

The logo for 'ENERGY PROSPECTS' features the text in a bold, dark blue, sans-serif font. To the right of the text is a stylized graphic of a person with arms raised, standing within a series of concentric, curved lines that resemble a target or a signal. The background of the top right corner is decorated with larger, light blue concentric arcs.

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PROSPECTS**

# National Policy Measures and Best Practices for Citizen Engagement in the Energy Transition

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## Introduction

During the past five years, the European Union has made significant legislative advancements towards the objective of reaching climate neutrality by 2050 with the introduction of the European Climate Law, the European Green Deal, and the 'Fit for 55' Climate and Energy Package. As we enter the implementation phase of these policies, understanding and supporting citizen involvement in this process is becoming more and more important. Especially considering the far-reaching societal transformation that the climate and energy transition implies. To this end, EnergyPROSPECTS has examined **how *energy citizenship* is taking shape across the continent today and under which conditions it could be further supported to contribute to the fulfilment of national and European decarbonisation objectives.**

**Energy citizenship provides a holistic approach for policymakers to consider citizens' multifaceted roles in the energy transition.** The concept encompasses various forms of civic involvement and engagement that can be practised at different levels of action, through different constellations of actors, in the fields of energy production, energy consumption, and in the governance of the energy and climate transition. This policy brief targets national policymakers with policy measures and best practices they could implement to advance energy citizenship in their country.

First, we introduce our approach to energy citizenship, with concrete examples of where and how it can be practised. Second, we highlight the potential of *energy citizenship initiatives* as enablers for citizen action in the energy transition. Going beyond energy communities, energy citizenship initiatives comprise a variety of organisational forms, driven by a diversity of actors that support and enable citizens to practise different forms of energy citizenship. Thereafter, concrete recommendations and best practices are outlined.



## Where and how can energy citizenship be practised?

Energy citizenship is being practised in a variety of ways across the European continent. This section outlines where and how energy citizenship can be practised, both individually and collectively.<sup>1</sup>

### Examples of actions in the private sphere

- Switching to a green electricity provider.
- Adopting soft or/and clean mobility options.
- Adopting energy saving and efficiency measures, including energy renovation.
- Becoming a prosumer through the installation of solar panels.
- Participating in demand flexibility and/or shifting use to align with time of use tariffs or energy events, for example by using smart metres.
- Aspiring for self-sufficiency through off grid energy sources and storage technologies.
- Energy literacy measures undertaken at the household level.

### Examples of actions within private and public organisations

- Practices mentioned above carried out within the framework of an organisation.
- Contributing to the development of new practices, business models and partnerships that contribute to the energy transition.
- Initiate energy saving campaigns or clean mobility plans at the workplace, school or university.
- Motivate colleagues for the installation of solar energy on the roof of the organisation.
- Supporting the organisation in acting as an intermediary that supports other initiatives working to accelerate the energy transition.

### Examples of actions in the public sphere

- Participating in consultations where citizens are invited to express their views on the energy transition in general or regarding a specific topic or project.
- Participating in digital participation platforms that enable consultation and proposal-making in the climate and energy sector.
- Voting in referendums and elections at different political levels regarding the energy transition.
- Shaping the political offer and the public debate with regards to the energy transition.

### Examples of collective action in citizen-based organisations and/or through collaboration between NGOs, public authorities, municipalities and/or private actors

- Engaging in initiatives shaped by NGOs, public authorities, municipalities, and/or private actors, such as involvement in local climate-energy plans, energy saving campaigns, home renovation

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<sup>1</sup> List adapted from Debourdeau *et al.* (2022). [Catalogue of energy citizenship cases and typologies](#). EnergyPROSPECTS Deliverable 3.2; and Debourdeau *et al.* (2021). [Conceptual typology](#). EnergyPROSPECTS Deliverable 2.2, European Commission Grant Agreement No. 101022492.



schemes, or buying shares in renewable energy production (as minority shareholders and/or to foster local acceptance).

- Engaging in initiatives shaped by citizen-based organisations, such as the creation of networks, cooperatives, and communities, sometimes supported by local authorities or other types of intermediary actors. One such example is energy communities.

### Examples of collective action through social movements

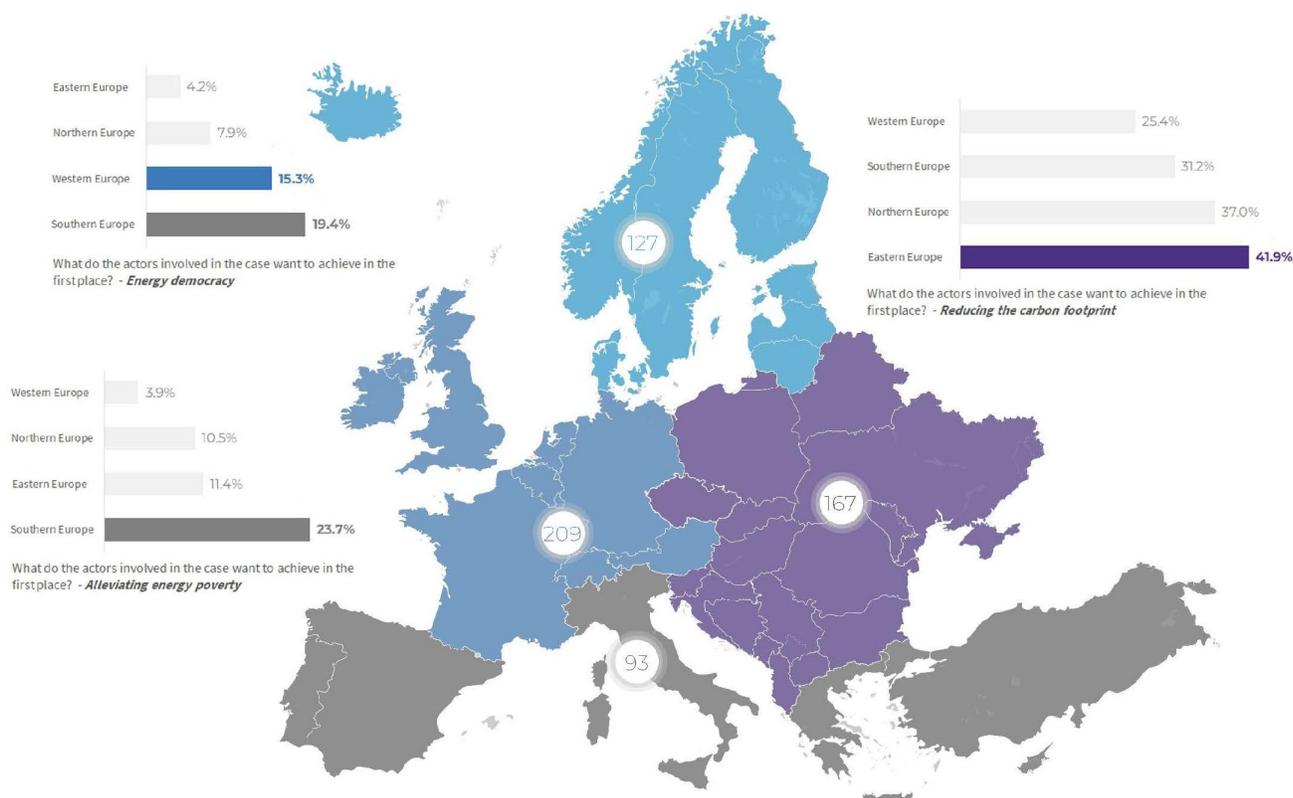
- Working to enhance the acceptance and acceptability of the energy transition through promoting debate, campaigning, or launching initiatives.
- Advocating, protesting, or opposing certain policy-orientations or specific projects through manifestations, direct action, public campaigns, protest networks, occupying movements, etc.



# Energy citizenship initiatives as enablers of citizen engagement

Just as energy citizenship practices can be diverse, energy citizenship initiatives take many forms. While often treated as synonymous to energy communities, such initiatives need to be understood more broadly and often take the form of programmes, companies, projects, partnerships, cooperatives, associations, and networks that contribute to the energy transition in a variety of ways.<sup>2</sup> Within the project we mapped 596 initiatives that support or enable citizens to practise energy citizenship in manifold ways in EU, EEA and accession countries.<sup>3</sup> The mapping was neither exhaustive nor representative, instead it aimed to capture the diversity of existing practices.

Most of the initiatives mapped support collective forms of action within the energy system. Through collective forms or action, energy citizenship initiatives have the potential to contribute not only to the achievement of national energy-relevant goals (expansion of renewables, reduction of energy consumption) but also to the democratic quality of the energy transition. For example, by offering citizens opportunities for co-determination, or by contributing to the accessibility and affordability of energy retrofitting or renewable electricity production.<sup>4</sup>



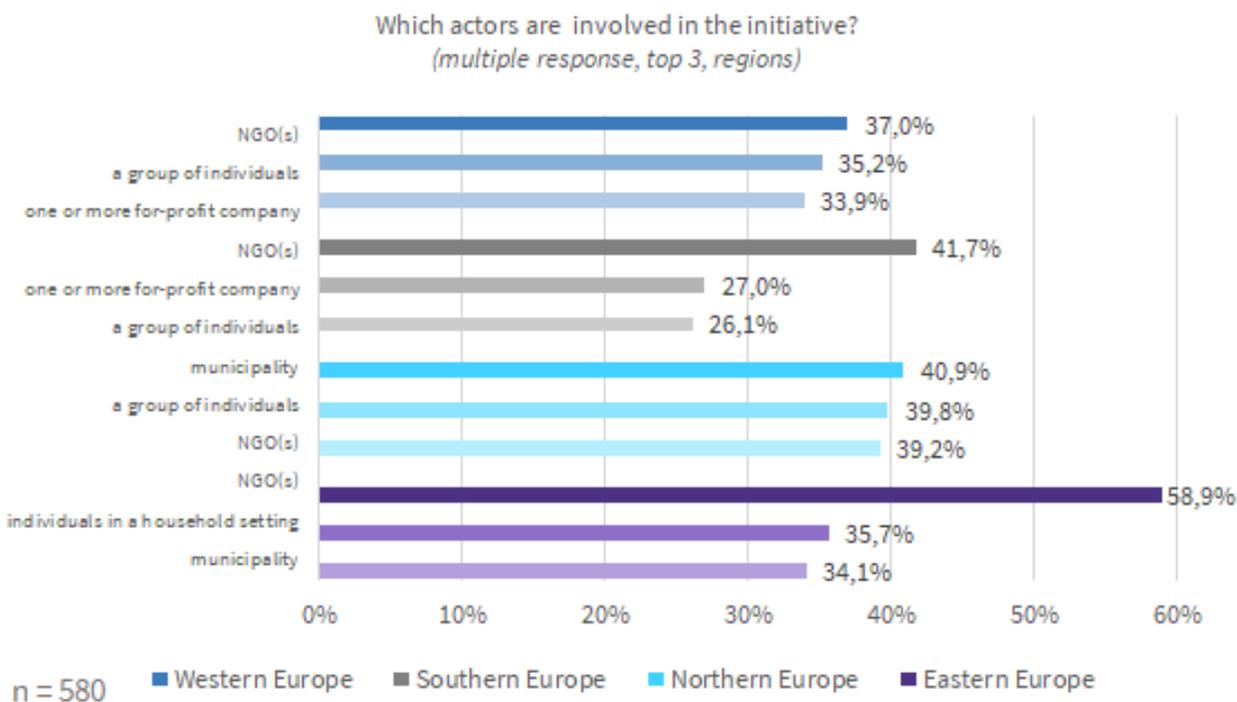
<sup>2</sup> Thalberg, K., Vadovics, E. and Szollossy, A. (2023). [Synthesis brief 4: Taking stock of energy citizenship in Europe - 596 examples of how citizens engage in the energy transition](#). European Commission Grant Agreement No. 101022492.

<sup>3</sup> See the [EnergyPROSPECTS database](#).

<sup>4</sup> See, Thalberg, K. and Debourdeau, A. (2024). [Enhancing energy citizenship through business and social innovation models](#). EnergyPROSPECTS Policy brief. European Commission Grant Agreement No. 101022492.



A rich ecosystem of actors take part in and enable initiatives that support citizen engagement and involvement.<sup>5</sup> Key stakeholders in these initiatives can be municipalities, for-profit companies, non-profit companies, citizen groups and non-governmental organisations. Activities of such initiatives include everything from retrofitting of buildings, energy sufficiency and efficiency practices in the home or within organisations, to citizen consultations and deliberative processes, renewable energy production, green energy suppliers, clean mobility initiatives and sustainable housing projects.<sup>6</sup>



<sup>5</sup> Markantoni, M. et al. 2023. [Strategic collective system building and institutional change: The nature and role of intermediation in making actors cooperate and transact with each other](#). EnergyPROSPECTS Deliverable 4.1, European Commission Grant Agreement No. 101022492.

<sup>6</sup> For examples see, Vadovics, E. et al. (2024). [Collection of energy citizenship case summary reports](#). EnergyPROSPECTS Deliverable 3.5, Part 2, European Commission Grant Agreement No. 101022492.



## How can energy citizenship be supported?

This section provides concrete recommendations and good practices on how national policymakers can support energy citizenship practices, given the diversity of practices and initiatives shown above.

### I. Raising awareness of the diversity of energy citizenship practices among policymakers and citizens

**Both citizens and policymakers are often unaware of the various forms of civic engagement in energy.** The following recommendations on raising awareness are thus two-fold. On the one hand, it calls for policymakers to develop a more profound understanding of existing and potential forms of energy citizenship in their country as well as how these forms are embedded in policy frameworks. On the other hand, it also calls for raising awareness of the various options for civic engagement among the citizenry and of available support schemes.

**Citizens themselves often have a limited perception of their own role and avenues for action in the energy transition.** While Member States support different forms of citizen engagement to varying degrees<sup>7</sup>, a survey carried out within the project<sup>8</sup> showed that many Europeans perceive their roles in the energy transition as limited to actions taken individually or within the framework of the household. That means that most of the actions listed above remain unknown or are perceived as out of reach for many European citizens. At the same time, a majority believes that most people in Europe are not well informed about what they can do to contribute to the energy transition. **This underlines the need for national policymakers to increase awareness about already available opportunities to enable engagement.** The different forms of energy citizenship identified above could be a good place to start.

#### **Recommendation 1. Develop a national roadmap for citizen engagement in the energy transition.**

Create a task force or assign a relevant authority to identify how different forms of citizen engagement and involvement could be implemented within the national context and which already exist. Available policy mixes of subsidies, financing opportunities, technical and administrative support schemes should be evaluated for each type to determine policy shortcomings. Special attention should be paid to the emergence of innovative and experimental energy initiatives that can support citizen engagement.

The identification process needs to be carefully crafted in dialogue with local and regional authorities as well as researchers and practitioners. Ideally, this process would feed into the creation of a national roadmap. The roadmap would instruct national governments in the development of enabling policy frameworks for a diversity of energy citizenship initiatives and practices paired with tangible objectives.

<sup>7</sup> Hajdinjak, M. *et al.* (2023). [Analytical report on PESTEL factors in the national and local contexts](#). EnergyPROSPECTS Deliverable 5.2, European Commission Grant Agreement No. 101022492.

<sup>8</sup> Hajdinjak *et al.* (2024). [Analysis of the online survey](#). EnergyPROSPECTS Deliverable 5.4, European Commission Grant Agreement No. 101022492.



One such example could be setting up at least one renewables-based energy community in every municipality with a population higher than 10,000 by 2025, as suggested in the REPowerEU plan.

**The proliferation of misinformation and populist communication around the energy transition across Europe<sup>9</sup> further accentuates the need for coherent, relevant, and accessible information on the costs and benefits of the transformation of our energy systems, energy products and services, available support measures and ways to get involved.**

**Recommendation 2. Streamline public communication and points of contact**, especially highlighting available opportunities, such as subsidies and technical assistance, and ways to get involved in the energy transition (see recommendation 1). Depending on the level of centralisation of the Member State in question, this could be done at the national, regional, or local level of government.

It is important for this project that government websites are easily accessible, and that information can be obtained without major hurdles. When citizens approach public authorities with questions, they should receive an answer within a reasonable period. Cooperation with conventional media outlets may also be beneficial for public communication with regards to available opportunities for energy citizenship, but with care of maintaining the independence of the press.

## II. Recognising unequal capacities to act

**Raising awareness is not enough. It is equally important to recognise that not everyone wants or has the capacities to engage in the same ways**, and therefore to make sure to provide examples of different forms and levels of engagement.<sup>10</sup> This is reflected in the results of a survey of European citizens, which show differences in the forms of active participation that citizens can imagine taking part in. Yet, many of them agree that the most important policy measures to enable citizen engagement and involvement in the energy transition are to **make universal access to affordable and sustainable energy a political priority and to design specific measures to support vulnerable energy consumers and people living in energy poverty**. These findings are supported by other European surveys: In the last EIB Climate Survey, for example, 68% of respondents reported that the energy transition can only succeed if policy makers address social and economic inequalities and support policies that take these into account.<sup>11</sup>

<sup>9</sup> Thalberg K. *et al.* (2024). [The European Green Deal in the face of rising radical right-wing populism](#), *Policy Paper n. 296*, Paris: Jacques Delors Institute, January.

<sup>10</sup> Thalberg, K. *et al.* (2024). [Empowering collective energy citizenship for a sustainable and democratic European energy transition](#). EnergyPROSPECTS Policy brief 1. European Commission Grant Agreement No. 101022492.

<sup>11</sup> European Investment Bank. (2023). [EIB Climate Survey 2023-2024](#).



**Recommendation 3. Carry out granular surveys on the social determinants of support for and resistance against energy and climate policy measures.** The [French IPSOS/RTE poll](#) can be seen as a good practice. This is an important complement to recommendations 1 and 2 to provide robust evidence for targeted policy measures that integrate socio-economic considerations.

#### Good practice: Innovative financing model to ensure access to energy retrofitting

The [Hauts-de-France Pass Renovation](#) project is operated by the regional one-stop-shop PSEE (Regional Public Service for Energy Efficiency). The initiative enhances energy efficiency through energy retrofitting in private buildings, including both single-family homes and condominiums. Pass Renovation facilitates citizens throughout the whole renovation process and is based on an innovative *third-party financing* economic model. The economic model is financed by a dedicated public fund through which the PSEE advances the payment for renovation works to the beneficiaries. Once the renovation works have been carried out, the beneficiaries can make the repayment in whole or in part through the financial savings that the energy renovation has generated. Long repayment periods are granted to low-income households.

### III. Building trust for the energy transition through participation and dialogue

**Lack of trust is a core concern for the energy transition.** Lack of trust in fellow citizens, public institutions, energy services or the energy transition, appears across all Member States, albeit in different forms.<sup>12</sup> Across the European Union, a common theme is the **fatigue of representative-technocratic democracy**.<sup>13</sup> This fatigue expresses itself in various ways, such as the lack of trust in decision-makers and the rise of populist discourse and political parties<sup>14</sup>. In our survey, 69% of respondents agreed to the statement that decision-makers do not consider the views and ideas of ordinary citizens when designing policies pertaining to development of the energy system. **Exploring the integration of citizens' assemblies within energy and climate transition policymaking** offers an avenue to balance participation and representation and to increase the democratic legitimacy of energy and climate policies.

**Furthermore, there is a lack of common transition narratives that speak to citizens' everyday lives and activities**<sup>15</sup>. Often, the transition remains an abstract process for many, which entails vague ideas

<sup>12</sup> Hajdinjak, M. *et al.* (2023). [Analytical report on PESTEL factors in the national and local contexts](#). EnergyPROSPECTS Deliverable 5.2, European Commission Grant Agreement No. 101022492.

<sup>13</sup> OECD. (2023). [Government at a Glance 2023](#).

<sup>14</sup> Thalberg K. *et al.* (2024). [The European Green Deal in the face of rising radical right-wing populism](#), *Policy Paper n. 296*, Paris: Jacques Delors Institute, January.

<sup>15</sup> Thalberg, K. *et al.* (2023). [Feedback report on knowledge exchange workshops](#). EnergyPROSPECTS Deliverable 6.1, European Commission Grant Agreement No. 101022492.



and goals about increasing the deployment of renewable energy sources, electrification of transport uses, reducing energy consumption, and so on. Implementing the European Green Deal will require substantial transformation of our fossil-based societies, which can create major disruptions and high levels of uncertainties among the population (concerning jobs, mobility, affordability, quality of life, etc.).<sup>16</sup> **In the light of these uncertainties, participative approaches are promising tools for consensus-building and collective foresight.**

**Recommendation 4. Integrate citizen assemblies and stakeholder dialogues in energy and climate transition governance.**

Member States should properly implement and increase their ambitions regarding stakeholder dialogues mandated under article 11 of the Governance of the Energy Union regulation (2018/1999). This could be done for example through the institutionalisation of Citizen Climate Assemblies at the national, regional, and local levels. Citizen assemblies should be complemented by fora for dialogue at different levels of government where a variety of actors can be heard, such as, local and regional authorities, civil society organisations, businesses, investors, and other relevant stakeholders. A key aspect of citizens assemblies is to manage expectations and to communicate clearly and transparently how recommendations are to be adopted and integrated into the overall policy-making process.

**Collaborative and inclusive consultation exercises are currently lacking.**<sup>17</sup> Building trust for the energy transition means bringing everyone along, especially socio-economically marginalised groups.<sup>18</sup> Therefore, participative processes need to be designed with care to include voices of those who are not usually represented in policymaking.

**Good practice: Citizen assemblies on how to achieve a socially just and inclusive transition**

The [Fair Energy Transition for All](#) project organised citizen assemblies that especially included marginalised groups in discussions on how to design more socially just and inclusive energy transition policies. Furthermore, the project established dynamic feedback loops for the deliberative exercises that involved both citizens and experts. In addition to providing initial input into the process this mechanism allowed the citizens to challenge the recommendations that experts had drafted in the end, showcasing a collaborative citizen-expert dynamic.

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<sup>16</sup> Thalberg K. *et al.* (2024). [The European Green Deal in the face of rising radical right-wing populism](#), *Policy Paper n. 296*, Paris: Jacques Delors Institute, January.

<sup>17</sup> Thalberg, K. *et al.* (2023). [Feedback report on knowledge exchange workshops](#). EnergyPROSPECTS Deliverable 6.1, European Commission Grant Agreement No. 101022492.

<sup>18</sup> Foster, C., & Frieden, J. (2017). Crisis of trust: Socio-economic determinants of Europeans' confidence in government. *European Union Politics*, 18(4), 511-535. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1465116517723499>

## IV. Enabling collective action in energy citizenship initiatives

Many energy citizenship initiatives operate at the local or regional level but perform different roles depending on the configuration of national energy systems and governance.<sup>19</sup> It is therefore important to understand recommendations about the support for these initiatives in the context of the configuration of the respective national multi-level governance system. A key distinction is the degree to which the (energy) governance in a country is organised in a decentralised-federalist or centralised manner, including what autonomy local governments must shape their own energy policy and engage with energy citizen organisations.

**In member states with more decentralised (energy) government systems, support from the local government level is pivotal.** Specifically, it is advisable to ensure that local government actors are equipped with enough capacity to substantially support energy citizen initiatives (see recommendation 5). Apart from capacity, it is also important for these actors to have their own leeway to ensure flexibility in the relationship and adapted measures. This includes their ability to ensure long-term and systematic financing (yet it is often limited to annual or pilot projects). There are indications that such cooperation with local government actors can alleviate pressures for strong professionalisation and thus enable long-term grassroots democratic governance within community energy organisations.

**Recommendation 5. Increase the innovation capacity of local and regional authorities.** This means creating a supportive innovative environment where new types of energy citizenship initiatives can be tested and developed by ensuring adequate human resources, competences, and financial capacities, to carry out the transition as well as support and involve citizens in this endeavour. Here, innovative partnerships and collaboration between citizen-based organisations, the private and public sectors should be given particular attention.

### Good practice: Local stakeholders joining forces to accelerate renewable energy deployment

Driven by the Département (i.e., a French government level in-between the local and regional level), the Maine-et-Loire charter was signed during the spring of 2023 by a mix of public energy actors, private developers and citizen-based networks and organisations. The aim is to accelerate the deployment of renewable energy in the territory and promote local appropriation of the energy transition by creating a framework for cooperation between citizens, the public and the private sectors based on shared values. This initiative opens a space to develop the local energy transition, importantly by reaching out to public authorities and citizens' groups that are not yet involved in locally governed renewable energy projects. To foster local anchoring and support for the transition, the initiative aims to maximise the local economic and social benefits of projects, pool skills and knowledge between actors, and importantly

<sup>19</sup> Schmid, B., Markantoni, M., & Kemp, R. (2023). Qualitative Comparative Analysis to investigate conditions for energy citizenship outcomes. EnergyPROSPECTS Deliverable 4.3, European Commission Grant No. 101022492.



create new venues for dialogue to inform, involve and listen, for all stakeholders, such as residents, elected representatives, economic players, and associations. A core value in the charter is to consider local needs and dynamics in the development of renewable energy projects.

**For more centralised energy governance systems, evidence shows that national support programs alone are not always sufficient.** These are often geared towards specific energy technologies and not tailored to the needs of energy citizenship initiatives. Access to such funding often represents a major barrier for energy citizenship initiatives due to lack of know-how and administrative capacity. In these contexts, complementary programmes specifically geared towards energy citizen initiatives are one way to alleviate this barrier and help them access conventional funding, for instance in the form of one-stop shops/single points of contact.

#### **Good practice: Requirements for local ownership of renewable energy generation**

Requirements for local ownership of renewable energy generation projects have proven to be a useful instrument in the Netherlands. The Dutch climate act advises that 50% of local energy ownership is targeted by 2030, allowing municipalities to enforce this as a formal requirement. This stipulation ensures that the community benefits from renewable energy projects, preventing the capture of revenues by commercial entities. Energy cooperatives, in particular, benefit from this requirement, as private developers often turn to them to meet the local ownership criteria.

**Overall, there is a need to align financing and support programs** between different horizontal (between different government departments) and vertical (between administrative tiers) levels of governance to create a more cohesive and supportive environment for energy citizenship initiatives. Addressing this lack of coherence involves streamlining communication and coordination between different entities involved in energy-related programs.

**Beyond financing, energy citizenship initiatives often require technical and administrative support to carry out their activities.** Energy citizenship initiatives often face considerable bureaucratic challenges when getting approval for and implementing projects, which often necessitates navigating multiple administrative units and support programs. Streamlining these processes and shifting bureaucratic responsibility to government entities can alleviate the challenges faced by energy citizenship initiatives.



**Recommendation 6. Set up a single point of contact for renewable energy projects.** The transposition of the recast EU Renewable Energy Directive (2018/2001) mandates the introduction of single contact points to provide guidance and facilitate the administrative procedures for applicants undertaking renewable energy projects (developers, energy communities, self-consumers) throughout their administrative permit application and granting processes. The Irish introduction of a [single point of contact](#) is a good practice in this regard.

**It is imperative not to regard energy citizenship initiatives solely as an instrument for implementing renewable energy or efficiency solutions.** Through their strong local engagement and by working on-the-ground, participants in such initiatives often develop a sophisticated understanding of the impact and challenges of existing or envisaged energy policies. Yet, compared to established actors, they are usually not as well organised as political lobbies. It can therefore be worthwhile not to neglect opinions and assessments that originate from these organisations. Put more broadly, there is a need for improved dialogues between energy citizenship initiatives, public actors, and different levels of government. Encouraging ongoing dialogues and ensuring policy stability are crucial for effective policy frameworks.

