CLIMAS

CLIMAte change citizens engagement toolbox for dealing with Societal resilience

Deliverable No. 5.3 – Recommendations for Policymakers to Support Climate-resilient Society

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List of Acronyms

Acronym	Definition
CA	Climate Assembly
LL	Living Labs
NAP	National Adaptation Plan
MOU	Memorandum of Understanding

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CLIMAS Project Overview

Climate change is one of the most critical issues to tackle today, as it is foreseen to have detrimental social, environmental, and economic impacts in the near future. The recent climate change events, such as flooding in Germany and Belgium in both Continental and Atlantic regions, heat waves, and water shortages in both Mediterranean and Boreal regions, show that policymakers, experts, and stakeholders' actions are not enough, and a 360 ° citizens' engagement is urgently needed. Therefore, we need to learn from good experiences in citizens' engagement in climate change action and build citizens' supporting infrastructure for climate adaptation measures to help the 150 European regions and local communities resist. Climate assemblies and Living labs are considered sustainable and reasonable tools to stimulate deliberative democracy in climate policymaking.

The ambition of the CLIMAS project is to support a transformation toward climate resilience by offering an innovative problem-oriented climate adoption Toolbox, co-designed with stakeholders, using a values-based approach, design thinking methods, and citizen science mechanisms. All that will be carried out with a gender and diversity approach. It is expected that the use of the Toolbox will anticipate potential tensions, points of controversy, and dilemmas regarding the adaptation to resilience. Therefore, the Toolbox aims at enabling empowerment and engagement strategies that produce a society "resilient by design". In addition, CLIMAS will include the empirical component to test this Toolbox and formulate science-based guidelines for policymakers on how to shift Climate Assemblies from technically based deliberations by climate change experts to multi-stakeholder deliberations focused on solving the dilemmas from a bottom-up, more societal, and value-based perspective. CLIMAS outcomes will positively influence policy development and awareness-raising processes and offer sustainable strategies to enhance the acceptance of citizens' decisions by policymakers.

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Executive Summary

Deliverable 5.3, *"Recommendations for Policymakers to Support Climate-Resilient Society"* (D5.3) presents the final strategic guidance of the CLIMAS project to strengthen the uptake and institutionalisation of Climate Assemblies (CAs) and other citizen-led decision-making processes across European governance contexts. The core objective of D5.3 is to provide evidence-based policy recommendations and practical implementation strategies derived from the project's main technical and empirical activities: (i) the design and piloting of Climate Assemblies in multiple European contexts (WP2); (ii) the development and testing of the CLIMAS Toolbox and associated support tools (WP3); and (iii) the collection of evaluation data and feedback from local actors and citizens (WP4).

The deliverable does not simply list recommendations. Instead, it explains the methodological process used to develop them and presents the policy problem categories that underpin them. These include: (i) institutional and structural misalignment, (ii) political reluctance and risk aversion, (iii) capacity and resource constraints, (iv) weak uptake and implementation pathways, (v) communication and public engagement gaps, and (vi) inclusion and equity deficits. To address these barriers, CLIMAS developed an integrated response architecture comprising:

- A *Toolbox of seven participatory tools* supporting each stage of the Climate Assembly process, from design and facilitation to prioritisation and policy translation;
- A *participatory evaluation framework*, including impact and inclusivity metrics, which supports accountability and learning across contexts;
- A set of *facilitation guidelines and training resources* tailored to institutional capacities and diverse governance settings.

Together, these outputs offer a coherent and tested package of solutions for public authorities seeking to embed participatory climate governance more effectively and sustainably. The accompanying Policy Brief (Annex II) distils these insights into a visually accessible, action-oriented format designed for policymakers, practitioners and civil society stakeholders.

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1. Introduction

CLIMAS deliverable, *D5.3 "Recommendations for Policymakers and Strategies for Enhancing the Acceptance of Citizen-Led Decisions"*, presents the final strategic guidance of the CLIMAS project aimed at supporting the uptake and institutionalisation of Climate Assemblies (CAs) across European governance contexts. Task 5.3, led by ID Vilnius with contributions from VILNIUS TECH, CAMBIAMO, IHS, UAEGEAN, EIP, DEEP BLUE, and EXGO-GENCAT, was carried out from Month 22 to Month 36 of the project. The main objective was to formulate a set of evidence-based policy recommendations and practical implementation strategies derived from the key learnings of the project's core technical and field work. More specifically:

- The design and piloting of CAs in multiple European contexts (WP2);
- The development and testing of the CLIMAS Toolbox and support tools (WP3);
- The collection of evaluation data and feedback from local actors and citizens (WP4).

The recommendations are intended to: (i) Support *policymakers at local, regional, and national levels* in applying the CLIMAS Toolbox; (ii) Enhance the *acceptance and impact of citizen-led decision-making processes* in climate adaptation; (iii) Provide pathways to embed participatory approaches more deeply into institutional planning frameworks; and (iv) Promote *climate adaptation governance models* that are inclusive, transparent, and evidence-informed. This deliverable is structured as follows:

- **Section 2: Methodology**. Describes the process used to develop the recommendations: data sources, synthesis methods, internal and external inputs, and validation steps. Emphasis is placed on how project outputs, pilot cases, and partner reflections were translated into strategic guidance.
- **Section 3: Framing of policy problems**. Outlines the main governance and implementation challenges identified across the CLIMAS pilots and stakeholder feedback. These problem areas formed the foundation for the recommendations and are linked to structural, operational, and institutional barriers.
- **Conclusions**. Summarises the process and strategic intent of the recommendations. It reflects on the added value of citizen-led adaptation and offers a forward-looking perspective on embedding participatory tools, such as the CLIMAS Toolbox, into long-term policy frameworks.

To support dissemination and usability, a *user-friendly Policy Brief* has been developed as a stand-alone document (Annexe II) that highlights key recommendations in a visually accessible format suitable for practitioners, city officials, and decision-makers.

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2. Methodology

The policy recommendations presented in this deliverable were developed through an iterative, collaborative process that drew on insights from across the CLIMAS consortium. The approach combined evidence from piloting activities, partner reflections, internal discussions, and targeted problem mapping to ensure the recommendations address real-world challenges policymakers face when engaging with citizen-led climate adaptation processes. The process unfolded in three main phases, detailed below.

Phase 1: Triangulated Data Sources (WP2-WP5). The methodological foundation relied on the triangulation of diverse empirical sources across the three core components of the CLIMAS project:

- **WP2** offered a practical lens on the implementation of CAs in varying governance and cultural contexts, revealing operational barriers, institutional tensions, and factors enabling successful citizen engagement.
- **WP3** and **WP4** contributed through the development and deployment of the CLIMAS Toolbox, comprising seven tools designed to support participatory processes, scenario development, stakeholder engagement, and policy co-creation. The tools were tested and iteratively refined based on pilot feedback, offering real-world insights into institutional usability and relevance.
- **WP5** generated evaluation data, including participant feedback, impact assessments, and implementation monitoring. This served as a critical evidence base for understanding the effectiveness of both participatory approaches and the tools themselves.

This multi-source evidence approach aligns with best practices in policy learning and adaptive governance (e.g., Sabel & Zeitlin, 2012), enabling the generation of grounded yet scalable policy insights.

Stage 2: Problem Identification through Distributed Expert Reflection. Recognising the diversity of institutional, political, and legal settings in which CLIMAS partners operated, the identification of policy problems was not top-down but rather grounded in distributed expert reflection. All WP and Task leaders were invited to contribute observed policy challenges using a shared, structured template distributed in April 2025. These reflections were based on: (i) empirical observations during pilot implementation; (ii) **i**nteractions with municipal and regional authorities; (iii) lessons from tool testing and facilitation experiences; and (iv) constraints observed in institutional uptake of citizen-generated recommendations. This phase was informed by principles of collaborative problem structuring (Muro & Jeffrey, 2008) and aligns with a growing recognition in public policy that robust recommendations must emerge from practitioner-grounded insights rather than from abstract theorisation alone.

Stage 3: Collective Framing and Thematic Synthesis. Inputs were collected and analysed ahead of the consortium meeting held in Bologna in May 2025. During this meeting, partners engaged in a collective sense-making exercise to: (i) cluster recurring problems into thematic categories (e.g.,

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institutional capacity, uptake mechanisms, inclusion); (ii) prioritise policy issues based on cross-cutting relevance and stakeholder urgency; and (iii) explore how these problem categories were linked to the tools and findings produced by CLIMAS. This collective framing process followed a design-thinking logic, enabling the translation of "pain points" into actionable recommendations. It also served as a validation checkpoint, ensuring that identified problems resonated across contexts and were not limited to isolated pilot experiences.

Stage 4: Co-Drafting and Iterative Validation. Following thematic synthesis, the drafting of recommendations was led by ID Vilnius, in close collaboration with VILNIUS TECH and contributors from WP2-WP4. The process involved: (i) drafting problem-solution-tool linkages for each recommendation; (ii) verifying the alignment between challenges and available CLIMAS tools; (iii) soliciting feedback from consortium partners, particularly those involved in piloting and evaluation; and (iv) designing visual and narrative elements in collaboration with Deep Blue to ensure communicative clarity. Each recommendation was crafted to satisfy the criteria of relevance, feasibility, scalability, and clarity, with attention to the applicability of multi-level governance (local, regional, and national).

Stage 5: Communication through a Dual-Format Strategy. To enhance accessibility, uptake, and long-term policy relevance, a dual-format communication strategy was adopted: (i) this formal deliverable (D5.3) documents the process, problem framing, and methodological justification behind the recommendations, ensuring transparency, traceability, and alignment with academic and institutional standards; and (ii) a standalone Policy Brief (Annex I) presents the complete recommendations in a visually accessible, action-oriented format tailored to the needs of policymakers, urban practitioners, and civil society stakeholders. The brief uses clear language, infographics, and practical guidance to facilitate engagement and uptake. To further support dissemination and impact, the recommendations will be:

- Publicly presented at the final CLIMAS policy event in Brussels (November 2025), bringing together EU-level stakeholders, public authorities, and project partners.
- Distributed via the CLIMAS newsletter and website, providing digital access to all project stakeholders and interested audiences.
- Shared at relevant policy events and multiplier conferences in 2025-2026, ensuring alignment with ongoing debates on climate governance, participatory democracy, and adaptation planning.

This communication strategy reflects the project's commitment to policy translation and institutional embedding, maximising the visibility, transferability, and utility of its key strategic outputs.

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3. Framing of the Problems

Throughout the CLIMAS project, partners identified a wide range of policy-level obstacles that limit the uptake and institutionalisation of citizen-led decision-making in climate adaptation. These challenges emerged from activities across the consortium, including local CA pilots, stakeholder workshops, surveys with municipal staff, expert interviews, and evaluation reports. The observations reflect real-world conditions encountered by those implementing or interacting with Climate Assemblies at the local and regional levels. To capture this insight, partners across work packages completed a structured template for identifying policy problems. This internal document synthesised observations from pilot implementation (WP2), tool development (WP3), evaluation and impact tracking (WP4), and cross-cutting analysis (WP5). It includes problem descriptions, affected actors, barrier types, and contextual details. The complete list of identified problems is presented in Annex 1.

While each problem presents a unique challenge in its specific context, many reflect shared structural, political, and procedural patterns. Based on a content analysis of the entries in Table 1, the identified problems were grouped into six overarching categories. Each category represents a recurrent theme that cuts across the different pilots and levels of governance engaged in the project. The six categories are as follows: (i) *Institutional and Structural Misalignment* (Gaps between participatory practices and existing governance or administrative systems); (ii) *Political Reluctance and Risk Aversion* (Resistance by political actors to share authority or accept uncertain outcomes); (iii) *Capacity and Resource Constraints* (Deficits in staff skills, facilitation experience, tools, or budgetary support); (iv) *Weak Uptake and Implementation Pathways* (Lack of mechanisms to ensure that citizen recommendations are followed through); (v) *Communication and Public Engagement Gaps* (Limited transparency, media presence, and public awareness beyond assembly participants); and (vi) *Inclusion and Equity Deficits* (Underrepresentation of youth, minority groups, and socio-economically disadvantaged populations). The following subsections present each category in more detail, drawing on examples from the problem list to illustrate the underlying dynamics and their implications for policy and practice.

3.1 Institutional and Structural Misalignment

One of the most fundamental challenges identified across the CLIMAS project is the institutional misalignment between the design and ambitions of participatory processes (including CAs) and the operational realities of local and regional governance systems. This theme emerged repeatedly across WPs 2-5 and was substantiated by pilot feedback, task-level evaluations, and a comparative analysis of existing engagement frameworks.

3.1.1 Lack of Institutional Anchoring for Climate Assemblies

Findings from WP2, Task 2.1, “Mapping citizen climate participation strategies adapted to different cultural, social, political and environmental contexts and using different civic technologies tools”

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(Analysis of 76 CA cases across Europe) and Task 2.3 "Understanding the EU regions and local communities capacity to engage citizens in deciding climate change actions" (Surveys and interviews with local authorities) revealed that many CA models are designed independently of existing institutional mandates. As described in Deliverable D2.1, "Map of citizen climate participation strategies adapted to different cultural, social, political and environmental contexts", CAs are frequently implemented as ad hoc or experimental processes, without a corresponding adaptation of local planning systems or formal administrative structures. This disconnect often leads assemblies to be perceived as temporary or symbolic rather than integral to decision-making. In the pilot cases reviewed in Task 2.3, several municipalities reported having no dedicated department, team, or legal obligation to manage participatory processes. Even where there was strong political interest in participation, the administrative apparatus lacked internal mechanisms to launch or follow up on CAs, making them dependent on project-based funding or external facilitation.

The question of institutional alignment also affects the long-term uptake of the CLIMAS Toolbox developed under WP3. While tools such as the *Scenario Prioritisation Tool* and the *KEBS platform* were found to be valuable by local organisers during testing in Task 3.3, their future use is likely to depend on whether municipalities establish internal pathways for adoption. As observed in several pilot reflections and evaluation feedback (WP4), integrating such tools into policy routines remains challenging in contexts without a structural or procedural mandate for participatory methods. Without such anchoring, the tools risk remaining underused once project support ends.

3.1.2 Gaps in Legal and Procedural Mandates

A core institutional challenge identified through the survey of local authorities (WP2, Task 2.3) is the widespread absence of formal mandates or dedicated structures for participatory processes within municipal governance systems. In many European cities and regions, there are no specialised departments, teams, or procedural mechanisms assigned to manage citizen engagement in climate-related decision-making. As respondents reported, public participation is often treated as an ad hoc or externally driven initiative rather than as a continuous, integrated function of local administration. This leads to situations where even well-intentioned participatory pilots cannot be sustained, repeated, or scaled due to a lack of internal ownership or resource allocation.

Moreover, without institutionalised pathways (such as standard operating procedures, policy guidelines, or legal mandates), local administrations face ambiguity about who is responsible for organising, responding to, or following up on citizen-generated recommendations. This ambiguity reduces the likelihood that assembly outcomes will influence long-term planning processes or be recognised in official policy frameworks. These structural gaps represent a significant barrier to the institutionalisation of citizen-led approaches and hinder efforts to build a participatory governance culture at the local level.

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3.2 Political Reluctance and Risk Aversion

While many municipalities and public bodies across Europe express support for participatory climate governance in principle, CLIMAS partners observed significant political hesitation and risk aversion when it comes to implementing or acting upon the outcomes of CAs. This theme emerged consistently across CLIMAS WP2, WP3, WP4, and WP5, particularly through pilot observations, stakeholder workshops, and evaluation interviews.

3.2.1 Fear of Losing Control and Politicisation of Outcomes

In activities under WP2, Task 2.2 (barrier identification workshop), partners reported that politicians and assembly organisers often perceive CAs as politically sensitive exercises. A key concern expressed was the fear of losing control over the process and its outcomes. In some cases, assemblies were viewed as potentially producing recommendations that challenged existing policy positions or conflicted with political priorities. As a result, organisers were reluctant to give the assembly real influence over decisions, preferring to frame it as an advisory or exploratory body. This reluctance reflects a broader risk-averse political culture, in which decision-makers may support participation in principle but resist binding commitments or follow-through. As noted in partner reflections (e.g., WP5, Task 5.2), some local authorities were hesitant to publicly reflect on lessons learned, fearing negative media attention or public misinterpretation of assembly outputs.

3.2.2 Uncertainty Around Mandates and Political Legitimacy

Findings from WP3, Task 3.2 (stakeholder consultations) and WP5 evaluations suggest that many policymakers are unsure how to interpret or act on CA outcomes within their existing mandates. Some expressed concern about the political legitimacy of randomly selected citizen groups or questioned how their proposals should be weighed against institutional strategies and expert advice. This uncertainty creates hesitation: decision-makers fear backlash if they follow recommendations that diverge from expert input, yet also risk undermining trust if they dismiss citizen contributions. The absence of clear frameworks to navigate this tension leads to either political inaction or symbolic engagement.

3.2.3 Lack of Metrics for Accountability and Impact

Several policymakers (noted in WP5, Task 5.2) raised concerns about the difficulty of linking CA outcomes to measurable results. Without robust accountability frameworks or follow-up indicators, politicians may feel exposed or unsure about how to justify their response (or lack thereof) to CA recommendations. This lack of political cover contributes to caution, or even avoidance.

3.3 Capacity and Resource Constraints

Beyond political will or institutional mandates, many of the barriers to embedding CAs identified by CLIMAS partners relate to practical limitations in capacity, knowledge, and resources at the local

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and regional levels. These constraints were particularly evident in WP2 (Task 2.3), WP3 (Task 3.1), and WP4 (Task 4.3 and 4.5).

3.3.1 Lack of Training and Operational Know-how

In surveys and interviews conducted under Task 2.3, municipal staff frequently cited a lack of internal training, guidance, and facilitation skills to run or sustain participatory processes. While municipalities expressed support for participatory approaches, engagement relied heavily on external experts, with no in-house capacity to manage the process independently. This was echoed in feedback from WP4 evaluation activities, where organisers noted difficulties in applying tools or facilitation methods without dedicated support. In particular, the effective use of scenario-building tools and engagement platforms required technical familiarity and conceptual clarity that were often lacking at the local level.

3.3.2 Resource Constraints and Institutional Dependence on Projects

As observed in WP3 (Task 3.1), the availability of staff time, budgets, and logistical infrastructure for organising CAs varies significantly between municipalities. In the Chios pilot, for example, the absence of a local engagement team meant that project partners had to lead most of the organisational effort, i.e., raising questions about replicability and ownership. Deliverables and workshop feedback from Task 4.5 further highlighted that without dedicated internal resources, the implementation of tools and assemblies tends to remain project-dependent. This reliance on external support limits institutional learning and reduces the likelihood that participation mechanisms will be continued after project funding ends.

3.3.3 Conceptual and Technical Complexity of Tools

Participants and facilitators also pointed to challenges in understanding and applying specific tools, particularly those involving multi-criteria analysis, knowledge-based systems (such as KEBS), or future scenario-building. As reported in Tasks 4.3 and 4.5, some stakeholders found the tools too complex or abstract and struggled to translate them into locally relevant processes. This underscores the importance of tailored capacity-building efforts, not only to introduce the tools but to support their contextual adaptation and use within diverse institutional settings.

3.4 Weak Uptake and Implementation Pathways

Even when CAs are well-designed and produce clear outputs, one of the most persistent barriers identified in CLIMAS is the lack of mechanisms to ensure follow-up, uptake, and institutional response. This issue was particularly prominent in the findings from WP4 (Task 4.5) and WP5 (Task 5.1 and 5.2) and reflects a critical implementation gap in citizen-led governance.

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3.4.1 Lack of Formal Response Mechanisms

Partners in several pilots reported that once the assembly concluded, there were no formal institutional pathways to carry the recommendations forward. As documented in WP4, Task 4.5, many local governments and CA organisers lacked predefined procedures for reviewing, assessing, or translating citizen proposals into policy decisions. Without these mechanisms, even well-formulated recommendations risk being shelved or forgotten, undermining both trust and impact. This structural gap often led to delays in internal communication of outcomes, uncertainty about who was responsible for action, and minimal feedback to participants, thereby reinforcing perceptions of citizen engagement as non-binding or symbolic.

3.4.2 Unclear Responsibility for Implementation

From the perspective of policymakers and evaluators (see WP5, Task 5.1), there is limited clarity about institutional responsibility for implementing assembly outcomes. Some policymakers expressed uncertainty about how to incorporate citizen input into formal planning, particularly when recommendations fell outside existing policy agendas or involved trade-offs that had not yet been politically resolved. Deliverable feedback under Task 5.2 further showed policymakers' reluctance to engage with outcomes in ways that might expose them to critique, especially in the absence of agreed frameworks for validating, prioritising, or modifying citizen proposals.

3.4.3 No Long-term Monitoring or Impact Assessment

As noted in WP5 (Task 5.1), one of the most significant barriers to sustained impact is the weak tracking of long-term policy uptake. There is little systematic assessment of whether and how CA outcomes shape local decisions, and no standard evaluation criteria for tracing their influence over time. Additionally, CA organisers reported in Task 5.2 that capturing the long-term impact after the process ended was difficult, particularly when no implementation-tracking system or follow-up team was in place.

3.5 Communication and Public Engagement Gaps

A key barrier to the broader institutionalisation of Climate Assemblies (CAs) identified across multiple CLIMAS work packages is the limited communication and public engagement strategy surrounding these processes. While the internal design and facilitation of CAs received attention, their visibility, societal resonance, and long-term communicative value often remained underdeveloped. This issue was particularly highlighted in WP4 (Task 4.5) and WP5 (Task 5.1) and closely connects to earlier findings from WP2 (Task 2.3) regarding the institutional infrastructure (or lack thereof) for engagement.

3.5.1 Limited Public Awareness and Visibility

Across several pilot contexts, both citizens and public officials noted that Climate Assemblies lacked broader public visibility beyond the direct participants. As captured in interviews under WP4, Task

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4.5, organisers observed low levels of awareness about the CA process among the general population and minimal media coverage. This contributed to a perception that the assemblies were internal or expert-driven exercises, rather than truly public forums. Similarly, evaluation results under T5.1 noted that many CAs did not engage with external communication channels, missing opportunities to influence local discourse, build public legitimacy, or mobilise wider civic support for climate action.

3.5.2 Weak Communication Capacity and Resources

Municipal staff reported through WP2, Task 2.3, that many local governments lack dedicated engagement or communications teams and lack the strategic or technical capacity to support ongoing outreach. Where communication was handled, it was often limited to invitations and logistics, without narrative framing, storytelling, or multi-platform engagement. This was echoed in WP3, Task 3.1, where feedback from the Chios pilot highlighted difficulties in communicating the CA's purpose and scope, both internally and externally. Without proactive communication, even well-designed participatory processes risk remaining siloed and misunderstood.

3.5.3 Lack of Clarity Around Civic Purpose and Narrative

Finally, insights from Task 4.5 and 5.1 showed that many participants and stakeholders struggled to understand how their participation fit into a broader civic or policy narrative. Without precise framing, CAs were sometimes perceived as technical consultations rather than democratic innovations with normative value. This lack of narrative clarity weakens citizen motivation and reduces the process's capacity to foster social learning and collective ownership.

3.6 Inclusion and Equity Deficits

Despite growing awareness of the need for inclusive citizen engagement, the CLIMAS project found that many Climate Assemblies continue to face significant challenges in reaching and representing marginalised groups. This issue emerged in tool development, pilot feedback, and evaluation reflections across WP3, WP4, and WP5. The concept of inclusion is often recognised in principle, but in practice, it is undermined by a lack of metrics, capacity, and design strategies to ensure equitable participation.

3.6.1 Lack of Inclusion Metrics and Monitoring Tools

As documented in WP5, Task 5.1, both organisers and researchers reported that inclusion was not systematically assessed in most assemblies. Many pilots lacked measurable criteria to evaluate whether marginalised groups (including youth, ethnic minorities, persons with disabilities, or low-income residents) were represented and able to participate meaningfully. Deliverable feedback indicated that inclusion was often treated as a recruitment target rather than a cross-cutting design feature, and there were few mechanisms for tracking inclusion throughout the process (e.g., in facilitation, deliberation, or follow-up).

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3.6.2 Capacity Gaps for Inclusive Design

In WP3, Task 3.1, policymakers and implementers involved in the Chios pilot noted that while inclusive participation was a goal, limited capacity and local experience in inclusive design made it difficult to operationalise. Without targeted training or external support, recruitment strategies defaulted to general outreach rather than proactive equity-based sampling. Evaluation activities in WP4, Task 4.3, also revealed that some CA tools (particularly scenario development and prioritisation methods) were perceived as too abstract or technical by participants from diverse educational and linguistic backgrounds. This complexity created unintended barriers to full participation, particularly among stakeholders unfamiliar with climate policy or formal deliberation.

3.6.3 Misalignment Between Design and Equity Outcomes

Several partners noted a deeper conceptual challenge: even when demographic quotas or inclusive recruitment were applied, they were not always accompanied by institutional practices that ensured equity during the process (e.g., in facilitation, agenda-setting, or access to background material). This creates a risk that nominally inclusive assemblies reproduce existing power imbalances, especially if dominant voices go unchecked or decision-making is left unstructured.

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4. Addressing the Challenges: How CLIMAS Tools Respond to Policy Problems

The previous sections outlined six critical categories of policy problems that hinder the uptake and institutionalisation of citizen-led climate decision-making. These challenges are significant, but they are not without responses. Over the course of the project, CLIMAS developed a Toolbox, a participatory evaluation framework, and a suite of facilitation strategies and learning resources that offer practical solutions to many of the barriers identified. These resources were co-designed and tested in real-world conditions, providing a foundation for institutional innovation. Table 1 below maps each problem category to the tools, methods, or guidelines developed to help address it.

Table 1 - Alignment Between Identified Policy Challenges and CLIMAS Tools

Policy Problem	CLIMAS Response	Related Tools / Methods / Tasks
Institutional misalignment	Templates and guides for embedding CAs into planning and administrative structures	Guidelines for Setting Up Climate Assemblies
Political reluctance	Structured formats for agenda-setting, transparency, and feedback loops; demonstration of political value through pilots	Scenario Prioritisation Tool Knowledge and Evidence-Based Support (KEBS) Platform
Capacity constraints	Hands-on facilitation guidelines; ready-to-use templates; modular tools that can be adapted to context	
Weak uptake and follow-up	Tools that link citizen input to policy pathways, including visualisation and prioritisation systems	Scenario Prioritisation Tool Knowledge and Evidence-Based Support (KEBS) Platform
Communication gaps	Recommendations on external engagement, transparency, and storytelling; examples from pilot experiences	Guidelines for Setting Up Climate Assemblies
Inclusion deficits	Inclusive recruitment guides; accessibility audits; reflections on participation metrics and equity	Facilitation guidelines

This integrated response architecture was designed not only to enable the smooth operation of Climate Assemblies during the CLIMAS project but also to support institutional learning, scaling, and long-term capacity building for climate adaptation beyond the project's lifespan. Where tools alone were insufficient, the evaluation framework and facilitation experiences provided insights into conditions for effective use (e.g., training needs, sequencing with policy cycles, or combining digital and in-person formats). In this sense, CLIMAS not only identifies challenges but also offers a coherent, tested package of solutions to help public authorities overcome them in the pursuit of more participatory climate adaptation governance.

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It is important to acknowledge, however, that several of the barriers identified in this analysis are structural in nature and cannot be fully resolved through toolkits or methodological interventions alone. Institutional inertia, lack of political will, resource constraints, and deeply embedded governance cultures operate at a systemic level, shaped by broader political, social, and economic forces. CLIMAS tools and resources are designed to work within and alongside these dynamics, lowering practical barriers where possible and demonstrating the value of participatory approaches through evidence from real-world implementation. Yet their effectiveness ultimately depends on the broader enabling environment, including sustained political commitment, adequate funding, supportive legal frameworks, and a culture of institutional openness to citizen input. Recognising these interdependencies is essential for realistic expectations about what toolbox-based interventions can achieve and for identifying the complementary policy reforms needed to make climate adaptation governance truly participatory.

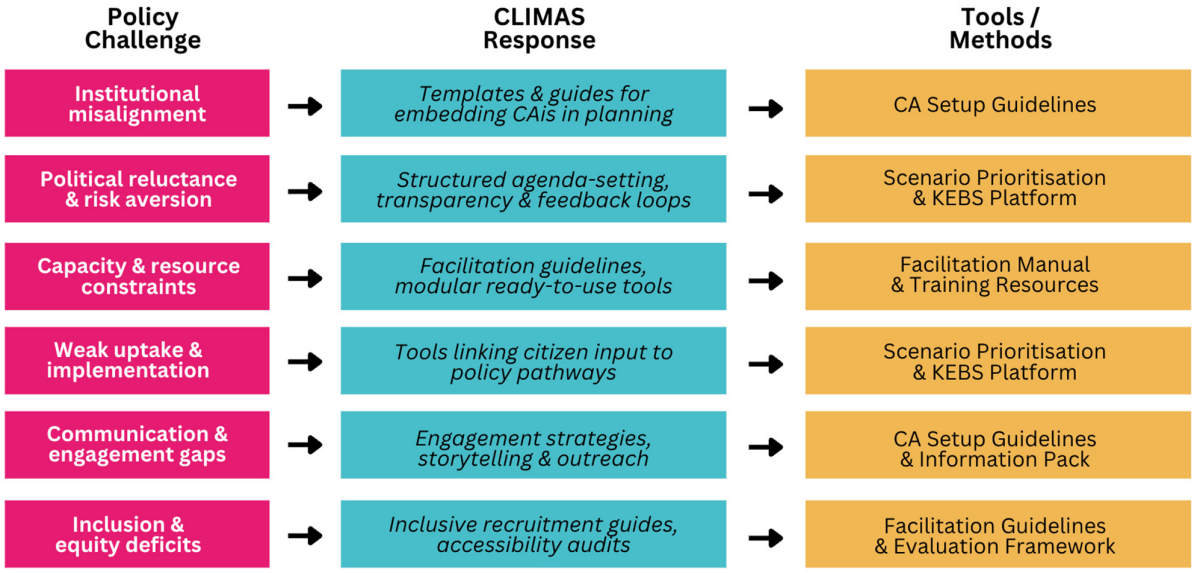


Figure 1 - From Policy Challenges to CLIMAS Responses: a summary of how identified barriers to citizen-led climate adaptation governance map to the tools and methods developed by the project.

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5. Conclusions

D5.3 presents a synthesis of the key policy challenges that constrain the uptake and institutionalisation of citizen-led decision-making in climate adaptation, alongside the strategic tools and methodologies developed by CLIMAS to address them. Drawing on insights from pilot implementation (WP2), tool development (WP3-4) and evaluation (WP5), the project has produced a grounded set of recommendations to empower public authorities to embed participatory climate governance more effectively. The analysis revealed six recurrent categories of challenges: institutional misalignment, political reluctance, capacity constraints, weak implementation pathways, limited communication, and persistent inclusion gaps. While these issues manifest differently across local contexts, they are systemic in nature and require both technical responses and structural reforms. CLIMAS responds to these challenges through a coherent set of contributions:

- A Toolbox of seven participatory tools, tested and refined with municipalities, offering practical support for each phase of the Climate Assembly process.
- A participatory evaluation framework, including impact and inclusivity metrics, which supports accountability and learning.
- A suite of facilitation guidelines and training resources tailored to institutional capacities and contextual realities.

Together, these outputs provide a concrete response to the call for more inclusive, transparent, and effective models of citizen participation in climate adaptation policy, aligned with the EU Mission on Adaptation and broader Green Deal objectives. The accompanying Policy Brief (Annex II) distils these insights into a set of actionable recommendations. These are designed to support not only local and regional governments but also national policymakers and EU-level actors seeking to scale deliberative climate adaptation governance.

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Annex 1 – Full List of Problems Identified

Table 2 - Summary of Policy Problems Identified Across CLIMAS Activities

WP	Task	Activity (source of insight)	Who faces the problem?	What kind of barrier is it?	Description
WP2	T2.1	Analysis of 76 CA cases	Local governments	Institutional/ contextual	CA models are often not adapted to local political culture or administrative capacity
WP2	T2.2	Workshop 2 (barriers identification)	Politicians, Assembly organisers	Political	Fear of losing control over outcomes; assemblies used to legitimise pre-decided measures
WP2	T2.3	Survey of local authorities	Local governments	Institutional	No dedicated departments for engagement in many municipalities
WP2	T2.3	Interview analysis	Municipal staff	Capacity/knowledge	Limited training or resources for effective engagement processes
WP5	T5.1	Review of evaluation frameworks	Policymakers, evaluators	Impact translation	Weak tracking of long-term policy uptake of CA recommendations
WP5	T5.1	Synthesis of conceptual frameworks	Assembly participants	Civic engagement	Limited understanding of how CA participation affects long-term civic activity and political efficacy
WP5	T5.1	Evaluation gap analysis	Public, media	Communication	Insufficient analysis of how CAs influence public discourse or media narratives
WP5	T5.1	Comparative review	Organisers, researchers	Inclusivity metrics	Lack of measurable criteria for assessing inclusiveness and representativeness across CAs
WP5	T5.1	Policy context analysis	Policymakers	Implementation	Limited understanding of institutional or political barriers to adopting CA recommendations
WP3	T3.2	Practitioner process design experience	Policymakers and stakeholders	Political	Not understanding the need for a balance framework

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WP3	T3.1	Discussion during meetings with the authorities (municipality and region) to present CLIMAS and ask them for their input and participation.	Policy makers	Capacity/knowledge	Only a small fraction of the potentially affected population actively participates in the discussions. Participation tends to be limited to individuals with specific interests or firmly held positions, which often leads to polarised dialogue. As a result, one of the main barriers identified is the low level of awareness and engagement among the broader public—the so-called "silent majority." To address this issue, targeted education and information campaigns are considered essential for increasing citizen awareness, fostering inclusive participation, and enriching the overall quality of the dialogue.
WP5	T5.2	CA participants survey	Local government, policymakers	Learning/knowledge	Participants express uncertainty about how their input is used or if the recommendations will be used
WP5	T5.2	CA impact evaluation	Local government, policymakers	Political	Reluctance among policymakers to openly reflect on CA impact/recommendations due to fear of criticism or unmet expectations
WP5	T5.2	CA participants survey	CA organisers		Difficulty in capturing the long-term impact of CA
WP5	T5.2	CA impact evaluation	Local government, policymakers	Political	Difficulty in linking CA outcomes to measurable policy influence makes it hard to justify investments or adjustments.
WP5	T5.2	Contribution to deliberative democracy debates	CA stakeholders, researchers	Conceptual/strategic	Unclear definitions of “success” in deliberative processes make it hard to compare cases or derive strategic lessons.

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WP4	T4.3	Implementing the scenario building and prioritisation in the CA	Stakeholders and researchers in understanding the methodology	Knowledge/technical/attitudes	The scenario-building steps were considered too technical and detached from citizens' life experiences and from people without an academic record (e.g., not very inclusive); the backcasting/forecasting approach. Concerning prioritisation, practitioners do not have a habit of doing it; no integration of tools.
WP4	T4.5	Citizens' surveys on scenario pathways	Participants, CA organisers	Conceptual/engagement	Participants faced difficulties connecting their values and preferences to a concrete scenario building without facilitation support.
WP4	T4.5	Toolbox validation through expert interviews	Policymakers, facilitators	Knowledge/technical	Difficulties in applying engagement tools to local realities due to insufficient technical training.
WP4	T4.5	Toolbox testing	Local governments, CA organisers	Institutional	No institutional mechanism to embed the toolbox into routine policy design or planning cycles, limiting its long-term use.
WP4	T4.5	Toolbox testing	CA organisers, citizens	Communication/engagement	Limited public awareness or understanding of the toolbox's purpose reduces legitimacy and trust in its use for climate decision-making.

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