

# NEWSLETTER

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## COLCHESTER PILOT: REDEFINING THE HOUSING DIALOGUE

The Colchester pilot stands as a cornerstone of the EU-CIEMBLY project, moving the project into the practical application of design choices for an intersectionality-oriented assembly. As a core component of our objective to create a scalable intersectional democratic participation framework, this pilot gathered 50 participants to navigate the complexities of housing.

By recruiting a cohort that brings together two parts of the community, meaning University of Essex students and Colchester residents, we moved the EU-CIEMBLY project from the "analytical framework" phase into a living laboratory for intersectional equality in democratic mechanisms' design.

The assembly took place in three stages with an online session on Tuesday, 24 February, an in-person session on Saturday, 28 February, and a final online session on 10 March.

## ENGAGING IN A CO-DESIGN PROCESS WITH THE PARTICIPATING COMMUNITIES

Housing was selected as the thematic focus of the Colchester pilot. The framing of the assembly resulted from a process of co-design with local communities. Specifically, we held two co-design workshops where we explored issues of concern with key stakeholders and encouraged the participants to contribute to the design of the assembly. We held two co-design workshops, one with local community organisers and one with student representatives from the University of Essex Students' Union.

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**Mission Statement:** The Colchester Citizens' Assembly takes the project one step closer to its objective of advancing a new paradigm for European democracy that moves beyond traditional participation to actively dismantling structural barriers through an intersectional lens.



## COLCHESTER'S CITIZENS ASSEMBLY ON HOUSING

From 24 February to 10 March 2026, the EU-CIEMBLY team gathered 50 participants to navigate the complexities of housing issues in the Colchester community and provide recommendations.

## A CONTEXT-BASED APPROACH TO THE DESIGN OF THE ASSEMBLY

One of the key features of the Colchester Assembly was the structured co-design process that was followed to ensure that the assembly was shaped *with* participants – or those close to participants – rather than *for* them.

The two workshops that took place in December 2026 aimed to collaboratively define the purpose, structure, values, and practical elements of the assembly.

Working together, the workshop participants explored four key components of the assembly:

- **Who participates** – identifying who should be invited, how to ensure diversity and representation, and what support would be needed to involve groups who often face barriers to participation
- **How they participate** – discussing accessibility (language, transport, digital), emotional and psychological safety, and the information or expertise required to support equitable deliberation;
- **How the assembly should run** – shaping facilitation approaches, preferred discussion formats, and how to elevate voices that are not usually heard;
- **How recommendations are adopted** – considering consensus-building, voting methods, transparency, documentation, and how recommendations should be used and communicated.



The co-design workshops allowed the project team to identify what issues are particularly relevant within the particular communities with regard to housing and fed directly into the design of the Assembly.

## WORKSHOP HIGHLIGHTS: DESIGNING FOR INTERSECTIONAL INCLUSION, EQUALITY AND DELIBERATION

Inclusive communication is necessary to maintaining the integrity of the deliberative process. Without deliberate safeguards, things like complex jargon, inaccessible online platforms, and an overly lengthy process, can act as barriers to participation. The following are some of the actions we took to address and dismantle such barriers during the pilot design and implementation phases:

- **Engaging with concepts of intersectionality theory:** Through a tailored ice-breaking exercise that took place in the first assembly session, participants were exposed to the ways in which gender, ethnicity, and age shape their unique social experiences and those of others around them.
- **Embracing lived experience as a form of expertise:** During the in-person assembly session, the participants received information about housing in Colchester but also got to listen from people with lived experience of housing problems in the community.

## FUTURE OUTLOOK: FROM THE LOCAL TO THE NATIONAL PILOT ASSEMBLY

The Colchester assembly served as a pivotal point of the EU-CIEMBLY project, testing our intersectional framework in a real-world, localised setting. Having established this proof-of-concept, the EU-CIEMBLY team is now looking to the future and actively preparing for the upcoming National Citizens' Assembly that will take place in Cyprus.

The expected areas of focus as we move towards the National Assembly will shift:

- **Framework Refinement and Scaling:** A reflective and reflexive evaluation of our experiences organising and implementing the Colchester pilot will aim to ensure that our methodology can be adapted to the much larger and more diverse demographic of a National Pilot Assembly.
- **A Context-Based Approach to Issue Identification:** Without the co-design workshops that took place for the Colchester Assembly, the issue identification will come from our research team's own context-based research on housing and housing challenges in Cyprus.
- **Reaching out to potential participants through Civil Society Organisations and local actors:** A mapping of Civil Society Organisations, municipal authorities, and institutional actors interested on housing problems in Cyprus is necessary before engaging with them as disseminators of the pilot activity.



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