

Rue Brederode 21
1000 Brussels, Belgium
T +32 2 500 4 555
info@kbs-frb.be
kbs-frb.be

B King Baudouin
Foundation
Together for a better society

FAIR ENERGY TRANSITION FOR ALL

Advancing a fair transition
by linking innovation, policy and people

Report

on the focus groups with disadvantaged communities
on solutions against energy poverty

March 2026

www.fair-energy-transition.eu

Schneider
Electric
Foundation

ifok
A CADMUS COMPANY

**MUSEO
NAZIONALE
SCIENZA
E TECNOLOGIA
LEONARDO
DA VINCI**

DEMOCRACY X



Polish
Foundation
For Energy
Efficiency
Est. 1990

Table of Content

1. Introduction.....	2
2. Framework of the focus groups	2
2.1. Design and methodology	2
2.2. Recruitment and participants' profiles.....	4
3. Lessons Learned	6
3.1. Content	6
3.2. Methodology.....	9

1. Introduction

The goal of the FETA project (Fair Energy Transition for All) is to identify and highlight **local solutions throughout Europe for a fair and inclusive energy transition**. [Ten initiatives](#) have been selected to receive support through a “project escalator” – a tailored programme that helps them grow, strengthen connections and enable broader impact.

To identify initiatives that empower vulnerable groups, it is **essential to speak directly with citizens** and listen to which solutions are relevant for them, and which are not. That is why the initiatives went through a multi-stage selection process that also included **assessment by vulnerable citizens**. In four focus groups held in different countries, participants discussed and evaluated the pre-selected initiatives that had applied and ultimately identified those that best respond to their needs. Their assessments played a decisive role in the final selection of the winning initiatives, alongside factors such as geographic diversity and the sustainability of the financial model.

Through the focus groups, we not only gained valuable **insights into which types of solutions are truly relevant** from the perspective of vulnerable people and can provide meaningful support in their daily lives. We also gathered important **methodological lessons** on how to effectively reach out to and engage with vulnerable citizens.

In this report, we share our learnings from this process.

2. Framework of the focus groups

2.1. Design and methodology

The focus groups took place in **Poland, Italy, Denmark, and France** in January 2026 and represented a key step in the selection process, after a shortlist of 20 initiatives from across the EU had been identified based on technical and financial criteria.

For the focus groups, the shortlisted initiatives were distributed across the four countries: each group was asked to **review and evaluate five initiatives** and select the three that best responded to their needs. Some of these initiatives were based in the same country as the focus group, while others came from different European countries.

All shortlisted initiatives had been asked to submit a short **video explaining their work** directly to the participants. These videos were translated (with a voice over) into the respective languages of the focus group countries using AI-supported translation to ensure accessibility and understanding.

Each focus group lasted around four hours, including 12-14 participants. During the sessions, facilitators used a **narrative approach**, encouraging participants to share personal stories, express their emotions, and reflect on what feels fair to them. The focus groups should enable a personal and accessible discussion that connected real needs with possible solutions. An informal setting with snacks and drinks, childcare where needed, and financial compensation further supported this approach.

Agenda of the focus groups

Time	Activity
30 min	Welcome & Trust Building <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Introduction • Ground rules of discussion • Icebreaker
30 min	Exploring Daily Realities <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Narrative approach • Participants are encouraged to tell personal stories, share their emotions and think about what is fair to them when it comes to housing and mobility
15 min	Break
30 min	Discovering Initiatives No. 1-2 <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Participants watch video introductions of initiatives 1 & 2. • Discussion of the initiatives in small groups and plenary → Connect real needs with possible solutions
10 min	Break
50 min	Discovering Initiatives No. 3-5 <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Participants watch video introductions of initiatives 1 & 2. • Discussion of the initiatives in small groups and plenary → Connect real needs with possible solutions
40 min	Collective Decision & Reflection <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Discussion of all initiatives together • Voting of the top 3 initiatives • Closing reflection
10 min	Closing <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Thank you • Next Steps

2.2. Recruitment and participants' profiles

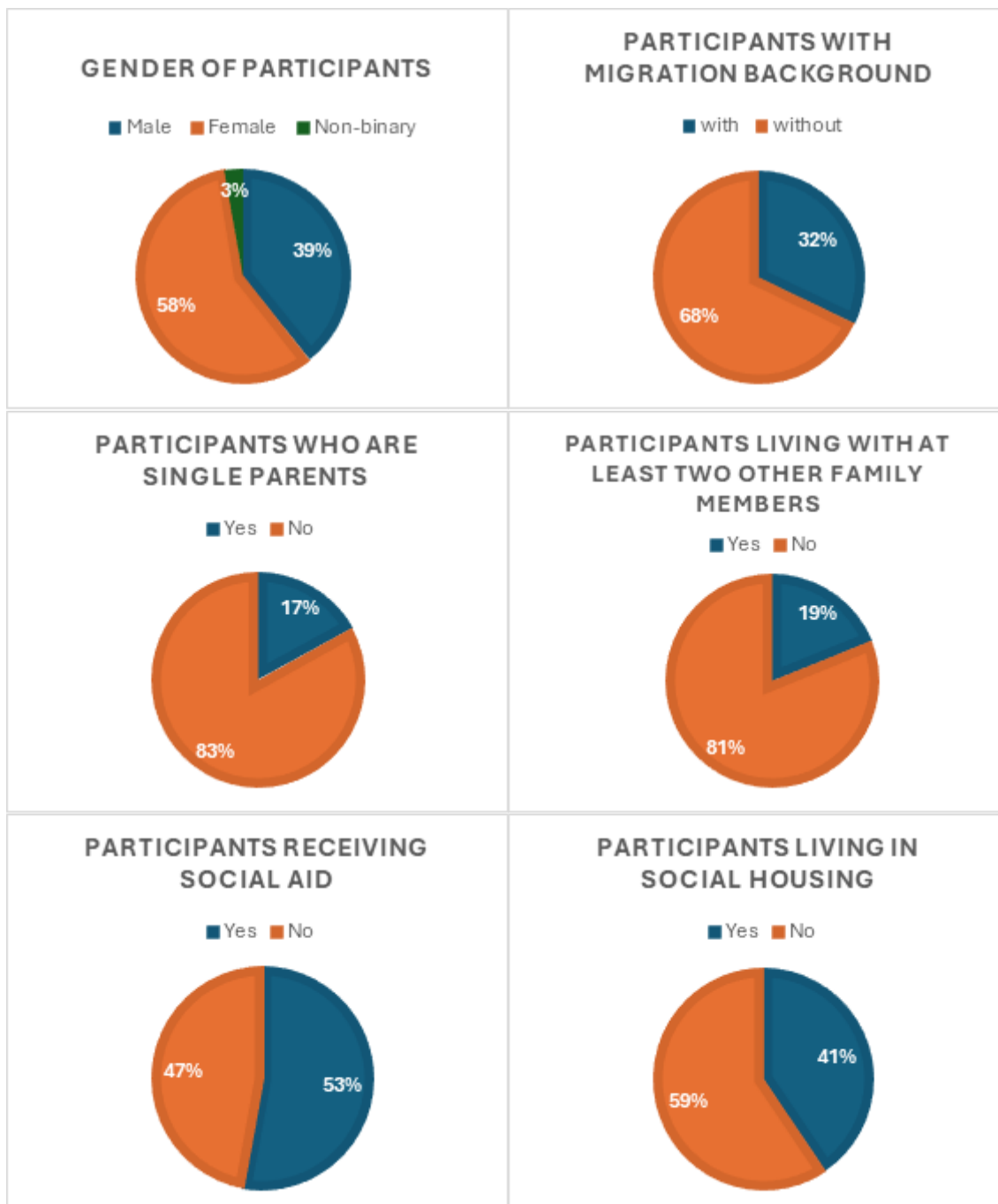
The focus groups were designed by the FETA core team in cooperation with four national partners. For the recruitment of the participants and the implementation, the national partners collaborated with intermediary organisations that work with people living in financially and socially challenging situations. This approach had already proven effective during the first phase of FETA; more details can be found in the [FETA Method Guide](#).

Overview of organisations and participants' profiles

National partner for facilitation	Intermediary organisation	Participants' profiles
Denmark DEMOCRACY X	Gadens stemmer and Medvind, Copenhagen	People with lived experience of homelessness, substance use, legal challenges, and mental vulnerability
France Missions Publiques	ATD Quart Monde, Lille	People experiencing poverty
Italy Museo Nazionale Scienza e Tecnologia Leonardo da Vinci	Casa della Carità, Milan	People living in social housing with low income
Poland Polish Foundation for Energy Efficiency, FEWE	Polish Red Cross, Katowice	Refugees (migrants), seniors and low-income families

Taken together, the four focus groups included 53 participants representing a **broad spectrum of residents in vulnerable and low-income situations**, spanning different age groups, household compositions, education levels, and degrees of dependence on public services.

Key statistics of the focus groups:



3. Lessons Learned

3.1. Content

Across all focus groups, certain patterns became clear regarding which types of initiatives were perceived as most helpful and which were considered less relevant to participants' daily realities. Above all, the people in vulnerable situations engaged in the focus groups valued initiatives that delivered **immediate visible and financially meaningful improvements to their living conditions**. As one participant put it:

“If the flat is warm and there is electricity in the socket, it gives a sense of security.”

The initiatives presented offered fair energy solutions in the areas of housing and mobility. They ranged from local renewable energy communities to social inclusion and capacity building projects to educational programs, focusing on expanding access to clean energy, improving energy efficiency, and empowering citizens in the just energy transition. A key insight is that **housing related initiatives**, especially those addressing structural problems such as insulation, dampness or inadequate maintenance, **received the strongest support**. Many participants live in deteriorated or poorly maintained homes and experience this as a major source of stress and insecurity. Even when renovation would require significant financial investment, the desire for safer, warmer and more comfortable homes outweighed concerns about feasibility. This sentiment was summarised by a participant who expressed:



Focus group from Denmark

“Every day I look at the ceiling and wonder if it will collapse.”

Participants also appreciated initiatives that prevent rent increases or protect tenants from displacement, noting their importance for avoiding repossessions and maintaining stability in neighbourhoods.

Similarly, **initiatives that reduce energy costs or provide clear, impartial guidance on bills and consumption were consistently rated very highly.**

Participants frequently described electricity and heating costs as a major financial burden and expressed difficulties navigating complex billing systems or aggressive market practices. Accessible advice delivered in familiar settings and tailored to individual needs was therefore felt to have substantial impact. The appeal was particularly strong when support included a **single point of contact, proactive outreach, and concrete actions such as identifying financial support, advising on insulation, or offering personalised solutions**. On the other hand, they emphasised that for some households, receiving a discounted appliance or device would not necessarily provide relief, as individuals facing severe financial stress might feel compelled to sell such items in order to meet basic needs:

“But if I had gotten a modern refrigerator with a freezer, I would have sold the damn thing to be able to afford food.”

This underlined that financial vulnerability shapes not only the usefulness of support but also how certain forms of assistance are prioritised, interpreted or repurposed in daily life.

Initiatives that combined financial relief with education or capacity building also resonated strongly. Participants valued projects that equipped young people or low income households with **practical skills, long term agency and a sense of ownership over their environment**. They stressed the importance of combining hands on learning with realistic access to opportunities. As one participant noted:

“Projects that build a sense of agency among young people are valuable.”

This preference was also reflected in **positive reactions to community-based approaches** where residents contribute to shaping activities, **and where engagement takes place in familiar environments such as schools, libraries or neighbourhood centres**.

By contrast, **initiatives relying heavily on peer-to-peer exchange, informal community mobilisation or collective decision making received more mixed responses**. Some participants valued the sense of solidarity and expressed enthusiasm for concepts that allow people to jointly manage energy resources, reduce dependence on large companies or take part in decision making that affects their lives. The appeal lays in the feeling of contributing to something larger, building community bonds and experiencing concrete benefits without increasing housing costs. Others expressed doubts about reliability, trust and feasibility. In neighbourhoods with low social cohesion or negative past experiences, the assumption that residents would attend meetings or collaborate appeared unrealistic. As one participant commented:

“Word of mouth can be misleading, like bar talk.”

Participants also noted that **initiatives based solely on volunteer involvement could create imbalances or risk overlooking those with the greatest needs.** It was emphasised that community involvement is only attractive when it does not place unrealistic expectations on individuals who already face significant daily pressures.



Focus group from France

Another **recurring barrier concerned initiatives requiring a driver’s licence,**

private mobility or significant personal agency. Mobility based solutions were often ranked lower, not because participants opposed the idea in principle, but because many could not realistically benefit from it. Not having a driving licence, facing mobility restrictions or lacking trust among neighbours limited the perceived usefulness of such initiatives.

“I wouldn’t need it because I don’t drive.”

In line with what has already been noted, participants expressed difficulty managing shared resources that require collective governance, particularly in settings with limited social cohesion.

Participants were also **cautious about initiatives perceived as overly targeted or potentially stigmatising. Projects focused exclusively on specific demographic groups were sometimes seen as helpful, but also as too narrow, with a risk of excluding others in similar situations. Home based interventions, however well intended, could feel intrusive** for those who did not want outsiders entering their homes.

“If the approach is too top-down, we won’t reach people experiencing poverty once again.”

Questions about governance, the mandate of the organisations involved and the long-term accountability of support providers were raised repeatedly when the target groups were narrowly defined.

Finally, some initiatives were viewed as **promising but distant, either because they required upfront financial contributions, home ownership or infrastructure not accessible to vulnerable households**. Participants recognised the long term value of these models yet could not imagine benefiting under current constraints. In these cases, the gap between the strategic ambition of the initiative and the everyday realities of participants influenced the rankings.

In summary, **vulnerable groups consistently prioritised initiatives that:**

- **deliver direct improvements to housing and living conditions,**
- **generate tangible financial relief or reduce energy related expenses,**
- **provide trustworthy and accessible information,**
- **involve them meaningfully through participatory design and respect privacy, dignity and the limits of personal capacity.**

They responded positively to projects that create concrete impacts, support individual care, offer community engagement without imposing pressure and provide opportunities to build skills or savings. Many participants also emphasised the emotional dimension of inclusive initiatives, those that make people feel seen, respected and supported.

“Let's hope these initiatives come to Milan.”

3.2. Methodology

Across the different focus groups, the applied **methodology proved generally effective** in engaging participants and generating valuable insights. Participants were highly motivated and actively involved throughout most stages of the sessions. The approach of treating the focus group as an evaluation committee was considered relevant and empowering, as it placed decision-making directly into the hands of those benefitting from the projects discussed. The warm-up activities, structured walk-through of the voting procedure, and the clearly framed purpose helped create a positive atmosphere. In several cases, the presence of trusted local organisations contributed significantly to building confidence and ensuring participants felt safe to speak openly. The absence of project leaders from the initiatives further supported this safe environment, allowing participants to express honest and critical opinions without hesitation. Facilitators also noted that the mix of small-group exchanges and plenary discussions created good dynamics and ensured that quieter participants were able to contribute.

Several logistical learnings also emerged, including the value of providing direct and proactive compensation, organising transport support, and ensuring a comfortable

environment for participants. Trust-building, accessible venue selection, and respectful facilitation proved essential for successful implementation.

“The discussion was good and gave me confidence.”

Despite these strengths, several **methodological challenges** emerged across countries. The most prominent issue concerned **group size and time management**. In many cases, the number of participants made it difficult to explore all initiatives in depth. Groups of around fourteen people proved too large to allow for detailed discussion, especially for participants who are not accustomed to deliberative formats. Smaller groups, e.g. closer to eight people, would have



Focus group from Italy

been more suitable for the target audiences. In addition, **participants often needed time at the beginning to feel comfortable**, which reduced the time available for analysis later on. Even when sessions were extended to four hours, the schedule remained tight, and facilitators had to skip certain questions or rush through the final initiatives. As a result, the last projects presented frequently received less attention, and fatigue became noticeable, reducing the quality of discussion.

Another recurring challenge was the **information basis available to participants**. In several sessions, participants lacked details about the initiatives and frequently asked clarification questions that facilitators could not answer. This sometimes **prevented a deeper analysis** and left unresolved concerns that may have influenced the final voting. This raised the question of whether representatives of the initiatives should be present at some point during the process or whether a dedicated Q&A phase should be integrated, possibly in a second session. At the same time, it was acknowledged that the absence of representatives also enabled more open discussion, as participants did not feel observed or judged.

The **presentation of the initiatives through AI-translated videos**, posed another methodological challenge. Many participants found the wording of the translation awkward or confusing, which created distance and made it harder to connect

the project descriptions to their own lives. In some cases, participants interpreted the messages differently than intended or missed key elements altogether. Technical limitations, translation inaccuracies, and short video formats made it challenging to convey complex ideas clearly. Facilitators played a crucial role in bridging these gaps, but even with good facilitation, the format limited depth of understanding. Participants often expressed a preference for more direct, personal ways of presenting initiatives, such as live explanations, printed materials, or opportunities to speak with project owners.

Beyond technical issues, several groups highlighted that the **structure of questions** used in the methodology was **too narrow**. Focusing mainly on what was “good” or “bad” about



Focus group from Poland

each initiative did not always allow participants to express what truly mattered to them or to explore broader reflections on feasibility, relevance, and emotional or social impacts. A **more diverse question set**, including prompts about personal experiences, implementation barriers, or broader impacts, could have enriched the discussions.

“I am intrigued and confident, but I also have new doubts after today’s discussion.”

The methodology also faced challenges related to **cognitive load and sustained concentration**. Many participants, especially those facing daily stressors or lower levels of formal education, found it difficult to maintain focus over several hours. After approximately two hours, **attention dropped noticeably**, and facilitators had to work harder to maintain engagement. This also **influenced the final review and ranking phase**: while the voting process itself was easy and well received, participants were often more tired and had not fully retained all elements of the discussion. In some groups, the voting outcomes differed significantly from the earlier debates, raising questions about whether the timing of the decision-making should be adjusted.

In addition, the methodology revealed limitations when participants supported each other during the session, such as when individuals with disabilities required assistance. Pairing participants or relying on mutual support sometimes limited the extent to which each

person could express their own perspective. This underlined the importance of ensuring accessibility, pacing, and sufficient facilitation support.

In summary, while the method successfully fostered engagement, ownership, and open expression, it also revealed limitations in pacing, group size, information availability, and cognitive load.

Future focus groups may benefit from:

- **smaller groups,**
- **more time for discussion,**
- **improved and clearer presentation formats,**
- **opportunities for participants to pose questions directly to initiative representatives**
- **and a broader range of guiding questions.**

Dividing the analysis into two sessions or allowing participants more individual reflection time, such as writing down impressions before group exchanges, could further support more balanced discussion.


“It’s been educational and exciting, and I’ve gained more insight into what kinds of initiatives might become available for vulnerable people. If some of these projects end up being options we can choose, I would probably use them.”

Imprint

Coordination King Baudouin Foundation:

Pascale Taminiaux Van Laere | Senior Project Coordinator


taminiaux.p@kbs-frb.be

 +32 2 549 02 91

Editing:

Carolin Piras | ifok


carolin.piras@ifok.de

 + 49 6251 8263 121

Facilitation partner:


Ophelie Bretaudeau | Missions Publiques

ophelie.bretraudeau@missionspubliques.com

 +33 6 19 61 59 92

Aske Palsberg | Democracy X

aspa@demx.dk

 +45 26 35 69 91


Sara Calcagnini | Museo Nazionale della
Scienza e della Tecnologia Leonardo da Vinci

calcagnini@museoscienza.it

 +39 02 48 555 322

Sabina Kozińska | Polish
Foundation for Energy Efficiency

s.kozinska@fewe.pl

 +48 786 940 969