

CO-DEAL NEWSLETTER

STRENGTHENING COMMUNITY PARTICIPATION AND RESILIENCE
THROUGH NATIONAL TRAINING

December 2025 | Issue 2

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INTRODUCTION

STRENGTHENING COMMUNITY PARTICIPATION AND RESILIENCE THROUGH NATIONAL TRAINING

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In recent years, Europe has witnessed profound transformations in the nature, frequency, and complexity of crises. Climate-driven disasters, public health emergencies, infrastructural disruptions, and social challenges have highlighted an **urgent need for local communities to strengthen their capacity to anticipate, adapt, and respond to uncertainty**. While national frameworks and EU-wide strategies play an important role in crisis management, it is ultimately at the local level—in municipalities, neighbourhoods, and civil networks—where resilience is built, tested, and sustained.

The CO-DEAL project (Erasmus+ KA220-VET) responds to this reality by developing an innovative set of **digital training tools, interactive simulations, and participatory learning methodologies tailored for municipal employees and community actors**.

By bridging institutional preparedness with community engagement, the project aims to strengthen professional competences while promoting inclusive and collaborative approaches to crisis management.



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Project partners in Germany, Portugal, Greece, Spain and Lithuania organised **National Participation Events to engage local authorities, civil protection actors, volunteers, and citizens.** These events served as laboratories of dialogue, bringing together diverse perspectives to **identify real community needs, share experiences, and collectively shape the next steps of the CO-DEAL training** modules and virtual scenarios.

Across countries, participants voiced strikingly similar concerns: **the need for stronger communication, clearer coordination across agencies, better public engagement, and more accessible training.** At the same time, each national context highlighted its own local challenges—for example, from wildfires in Greece, to floods and heatwaves in Germany, to municipal planning in Portugal, and inclusive communication needs in Spain.

This **newsletter** presents a detailed **overview of each national event, illustrating how CO-DEAL partners are working together to build resilient, proactive, and well-connected communities across Europe.**



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NATIONAL EVENTS



GERMANY – FHM NATIONAL PARTICIPATION EVENT

The German National Participation Event took place on 6 May 2025, bringing together residents and representatives from the municipalities of Kalletal and Schlangen. Hosted at Kalletal Town Hall and coordinated by the **University of Applied Sciences FHM**, the workshop gathered 18 participants, including local citizens, municipal staff, and civil protection actors.



Understanding local climate impacts

The event began with a presentation by Prof. Dr. habil. Anett Wolgast, who introduced the goals of CO-DEAL and contextualised the growing pressures German municipalities face due to climate change—extreme weather, heatwaves, floods, and the increasing strain on local infrastructures and emergency systems. Participants were invited to reflect on the changes they had observed over recent years, noting shifts in seasonal patterns, rising temperatures, and the appearance of new risks in rural and semi-urban areas.



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NATIONAL EVENTS



GERMANY – FHM NATIONAL PARTICIPATION EVENT

A participatory and community-centred format

Guided by focus group discussions, participants shared memories, experiences, and stories that illustrated how past generations approached emergencies. A light-hearted moment emerged when former district mayor **Friedel Heuwinkel** recalled how his grandmother would sit on the stairs with a packed suitcase during thunderstorms, “**ready to be evacuated if necessary.**” Laughter filled the room, but the anecdote underscored a deeper truth: preparedness often begins with simple habits, awareness, and local knowledge.

Mayor **Mario Hecker** echoed this sentiment, highlighting that practices which appear small or humorous can become “**surprisingly valuable when things get serious.**” His reflection helped participants recognise that resilience requires both modern systems and the everyday wisdom embedded in community traditions.



Key findings and practical insights

Five core conclusions emerged from the German event:

- **Community-based support networks** are important for multiplying warnings, mobilising assistance, and protecting vulnerable neighbours.
- **Early-warning systems and communication channels** must be strengthened and made more inclusive.
- **Cross-sectoral coordination**—between municipal staff, emergency services, volunteers, and local residents—is fundamental.
- Municipal employees need **practical, scenario-based training** that prepares them for uncertainty and non-linear problem solving.
- **Local infrastructures** (public buildings, cooling centres, green areas) can play an active role in mitigating heatwaves and supporting community resilience.



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NATIONAL EVENTS

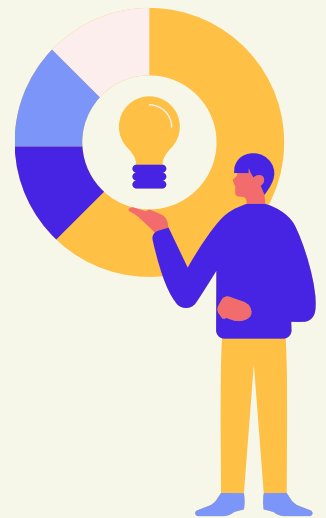
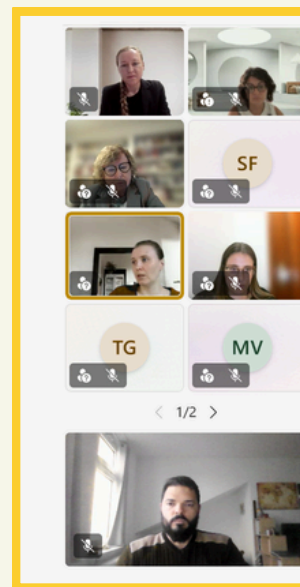


GERMANY – FHM NATIONAL PARTICIPATION EVENT

Moreover, **The CO-DEAL Expert Discussion, held virtually on 6 October 2025**, convened European experts, municipal representatives, and project partners to exchange insights on climate-related challenges and resilience strategies. Moderated by Prof. Dr. Anett Wolgast and Tomas Lengemann, the event featured three keynote presentations followed by a moderated discussion.

Dr Jürgen Laudien (German Life Saving Association, DLRG) addressed the **increasing complexity of water safety due to climate change**. He highlighted the need for extended lifeguard operations, the use of drones for flood mapping and logistics, and the importance of emotional regulation and rapid decision-making in crisis leadership.

His four-step strategy—**assess, prioritise, communicate, and act**—was illustrated through the **2023–24 Christmas flood response**, where swift coordination helped protect a village from flooding.



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GERMANY – FHM NATIONAL PARTICIPATION EVENT

Dr Iuliia Polkova (German Weather Service, DWD) presented on **climate prediction tools**. She explained the difference between **short-term weather forecasts and long-term climate projections**, emphasising the rising frequency and intensity of extreme events. DDWD's services include sub-seasonal to decadal climate forecasts, hazard portal, and tailored warnings for various types of extreme events. She stressed the importance of regular public training to ensure preparedness becomes instinctive.

Dr Ralf Schüle (Federal Office for Building and Regional Planning) explored the role of **digital tools in urban resilience**. He outlined Germany's Smart City funding programme and emphasised the need for cross-sectoral cooperation, data competence, and organisational transformation. He argued that digital infrastructure alone is insufficient without strategic integration and skilled personnel.

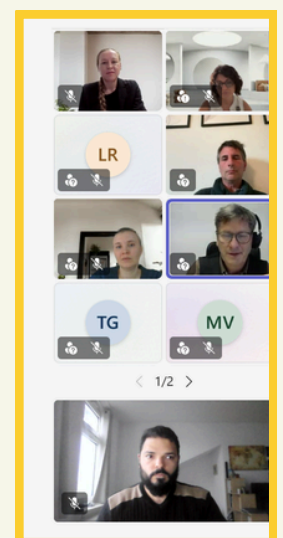
The discussion concluded with reflections on participatory processes, particularly **the inclusion of vulnerable groups**. Experts agreed that training, emotional preparedness, and digital literacy are essential pillars of climate resilience. The event highlighted the importance of interdisciplinary collaboration to build adaptive and inclusive communities.

1. CONTEXT: GERMAN NATIONAL FUNDING SCHEME ON SMART CITIES „MODEL PROJECTS SMART CITIES“ BBSR

Funding Programme

- **Budget:** 820 Mill. € (2019-2030)
- **Funded municipalities:** 73 MPSC (3 Seasons 2019/20/21)
- **Management:** Support of MPSC through programme agency (KTS): PR, advice, SC academy
- **Networking:** community-building and networking, development communities
- **Research**

More information:
<https://www.smart-city-dialog.de/en>



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GERMANY – FHM NATIONAL PARTICIPATION EVENT

Finally, a national CO-DEAL dialogue event, held on 21 October 2025, brought together **administrative staff and engaged citizens to explore strategies for strengthening community resilience in the face of climate-related crises.** The program featured expert inputs, a moderated panel discussion, and informal exchanges.

The event began with a key impulse on climate change by **Markus Winkler** (DWD), followed by a thought-provoking impulse on “Anti-Dystopias” by **Dr. Isabella Hermann.** **Prof. Dr. Anett Wolgast** presented insights from the **CO-DEAL partner countries,** outlining the project’s scientific foundation, participatory research methods, and **key findings from focus groups** conducted in Germany, Greece, Lithuania, Portugal, and Spain.

The focus groups revealed common challenges and local strengths. **In Germany, participants emphasized the value of local knowledge and green infrastructure.** Greece highlighted the need for tailored disaster planning and youth engagement. Lithuania focused on digital resilience and flood protection. Portugal addressed environmental practices and communication gaps, while Spain pointed to the importance of informal networks and inclusive emergency communication.

The panel discussion revolved around three guiding questions: **how to make weather warnings effective and inclusive, how to promote community-driven solutions, and how often dialogue and training are needed to ensure preparedness.** These questions sparked a lively and inspiring exchange among participants, reflecting a shared commitment to proactive and inclusive crisis strategies. The exchange led to an open and motivating discussion among attendees. This final exchange reinforced the value of collaborative thinking and community engagement as central pillars of the CO-DEAL approach to resilience.



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PORTUGAL – SPIN NATIONAL EVENT

On 22 July 2025, **SPIN** hosted the Portuguese National Participation Event in Ponte da Barca, a municipality committed to sustainability and community engagement. The event gathered **municipal officials, local stakeholders, and residents to explore climate resilience and prepare for environmental and social challenges** affecting northern Portugal.

Opening discussions: Where are we now?

SPIN introduced the CO-DEAL project by emphasising its **community-centred approach** and the value of local knowledge in designing effective crisis strategies. Participants reviewed current municipal plans, including:

- **The Emergency Municipal Plan,**
- **The Forest Fire Defence Plan, and**
- **The forthcoming Climate Action Plan.**

This discussion surfaced a key theme: **although municipalities have multiple strategic documents, citizens are often unaware of them, and therefore less able to contribute to preparedness or response efforts.**



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PORTUGAL – SPIN NATIONAL EVENT

Local initiatives and ongoing practices

Participants highlighted several climate-related initiatives already underway in Ponte da Barca:

- **Reforestation programmes following previous wildfire seasons**
- **Selective waste collection and recycling improvements**
- **Sustainable mobility initiatives, including electric vehicle integration**
- **Waterway maintenance aimed at reducing flood risks**

They also reflected on collaborative efforts during the **COVID-19 pandemic**, which revealed both the strengths of community solidarity and the need for better digital communication infrastructure.

What needs to improve?

A strong consensus emerged on the need to:

- **Integrate existing municipal plans into a coherent and accessible resilience strategy.**
- **Strengthen public engagement and awareness campaigns on climate-related risks.**

- **Improve digital communication tools to ensure citizens receive timely alerts.**
- **Enhance protection for vulnerable residents, who often face higher risks during crises.**

One participant summarised the challenge succinctly:

“We have plans, but most citizens are not aware or involved.”

Impact on CO-DEAL

The recommendations from Portugal will directly influence the design of CO-DEAL’s digital modules, particularly the simulations on wildfire preparedness, emergency communication, and community coordination.



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GREECE – CRETHIDEV NATIONAL PARTICIPATION EVENT

The CO-DEAL Greek National Participation Event was hosted by **CRETHIDEV in Penteli**, a suburb located 17 kilometers northeast of the center of Athens, surrounded by the mountainous terrain and pine forests of Mount Penteli. The **twenty-two (22)** event participants included **municipality employees, persons involved in the civil protection, volunteers, and citizens, young and old**. The aim of the event was to present the **CO-DEAL project, to engage in discussion in order to gather community-based input on challenges and crises as well as to collect proposals for improving community preparedness in climate crises**.



Penteli (Greece)

The discussion revealed that **wildfires are the biggest climate related challenge in this municipality** due to the proximity with the mountains. After the 2022 and 2024 fires, it was recognized that **a single response is insufficient and requires a synchronized effort from many different groups, including fire services, forestry services, the meteorological agency, police, municipal technical crews, and health services**. The municipality has a quite active volunteering team but broader community awareness still needs strengthening through consistent outreach, training, and practical support.

The outcome of this event was the realization that a **core crisis preparedness strategy should involve a multi-agency, synchronized response, implementation of early warning systems, fostering collaboration with neighboring municipalities as well as enhancing community awareness and preparedness through simulation exercises and public engagement**. This is critical for providing timely alerts and enabling faster responses to potential fires as well as in creating a more effective and cohesive response strategy across borders. Training and simulations based on community relevant information to provide hands-on training can be a valuable tool for testing and improving the municipality's overall preparedness for wildfire events.



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NATIONAL EVENTS



GREECE – CRETHIDEV NATIONAL PARTICIPATION EVENT

The CO-DEAL consortium will incorporate this feedback to develop specific modules that address the challenges identified by the communities and simulation exercises tailored to the real needs of the communities.

Some quotes, reflecting experiences or lessons learned:

- “All these disasters that are coming, all these events, are much stronger, and while ten years ago could have been dealt with using conventional means, now the means and procedures we have are not sufficient” (local official).
- “But we can't wait until the last minute for citizens to take part. We need to create processes for active citizen participation” (citizen).



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SPAIN – UNIVERSITY OF SEVILLE PARTICIPATION EVENT



The Spanish National Participation Event, coordinated by the University of Seville, gathered **local residents, municipal workers, youth representatives, and community leaders to explore how small Andalusian municipalities understand and respond to emergencies.** Rather than speaking in abstract terms, participants shared vivid experiences of **floods, fires, heatwaves, drought, blackouts, and the COVID-19 pandemic**—offering a grounded perspective on what resilience truly means at the local level.

Local risks and lived experiences

Residents described how floods remain the area's most disruptive hazard, with increasingly intense rainfall overwhelming drainage systems and affecting vulnerable neighbourhoods. The recent blackout also revealed the fragility of digital dependence: without phone service or internet, municipal staff and neighbours resorted to **door-to-door checks** to identify and support older adults, dependent residents, and isolated households. Participants also linked climate change to everyday impacts such as extreme heat, declining agricultural productivity, and visible changes in local fauna.



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SPAIN – UNIVERSITY OF SEVILLE PARTICIPATION EVENT



Preparedness and institutional gaps

While the municipality has a basic emergency plan, participants noted that most citizens are unaware of it. Alerts rely heavily on social media—leaving older people unprotected—and no regular drills are conducted in schools or public buildings. Residents expressed a strong need for **practical training**, clearer communication channels, and better infrastructure, such as storm-water tanks to reduce flood risk. They also highlighted structural challenges: bureaucratic delays, limited local resources, and a lack of coordination across administrative levels.

The strength of informal networks

Across discussions, community solidarity emerged as a defining asset. In emergencies, neighbours mobilise quickly, associations coordinate volunteers, and local businesses provide equipment and support. Participants described this collective response as “the human side of emergencies,” essential in rural contexts where formal systems may take longer to activate.

Community proposals: what citizens want next

Participants emphasised the need to incorporate preparedness into **schools, expand awareness campaigns, run realistic emergency drills, and develop local volunteer groups trained to respond to crises**. They also supported the creation of accessible digital tools—such as those developed by CO-DEAL—to guide citizens during floods, fires, heatwaves, and blackouts.

Contribution to CO-DEAL

The Spanish event highlights how resilience in small municipalities is built through a combination of institutional planning and strong community ties. The insights gathered—rooted in lived experience—will directly inform the design of CO-DEAL’s digital modules and simulations, ensuring they reflect the realities, capacities, and challenges of rural communities across Europe.



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NATIONAL EVENTS



LITHUANIA – BETI NATIONAL PARTICIPATION EVENT

Lithuania's **CO-DEAL National Event** brought together community members, municipal representatives, and sector experts for an in-depth focus group on climate resilience and crisis preparedness. Held in the **Kaunas district**, the discussion served as an opportunity to reflect on local experiences, identify strengths, and explore what communities need to become more resilient in the face of growing environmental and societal risks.



Building Climate Resilience Together

Participants shared examples of how Lithuanian municipalities are already working toward a more climate-resilient future. Green procurement practices, tree planting initiatives, the widespread adoption of solar panels, and ongoing improvements to public transport and cycling infrastructure were highlighted as positive steps forward.

At the same time, many participants noted that formal municipal resilience strategies are not widely known among citizens. This revealed an important need for clearer communication from local authorities about existing plans, resources, and long-term goals.



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NATIONAL EVENTS



LITHUANIA – BETI NATIONAL PARTICIPATION EVENT

Improving Disaster Preparedness

Lithuania's targeted SMS alert system emerged as a major strength, with citizens confirming that emergency messages reach them quickly and reliably. Participants recalled recent events, such as searches for missing persons or localized hazards, where these alerts worked effectively.

Yet, despite well-developed internal emergency plans, many residents said they were unaware of evacuation procedures or what specific actions to take during different crises. This highlighted a critical gap: the need for more public involvement in emergency drills and more accessible information on preparedness.

Positive developments since the pandemic were also noted, including remote medical consultations, increased availability of disinfectant stations, and greater general awareness of health-related behaviours.

Community Efforts Driving Local Change

One of the strongest themes to emerge was the importance of community-driven resilience. Participants shared several inspiring examples:

- Local revitalisation projects such as new parks and pedestrian areas
- Expansion of waste sorting and stormwater drainage systems
- Neighbour-to-neighbour communication during emergencies
- Volunteers supporting vulnerable residents, including during the Covid-19 pandemic

Such stories underscored that resilience is not only about infrastructure — it is also about people, relationships, and shared responsibility.



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LITHUANIA – BETI NATIONAL PARTICIPATION EVENT

A Foundation for Future Action

The Lithuanian CO-DEAL National Event highlighted both the progress already made and the opportunities that remain. Participants demonstrated a strong willingness to contribute to local preparedness and to support one another during crises. The insights gathered will help shape future strategies and strengthen collaboration between citizens, municipalities, and organisations.

By fostering open dialogue and community engagement, Lithuania continues to build a more resilient, informed, and connected society—one that is better prepared for the challenges of tomorrow.

Some quotes, reflecting experiences or lessons learned:

- "The notifications we get on our phones work flawlessly. When something happens, the message arrives immediately. It's very targeted, and it really helps us feel informed."
- "Neighbours play an important role. Often the first information we get about dangers or crises comes from the people living around us. That support is a big part of how we stay prepared."



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CONCLUSIONS

STRENGTHENING COMMUNITY PARTICIPATION AND RESILIENCE THROUGH NATIONAL TRAINING

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The National Participation Events across Germany, Portugal, Greece, Spain and Lithuania demonstrate a clear collective vision: **resilience is a shared responsibility**. While each region faces unique environmental and social challenges, several common themes emerged.

Common needs

- Greater citizen engagement in preparedness and response plans
- Stronger communication systems, including early warnings and digital channels
- Better coordination across agencies, institutions, and community actors
- Training that reflects real-world complexity, uncertainty, and emotional demands
- Support for vulnerable groups, who are often the most affected during crises

Toward the next phase

These events provide essential input for the next stage of the project:

- designing digital training modules,
- developing virtual scenarios and crisis simulations,
- and ensuring that municipal employees and citizens can practice crisis strategies in realistic, safe, and accessible environments.

By combining participatory insights with technological innovation, CO-DEAL is building the foundations for a new model of local resilience—one that is community-driven, inclusive, and future-oriented.

