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Getting marginalised communities on board through multi-stakeholder initiatives and community building – the role of participatory methods

The recent years have seen a surge in housing inequalities, impacting a wide spectrum of stakeholders and most notably those referred to as marginalized or vulnerable communities (including but not limited to elderly, persons with disabilities, refugees). Safe and equal housing for these communities should be a priority yet the situation on the ground reflects a poor consideration of the topic. The rights to a decent and affordable housing (including with proper and affordable access to energy, health, transport and digital access) is part of this “European quality of life”.

Horizon-funded project HouseInc uses innovative approaches and methodologies to analyse different dimensions of housing inequality, focusing on marginalised communities across Europe, and contributing to policy measures to increase access to affordable, inclusive and sustainable housing. The project puts communities at the heart by focusing on their engagement, empowering them in co-creating solutions in a series of living labs, focus groups and more participatory methods. Partners include organisations working on the ground with diverse marginalised communities including refugees, Roma communities, migrants from Eastern Europe as well as elderly, with a focus on 4 pilots in Germany, Italy, Czech Republic and Romania. Using the project as a lever, the author’s dual approach combines literature review with interviews of researchers and practitioners to understand what seems to work as forms of engagement. How can one ensure hearing marginalised groups’ voices, for a fair and just (energy) transition? Interviewing researchers from various projects or initiatives who looked into the topic, the author questions how they involved vulnerable groups and what barriers limit participation. How are the strategies put into reality? The paper will present a set of operational recommendations for inclusive and effective stakeholder engagement.

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- User-Centred Energy Systems TCP Hard-to-Reach Energy Users Task