establish clear legal and policy frameworks at EU, national, regional, and local levels that formally integrate and, where appropriate, mandate meaningful engagement as a systematic component throughout the entire climate adaptation cycle (e.g. Regional Adaptation Support Tool (RAST) and Regional Resilience Journey), from planning to implementation and monitoring, including transparent mechanisms to track uptake and impact.

• **Expected benefits:**

- Increased consistency and quality of engagement across Europe;
- Mainstreaming engagement as standard practice, moving beyond ad-hoc initiatives;
- Enhanced legitimacy and public acceptance of adaptation policies;
- Improved policy effectiveness through integration of diverse types of knowledge;
- Greater accountability of public authorities;
- Inclusion of new standardized democratic procedures that involve citizens in existing representative democracy systems.

• **Rationale/challenges:** Currently, citizen engagement in climate adaptation often remains voluntary, fragmented, and dependent on fluctuating political will (as mentioned in C.7). Lack of formal integration leads to inconsistencies and missed opportunities for leveraging local knowledge (C.9). Existing institutional barriers and siloed approaches hinder effective co-production (C.8). Establishing clear frameworks and mandates,

supported by strong institutional backing and potentially making participation legally binding in certain contexts, is crucial for ensuring engagement is systematic, sustained, and influential across all governance levels. This addresses the need for structural changes to institutionalize public participation and provides the predictability needed for long-term planning and accountability.

• **Examples of implementation actions and mechanisms:**

- Develop models of hybrid representative democracy that integrate different forms (electoral, participatory) of political representation and participation into climate adaptation policy and decision making.
- Design new directives or reinforce existing legislation (e.g. Aarhus Convention implementation, Climate laws) setting standards for citizen engagement in national/regional adaptation planning and significant adaptation projects.
- Develop or revise national and regional adaptation strategies and laws to explicitly require and guide engagement processes at relevant phase of the cycle (planning, implementation, monitoring).
- Develop clear administrative guidelines or a “code of conduct” defining scope, methods, target groups, expected outputs, including how inputs will be considered and feedback provided (Adaptation Support Tool, Regional Resilience Journey).
- Integrate engagement requirements into existing local planning instruments like Sustainable Energy and Climate Action Plans. Include clauses for inter-municipality cooperation within political mandates to address cross-border issues.

• **Key actors involved:**

- EU level: European Commission, European Parliament, Council of the EU.

- National level: National governments and parliaments, environmental agencies.
- Regional and local level: Regional and local authorities, planning departments.

Recommendation 1.C: Mainstream engagement across socio-economic sectors, including the private sector

• **Main objective:** Expand the scope of citizen engagement beyond government structures into the fabric of the economy and different societal sectors. Promote and incentivize the integration of citizen engagement to co-produce climate adaptation strategies and actions across all relevant socio-economic sectors moving beyond silos (e.g. energy, transport, agriculture, health, finance), and explicitly encouraging private sector participation, investment, and responsibility in co-developing and implementing adaptation solutions.

• **Expected benefits:**

- More comprehensive and integrated adaptation solutions across sectors;
- Breaking down institutional silos;
- Leveraging private finance and innovation for resilience;
- Increased relevance and ownership of adaptation measures across society;
- Potential for co-benefits (e.g. green jobs, improved health outcomes).

• **Rationale/challenges:** Climate adaptation is not only a public sector responsibility, and it requires action across all parts of society and the economy. Current approaches are often siloed within environmental or planning departments (C.8), neglecting the specific adaptation needs and potential contributions of sectors like agriculture, health, tourism, or finance. Furthermore,

public funding alone is insufficient; engaging the private sector can unlock additional resources, innovation, and expertise. Mandating cross-sectoral strategies that include engagement and fostering public-private partnerships are crucial for holistic and effective adaptation.

• **Examples of implementation actions and mechanisms:**

- Mandate through national policy that key socio-economic sectors (e.g. transport, agriculture, health) develop climate adaptation plans that incorporate affected stakeholder and citizen perspectives on risks and solutions.
- Integrate citizen engagement considerations into sectoral policies and funding streams (e.g. Common Agricultural Policy, regional development funds).
- Develop financial and non-financial incentives (e.g. public procurement criteria, recognition schemes) for businesses that integrate engagement into their adaptation efforts.
- Link citizen and stakeholder engagement requirements to mandatory corporate sustainability and climate risk reporting frameworks (e.g. CSRD, TCFD), requiring companies to report on how they engage affected communities in their adaptation planning.
- Establish or support multi-stakeholder platforms, regional climate hubs, or communities of practice focused on specific sectors or cross-sectoral challenges.
- Develop guidance materials tailored to specific sectors on how to effectively engage stakeholders and citizens in their adaptation planning.

• **Actors involved:**

- EU level: EU general directions (DGs) such as CLIMA, GROW, all sectoral DGs, EIB, EBRD.

- National level: National ministries (environment, economy, agriculture, health, transport, etc.), industry regulators, financial institutions (e.g. national banks).
- Regional and local level: Regional/local authorities, chambers of commerce, financial institutions.
- Others: Private sector companies and associations, research institutions.

Recommendation 1.D: Embed environmental and climate justice in the policy framework

• **Main objective:** Ensure that engagement practices are grounded in justice and equity, addressing power imbalances and promoting inclusive resilience that prioritises vulnerable, marginalised and under-represented voices. Embed principles of environmental and climate justice as a core requirement within all climate adaptation policies and associated citizen engagement frameworks. Make sure that no one is left behind in climate adaptation policies by equally distributing the benefits of adaptation and avoiding placing the burden of adaptation on vulnerable groups. To do so, ensure that dedicated strategies, resources, and methodologies are employed to actively prioritize the inclusion, meaningful participation and specific needs of vulnerable and historically marginalized groups.

• **Expected benefits:**

- Fairer and more equitable adaptation outcomes;
- Reduced vulnerability of marginalized communities;
- Increased social cohesion and trust in governance;
- Prevention of maladaptation (i.e., adaptation solutions that lead to an increased vulnerability) that harms vulnerable groups or unfairly burdens some parts of the population, potentially increasing inequalities;

- Alignment with EU fundamental rights and Sustainable Development Goals.

• **Rationale/challenges:** Climate change impacts disproportionately affect vulnerable populations, yet these groups often face the greatest barriers to participating in decision-making (C.1). Without explicit attention to justice, adaptation policies risk reinforcing or even exacerbating existing inequalities. Consistently embedding justice principles at all governance levels and at all levels of the adaptation policy cycle is essential for achieving “just resilience” and ensuring engagement processes are truly inclusive and equitable. This requires moving beyond tokenistic inclusion to ensure vulnerable groups have genuine influence. Mandating the identification and targeted engagement of these groups is crucial.

• **Examples of implementation actions and mechanisms:**

- Explicitly integrate environmental and climate justice principles into EU, national, regional, and local adaptation strategies and the formal frameworks mentioned in recommendation 1.B.
- Mandate participatory social vulnerability assessments as part of climate risk assessments, identifying groups most at risk, including vulnerability spatial mapping.
- Develop and fund targeted inclusion strategies tailored to the specific needs and contexts of vulnerable and “difficult to reach” groups (e.g. using trusted intermediaries, providing translation, childcare, compensation).
- Allocate dedicated budget lines within adaptation funding for inclusive and equitable engagement activities, leveraging EU funding mechanisms (e.g., Cohesion Funds, Horizon Europe).

- Build capacity among public authorities and facilitators on justice principles, gender mainstreaming and inclusive, power-sensitive facilitation techniques.
- Require reporting on how the perspectives and needs of vulnerable groups have influenced adaptation planning and outcomes.
- Learn from existing models like the Scottish Just Transition Commission to inform the creation of new governance bodies focused on distributional and procedural justice.

Key actors involved:

- EU level: EU funding for justice and social inclusion
- National level: National governments, policymakers, human rights bodies.
- Regional and local level: Local authorities and governments, social services departments.
- Others: CSOs representing vulnerable groups, community leaders/intermediaries, research institutions (social sciences).

5.2.2. Pillar 2: Strengthening capacity and resources for local authorities to implement effective engagement mechanisms

This pillar directly empowers local authorities, the critical level for adaptation implementation and citizen interaction, by equipping them with the necessary capacities and resources to design, manage, and sustain high-quality engagement processes. Recognizing that local institutions often face significant constraints (financial, structural, human resources, technical capacities), the strategic objective aims to build their internal operational strength. This pillar strengthens the internal organizational capacities of local authorities through enhanced skills, robust structures and strategic partnerships (Scaling in – Figure 4). It provides local authorities with the dedicated funding and practical capacities necessary to translate

strategy into action (Scaling down) and by embeds engagement principles into local policies, thereby elevating participation from an ad-hoc activity to a formal part of local governance (Scaling up). This capacity building will, in turn, enhances their ability to participate and replicate successful practices (Scaling out). Finally, by fostering lasting political commitment, it contributes to shift the local governance culture towards valuing engagement as a core component of effective climate adaptation (Scaling deep).

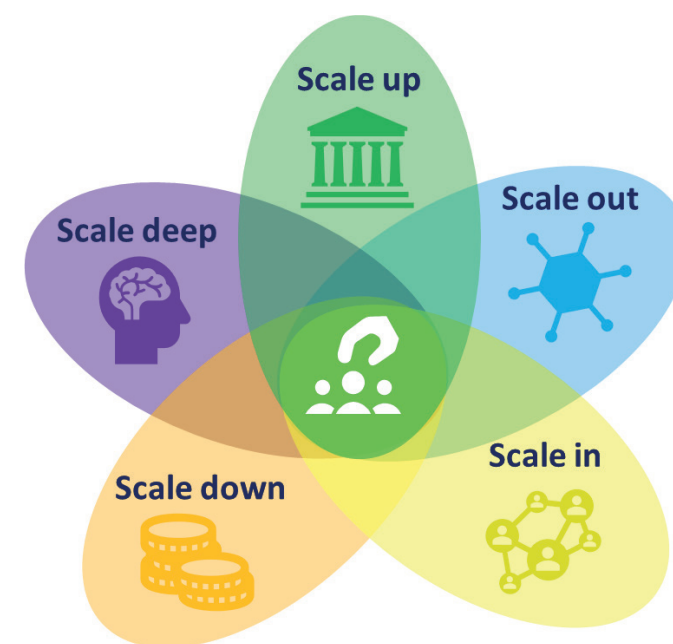


Figure 4. Scaling directions addressed by strengthening local authorities' capacity and resources.



Recommendation 2.A: Secure dedicated and sustainable funding for local climate adaptation engagement

• **Main objective:** Provide the essential financial resources needed to build and exercise local capacity for engagement. Secure dedicated, adequate and sustainable funding streams specifically allocated for designing, implementing, and evaluating citizen and stakeholder engagement processes within local climate adaptation initiatives.

• **Expected benefits:**

- Increased ability of local authorities to conduct high-quality, sustained engagement;
- Reduced barriers to participation for citizens (through compensation/support);
- Greater scope and ambition of engagement projects;
- Improved planning and professionalization of engagement activities.

• **Rationale/Challenges:** Lack of stable, long-term funding is a critical barrier preventing local authorities from initiating, scaling, and sustaining meaningful engagement activities (C.8). While pillar 1 advocates for higher-level resource considerations, effective local implementation requires dedicated financial mechanisms at the municipal level. Sustainable funding allows for proper planning, compensates participants where appropriate, supports necessary logistics, and ensures engagement is an integral part of adaptation efforts.

• **Examples of implementation actions and mechanisms:**

- Ensure climate adaptation funding programmes include specific allocations for local engagement activities and simplify access for municipalities.

- Mandate gender-responsive budgeting in local climate action plans.
- Dedicate a percentage of climate adaptation or environmental budgets specifically for engagement processes, moving beyond project-based funding.
- Explore and pilot innovative local funding mechanisms, such as adaptation-focused participatory budgets, local climate bonds, leveraging public-private partnerships for engagement activities.
- Provide guidance to local authorities on accessing available EU and national funding streams for engagement.

• **Key actors involved:**

- EU level: EU funding programs (e.g. LIFE, Cohesion Policy), EIB, EBRD.
- National level: Regional/national governments (ministries of finance, environment), fundings institutions, national banks.
- Regional and local level: Local authorities (finance/budget departments, climate/environment departments), associations of local governments.

Recommendation 2.B: Establish robust internal structures and processes for coordinated, accountable, and adaptive engagement

• **Main objective:** Address the organizational and procedural aspects of local capacity, ensuring engagement is managed professionally and accountably. Establish robust internal structures, clear mandates, and coordinated processes within local authorities to manage citizen engagement effectively, ensure accountability, facilitate cross-departmental collaboration, and allow for adaptive management based on monitoring and evaluation.

• **Expected benefits:**

- Improved coherence and consistency of engagement activities;
- Enhanced institutional learning and adaptation;
- More efficient and effective use of resources for engagement;
- Increased transparency and accountability towards citizens;
- Stronger trust between citizens and the municipality.

• **Rationale/Challenges:** Engagement efforts often fail due to fragmented responsibilities, lack of coordination between departments (silo effect), and unclear lines of accountability (C.8 and C.9). Establishing dedicated units or clear focal points, along with cross-departmental frameworks, can ensure engagement is integrated, consistent, and avoids duplication.

• **Examples of implementation actions and mechanisms:**

- Designate a specific department, unit, or an appointed person within the municipality with a clear mandate for coordinating and supporting citizen engagement.
- Develop internal protocols or frameworks requiring and facilitating cross-departmental collaboration on engagement initiatives related to adaptation.
- Integrate engagement planning into regular municipal work processes and project management cycles.
- Establish formal, transparent feedback systems to communicate back to participants how their input was used.

- Implement systematic M&E for engagement processes, assessing both process quality and influence on outcomes to adapt and improve future engagement strategies and involving local actors as certified auditors of engagement process performance.

• **Key actors involved:**

- Regional and local level: local authorities (Mayor's office, municipalities' management, planning, environment and communications departments, potentially dedicated participation unit, audit/evaluation offices).

Recommendation 2.C: Enhance local capacity through targeted training, accessible knowledge, and strategic partnership

• **Main objective:** Address the human capital, knowledge, and network dimensions of local capacity for engagement. Enhance the capacity of local authorities and their partners by providing targeted training, ensuring easy access to relevant knowledge and data, and fostering strategic partnerships with civil society, research institutions, private sector and other relevant actors. Provide specific skills for mediating conflicts, managing highly politicized discussions, tackling misinformation with transparent communication and rebuilding trust.

• **Expected benefits:**

- Improved skills and confidence of local staff and partners in running engagement processes;
- Better-designed, more inclusive, and effective engagement;
- Enhanced use of evidence and best practices;
- Stronger collaboration between municipalities and other actors;

- Increased innovation through knowledge sharing.

• **Rationale/challenges:** Effective engagement requires specific skills, knowledge, and networks that local authorities may lack (C.8). Staff need training in facilitation, inclusive methods, conflict management, and understanding climate (C.3). Access to context-specific data, best practices, and engagement tools is needed. Furthermore, partnerships are vital for reaching diverse communities, leveraging external expertise (e.g., knowledge brokering by academics), sharing resources, and building trust. Building this multi-faceted capacity is essential for designing and delivering high-quality, impactful engagement. Engagement occurs in a messy world with distrust, political instrumentalization, conflict, misinformation, and the "fear of authorities" to engage (C.4 to C.7).

• **Examples of implementation actions and mechanisms:**

- Develop and disseminate practical training modules and toolkits on co-production methods, inclusive facilitation, digital/non-digital engagement techniques, and climate adaptation communication for municipal staff and community representatives.
- Provide specialized training for municipal staff in conflict mediation, misinformation response, and strategies for rebuilding trust in polarized environments.
- Establish accessible knowledge platforms providing relevant information, data, case studies, and tools in relevant languages.
- Promote peer-to-peer learning networks among municipalities, potentially through existing structures like the Covenant of Mayors or national associations.
- Facilitate local partnerships between local authorities, academics, civil society, community

groups, and potentially private sector entities for knowledge exchange, joint project implementation, and outreach.

- Support the role of intermediaries or 'knowledge brokers' connecting different actors.
- Invest in building the capacity of local civil society representatives and community groups to engage effectively.

Key actors involved:

- National level: National/regional agencies.
- Regional and local level: Local authorities, human resources dept., climate/environment dept., community relations, associations of local and regional governments and city networks (e.g., community of municipalities, ICLEI).
- Others: CSOs and NGOs (e.g., ECSA); universities and research institutions, professional associations (planners, facilitators), training providers.

Recommendation 2.D: Foster and sustain political and institutional commitment to citizen engagement in local climate adaptation

• **Main objective:** Foster political and institutional backing, essential for a rooted engagement and capacity-building effort. Foster and sustain high-level political and institutional commitment within local authorities, ensuring citizen engagement is recognized as a core component of democratic climate governance and is embedded structurally to sustain beyond short-term political cycles.

• **Expected benefits:**

- Increased likelihood of engagement initiatives being initiated, adequately resourced, and sustained over time;

- Greater political and administrative buy-in;
- Enhanced democratic legitimacy of local climate action;
- More resilient engagement processes and less vulnerable to political shifts.

• **Rationale/Challenges:** Lack of consistent political will is a major impediment to scaling and sustaining engagement (C.7). Engagement seen merely as optional or a potential risk will remain fragile. Securing long-term commitment requires framing engagement as valuable for achieving better, more legitimate adaptation outcomes and integrating it into the municipality's strategic vision and standard operations. Strong leadership signals its importance, but structural embedding helps ensure continuity despite political changes.

• **Examples of implementation actions and mechanisms:**

- Integrate citizen engagement principles and commitments explicitly into the municipality's overall strategic plan, climate action plan, and establish a mandatory accountability mechanism, such as an annual public report, to track their implementation.
- Promote awareness among elected officials and senior management about the benefits of engagement for climate adaptation and public action (e.g. through briefings, showcasing successful local examples, highlighting links to funding opportunities).
- Promote engagement as a risk management tool that reduces political opposition, litigation, and project failure directly contributing to institutional goals.
- Establish mechanisms (like the internal structures in Rec 2.B) that institutionalize engagement practices,

making them less dependent on individual political champions.

- Encourage participation in national and international city networks that promote and normalize citizen engagement in climate action, and actively leverage EU programs (such as the Mission on Adaptation or the Covenant of Mayors) to champion political leadership and gain international visibility.
- Develop clear communication strategies that frame engagement positively, emphasizing shared responsibility and democratic values.
- Ensure continuity of engagement processes across election cycles by establishing non-partisan frameworks or oversight bodies where appropriate.
- Leverage political leadership and the role of the mayor to signal the importance of engagement and provide institutional backing.

• **Key actors involved:**

- Regional and local level: Mayors, city councillors, senior municipal management, political parties (local branches), local government associations, city networks.



5.2.3. Pillar 3: Empowering stakeholders and citizens to take an active and meaningful role in adaptation actions.

This pillar directly empowers citizens and diverse stakeholder groups to become active and influential participants in climate adaptation, moving beyond passive consultation. It strategically aims to foster the necessary awareness, motivation, skills, and opportunities for meaningful engagement, particularly addressing barriers faced by often-excluded groups.

Pillar 3 fundamentally impacts cultural roots and fosters climate literacy across society, building awareness and empowering citizens to see engagement as a valuable and accessible activity (Scaling deep – Figure 5). By proactively removing practical and economic barriers for vulnerable groups and supporting grassroots actions, it directly provides the means for action (Scaling down). This empowerment at individual and community level creates a broader and more committed citizen base, which in turn increases the number and diversity of people actively engaged in adaptation (Scaling out) and supports greater public and political demand for the institutionalization of participatory governance (Scaling up).

This involves mandating and supporting the inclusion and influence of affected and vulnerable populations and creating avenues for direct citizen contribution through community-led adaptation actions and citizen actions initiatives.

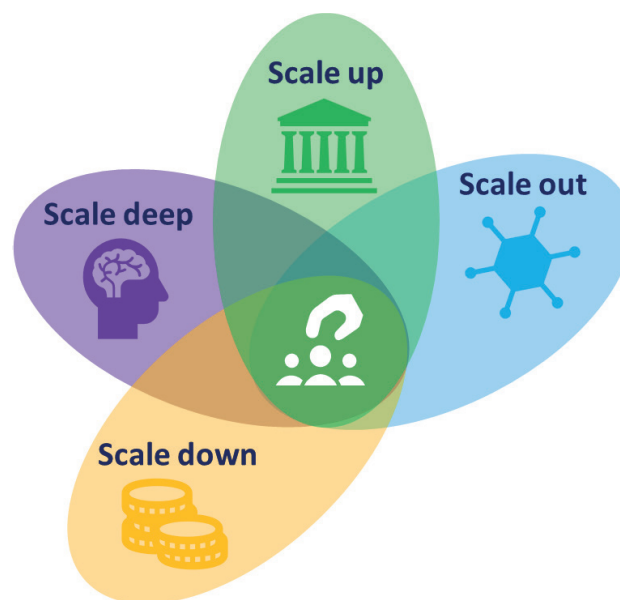


Figure 5. Scaling directions addressed by stakeholders and citizens empowerment to engage.

Recommendation 3.A: Enhance climate adaptation and citizen action literacy and awareness across society

• **Main objective:** Build the foundational knowledge and awareness necessary for citizens to feel empowered and equipped to engage meaningfully. Enhance climate adaptation and citizen actions literacy and awareness across society through sustained, accessible public education campaigns using plain language, and by systematically integrating adaptation and engagement concepts into educational curricula at all levels.

• Expected benefits:

- Increased public understanding and knowledge about climate risks and adaptation;
- Enhanced awareness and capacity of citizens to engage meaningfully;
- Greater motivation for participation and individual action;
- Improved long-term societal resilience through informed citizenship.

• **Rationale/Challenges:** Meaningful participation requires a foundational understanding of climate change impacts, adaptation options, and the role citizens can play. Citizens themselves highlighted educational gaps and a lack of awareness hindering motivation to engage (C.6). Public education campaigns using clear, relatable language and focusing on local impacts can bridge this gap (C.3). Integrating adaptation into school curricula ensures long-term, systemic capacity building for future generations.

• Examples of implementation actions and mechanisms:

- Develop and fund national and regional public awareness campaigns on climate adaptation, using diverse media (including traditional channels like local radio/print) and tailoring messages to local contexts and concerns.
- Mandate and support the integration of climate change adaptation and citizen action topics into formal education curricula from primary to tertiary levels, while promoting schools as hubs for hands-on community resilience projects.
- Invest in equitable access to quality climate adaptation education for all, including bettering the connection between the teaching and scientific communities.

- Foster a culture of engagement by providing resources and opportunities for citizens to develop and lead climate adaptation initiatives in their own languages, promoting a sense of ownership and participation in the process.
- Enable transparent and accessible practices and media that promote critical thinking and challenge misinformation and disinformation about climate adaptation.
- Develop accessible educational materials (infographics, videos, factsheets) in multiple languages, avoiding technical jargon.
- Develop public communication campaigns that proactively address misinformation and sources of public distrust.
- Support informal education initiatives through museums, libraries, community centres, and civil society organisations.
- Train educators and communicators on effectively conveying climate adaptation and engagement concepts.
- Promote transdisciplinary co-creation and knowledge sharing to identify climate adaptation solutions through the sharing of practices and experiences.

• Key actors involved:

- National level: National and regional ministries of education and environment.
- Regional and local level: Institutions in charge of education.
- Others: Education CSOs and NGOs, media, schools and universities, science communication professionals, museums and libraries.

Recommendation 3.B: Ensure equitable access to engagement by removing barriers and improving outreach

• Main objective: Empower citizens directly by ensuring they have the practical means and information needed to access and participate in engagement opportunities. Ensure equitable access to climate adaptation engagement opportunities by implementing proactive, targeted communication strategies to reach all segments of the population and systematically removing practical and economic barriers to participation.

• Expected benefits:

- More diverse and representative participation in engagement processes;
- Reduced socioeconomic barriers to participation;
- Increased legitimacy of engagement outcomes;
- Empowerment of groups previously excluded.

• Rationale/Challenges: Participation is often skewed towards already engaged or privileged groups due to various barriers. Financial constraints, lack of time (care duties, job constraints), mobility issues, and language barriers prevent many from participating (C.1 and C.2). Providing compensation or support (childcare, travel) is crucial for equity. Furthermore, simply announcing opportunities isn't enough; targeted outreach through diverse channels, including non-digital ones and trusted community networks, is needed to reach those often missed.

• Examples of implementation actions and mechanisms:

- Systematically offer financial or non-financial compensation, reimbursement for travel/childcare, or other relevant incentives for participation, particularly for underrepresented groups. "Citizen engagement can't be done for free".
- Develop multi-channel communication strategies using diverse formats (digital, print, local radio, community meetings) and languages tailored to different target groups.
- Partner with community organizations, social services, and local leaders who have established trust and networks within specific communities.
- Ensure engagement activities are held at accessible times and locations.
- Provide options for both online and offline participation to cater to different needs and capacities.
- Simplify and tailor communication about engagement opportunities, clearly stating the purpose, time commitment, and support available, framing them around local realities instead of abstract concepts.

• Key actors involved:

- National level: National funding bodies (providing guidelines/funding for support measures).
- Regional and local level: Local authorities, social services.
- Others: CSOs (e.g., ECSA), community leaders/groups, engagement practitioners and experts.

Recommendation 3.C: Support the meaningful inclusion and influence of vulnerable groups

• **Main objective:** Empower specifically vulnerable citizens by ensuring their voices are not only heard but also influential in shaping adaptation actions that affect them most. Mandate the explicit consideration of pre-existing inequalities and ensure the meaningful inclusion and demonstrable influence of vulnerable and marginalized groups within climate adaptation planning and decision-making processes through tailored support and methodologies. These processes should include younger generations, who will be most affected by the consequences of climate change.

• **Expected benefits:**

- More equitable adaptation policies that address the specific needs of those most affected;
- Reduced risk of maladaptation harming vulnerable groups (as detailed in Rec. 1.D);
- Increased trust and social cohesion;
- Empowerment of marginalized communities;
- Fulfilment of justice and equity principles.

• **Rationale/Challenges:** Vulnerable groups and younger generations are disproportionately affected by climate change but systematically underrepresented in decision-making (C.1). Achieving “just resilience” requires moving beyond tokenistic inclusion to ensure these groups have genuine influence (power-sensitive participation). This necessitates specific mandates, tailored approaches recognizing their specific needs and constraints (C.2), and ensuring their input is demonstrably considered.

• **Examples of implementation actions and mechanisms:**

- Mandate within adaptation policy frameworks (linked to Rec 1.B & 1.D) that vulnerability assessments identify key groups and require targeted engagement strategies for them.
- Require adaptation plans to report specifically on how vulnerable groups were involved and how their input influenced decisions.
- Co-design engagement processes with representatives of vulnerable groups (women-led, minority groups), to ensure methods are appropriate, accessible, and culturally sensitive.
- Provide dedicated support (e.g. capacity building for participation, translation services, safe spaces for dialogue) tailored to the needs of specific groups.
- Utilize methods that empower marginalized voices, potentially including community-driven assessments or partnerships with representative organizations.
- Train facilitators in power-sensitive and inclusive methodologies.

• **Key actors involved:**

- National level: National authorities’ components, human rights organizations.
- Regional and local level: Local and regional authorities (policy makers, planning depts., social services).
- Others: CSOs representing vulnerable groups, community leaders, local human rights organizations, research institutions (social vulnerability).

Recommendation 3.D: Promote and support citizen-led adaptation and grassroots initiatives

• **Main objective:** Empower citizens by supporting their capacity to initiate and implement adaptation actions and contribute directly to knowledge generation and monitoring. Actively promote and provide tangible support (financial, technical, administrative) for citizen-led adaptation initiatives and citizen action programs (e.g. citizen science) related to climate impacts and adaptation monitoring to avoid maladaptation.

• **Expected benefits:**

- Increased local adaptation action driven by communities;
- Enhanced sense of agency and ownership among citizens;
- Improved local data and monitoring capacity;
- Stronger social capital and community networks;
- Innovative and context-specific adaptation solutions.

• **Rationale/challenges:** Empowerment extends beyond participating in government-led processes to enabling citizens to take direct action themselves. Supporting grassroots initiatives fosters ownership, taps into local creativity and energy, and can lead to highly context-specific solutions. Citizen programs such as citizen science involve the public directly in action/research and monitoring, enhancing understanding, data collection, and potentially informing adaptive management. Supporting these activities empowers citizens as active agents of change and contributors to resilience building, moving beyond a passive recipient role.

- **Examples of implementation actions and mechanisms:**

- Establish dedicated small and flexible grant schemes or funding mechanisms accessible to community groups for local adaptation projects (e.g. greening initiatives, local awareness campaigns, mutual support networks).
- Provide technical assistance and administrative support from local authorities to help community groups navigate regulations and implement projects.
- Develop and support citizen action/science programs focused on monitoring local climate impacts (e.g. heat mapping, flood reporting, biodiversity monitoring) or the effectiveness of adaptation measures.
- Create platforms or formal pathways for sharing results and experiences from citizen-led initiatives and citizen science (linking to knowledge platforms in Rec 2.C).
- Integrate data from credible citizen science projects into official monitoring and reporting where appropriate.
- Facilitate partnerships between citizen groups, local universities, and local authorities for co-designed projects

- **Key actors involved:**

- National level: National funding institutions.
- Regional and Local level: Local authorities (environment dept., community development).
- Others: CSOs and NGOs (e.g., ECSA), community groups/activists, research institutions, citizen science platforms/associations.



5.2.4. Pillar 4: Sharing and applying knowledge and best practices to facilitate the co-production of just and tailored adaptation actions.

This pillar enhances the quality, effectiveness, and appropriate application of co-production practices across the diverse geographical, cultural, and political contexts of Europe through improved knowledge sharing, mutual learning, and contextual adaptation. It aims to replicate successful approaches by ensuring that valuable knowledge, practical experience, and innovative methods are effectively captured, disseminated, critically evaluated, and thoughtfully adapted.

Pillar 4 primarily establishes the infrastructure (platforms, Communities of Practice) and processes (cross-cultural learning, tailored methods) necessary for the effective replication and dissemination of engagement practices to greater numbers of people and places (Scaling out – Figure 6). It simultaneously promotes a culture of learning, transparency and accountability, which helps build trust and shifts norms around how knowledge is valued and shared (Scaling deep). It also enhances practitioners and organizations internal capacities by strengthening the knowledge base and methodological repertoire (Scaling in). Finally, it demonstrates the tangible impact and value of engagement and provides the evidence and justification needed for high-level policy support and institutionalization (Scaling up).

This strengthens knowledge exchange infrastructure, fostering cross-cultural dialogue, promoting methodological diversity and tailoring, and establishing robust feedback and evaluation systems to ensure

transparency, accountability, and continuous improvement as practices diffuse.

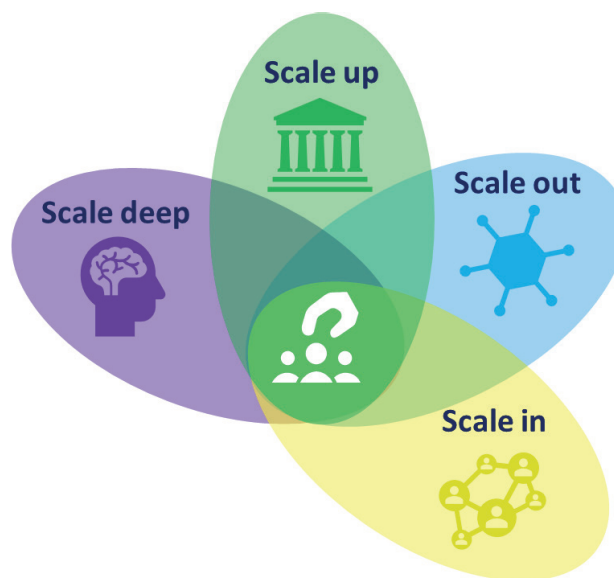


Figure 6. Scaling directions addressed by shared and applied knowledge and best practices.

Recommendation 4.A: Strengthen knowledge exchange through accessible platforms and multi-level communities of practice

• **Main objective:** Provide the necessary infrastructure and networks for good practices and knowledge dissemination and collaborative learning, focusing on integrating with and enhancing existing platforms rather than creating duplicative new ones. This involves

strengthening the sharing, adaptation, and application of co-production knowledge across Europe by supporting accessible, multi-lingual knowledge platforms and by actively fostering robust Communities of Practice at European, national, and local levels.

• Expected benefits:

- Reduced duplication of effort;
- Faster uptake of effective practices;
- Improved quality and consistency of engagement across Europe;
- Enhanced capacity of practitioners through peer learning;
- Fostering innovation through cross-fertilization of ideas;
- Better adaptation of practices to diverse contexts.

• **Rationale/Challenges:** Scaling out effective co-production requires mechanisms for practitioners, policymakers, and citizens to easily access and share lessons learned, best practices, tools, and relevant data (C.3). Centralized, user-friendly platforms providing relevant information in multiple languages can overcome knowledge fragmentation. Complementing this, dynamic communities of practice enable vital peer-to-peer learning, collaborative problem-solving, and the adaptation of practices to different contexts. Strengthening both static updated resources and dynamic networks is crucial for effective knowledge dissemination and capacity building across diverse European settings.

• Examples of implementation actions and mechanisms:

- Invest in developing and maintaining accessible online platforms by building upon and ensuring interoperability with successful existing initiatives (like weADAPT and MIP4Adapt), offering curated resources on co-production for adaptation.

- Create community-based physical spaces for engagement and education tailored for different communities' needs and contexts.
- Establish and support multi-level Communities of Practice focused on citizen engagement in climate adaptation, connecting practitioners, policymakers, researchers, and potentially citizen representatives across different governance scales (such as AGORA Community Hub and EU Mission Community of Practice and Thematic Working Groups).
- Facilitate regular online and offline meetings, workshops, and webinars within these Communities of Practice for knowledge sharing and joint reflection.
- Promote the documentation and sharing of both successful and challenging engagement experiences to foster realistic learning.
- Ensure platforms and Communities of Practice actively disseminate information about innovative methods and tools, including those for inclusive engagement (Rec 4.C) and evaluation (Rec 4.D).

• **Key actors involved:**

- EU level: EU (EEA, JRC, DG CLIMA).
- National level: National/regional environment/adaptation agencies.
- Regional and local level: city networks (e.g. community of municipalities, ICLEI).
- Others: CSOs, professional associations, research institutions, practitioners.

Recommendation 4.B: Facilitate cross-cultural learning and dialogue on engagement practices

• **Main objective:** Foster mutual understanding and promote progress in engagement practices across diverse cultural contexts. Facilitate structured cross-cultural learning initiatives and dialogue platforms specifically designed to bridge diverse regional experiences, expectations, and cultural perspectives on citizen engagement, promoting mutual understanding and the progression of practices.

• **Expected benefits:**

- Increased awareness and understanding of contextual factors influencing engagement;
- Improved ability to tailor engagement strategies effectively across diverse European regions;
- Reduced risk of imposing inappropriate models;
- Enhanced collaboration and trust between actors from different backgrounds;
- More nuanced and culturally sensitive scaling of practices.

• **Rationale/Challenges:** Europe exhibits significant regional differences in public perception, familiarity, and traditions regarding citizen engagement (C.5). Directly transferring practices without considering these cultural contexts can lead to failure or mistrust. Effective practice replication requires spaces for actors from different backgrounds to understand these nuances, share experiences constructively, and learn how to adapt approaches sensitively. Structured dialogue can help overcome assumptions and build common ground for collaboration across diverse European settings.

• **Examples of implementation actions and mechanisms:**

- Organize dedicated cross-national or regional workshops and forums focused on sharing experiences with engagement across different cultural and political contexts (e.g. peer learning workshops, Adaptation AGORA).
- Strengthen national or regional level hubs that translate the recommendations and best practices to the specific context and institutional specificities.
- Develop twinning programs or visits allowing practitioners and policymakers from different regions to observe and learn from each other's approaches.
- Integrate modules on cultural sensitivity and contextual adaptation into training programs for engagement practitioners (linking to Rec 2.C).
- Support research analysing the influence of cultural and political contexts on engagement effectiveness and how to navigate these differences.
- Utilize Communities of Practices (from Rec 4.A) as safe spaces for open discussion about challenges and successes related to cultural differences in engagement.
- Develop guidance materials specifically addressing how to adapt engagement methodologies for different cultural settings within Europe.

• **Key actors involved:**

- EU level: EU institutions (e.g. Committee of the Regions, EESC).
- National level: National/regional governments.
- Regional and Local level: city networks.
- Others: CSOs (e.g., ECSA), cultural institutions, research institutions (social sciences, political science), training providers.

Recommendation 4.C: Promote diverse, inclusive, and context-tailored engagement methodologies

• **Main objective:** Promote tailored and diverse engagement methodologies to ensure processes are inclusive, relevant, and fit-for-purpose across varied European situations. Promote the use of diverse and inclusive engagement methodologies, encouraging the flexible, context-sensitive application of digital, non-digital, and hybrid approaches tailored to specific target audiences, local capabilities, and adaptation challenges.

• **Expected benefits:**

- More inclusive participation by responding to diverse needs and preferences;
- Increased effectiveness of engagement by matching methods to objectives;
- Greater innovation in engagement design;
- Improved relevance of engagement to local contexts;
- Better ability to address specific adaptation challenges through tailored approaches.

• **Rationale/Challenges:** There is no “one size fits all” engagement method; effectiveness depends heavily on the context, objectives, and participants. Over-reliance on digital tools can exclude significant portions of the population, while purely traditional methods may miss opportunities (C.2). Application of different methods requires an evolving repository and the capacity to choose and adapt them appropriately.

• **Examples of implementation actions and mechanisms:**

- Develop and disseminate guidance (via platforms in Rec 4.A) on selecting, adapting, and combining different engagement methods (workshops,

assemblies, digital platforms, mobile units, traditional media, citizen science, etc.) based on context and goals.

- Showcase examples of successful tailoring of methods for specific groups (e.g. youth, elderly, migrants, rural communities) and different adaptation issues.
- Encourage experimentation of innovative engagement approaches, including hybrid models.
- Include training on methodological selection and adaptation in capacity-building programs (Rec 2.C).
- Ensure funding criteria for engagement projects value methodological appropriateness and inclusivity over adherence to a specific model (Rec 2.A).
- Support the development and ethical use of digital engagement tools while stressing the continued need for non-digital alternatives.

• **Key actors involved:**

- National level: Funding bodies.
- Regional and local level: Local/regional authorities.
- Others: CSOs representing diverse groups (e.g., ECSA), practitioners/facilitators, research institutions (evaluating methods), technology developers (digital tools).

Recommendation 4.D: Ensure transparency, accountability, and learning through robust feedback and evaluation

• **Main objective:** Ensure that knowledge and practices are applied based on mechanisms in place to maintain transparency, accountability, and learning across different engagement practices. Establish robust and transparent mechanisms for systematic monitoring and evaluation of engagement processes and their outcomes, coupled with formal feedback loops to ensure citizen input informs decisions, fosters accountability, and drives continuous learning.

• **Expected benefits:**

- Increased transparency and trust in engagement processes;
- Enhanced accountability of decision-makers;
- Demonstrable impact of citizen participation;
- Continuous improvement of engagement practices based on evidence;
- Stronger motivation for citizens to participate;
- Greater legitimacy of co-produced adaptation actions.

• **Rationale/Challenges:** For engagement to be credible and sustainable, participants and institutions need to see that it leads to tangible results and that processes are just (C.4). Formal feedback loops showing how input was considered are crucial for building trust and motivating continued participation. Systematic M&E provides evidence of impact (or lack thereof), allows for learning and improvement, and holds organisers accountable.

• Examples of implementation actions and mechanisms:

- Build on existing standardized and flexible M&E frameworks and indicators for co-production in adaptation, covering process quality (e.g. inclusivity, deliberation) and outcomes/influence.
- Mandate the inclusion of M&E plans and budgets in engagement projects funded by public sources, including participatory ex-post evaluations (Rec 2.A).
- Require public authorities and practitioners to implement clear, timely, and accessible feedback mechanisms communicating back to participants how their input was included (or why not).
- Establish independent bodies or mechanisms for auditing engagement processes and their impact in significant cases.
- Institutionalize gender and minorities-disaggregated data in all adaptation monitoring systems.
- Ensure M&E findings are publicly reported and actively used to inform the design of future engagement activities and adaptation policies.
- Integrate M&E training into capacity-building programs (Rec 2.C).
- Use M&E to explicitly track and communicate the “return on investment” of engagement for the institution itself.

• Key actors involved:

- EU level: EU Institutions, funding bodies.
- National level: National authorities, funding bodies.
- Regional and local level: Local/regional authorities.
- Others: CSOs, participants/citizens, independent evaluation experts/bodies, research institutions.



6. Conclusion and way forward

The Adaptation AGORA policy white paper addresses the gap between high-level ambition and on-the-ground implementation of stakeholder engagement processes for climate change adaptation in Europe. The document starts from the assumption that to move from isolated successes to a new standard of climate governance, Europe should adopt a holistic approach to scale engagement. Moreover, Member States should act at multiple levels to promote democratic participation aimed at urgently addressing the climate crisis. This requires moving beyond replicating successful pilots (scaling out) to simultaneously impacting laws and policies (scaling up), shifting cultural values toward participation (scaling deep), and strengthening the internal capacities and means for action of the organizations responsible for implementation (scaling in and down). A multi-dimensional strategy is essential to create enabling conditions for engagement practices that contribute to increasing democratic participation, reducing inequalities, fostering public trust and achieving short, medium and long-term adaptation goals.

The white paper provides recommendations for the adoption of a multi-dimensional strategy and its enabling conditions. It builds on an evidence synthesis, including a systematic review of academic literature, an analysis of European adaptation policy instruments and participatory practices at the EU and national (Spain and Germany) levels, lessons learned from engagement practices conducted within the Adaptation AGORA project, and a comprehensive review of EU-level

documents, guidance materials, roadmaps, guidelines, and reports about citizen engagement. This synthesis of existing evidence allowed the identification of strategic pillars and recommendations that were then refined and validated through deliberation with over 60 stakeholders at three major European events/conferences.

As a result, a strategic roadmap has been designed including four strategic pillars and sixteen recommendations, that are summarised here below.

Institutionalizing engagement:

- Strengthen EU leadership and culture of citizen engagement
- Establish formal mandates and frameworks for citizen engagement in the adaptation cycle
- Mainstream engagement across socio-economic sectors, including the private sector
- Embed environmental and climate justice in the policy framework

Strengthening local capacity:

- Secure dedicated and sustainable funding for local climate adaptation engagement
- Establish robust internal structures and processes for coordinated, accountable, and adaptive engagement
- Enhance local capacity through targeted training, accessible knowledge, and strategic partnership
- Foster and sustain political and institutional commitment to citizen engagement in local climate adaptation

Empowering citizens and stakeholders:

- Enhance climate adaptation and citizen action literacy and awareness across society
- Ensure equitable access to engagement by removing barriers and improving outreach
- Support the meaningful inclusion and influence of vulnerable groups
- Promote and support citizen-led adaptation and grassroots initiatives

Sharing and applying knowledge and best practices:

- Strengthen knowledge exchange through accessible platforms and multi-level communities of practice
- Facilitate cross-cultural learning and dialogue on engagement practices
- Promote diverse, inclusive, and context-tailored engagement methodologies
- Ensure transparency, accountability, and learning through robust feedback and evaluation

For each recommendation objectives, expected benefits, challenges, examples of implementation actions/mechanisms and actors involved have been identified. Future deliberations should focus on the implementation of these recommendations in the context of different Member States and political systems, considering anchoring each recommendation to specific timelines, policy windows and pathways. Moreover, performance indicators (KPIs) or baselines to monitor and evaluate these recommendations should also be developed, to make easier the operationalisation of the roadmap by concerned actors and to allow comparison of progress across different political systems.

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