

# Energy Communities

## Building Citizen Acceptance & Engagement

An Interreg Europe Policy Learning Platform event

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Budapest, Hungary



**Summary:** Energy communities empower local populations to generate, consume, and manage their own renewable energy, promoting sustainable development, reducing greenhouse gas emissions, and stimulating local economies through job creation and reduced energy costs for residents. Municipalities and regions have a role to play in their establishment, but many do not know where to start. This workshop gathered 69 policymakers, and explored good practices on how to engage citizens in the early stages of energy community establishment, including an interactive training session on community formation, led by the association RESCoop.eu. Presentations were provided by all of the Interreg Europe projects examining energy communities – BLOWIND, LEEWAY, REC4EU, ShareRES and SireENERGY.

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## 1. Highlights

Energy Communities are recognised as having high potential for the energy transition and are supported by the EU’s energy policy framework. The [Clean Energy Package of 2018](#) introduced two definitions of energy communities – Citizen Energy Communities and Renewable Energy Communities, with the later recognising that Communities should provide a social good, not only financial profit. The second von der Leyen Commission, appointed this year, is expected to further support energy communities with a new Citizens Energy Package and Energy Communities Action Plan. To support development of energy communities, a number of different support instruments are already available, including the [Citizen Led Renovation Initiative](#), the [Energy Communities Repository](#), and the new [European Energy Communities Facility](#).

Energy communities are highly flexible, with many possible legal forms and different service offers. The public sector can do much to support their emergence, from setting favourable regulations, engaging and informing citizens, establishing frontrunner groups, offering financial support and acting as a buyer for generated energy. They can also share resources, including staff, facilities, land or rooftops for the installation of renewable technologies, or even act directly as members in the community. In some cases, local authorities can take the lead in establishing energy communities and then cede control and ownership to citizens – this helps to derisk investment while also ensuring longevity of projects, which may otherwise lose political support.

The workshop explored several case studies related to energy communities, looking at approaches for engaging and communicating with citizens, and tools and methods for supporting the emergence of energy communities. Discussions showed that the case studies were considered as being replicable, though there is a need to customise to the local context, and municipalities need to take the lead for implementation in less experienced regions.

## 2. Good practices

### Citizen Engagement & Communication

#### Consensus Building Among Stakeholders (BIOWIND)

- The BLOWIND project has examined how to improve acceptance of wind turbines, with a particular consideration of energy communities, which are a proven way of reducing resistance as they share benefits amongst the local population. BLOWIND's examination of good practices has revealed the need for transparent communication, with workshops, meetings and public consultations to bring citizens onboard. In particular, they identified the need to incentivise participation and share benefits as being key. For example, in **Catalonia** there is a **requirement** that local individuals own or finance at least 20% of rural wind energy projects.

#### **Engagement Path for Stakeholders (REC4EU)**

- REC4EU has explored the role of citizen engagement in developing RECs. They noted the need to inform and build capacity of citizens, as energy community members are expected to have an active role in the community implementation, and not just be passive consumers. The project's work recommends some key messages to use, focusing on economic advantage with a low and stable price for energy; appealing to people's environmental consciousness by explaining the contribution to reducing carbon emissions; and stressing the social benefits of fighting energy poverty and improving social cohesion. They also emphasised the need for local champions to drive project development, and the benefit of sharing success stories from other RECs. The project will publish their engagement path in February of 2025 with advice for other public authorities.

#### **Communication Strategy for Energy Communities (SHAREs – Horizon 2020)**

- The SHAREs project, funded by Horizon 2020, developed communication strategies for energy communities in its six participating countries. The project identified local heroes, built one-stop-shops, and implemented twenty pilots of energy communities. It also identified four main stakeholder types – prosumers, consumers, multipliers, and investors – each needing different communication channels and messages. From this, the project developed materials and methodologies which are available for other countries and regions to use, including a blueprint for the one-stop-shops, white label communication materials which can be adapted to regional contexts, typologies of stakeholder groups, and key messages for communication campaigns.

### **Energy Community Support Programmes**

#### **ENLUCES: Energy Communities Germinator for Extremadura (ShareRES)**

- EnLuces is an initiative launched by the energy co-operative EnVerde, to empower citizens in energy community development. EnLuces runs training and capacity building activities for different audiences (municipal staff, citizens, multipliers), a network of promoters, and a web platform. The network is comprised of ambassadors and local heroes able to motivate citizens, and act as disseminators. The website enables interaction and communication between different actors from the third sector, the private sector, public administration and academia. It also provides a collaborative space to share information, as well as providing access to resources, documents, the online training courses, and a roadmap on how to establish an energy community. After the first year of implementation, four energy communities have been established from the support offered by EnLuces.

#### **EKIOLA: Public-private partnership for energy community development (SIreENERGY)**

- EKIOLA is an initiative for developing energy communities in the Basque Country, developed by the Basque Energy Agency and the engineering company KREAN. EKIOLA follows a set process to establish energy communities, making a proposal to local government, performing feasibility studies where new PV projects are dimensioned so that they cover the energy demand of a group of households, acquiring permits, and developing and implementing the overall project and managing the co-operative. Municipalities act as promoters to raise awareness of the project and may also make land or rooftops available for PV installation. The Basque government provides the initial investment, so that EKIOLA takes on all the PV project development risk before citizens, public institutions and local associations are invited to join the cooperative as investors and consumers. The practice has shown that municipalities and public agencies have a key role in building confidence, resulting in high citizen involvement.

#### **CIRENA: Regional funding for local advisors (REC4EU)**

- The CIRENA initiative aims to facilitate new energy community projects as a contact point for citizens and local authorities. CIRENA raises awareness amongst the public, supports new communities to structure their co-operation and access subsidies, gives legal and technical advice, supports in developing a communication and outreach plan, and shares good practices amongst stakeholder networks. Since its foundation in 2017, CIRENA has supported more than fifty projects in the region of Nouvelle Aquitaine, and nearly two-thousand citizens have been in contact with CIRENA in 2023.

#### **Capacity Building Materials**

As part of the workshop, RESCoop.eu ran a training session for the participants looking at socio-dynamic mapping of stakeholders, and the LICHT approach for setting up energy communities, and participants were invited to emulate the process for their own territory. Details on the socio-dynamic mapping can be found in the COMPILE Toolkit while the LICHT methodology can be found through RESCoop.eu. Additional guidance can be found in the guidebook Community Energy: A practical guide to reclaiming power and the RESCoop toolbox.

## **3. Next steps**

#### **Key Messages & Recommendations**

Drawing from the discussions and presentations, several key recommendations can be drawn for regions to implement.

- Municipalities have a key role to play in establishing energy communities, especially in less experienced regions, through engaging citizens and making them aware of the opportunities, as well as providing training and technical expertise, and derisking investment by supporting sound business model development;
- Having local authorities involved in energy communities helps to increase acceptance of those communities by building confidence in citizens and groups, as they are led by a well trusted local player. Well respected local associations may be able to play a similar role;
- Energy communities often form around a local hero, or ambassador, who has the passion and vision to take the lead in development. Reach out to community organisations and associations to find and support them;

- There are many ways for municipalities to engage, from increasing awareness, to becoming members of energy communities themselves, or making their land, buildings and resources available;
- A thorough stakeholder mapping is a prerequisite for action, identifying those who need to be engaged as core partners, those who may be investors, or those who may be customers. Different levels of engagement and types of information will be needed for different groups;
- Community development can be bottom-up or top-down. Both models are interesting and can be supported, but each model may be more suitable for different technologies or contexts (top-down might be more suitable for wind or multi-MW PV projects that require larger investments, technical expertise, complex permitting and are overall more risky, for example);
- Explore the many resources available from the European Union, RESCoop.eu and the SHAREs project – these can provide financial and technical guidance, as well as ready to adapt methodologies and tools;
- Learn from those who have already developed energy communities – such as the [Bürgerenergie Pfaffenhofen](#) (Germany), [Kistelek Energy Community](#) (Hungary), and the [Community Energy Working Group of Friends of the Earth Hungary](#), all of whom shared their experiences;
- Be sure to keep up with the Interreg Europe projects – [BIOWIND](#), [LEEWAY](#), [REC4EU](#), [ShareRES](#) and [SireENERGY](#) – to see their good practices and results.

### Further Resources from the Interreg Europe Policy Learning Platform

Discover resources from the Interreg Europe Policy Learning Platform at the [Energy Communities Collection Page](#).

#### Policy Briefs

- [Empowering Citizens for Energy Communities](#)
- [Tackling energy poverty with low-carbon interventions](#)
- [Supporting energy renovation of households through One-Stop-Shops](#)
- [Skills for the energy transition](#)

#### Webinars

- [Jobs and skills for the energy transition](#)
- [Green transition under the European Recovery and Resilience Facility](#)
- [Renewable energy financing for the public sector](#)
- [Mobilising citizen financing for renewables](#)

#### Peer Review & Matchmaking Reports

- [Supporting the development of Renewable Energy Communities](#)
- [Fast tracking Renewable Energy Communities in the Cypriot context](#)
- [Citizen participation models to increase local value creation for renewable energy](#)

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