



ACHIEVING HIGH-INTEGRITY VOLUNTARY CLIMATE ACTION

M8 – Stakeholder Engagement Guidelines

WP5 – Communication & dissemination



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EC Summary Requirements

1. Changes with respect to the Description of Action (DoA)

No changes with respect to the work described in the DoA.

2. Dissemination and uptake

This report will be primarily used by ACHIEVE’s consortium partners to guide the stakeholder activities of the project. It can be also used as a reference by external researchers and future EU projects for developing their own engagement guidelines.

3. Short summary of results (<250 words)

One of ACHIEVE’s main missions is the active engagement of policymakers and societal stakeholders in a co-creative process. By involving stakeholders from the beginning, we ensure that the project’s outcomes are not only scientifically robust but also responsive to the real-world needs of those who will implement and benefit from them. The Stakeholder Engagement Guidelines are designed to facilitate this co-creation process, offering a consistent and structured approach for involving diverse voices across all stages of the project. By providing multiple avenues for engagement—through surveys, interviews, workshops, and digital platforms—these guidelines aim to foster transparency, collaboration, and trust. The integration of stakeholder input will be vital to enhancing the integrity and effectiveness of voluntary climate action. Through these guidelines, ACHIEVE ensures that its scientific insights are grounded in practical, stakeholder-driven solutions that accelerate the transition to climate neutrality.

4. Evidence of accomplishment

This report.





Preface

In recent years an unprecedented number of voluntary climate commitments have been made by a wide array of non-state and subnational actors. These voluntary climate actions aim to reduce greenhouse gas emissions and build climate resilience and are crucial for lowering risks of exceeding warming limits. However, the full potential of voluntary climate action can only be realised when integrity-related concerns are overcome. ACHIEVE aims to identify opportunities to strengthen and scale up high-integrity voluntary climate action towards achieving net-zero emissions by mid-century. The project will generate transformative and timely scientific insights on the role, effectiveness and integrity of voluntary climate action including carbon credits; assess the integrity and impacts of such action; analyse how policies and regulations, and high-integrity voluntary climate action can strengthen each other; and use scientific findings to support the scaling up of high-integrity voluntary action. This will be achieved through a highly inter- and transdisciplinary consortium that, from the start, actively engages policymakers and other societal stakeholders in co-creating outcomes that respond to end users' needs. ACHIEVE is aligned with the Work Programme of Cluster 5, Destination 1 "Climate sciences and responses for the transformation towards climate neutrality" as the project directly contributes to advancing knowledge and providing solutions for climate change specifically on high integrity voluntary climate action. ACHIEVE will develop transition pathways to climate neutrality that integrate voluntary climate action by cities, regions and companies; it will develop novel social science insights for climate action; contribute to better understanding sustainability co-benefits and trade-offs; and increase transparency and trust in voluntary climate action by strengthening integrity and making scientific results easily accessible for different stakeholder groups.

RU – Stichting Radboud Universiteit	NL	 Radboud Universiteit
NCI – New Climate Institute for Climate Policy and Global Sustainability GGMBH	DE	
PBL – Ministerie van Infrastructuur en Waterstaat	NL	
OEKO – Öko-Institut E.V. – Institut für Angewandte Ökologie	DE	
E3M – E3-Modelling AE	EL	
UEF – ITA-Suomen Yliopisto	FI	
CATIE – Centro Agronomico Tropical de Investigacion y Enseñanza Catie	CR	
SU – Stockholms Universitet	SE	
HOL – HOLISTIC IKE	EL	
WWF – Fondo Mundial para la Naturaleza Colombia - WWF Colombia	CO	
CDP – CDP Worldwide (Europe) Gemeinnützige GmbH	DE	
UOXF – The Chancellor, Masters and Scholars of the University of Oxford	GB	





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1 Purpose of stakeholder engagement in ACHIEVE

Stakeholder engagement can be defined as the communication-related actions that an organisation can perform to secure the involvement and commitment of stakeholders in a project or reduce their indifference or hostility towards it. There are numerous opinions over who exactly stakeholders are in a specific project (Reed M., 2009, Ackermann, F., & Eden, C., 2011). For ACHIEVE's stakeholder engagement guidelines, we adopt a very broad definition from Arsenopoulos & Nikolaev (2023):

A stakeholder is any individual or group affected by the project, and/or who may be interested in the project, and/or is able to influence the project's outcomes.

Based on this conceptualisation of a stakeholder, engagement methods primarily interact with the interest and influence of the stakeholders over a specific project and enable dialogue between the and its stakeholders (Kujala, 2022). These interactions may include at a basic level the simple provision of information in order to increase the interest of the stakeholders and put the project in their radar. Conversely, at the highest level of engagement, stakeholders may actively collaborate and become effectively partners with the project team.

Based on the interest and influence level of different stakeholders, **four levels of engagement** will be used in ACHIEVE's engagement activities, inspired by Durham et al. (2014):

1. **Inform:** Typically consisting of a one-way information flow, e.g. sharing information about the project through a project website or a conference. Practically coincides with the communication activities of the project as part of its Communication, Dissemination, and Exploitation (CDE) strategy.
2. **Consult:** Stakeholders are asked for their opinion on a specific topic (e.g., through a survey) or are asked to provide information that will be used in the project's research work (e.g., on the subjective effectiveness of specific voluntary climate actions).
3. **Involve:** Stakeholders are invited to actively participate in the project, as in the case of the members of Stakeholder Advisory Board of ACHIEVE that are participating in project meeting and activities.
4. **Collaborate:** The highest level of engagement, involving simultaneously interested and influential stakeholders that can co-create the research questions and support the development of the project.

Involving stakeholders is essential to the success of a research process such as the one taking place in ACHIEVE. The insights, perspectives, and expertise of consulted stakeholders can ensure that our research findings and products are not only relevant but also useful and widely supported. Additionally, co-creation activities can foster collaboration, empowering stakeholders to take ownership of the outcomes and leading to more innovative, practical solutions that reflect the needs and priorities of everyone involved. Apart from practical benefits of stakeholder engagement and co-creation, many researchers see legitimacy, trust, and fairness as important moral aims of stakeholder engagement (Kujala, 2022).

Based on these considerations, the overall objectives of stakeholder engagement for ACHIEVE are the following:

- Facilitate inclusive participation through the engagement of diverse range of stakeholders, ensuring that different perspectives and expertise are incorporated.



- Ensure transparent information and communication to maintain open, honest, and continuous exchange with stakeholders.
- Foster co-creation through active participation from stakeholders in co-designing research questions or approaches within the project.
- Enable capacity building for stakeholders to effectively engage and use our results.

The Stakeholder Engagement Guidelines will be an important reference document for ACHIEVE’s partners to enable the aforementioned objectives, guiding stakeholder interactions and fostering meaningful co-creation throughout the project. This first version provides a basic framework of understanding engagement in the context of ACHIEVE, identifying stakeholders (Section 2) and methods to approach them (Section 3), and providing an initial strategy in terms of monitoring and privacy issues (Sections 4 and 5). The guidelines follow a similar structure with the CDE Plan of the project (Nanasi et al., 2024) and together they provide guidance to all external interactions of the project. By integrating structured stakeholder engagement and communication methods, we create a platform for diverse voices to contribute, ensuring that every perspective enriches the project's outcomes.

Similar to the CDE Plan, the Stakeholder Engagement Guidelines will be also a living document that will be updated throughout the project and adapted to the requirements of different activities. Specifically, the Guidelines are expected to be updated based on the stakeholder interactions throughout the development and use of the Stakeholder Engagement platform of ACHIEVE in the context of Work Package (WP) 4. Additionally, the guidelines will inform and be informed by the organisation of the capacity development webinars (WP4) and the online co-creation workshops of WP6).



2 Stakeholder identification

The main stakeholder groups of ACHIEVE are similar to the target audiences that were identified in the CDE Plan of the project. These groups and their relationship to the project are the following:

- **Policymakers and public sector entities:** key stakeholders for the integration of high-integrity voluntary climate action into policies and transition pathways.
- **Sub-national authorities and cities:** key stakeholders in defining local and regional needs that can be translated and upscaled into transition pathways.
- **Private sector entities and their respective associations:** stakeholders that are committed to reduce their emissions through participation in VCIs and carbon credit schemes, or through individual action.
- **Environmental, climate, and civil society NGOs:** key players in fostering and monitoring voluntary climate action, NGOs will be one of the main targets of capacity building programmes developed in ACHIEVE.
- **Scientists and researchers:** These stakeholders are key to advance the state of the art and excellence of voluntary climate action research in different disciplines. Users of newly developed methods (e.g., standardised assessment frameworks).
- **Citizens, including subgroups such as students:** Essential to ensure the societal acceptance of voluntary climate initiatives. This also includes students at universities who will be able to assess voluntary climate action in their careers.
- **Media:** Promoting the findings of the project to the wider public.

It is noted that most of these groups are defined broadly, such as “policymakers” or “researchers”. However, the members of such groups may be quite differently affected by the project and may have different interests and influence. In that case, we will further distinguish each sub-group and consider it separately during the project.

Based on the definition of engagement used in Section 1 and the potential engagement levels that are identified, stakeholders can be further divided based on their interest and influence on the project and can also include members of the project consortium. In the case of ACHIEVE, we identify the following groups of stakeholders:

- **CDE core** is led by Holistic and WWF Colombia and supported by RU. The CDE core partners are developing and implementing the communication, dissemination, and exploitation strategy and support all stakeholder engagement activities of the project.
- **Internal Stakeholders are the core ACHIEVE Partners:** NCI, PBL, OEKO, E3M, UEF, CATIE, SU, CDP, and UOXF. Core CDE staff will work together with researchers and advisors to strengthen internal capacities and build strong messages to other audiences.
- **External Stakeholders:** private sector, subnational governments, and organisations interested or working on the main topics of the project such as High-Integrity Principles, Voluntary Climate Initiatives, and Carbon Credits. For example, a major stakeholder group for the project will be the Alliances for Climate Action (ACA), a network of national alliances dedicated to driving ambitious

climate action, increasing public support for addressing the climate crisis, encouraging local governments to decarbonize faster by supporting 1.5C-aligned national climate targets.

The interactions among these different stakeholder levels are shown in Figure 1. Apart from the three main groups, specific sub-groups are also highlighted such as the ACA members, the Stakeholder Advisory Board, the network of ACHIEVE partners, and the Technical and Communications Staff of the project.

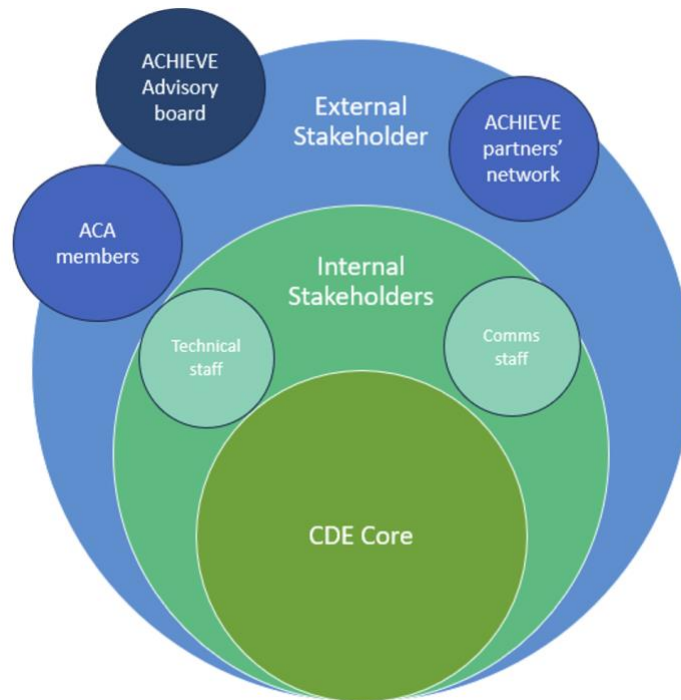


Figure 1. Interactions between the main groups of ACHIEVE's stakeholders

As an example of these interactions, WWF from the CDE core team will start approaching stakeholders from the ACAs at COP 29 from November 11 to 17. WWF will approach a delegation of about 20 people, from different countries including Argentina, Chile, Mexico, Japan, South Africa, UAE, USA and Vietnam. The intervention is designed as a fellowship, where members of the delegation will follow a learning and exchange journey throughout the week. These interactions will be important for ACHIEVE as they can serve as insights for the design of the stakeholder engagement platform which will aim to replicate these interactions in a higher scale.

Apart from the stakeholder groups that are already known in the project (such as ACAs), there may be other groups that are relevant for specific project activities. In this case, stakeholder mapping methodologies can be used to understand who the key stakeholders are, which expertise they have, and where and how they can contribute to the project (or a specific part thereof). Indicatively, a stakeholder mapping process can include criteria for selecting stakeholders such as their influence, interest, or expertise. The stakeholders can be then invited to subscribe to the newsletter, the stakeholder engagement platform, and the social media of the project to keep up-to-date with ACHIEVE and to be part of the stakeholder pool that will receive invitations to the co-creation events of the project. All these interactions will adhere to GDPR requirements such as informing stakeholders what will happen with their collected data etc. (see Section 5 for more details).



3 Methods and tools for stakeholder engagement

There is a wide variety of methods to engage the project stakeholders. Their selection depends on the purpose and desired/appropriate level of engagement, i.e. on whether we want to inform, consult, involve, or coordinate. Additionally, at different project stages, different methods may be the most appropriate ones to approach the same stakeholder group. Finally, the methods must consider the needs, capacity, and expectations of stakeholders (Durham E., 2014).

The ACHIEVE project aims to effectively engage stakeholders by leveraging a variety of methods and tools, each with its own strengths and limitations. Understanding these advantages and disadvantages is essential for selecting the most appropriate mix of methods to meet the project's objectives.

The methods can be informative (one-way) or participatory (two-way). Informative methods need to consider the needs of stakeholders and normally they are co-defined or co-designed with the stakeholders. The participatory methods include (Durham E., 2014):

3.1 Opening out methods for dialogue and collecting information

To facilitate open dialogue and information gathering, the ACHIEVE project will employ techniques such as brainstorming, Metaplan, Venn diagrams, Ideas listing, and Carousel. These techniques are very useful during the initial project phases, where the project is adapted to better fit the needs of stakeholders. The methods include:

- **Brainstorming.** It is used to rapidly identify initial ideas from a group. Participants are encouraged to share any ideas, even if they do not appear relevant.
- **Metaplan.** Participants are given note papers (typically 2 – 5 each) and asked to write their ideas on one or piece of paper. Then participants place the note papers on a wall, grouping similar ideas together. The facilitator summarizes each group and possibly allows participants to further elaborate their views.
- **Venn diagrams.** It helps participants identify key issues and overlaps between them.
- **Carousel.** Participants, via social media, are asked to list ideas or information on a specific topic
- **List ideas or information.** Participants are divided in groups and each group contributes to one of the topics, before being rotated to the next. Participants read the ideas of the previous groups before adding new points.

3.2 Exploring methods

Additionally, methods like categorization, mapping, problem tree analysis, SWOT analysis, and timeline creation will be used for deeper exploration and analysis of key issues. These methods enable the participants to explore and evaluate project findings.

More analytically, the exploring methods we will use during ACHIEVE include:

- **Categorisation.** Participants are asked to group ideas into themes.
- **Mind-mapping.** It is used to quickly capture and link ideas with stakeholders.
- **Problem tree analysis.** It is like mind-mapping, but simpler and with more limited use. It is





applicable when the purpose is to keep the process simple and quick.

- **SWOT analysis.** Participants are asked to specify the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats related to the research question.
- **Timelines.** They are used to help discuss historical or future events with a strong temporal dimension. Participants may be asked to write comments at different points.

3.3 Closing and decision-making methods

For decision-making processes, ACHIEVE will utilise voting, ranking, and prioritization methods to ensure clarity and consensus among stakeholders.

- **Voting.** It is a quick and democratic method, but the participants are unable to explain their preferences and there is a risk of biased results unless anonymity is ensured.
- **Ranking.** It is used to get ideas in rank order. Although reaching a consensus might be challenging, the discussions might be fruitful.
- **Prioritisation.** It differs from the ranking because here participants can express the strength of their feelings about options.
- **Prioritisation.** It is used to decide on an issue involving multiple dimensions or criteria.

Table 1. Levels of stakeholder engagement and associated benefits. Source: Durham et al. (2014)

Benefits of engagement	Level of engagement			
	Inform	Consult	Involve	Collaborate
Benefits to research teams	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Higher profile and enhanced reputation • Useful contacts for future engagement • Improved dissemination of results • Enhanced impact of research • Increased support for the research 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Improved chances of funding success • Better knowledge • Opportunities for learning • Better quality data 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • More resources provided • Potential to improve methods 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Improved research • Better analysis • Improved potential to influence research & society
Benefits to stakeholders	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Opportunities for learning • Better access to knowledge 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Access to better technologies • Business opportunities 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Opportunities for connection and networking 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Opportunities to influence or drive research



	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Improved decision-making • Improved policies 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Sense of inclusion and involvement 		
Benefits to wider society	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Connect AcA's with society • Improved VCA options • Reduced barriers between science and society 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Improved trust and respect • Access to opportunities 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Better evidence 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Shared responsibility & decision-making • More relevant and inclusive research

3.4 The tools for implementation

In the final stages, ACHIEVE will implement a range of tools, including surveys, reports, interviews, workshops, webinars, stakeholder platform co-creation, training courses, and capacity-building sessions. These tools will ensure comprehensive engagement, knowledge-sharing, and the achievement of the project's goals.

In detail the tools for implementation are:

- **Surveys:** Use structured questionnaires to gather feedback on key issues or topics from a broad range of stakeholders, e.g., LimeSurvey¹, Mentimeter², EUSurvey³.
- **Reports:** Share project updates and findings through regular reports to keep stakeholders informed. A LinkedIn community has already been created with the AcA's and ACHIEVE project and also survey outcomes will be published regularly.
- **Interviews:** Conduct one-on-one or group interviews with stakeholders to gain in-depth insights and qualitative feedback. Interviews can be conducted online through a variety of online tools, e.g., Teams, Zoom, Skype.
- **Workshops:** Organize interactive workshops to facilitate brainstorming, problem-solving, and collaboration among stakeholders.
- **Webinars:** Use webinars to engage remote stakeholders and provide a platform for discussions and presentations. All webinars will be available online in ACHIEVE's YouTube channel and website.
- **Stakeholder Platform:** We will co-develop a platform where your stakeholders can access project information, submit feedback, and engage in discussions.
- **Training courses and capacity building:** As part of WWF's interactions with the ACAs, we will

¹ <https://www.limesurvey.org/>

² <https://www.mentimeter.com>

³ <https://ec.europa.eu/eusurvey/>



organise training courses and capacity-building workshops to enable ACA’s participants to understand and use VCA options more effectively. An example of this capacity building will take place during COP29 as part of the ACAs Fellowship Program.

3.5 Kick-off Workshop for the co-designing of the platform during COP 29

The ACHIEVE project aspires to start the co-creation of the stakeholder engagement platform during the ACA Fellowship Program at COP 29 with a collaborative workshop where participants can share their initial thoughts, ideas, and expectations. We will use interactive tools like Mentimeter for brainstorming and sketching features together.

At first, ACHIEVE will start co-designing the stakeholder engagement platform together with the Alliances for Climate Action (ACAs) and will adopt during this process all the aforementioned techniques. At the same time, ACHIEVE will guide them on how they can effectively apply each technique.

Also, we plan to give a short survey to the participants at the beginning and at the end of the fellowship program. The first survey will include questions related to their expectations while the second will check if these expectations have been met and what suggestions would they have about replicating this experience online. The second survey will be used for the evaluation phase as well.



4 Engagement implementation and monitoring

During the ACHIEVE project we will use a phased approach on our engagement and outline in the CDE plan when and how stakeholder engagement will occur at different stages of the project (e.g., planning, implementation, review). We will also use regular check-ins and schedule regular updates and opportunities for engagement to keep stakeholders informed and involved.

4.1 Stakeholders fatigue and how ACHIEVE will try to avoid it

Stakeholders easily tire of engagement processes, especially if they are time consuming and with no immediate results (Mayer D., 2019). This problem can be mitigated by clearly informing stakeholders about the project and their commitments in it and ensuring clear benefits for them from the engagement process.

Stakeholder engagement is a crucial ingredient for the success of Horizon projects. It needs to be built on a two-way, mutually beneficial relationship.

To prevent stakeholder fatigue throughout the project, ACHIEVE will implement methods designed to sustain engagement and ensure more effective outcomes as mentioned below:

The ACHIEVE stakeholder engagement strategy to avoid stakeholder fatigue and ensure better results is:

1. **Common goals:** The ACHIEVE project will establish common goals with the stakeholders. It will consider and communicate to stakeholders what is the purpose of their engagement, and how much will be required from each stakeholder. Also, what will they get in return, and when will they get it? ACHIEVE will provide them with the data they need, offer networking connections, help them to build communication bridges across departments and sectors that will make their work easier, and build trust between stakeholders, it is crucial to clarify how their involvement will result in the development of better tools for them to use in their work.
2. **Co-creation:** stakeholders' voices will influence the creation of the platform and the goals for measuring the project's success are aligned with the needs of stakeholders. They will take an active role in defining the challenges, the problems, and the necessary pathways for change, based on their expertise and knowledge.
3. **Cross-fertilisation:** Networking and exchange of knowledge will be used to facilitate mutual learning between different stakeholders.
4. **Capacity building:** We will seek out opportunities to enhance technical and institutional capacities, to establish a common language.

ACHIEVE's goal after the engagement process is that the stakeholders will be viewing some of their challenges in a new light, with new tools to address them, a new network of people to collaborate with, and with broadened options for making different, and better, decisions.

4.2 Feedback and evaluation

Throughout the project, ACHIEVE will gather continuous feedback to enhance the platform and ensure its



ongoing improvement.

Since we will co-design the platform together with the Alliances for Climate Action (ACAs), we will create **Focus Groups** and use this setting to test different features, layouts, and functionality options to see what resonates most with users.

Alos, we will run **Prototype Feedback Surveys** where we will share early versions of the platform to get input on layout, features, and usability.

In addition, since one of the platform’s goals is to promote open dialogue between the ACAs we will create **Community Feedback Boards**, which will serve as online forum where users can share their feedback, report issues, and suggest features. This can also foster a sense of community among users, where they can engage with one another and help improve the platform.

In terms of feedback mechanisms, we will ensure that stakeholders can provide continuous feedback through surveys, emails, or via the online platform. We will also periodically assess the effectiveness of the engagement process and make necessary adjustments as part of the CDE plan.

In terms of monitoring and evaluation of engagement methods we can use international standards such as the AA1000 Stakeholder Engagement Standard. The AA1000 Account Ability Stakeholder Engagement Standard is the most widely applied stakeholder engagement standard – establishes the global benchmark for conducting high-quality stakeholder engagement projects and programs.

WWF and HOLISTIC will continuously monitor the platform after its implementation and find ways to improve it. Other stakeholder engagement considerations and challenges will be also addressed.



5 GDPR Compliance

While identifying, contacting, and engaging with external stakeholders, the ACHIEVE project will comply with the General Data Protection Regulation on the protection of natural persons regarding the collection and processing of personal data and the free movement of such data. Stakeholder contacts will be stored in the Team's platform provided by Radboud University where only members from the project have access. In particular, the following requirements will be considered:

- By subscribing to the project's network, the stakeholders will be asked to provide minimum and limited amount of personal data, i.e. name, affiliation, role in the organization, country and contact data (email address and phone number). An Informed Consent Form explaining the use of the personal data will be available as part of the registration form and its approval (opt-in approach) will be necessary to complete the subscription.
- No sensitive data will be collected from the stakeholder while registering.
- The personal data collected from the stakeholders will not be publicly available (i.e. these personal data will not be shared with third parties and are not attribute to any commercial use), but solely serve the purpose of guaranteeing the project's stakeholder interaction. No contact data will be shared without consent.
- No secondary use of personal data will be performed. In order to determine an efficient communication strategy with the identified stakeholders and to cluster them into target groups, analysis of data Persona (i.e. analysis of influence / position in an organisation, analysis of relevance / type of organisation) will be performed.
- The stakeholders will be approached in their professional capacity in the context of the ACHIEVE project only.
- To guarantee the confidentiality of the stakeholders' opinions, publication of stakeholder's input in project reports will be anonymous unless the stakeholder has agreed to include his/her personal data against the comment.
- After subscription to the project's platform, the stakeholders reserve the right to terminate their communication with and involvement in the project at any time upon their request (opt-out option).



6 Conclusion

Stakeholder engagement plays a key role in the implementation of the ACHIEVE project. Therefore, for an efficient engagement strategy, close collaboration between all work packages is required. More specifically, the stakeholder management strategy will be strongly supported by the communication team to ensure a systematic outreach and an efficient messaging to the target groups. Standardized rules for identifying and engaging with the stakeholders is a key requirement. By adhering to these rules, overlaps between work packages will be avoided and best use of stakeholders' time will be ensured. As such complying with the general personal data protection rules will be ensured. Engagement with the stakeholders is an ongoing activity of the project and aims to build a sustainable two-way communication and collaboration with the most relevant experts and stakeholders. Regular monitoring and evaluation of the engaging activities is required to explore areas for improvements for the next activities.



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