

Taking stock of energy citizenship in Europe

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596 examples of how citizens engage in the energy transition

ENERGY
PROSPECTS



Synthesis brief 4

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Energy is being discussed like never before. At dinner tables and workplaces, in media and political debates, energy has taken the centre stage as energy prices started surging during Autumn 2021. **As the shift away from fossil fuels speeds up in response to the crisis¹, understanding and supporting citizen participation in the energy transition is becoming more and more pressing.**

In the previous three synthesis briefs, the EnergyPROSPECTS conceptual framework, ten tentative types of energy citizenship and regional perspectives on energy citizenship were presented. One year later, we have moved from developing our initial conceptual work and regional perspectives, to study how energy citizenship is taking shape across Europe today. **This fourth synthesis brief takes stock of the empirical work done so far with 596 energy citizenship cases mapped.**

The cases collected aim to capture the diversity of energy citizenship that is being practised on the European continent, but do not make any claim of representativeness. Nonetheless, the cases mapped can help us understand the roles of citizens in the energy transition today, and the potential that energy citizenship has to contribute to a more sustainable and democratic energy transition in the EU moving forward. Regional differences are also highlighted. Moreover, the cases provide evidence for what is needed of decision-makers to harness this potential, a topic that will be discussed in future Policy Briefs.

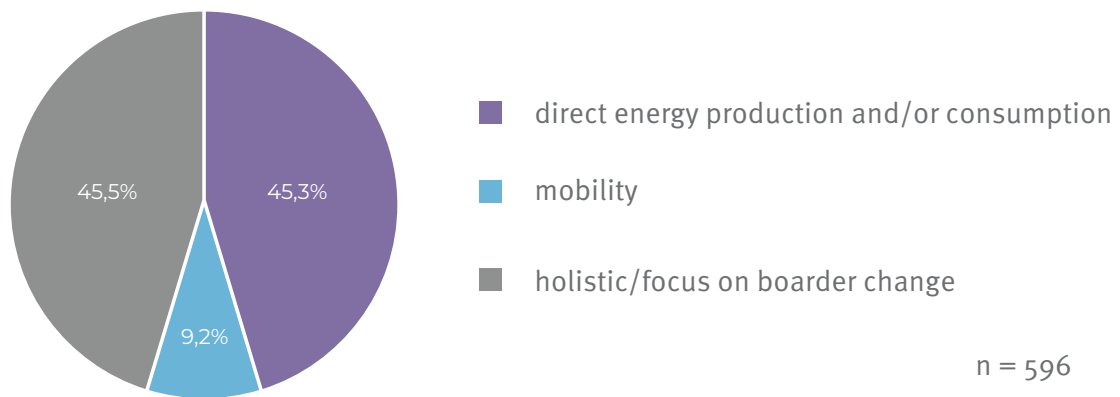
596 cases of energy citizenship

Initiatives in the EU, EEA, and accession countries were studied through desk-based research. The number of cases per country describes the mapping conducted within the project, and does not intend to indicate higher levels of energy citizenship activity in certain countries. In the EnergyPROSPECTS database, all cases can be found and filtered according to different criteria.

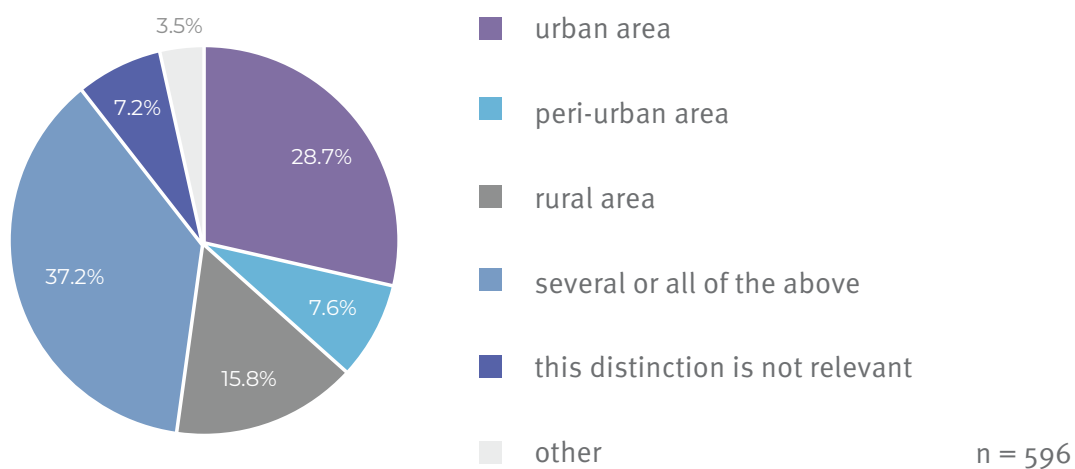


¹ Ember (2023). [European Electricity Review 2023](#).

What is the main focus of the case?



What is the target area of the case?



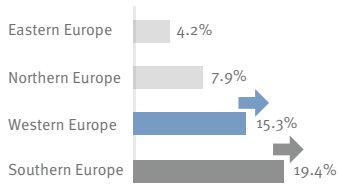
As potentially many forms and types of energy citizenship can be found in Europe, we decided to focus our mapping on three main focus areas: direct energy production and/or consumption; mobility; and holistic/focus on broader change. Examples of engagement under the category ‘direct energy consumption and/or production’ are energy renovation, changes of behaviour/practices and replacement of equipment for increased energy efficiency, and production of renewable energy. Initiatives that for example promote biking, car-sharing, and car-free living, as well as no-flight campaigns, are included within the ‘mobility’ category. Cases that have been categorised as having a ‘holistic overall focus on broader change’ include initiatives such as social movements, sustainable cities and communities, and citizen assemblies, to name a few. Furthermore, the cases represent a mix of cases in urban, peri-urban and rural areas, or covers several of the levels.

Cases were also examined with regards to a focus on disadvantaged groups and/or gender. One fifth of all cases mapped have a specific focus on disadvantaged groups, and deal with, for example, energy poverty. This is a useful indicator when examining the potential of energy citizenship to contribute to a more just transition, especially in light of the energy price crisis that has highlighted the inequalities characterising the prevailing energy system². In addition, around 6% of the cases have a specific gender focus that can provide further understanding of the role of women in the energy transition, considering that women are underrepresented in the energy sector and are more likely to live in energy poverty than men³.

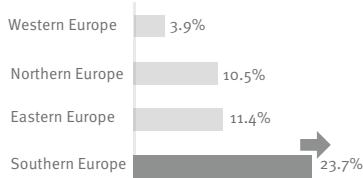
² European Commission. [Energy Poverty in the EU.](#)

³ European Parliament Think Tank (2019). [Women, Gender Equality and the Energy Transition in the EU.](#)

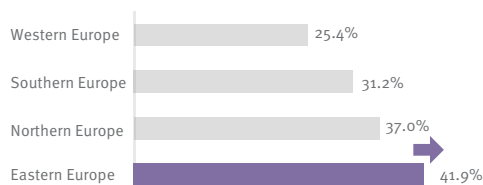
What do the initiatives want to achieve?



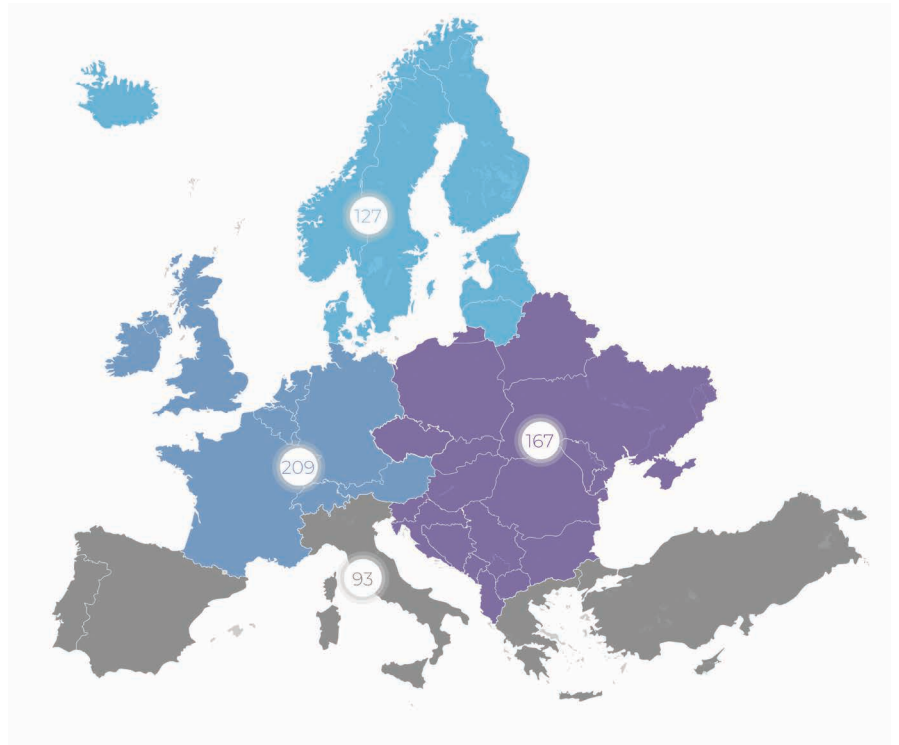
What do the actors involved in the case want to achieve in the first place?
- *Energy democracy*



What do the actors involved in the case want to achieve in the first place?
- *Alleviating energy poverty*



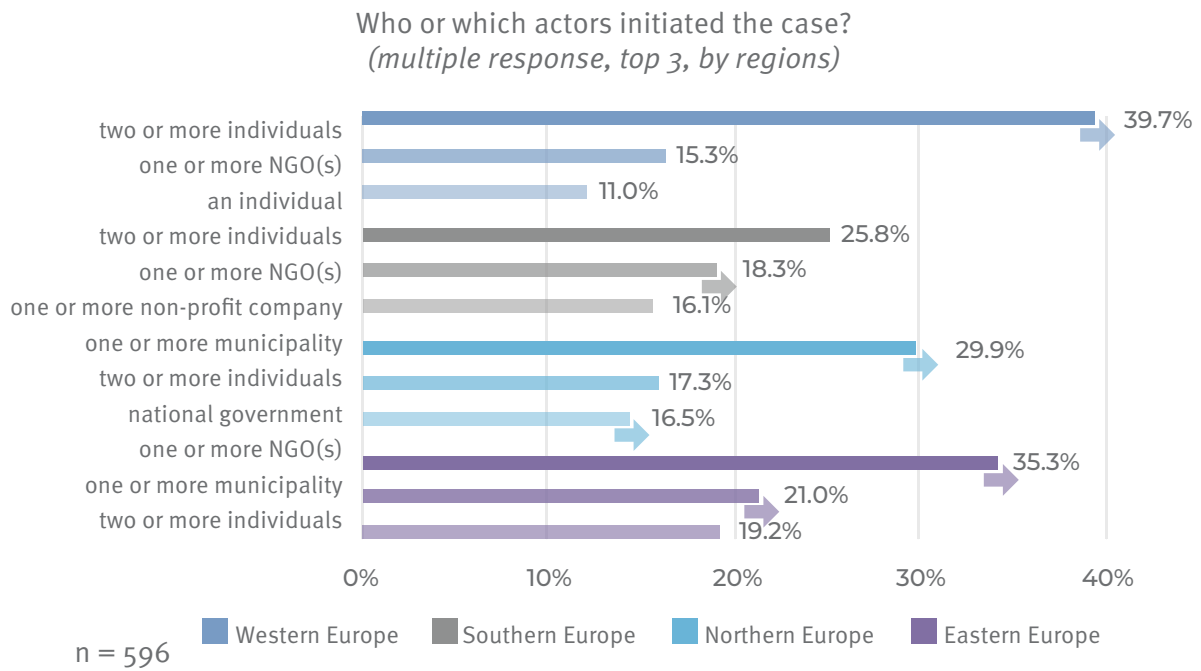
What do the actors involved in the case want to achieve in the first place?
- *Reducing the carbon footprint*



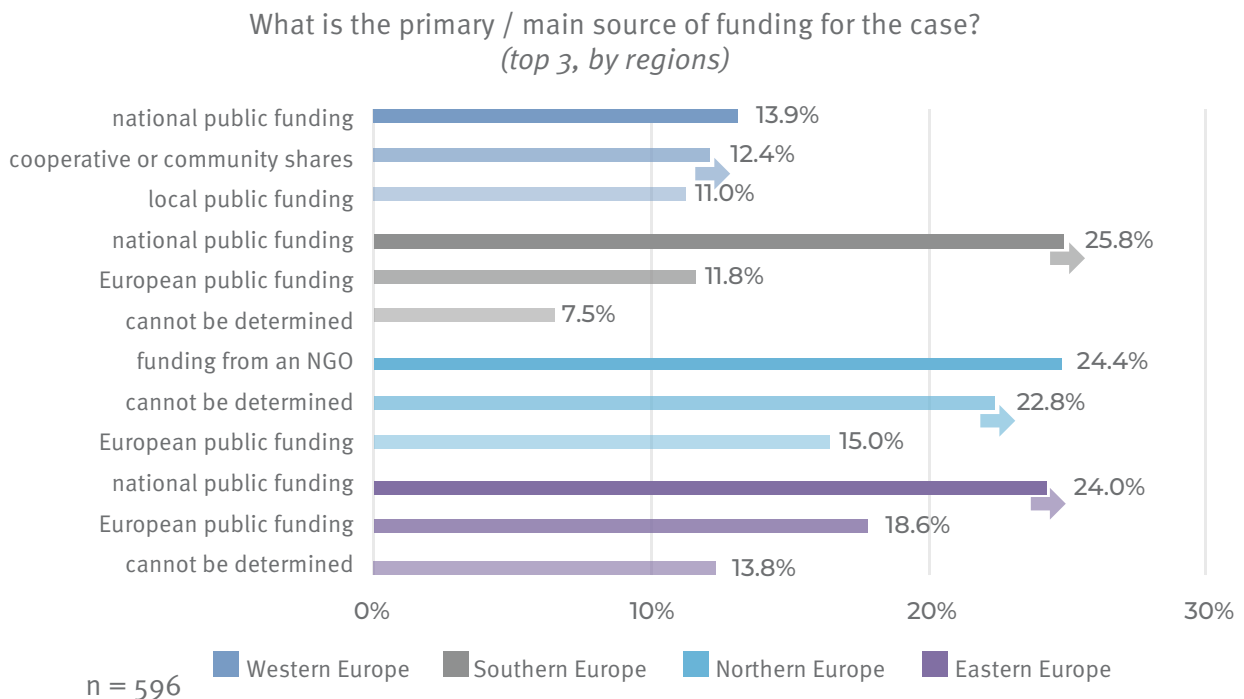
One of the main findings is that citizens engage and involve themselves in different energy citizenship practices, across European regions, as a response to the climate crisis, to reduce carbon footprints and thereby contributing to fighting climate change. The goal to increase energy democracy is particularly prevalent in Western Europe and Southern Europe. In Southern Europe, of the energy citizenship cases mapped, more than one fifth of cases work to alleviate energy poverty⁴.

⁴ Significant differences found in the analysis are indicated by arrows in the figures.

Initiating actors and main sources of funding



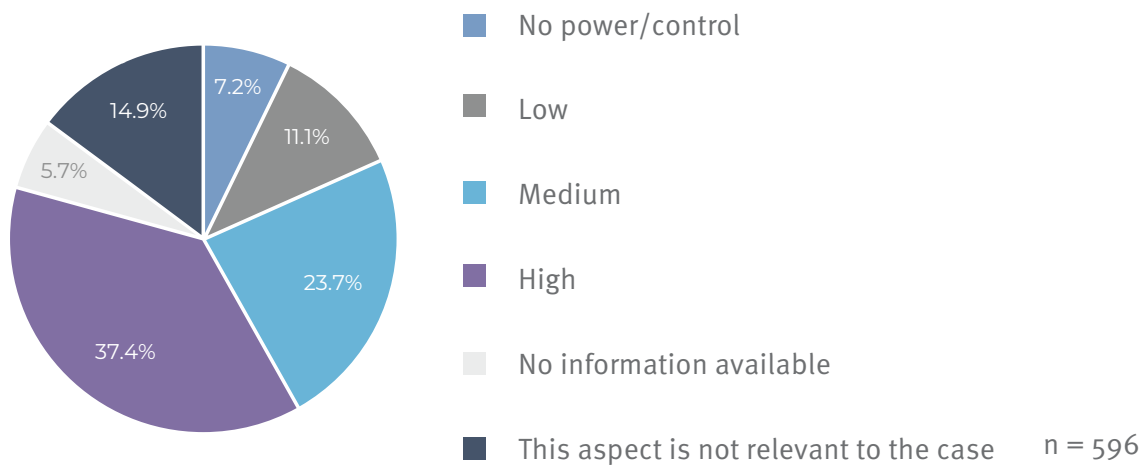
In order for decision-makers to better understand how to support energy citizenship, a key finding from the mapping is the actors that are involved in initiating energy citizenship initiatives. Across all regions, a significant share of the initiatives mapped are started by individuals, in some cases driven only by one person. NGOs are another key actor in all regions, although less so in Northern Europe, where more initiatives are started by municipalities or even the national government.



The main source of funding of the mapped cases provides additional important information. For example, the results highlight the important role that European funding can play for energy citizenship initiatives. In many cases public funding from the national or local levels also make a significant contribution to financing the mapped cases. At the same time, the significance of community funding, especially the role of cooperative community shares also need to be recognised.

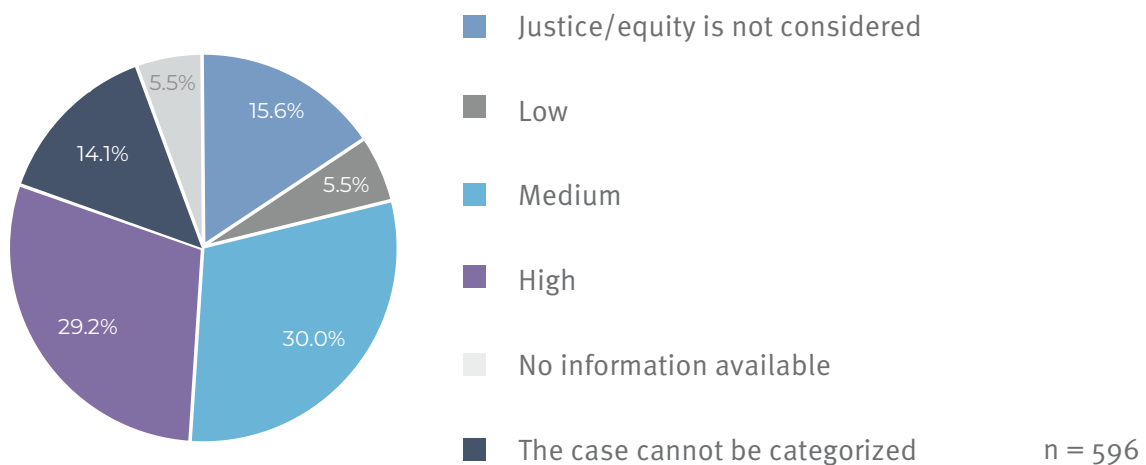
What contribution do they make to a more democratic and just energy transition?

Citizen power/control



When it comes to contributing to a more democratic energy transition, almost 40% of the mapped cases are committed to deeply renew and restructure the energy system towards a more democratic and sustainable one reflected by the share of cases with “high” citizen power/control.

Justice and equity issues

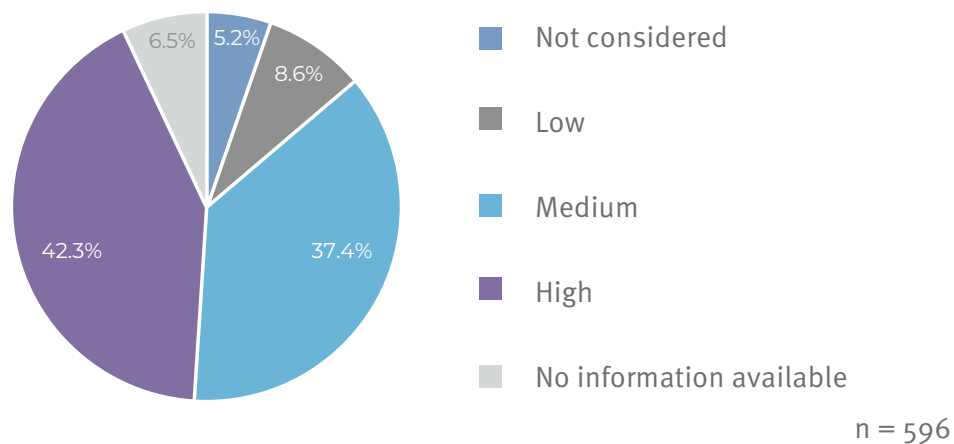


Around 60% of the cases mapped are set up to support increased justice and equity within the energy transition. For example, by taking energy poverty into consideration, targeting the inclusion of marginalized groups in the energy transition, or making sure that membership/taking part in the initiative is widely accessible.

⁵ To see the descriptions of the different categories for this and following graphs, please consult Vadovics, E., et al. (2022). [Methodology for meta-analysis of energy citizenship](#), EnergyPROSPETS Deliverable 3.1, European Commission Grant Agreement No. 101022492.

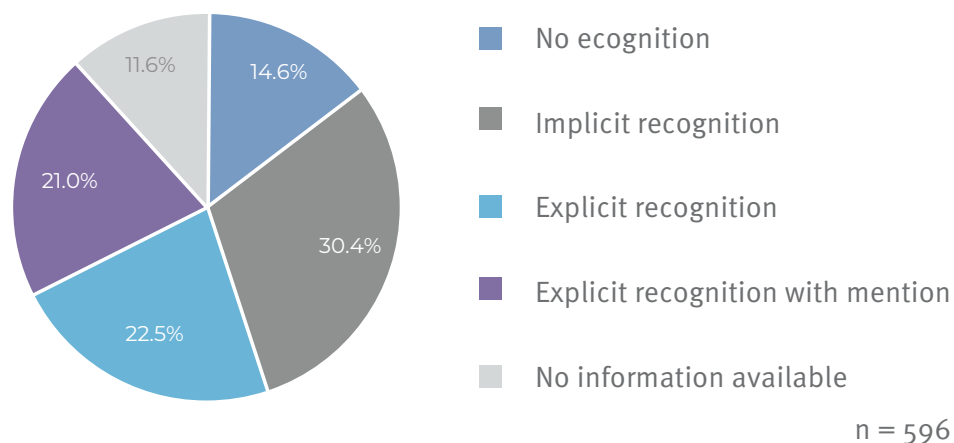
What contribution do they make to a more sustainable and carbon-neutral energy transition?

Environmental sustainability



Environmental sustainability is an important or even core part of around 80% of all mapped cases. The cases contribute to environmental sustainability for example by promoting a mix of sufficiency and efficiency measures and/or deploying renewable energy.

Recognises the ecological limit of atmospheric carbon emissions



Given the significance of climate change for motivating the mapped cases, we found it important to examine the extent to which they recognise a carbon limit consistent with the Paris Climate Agreement. **70% of all cases that were mapped are implicitly (without formal reference to carbon emissions or carbon footprints) or explicitly engaged in reducing in activities that reduce carbon consumption/emissions.** This underlines the potential of energy citizenship to contribute to climate change mitigation. At the same time, the number of cases that explicitly recognize the carbon limit and mention a concrete reduction target with reference to a 1.5°C compatible carbon footprint is relatively low. Given the urgency of climate change, this finding is interesting to explore further for policies that want to harness the carbon reduction potential of energy citizenship.

What's next from EnergyPROSPECTS?

- An interactive data base of the 596 cases
- Case reports of 40 in-depth case studies in Belgium, Bulgaria, France, Germany, Hungary, Ireland, Latvia, the Netherlands and Spain
- An empowerment toolkit for citizens and practitioners
- An exploration of the roles of ICT, business, and social innovation models in energy citizenship initiatives
- Policy recommendations aimed at the local, national and EU-level

To learn more about the case mapping please check out:

- The EnergyPROSPECTS interactive data base of the 596 cases
- Our Fact Sheet series on the cases with regional perspectives
- Blog Posts on the cases collected
- Deliverable 3.1. [Methodology for meta-analysis of energy citizenship.](#)



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