

# Energy Citizenship in the making

## Pathways to support citizen engagement in the European energy transition

### Joint Policy Brief

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## Contents

Contents	2
Introduction	3
Navigating the energy transition: Challenges faced by citizens	3
Challenges of equitable distribution: <i>Why should I be the one to change?</i>	3
Challenges of democracy and trust in institutions: <i>Why should I trust what you tell me?</i>	4
Challenges in legal, economic, and technological frameworks: <i>Am I able to take part in a citizen-based energy transition?</i>	6
Recommendations: Pathways for energy citizenship	7
Pathway I: Deep inclusion — ensuring meaningful inclusion in decision-making with marginalised groups in the energy transition	7
Pathway II: Boosting innovation in democratic engagement and building institutional trust	9
Pathway III: Creating a supportive ecosystem for inclusive energy citizenship	11
Energy citizenship in the making	13
The energy citizenship projects	14

## Introduction

This is a joint policy brief produced by four Horizon 2020 projects working on energy citizenship: DIALOGUES, EnergyPROSPECTS, ENCLUDE & EC2.

**Energy citizenship has so far been a missing piece of the energy transition puzzle.** Despite the European Energy Union's vision to put citizens at the core of the transition, much remains to be done to ensure that the pathway towards carbon neutrality is inclusive and provides opportunities and benefits for all.

Energy citizenship pertains to citizen engagement and involvement in the energy transition and the rights and responsibilities of citizens to that end. This includes considering how to balance right and responsibilities between different stakeholders in the energy transition, ensuring that citizens have the possibility to get engaged in ways tailored to needs.

The four projects who have collaborated on this policy brief agree that the view on citizens' roles in the European energy transition must be expanded beyond being consumers, prosumers and belonging to energy communities. There are a variety of energy citizenship practices, including collective endeavours undertaken by citizen-based or hybrid organisations either by themselves or in collaboration with private and public entities, participation in energy-related governance and decision-making, as well as in social movements and protests.

**Across the four projects, around 32,000 citizens have been involved in research and capacity-building** around the concept of energy citizenship through interviews, surveys, workshops, case studies, co-creation activities, and educational and training programmes. In this policy brief, we translate citizens' knowledge, perspectives, and experiences together with our analyses into concrete pathways and recommendations, for decision-makers, primarily at the EU-level but which may also be relevant for Member States as well as regional

and local authorities. Our combined research findings form a strong knowledge base for strengthening citizen engagement and involvement in the coming European mandate period to achieve the Union's 2050 climate neutrality target.

This policy brief starts by identifying the **key challenges for energy citizenship from citizens' point-of-view:** (in)equitable distribution of resources; (lack of) meaningful public participation in energy governance decisions and institutional trust; and broader issues pertaining to legal and economic frameworks. Thereafter, we present three pathways with concrete policy recommendations<sup>1</sup>. These recommendations aim to empower citizens to take part in the energy transition both individually and collectively.

## Navigating the energy transition: Challenges faced by citizens

In this section, we outline questions from citizens that often come up when discussing energy citizenship: highlighting citizens' key concerns, perceptions and challenges regarding their involvement and engagement in the energy transition. We also present principal barriers for energy citizenship practices identified across the four projects.

### Challenges of equitable distribution: *Why should I be the one to change?*

Inflation and decreasing purchasing power, large income and wealth inequalities, energy poverty, and high initial investment costs in green technology were found to be major barriers for citizens to take part in the energy transition. If green options are not accessible and affordable, citizens ask: *"Why should I be the one to change?"*

**An increasing number of Europeans experience energy poverty.** The energy price crisis (2021-2022) brought to the surface the wider inequalities that characterise the prevailing energy system. In 2021, 7% of EU citizens were unable to keep their homes adequately warm compared to 9% in 2022, with large differences between Member States<sup>2</sup>: ranging

<sup>1</sup> To see the recommendations, go the page 7.

<sup>2</sup> Eurostat. (2023). Inability to keep home adequately warm - EU-SILC survey. 2013-2022.

from 1.4% in Finland to 22.5% in Bulgaria. At the same time, energy poverty is usually one facet of a much more complex assemblage of socio-economic challenges. Many citizens have more pressing issues than the energy transition to consider in their day-to-day lives.

**The energy transition is taking place in an increasingly difficult socio-economic context.** While most Europeans are well-aware of the climate emergency and the majority are already personally affected by its consequences, a high proportion of citizens now prioritise concerns related to purchasing power<sup>3</sup> and the fight against poverty and social exclusion over climate action.<sup>4</sup> This underlines the effects of the current economic situation characterised by high levels of inflation.

68% of Europeans believe that the energy transition can only succeed if it addresses social and economic inequalities and supports policies that take these into account<sup>5</sup>. There is a real risk that the implementation of European Green Deal policies might have negative distributional impacts in terms of benefits and costs for citizens. Therefore, the increased ambition at the EU-level, for example on energy retrofiting<sup>6</sup> and the phase out of fossil powered heating technologies<sup>7</sup>, needs to be accompanied with support particularly directed towards those with the least capacity to change. The financial envelope currently foreseen to support vulnerable households in the energy transition under the Social Climate Fund is not sufficient to meet the challenges<sup>8</sup>. Empirical evidence suggests that home ownership and high incomes are key factors for households to invest in energy efficiency measures and renewable energy<sup>9</sup>. In the long run, these investments will allow select households to make considerable financial savings — leaving behind

tenants, in cases where building owners fail to invest. Thus, if public support programmes are not well-designed and targeted, there is a risk that socio-economic inequalities will be entrenched or aggravated, which in turn could create frustration and social backlash.

**Many citizens perceive that the current path of the energy transition is not inclusive.** In a survey carried out by ENCLUDE, 66% of respondents disagree that the current path of the energy transition is inclusive and equal for all citizens. 42% think that their efforts to participate in the energy system have been limited by current government structures or decision makers<sup>10</sup>. Equally, a majority of respondents in a DIALOGUES survey found that: people will not benefit equally from the transition to more renewable energy (66%) and not everyone should bear the same burden for the cost of the energy transition (72%)<sup>11</sup>. To that end, policy makers need to make sure that clean technologies and options are affordable and accessible for all, taking particular care of the ones with the least capacity to change.

### Challenges of democracy and trust in institutions: *Why should I trust what you tell me?*

**Lack of trust in institutions, lack of representation, lack of social networks, lack of clear and inclusive communication, as well as fragmented access to information** were found to be essential barriers for citizen engagement in the energy transition. Citizens ask: *"Why should I trust what you tell me?"*

Declining and low trust in institutions are challenges for the EU and its Member States that go well beyond the energy transition<sup>12</sup>. However, considering the large-scale societal transformations

<sup>3</sup> Ipsos and BNP Paribas. (2023). Just transition. *Global survey report*.

<sup>4</sup> Eurobarometer. (2023). EP Autumn 2023 Survey: Six months before the 2024 European Elections.

<sup>5</sup> European Investment Bank. (2023). EIB Climate Survey 2023-2024.

<sup>6</sup> European Commission. (2023). New rules to boost energy performance of buildings across the EU.

<sup>7</sup> Kurmayer, N.J. (2023). EU agrees 2040 fossil boiler ban in revamped green buildings law. *Euractiv*. 8 December.

<sup>8</sup> See page 23 in: Thalberg, K., Defard, C., Chopin, T., Barbas, A. & Kerneis, K. 'The European Green Deal in the face of rising radical

right-wing populism'. *Policy Paper n. 296*, Paris: Jacques Delors Institute, January 2024.

<sup>9</sup> Ameli, N. and Brandt, N. (2014) 'Determinants of households' investment in energy efficiency and Renewables'. *OECD Economics Department Working Papers*.

<sup>10</sup> Dunphy, N., Revez, A., Lennon, B., & Brenner-Fließner, M. (2023). Typology of Energy Citizenship(s). ENCLUDE Project. <https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.10005552>

<sup>11</sup> A survey conducted among people participating in DIALOGUES Citizen Action Labs (n=168).

<sup>12</sup> Eurobarometer. (2023). Standard Eurobarometer 98 - Winter 2022-2023.

that achieving climate neutrality by 2050 will require, trust of institutions and experts appears to be an important foundation for the energy transition to succeed. The recent health, geo-political and energy crises have led to strong pessimism among the population about the current socio-economic situation. Lessons from the 2008 recession have shown that trust in European institutions among groups with lower levels of education and income have not yet risen to pre-recession levels<sup>13</sup>. There is thus a risk of further erosion of trust in democratic institutions if the EU and its Member States fail to adequately facilitate access to affordable green alternatives, as highlighted by the recent energy price shocks<sup>14</sup>.

**There is a lack of a common transition narrative with tangible objectives that has relevance for citizens' everyday lives.** The transition remains for many an abstract process entailing vague ideas and goals about increasing the deployment of renewable energy sources, electrification of transport uses, reducing energy consumption, and so on. Furthermore, the framing of citizens as consumers in the mainstream transition narrative and policies limits their involvement and engagement beyond the marketplace. One challenge that relates to democratic engagement is about rendering opportunities for collective action, beyond the marketplace, concrete. Different forms of experimentation are promising, such as the citizen action labs that were tested in the DIALOGUES<sup>15</sup> project or, more generally, citizen forums and assemblies.

**Women, people with low income and other social groups are underrepresented in collective action efforts and community-building.** In initiatives that enable active involvement and engagement of citizens in the energy transition, such as energy com-

munities, there is often a lack of representation. This dynamic of exclusion stands in the way of more people being able to access the potential benefits of energy communities particularly and of the energy transition more broadly.

**There is a widespread mistrust towards energy transition decision-making.** In a survey carried out by ENCLUDE<sup>16</sup>, 70% of respondents are not confident that they would be invited and encouraged to participate fully in decision-making processes related to the energy transition. Of those who have participated in the past, 45% felt they were not heard in those decision-making processes and 65% do not think that these decision-making processes are fair and just.

Similarly, according to the survey conducted by EnergyPROSPECTS<sup>17</sup>, 69% of respondents agree or strongly agree with the statement that politicians do not consider the views and ideas of ordinary citizens when designing policies pertaining to development of the energy system. 57% believe that the options that individuals must contribute to developments in the energy system are limited to their private lives. These results indicate that the lack of trust in decision-making processes is a significant stumbling block for more people to take part in democratic processes as well as citizen-led initiatives. However, this same mistrust has catalysed citizen action in the case of projects that strive for energy self-sufficiency and independence<sup>18</sup>.

A feeling that ordinary citizens have very limited power and agency to affect political ambitions and actions in relation to energy and climate was also found in the DIALOGUES Citizen Action Labs. Survey results also illuminate these sentiments: one third of the participants had the general impression that

<sup>13</sup> Jansen, J. (2023). "When trust becomes a luxury: How economic crises undermine political trust among the most disadvantaged". Policy Brief. Berlin: Jacques Delors Centre/Hertie School, June.

<sup>14</sup> Thalberg K., Defard C., Chopin T., Barbas A. & Kerneis K. "The European Green Deal in the face of rising radical right-wing populism", *Policy Paper n. 296*, Paris : Jacques Delors Institute, January 2024.

<sup>15</sup> Clément, G. et al. 2022. Guidebook for designing and implementing Citizen Action Labs and Recruitment to the Citizen Action Labs. DIALOGUES Deliverables 5.3 and 6.1 European Commission Grant Agreement No. 101022585.

<sup>16</sup> Dunphy, N., Revez, A., Lennon, B., & Brenner-Fließer, M. (2023). Typology of Energy Citizenship(s). ENCLUDE Project.

<https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.10005552>; Debourdeau, A. et al. (2021). Conceptual typology. EnergyPROSPECTS Deliverable 2.1, European Commission Grant Agreement No. 101022492.

<sup>17</sup> Hajdinjak, M. et al. (2024). "Analysis of the online survey". EnergyPROSPECTS Deliverable 5.4, European Commission Grant Agreement No. 101022492.

<sup>18</sup> Dunphy, N., Revez, A., Lennon, B., & Brenner-Fließer, M. (2023). Typology of Energy Citizenship(s). ENCLUDE Project European Commission Grant Agreement No. 10122791. <https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.10005552>

the government is not doing enough to guarantee access to affordable and clean energy; only 36% trust that the government will help their country to transition to sustainable energy in the near future, and 59% of the participants believe that the environmental taxes were not used properly<sup>19</sup>.

### **Challenges in legal, economic, and technological frameworks: Am I able to take part in a citizen-based energy transition?**

In addition to socio-economic challenges and barriers related to trust and democratic processes, there also exist a number of regulatory, administrative, economic, financial, technical skills, and knowledge-related challenges. Citizens ask — *"Am I able of making changes and taking part in the energy transition or is it just talk?"*

The lack of consistent, coherent, and tailored regulatory frameworks combined with complex administrative processes and highly limited administrative support remain important impediments for citizens to engage in the energy transition, both individually and collectively. Similarly, economic frameworks are not well-adapted to active citizen engagement or citizen-led initiatives. In general, economic frameworks reflect a top-down, producer-consumer relationship not well-adapted to more active forms of citizen engagement in the energy transition, such as self-consumption, energy sharing, local storage facilities and energy community involvement. Moreover, the general lack of readily available, understandable, and reliable information regarding regulations, procedures and possible fundings further complicates the endeavour. Lengthy administrative procedures also hamper citizen initiatives<sup>20</sup>. These findings are supported by an in-depth study of 69 collective energy initiatives by ENCLUDE that found 48% of energy communities, for example,

found that there was not enough support by authorities, 45% faced bureaucratic barriers, and 43% lacked access to funding<sup>21</sup>. This shows that even the most committed citizens in the energy transition perceive a lack support for their activities.

These challenges can hardly be addressed at the level of individual citizens since they related to *the ecosystem* of energy citizenship. This ecosystem encompasses notably the intermediation activities and intermediary actors that are enabling energy citizenship to take shape through various sorts of initiatives, as well as the transformative agency of energy citizenship. Here, policy makers have an important task to respond to these barriers and create an enabling environment in which energy citizenship can thrive. Supporting and strengthening the capacity of intermediary actors is an important priority in this regard.

Intermediaries and intermediation are a central part of emerging 'new' forms of governance aimed at accelerating the energy transition by helping energy citizenship initiatives to achieve their goals<sup>22</sup>. Many energy citizenship initiatives face a range of obstacles to get their activities or projects up and running. Examples include a lack of knowledge, skills or resources, time-constraints, information asymmetry or communication problems. Intermediary actors act as bridge-builders and help initiatives overcome the diverse barriers they face.

**Intermediary actors are highly diverse**, from commercial actors (such as banks and law firms) to governmental actors and agencies, from educational actors to non-governmental collective or civil society organisations (such as umbrella organisations, cooperative networks, etc.) to key individuals or "intercessors" (i.e., individuals with original ideas, drive, skills, mediation abilities and the ability to create links and networks between different actors).

<sup>19</sup> Zhan, M. *et al.* (2023). Pathways to deepening energy citizenship. DIALOGUES Deliverable 5.4, European Commission Grant Agreement No. 101022585.

<sup>20</sup> Bertel, M. *et al.* 2023. "Catalogue of potential legal and economic barriers and facilitators of energy citizenship". EC<sup>2</sup> Deliverable 3.3, European Commission Grant Agreement No. 101022565.

<sup>21</sup> Brenner-Fliesser, M., Matowska, M., Schwarzingler, S. (2023). Report on survey and structured interview results for identifying

potential emergence and consolidation factors. ENCLUDE Deliverable 3.1, European Commission Grant Agreement No. 10122791, <https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.10696080>

<sup>22</sup> See, 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.



Findings from the projects provide some key insights on intermediation activities:

▷ **A combination of intermediations** is needed for energy citizenship initiatives to achieve their goals, providing diverse services across the development stages of initiatives.

▷ **Financial and organisational intermediation are the two most important types.** Governmental, commercial, and non-governmental collective/ umbrella organisations are particularly important for these types of intermediations.

▷ **Intermediation is not always successful or neutral.** In some instances, intermediary actors may champion certain innovations or represent certain interests that are influenced by their funding, which can endanger the contribution of energy citizenship to a more sustainable, just, and democratic energy system.

Exploration of transformative agency<sup>23</sup> and pathways for strengthening, lengthening, and deepening energy citizenship<sup>24</sup> highlight that, **much more than government and business, energy citizenship initiatives champion different ownership structures, give more attention to ecological sustainability and energy justice.** Transformative agency depends on many factors: resources, empowerment, forward-thinking and attention to justice. The (transformative) agency of energy citizenship actors are dependent on their ability to obtain funding, to combine institutional logics and engage in work leading to institutional change (which in turn depend on their ability to lobby for specific institutional arrangements). It is enhanced by the presence of intermediaries and well-crafted strategies for achieving political and social change.

## Recommendations: Pathways for energy citizenship

In the previous section we have outlined major barriers for energy citizenship across our four projects which contributes to citizens' reluctance about engaging in the energy transition. In this section we lay out three pathways to overcome these barriers including concrete policy recommendations that European policy makers should consider in order to improve the enabling environment for citizen involvement in the energy transition.

### Pathway I: Deep inclusion - ensuring meaningful inclusion in decision-making with marginalised groups in the energy transition

Deep inclusion within the energy transition means creating conditions which enable all people, including marginalised<sup>25</sup> groups and those with diverse perspectives, to all take part and make a difference in energy governance. Concretely, this means policy makers and organisers should: 1) Embolden participants to voice their perspectives, 2) Ensure that these perspectives will matter for decision-making processes, and thus contribute towards realising energy justice.

This pathway is relevant to specific aspects of the challenges described previously and further identifies opportunities and recommendations to address these challenges. The recommendations are primarily targeting Member States and local and regional authorities but could equally be beneficial for participative exercises at the EU-level, such as citizen panels<sup>26</sup>, and integrated into the knowledge base of the Competence Centre on Participatory and Deliberative Democracy<sup>27</sup>.

***The "why should I be the one to change?" challenge:*** People's willingness to become active in the energy transition is linked to a diverse set of values and

<sup>23</sup> Kemp, R. et al. 2023. "Enhancing the transformative agency of energy citizenship. The transformative agency of social innovation actors". EnergyPROSPECTS Deliverable 4.4, European Commission Grant Agreement No. 101022492.

<sup>24</sup> Debourdeau, A. and Markantoni, M. 2023. "Viable business models and strategies for growth and expansion. The economic-transactional aspects of energy citizenship cases".

EnergyPROSPECTS Deliverable 4.5, European Commission Grant Agreement No. 101022492.

<sup>25</sup> Specific groups of people who do not easily participate because of socioeconomic, demographic, attitudinal and/or cultural barriers.

<sup>26</sup> European Commission: Citizens' Engagement Platform.

<sup>27</sup> Joint Research Centre: Competence Centre on Participatory and Deliberative Democracy.

needs, ones that may or may not be directly related to energy. These needs are interlinked but distinct (for example, poverty, the need for collective belonging and community building, ability to control one's own access to resources, etc.). A siloed approach to discussing and making decisions about energy may discourage participation by those for whom issues of concern lie outside of the energy system but who might otherwise be motivated to use energy concerns as a vehicle of involvement.

Recognizing and acknowledging these different needs while talking about the energy transition could be a means to build public trust of institutions by exhibiting empathy (as opposed to pity or sympathy alone) for people in diverse situations in life. This would embolden participants to make their point-of-view known and allow an integration of the goals that people conceive for themselves and those that are determined by distant policymakers.

### Recommendations

▷ In public documents and communications, **acknowledge that a diverse set of values and needs exist** that both encourage and discourage people's involvement in the energy transition. Rather than assuming that citizens respond primarily to financial incentives (which may be the case sometimes), take on a "human-centred" governance strategy that assumes people act according to their beliefs and values that may enrich rational considerations<sup>28</sup>. *[European Commission, Member States, local and regional authorities]*

▷ In public participation events organised by authorities, **enable citizens to elicit, deliberate and prioritise values as a precursor to deciding** on a course of action. To equal the playing field of those who may be more verbal vs. those who are less comfortable to speak, consider approaches which

are accessible to more people, like visualisation techniques and guided activities<sup>29</sup>. *[European Commission, Member States, local and regional authorities]*

▷ **Recruit excluded and/or marginalised participants through local community organisations** where members of a disadvantaged group already meet voluntarily on a regular basis. The voices of the marginalised may have a better chance of being heard when there is more than one person or group representing this minority view<sup>30</sup>. *[Local and regional authorities]*

**The "why should I trust?" challenge:** Participation organised by governmental authorities can often be perceived as an "empty ritual" rather than a means by which all voices will be equally heard and heeded. Though public participation activities may be organised with the best of intentions, it still may appear to those who are invited that without a redistribution of power in the process of participation, it remains a frustrating process for those without power. In some of these processes, perhaps participants will be heard and able to hear, but there is no pathway by which their points-of-view will be acted upon.

The projects encountered plenty of dedicated citizens who are working towards the goals of the energy transition in all modes of participation. We have found that those who are already involved in both invited, and especially invented, modes of participation<sup>31</sup> have a sense of self-efficacy in which they believe they have an important role in the energy transition and transformation. There is hope that this perspective can be shared by more people.

### Recommendations

▷ **Clear communication about the purpose and outcome of participation.** Level with participants about the type of participation they will take part in

<sup>28</sup> Brenner-Fliesser et al. (2023) and Matowska et al. (2023) from the ENCLUDE project found that leaders and members of collective energy initiatives were motivated to join these initiatives by their overall concern for environmental sustainability, self-sufficiency and gaining a sense of control over decisions in their community, sense of belonging to a community.

<sup>29</sup> These techniques have been tested with positive reactions through the ENCLUDE Academy and documented in Pearce, B.,

& Djinlev, V. (2022). Action-based online modules.. ENCLUDE deliverable 6.1. <https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.7319479>

<sup>30</sup> The approach suggested by Young, I. M. (2002). *Inclusion and Democracy* (1st ed.). Oxford University PressOxford. <https://doi.org/10.1093/0198297556.001.0001> was followed during online sessions during the ENCLUDE Academy.

<sup>31</sup> Mirafteb, Faranak. (2004). Invited and Invented Spaces of Participation: Neoliberal Citizenship and Feminists' Expanded Notion of Politics. Wagadu. 1.



and what kinds of outcomes they should expect. If participation is only for the purpose of consulting their opinion, for example, then it should not be framed as participants taking part in decision-making.<sup>32</sup> *[European Commission, Member States, local and regional authorities]*

▷ **Boost perceptions of self-efficacy by sharing stories of citizen initiatives.** Be aware that the wording of policies linked to the energy transition value citizens primarily as consumers and passive agents of change, except in the case of energy communities.<sup>33</sup> *[European Commission, Member States, local and regional authorities]*

▷ Stronger governance structures that ensure greater inclusivity and transparency when developing energy infrastructure, both at the local and national levels. In addition, greater transparency by public representatives, when commenting on a local energy infrastructure project, whereby they must outline and reveal any campaign contributions received or relevant past work with a project lead. *[Member States, local and regional authorities]*

**The "am I able to take part a citizen-based energy transition?" challenge:** people are implicitly excluded from active participation due to the time, energy and financial resources needed for taking part in meetings and discussions. Most forms of participation in the energy system require extra time and resources. Without access to these extra resources, it is not reasonable to assume that those who are already in need of basic comforts will be likely to also participate in the same way. Strategies need to be developed which would make it possible for those with limited resources to also participate, given the understanding that trade-offs must be made when participation is expected.

Understanding and acknowledging the obstacles to active participation in the energy transition is an essential step towards realising inclusive governance. Being creative about removing obstacles to meaningful participation for those who are not

currently active would allow institutions to work towards the goals of the just transition and work towards the ideals of energy justice.

## Recommendations

▷ **Consider including processes of deliberation and discussion in the daily routine of those who are currently excluded.** Discussions and decisions about the energy transition can be incorporated into workplaces, childcare centres, and social services<sup>34</sup>. *[Local and regional authorities]*

▷ **Consider measures that would provide practical support for people who would otherwise be unable to expend the time or effort to attend in meetings and events about the energy transition.** Ideas range from providing childcare at participatory meetings, timing the participation around holidays (during which those who are disadvantaged are not travelling and more available than those who are travelling), mandating a "deliberation day", or dedicating (and paying for) certain workdays for participation in the energy transition. *[Local and regional authorities]*

▷ **Address gender issues by analysing reasons for exclusion or misrepresentation** in the first place, looking at the energy perceptions, needs and wants of the less represented, and finding entry points for organisational reforms at the initiative level. *[European Commission, Member States, local and regional authorities]*

▷ **Provide opportunities for citizens with restricted financial options** to engage in collective energy initiatives without payment obligations. *[Local and regional authorities]*

## Pathway II: Boosting innovation in democratic engagement and building institutional trust

To enable energy citizenship practices through innovation in democratic engagement, policy makers need to consider three interlinked questions: What shared perceptions around the energy transi-

<sup>32</sup> Refer to the survey results from Dunphy et al. (2023).

<sup>33</sup> Building on insights from Fritzsche, I., Barth, M., Jugert, P., Masson, T., & Reese, G. (2018). A Social Identity Model of Pro-Environmental Action (SIMPEA). *Psychological Review*, 125(2), 245–269. <https://doi.org/10.1037/rev0000090>, the documented

impacts of storytelling from the GreenFutures Initiative at University of Exeter and interviews from Matowska et al (2023).  
<sup>34</sup> Young, I. M. (2002). *Inclusion and Democracy* (1st ed.). Oxford University PressOxford.

<https://doi.org/10.1093/0198297556.001.0001>

tion exist; what skills and competencies do people have, for example to work collectively towards a common goal; and what spaces are available for them to do so? By providing answers to these questions, our recommendations can provide policy makers with tools to build institutional trust and boost citizen engagement in the energy transition.

This pathway of boosting innovation is relevant to specific aspects of the challenges described previously and further identifies opportunities and recommendations to address these challenges.

**The “why should I trust” challenge:** Without spaces where collective visions can occur, the energy transition risks remaining an abstract process for most citizens. The dominant narrative of citizens as consumers in the energy market furthermore hinders collective forms of energy citizenship.

**The discussion of energy is in of itself a means for creating a shared vision of the future.** Such discussions can help people to come together, reflect on the future and recognise how visions of the future can have an impact on decisions being made in the present. Engaging in change must go beyond tapping into individual preferences to the collective need for justice in terms of distribution, representation, and procedure. For example, each of the projects<sup>35</sup> created spaces or tools where and with which people could experiment with new knowledge, share meanings and aspirations, develop new competencies, and generally come together to imagine and act in the energy transition. Clear and accessible information can furthermore enable collective engagement in the energy transition.

## Recommendations

▷ There is a need for granular surveys on the social determinants of support for different energy transition policy measures, both at the national and EU-level. The IFOP/RTE study on French decision making mechanisms on energy consumption can

be seen as a good practice. Such data could complement participatory and deliberative exercises at different levels of government. *[European Commission, Member States]*

▷ The EU should strengthen provisions on public participation and consultation under the regulation on the Governance of the Energy Union and Climate Action (2018/1999). This could be done for example by supporting Member States in setting up Citizen Climate Assemblies at the national and local levels in relation to update of their National Energy and Climate plans that is set to take place every five years. In organising such democratic processes, the recommendations in the pathway above should equally be considered. *[European Commission, Member States]*

▷ 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” could be seen as a good practice<sup>36</sup>. This mission could be complemented with providing information on benefits, economic viability, and available subsidies for renewable energy, especially targeting citizens with no prior technical knowledge. *[European Commission, Member States]*

▷ EU initiatives such as the Energy Communities Repository, Rural Energy Community Advisory Hub and the Energy Poverty Advisory Hub could design **calls for proposals to fund existing collective energy initiatives in creating projects to support the development of skills and competencies for community participation** in their wider communities. *[European Commission]*

<sup>35</sup> Clément, G. et al. 2022. Guidebook for designing and implementing Citizen Action Labs and Recruitment to the Citizen Action Labs. DIALOGUES Deliverables 5.3 and 6.1 European Commission Grant Agreement No. 101022585; Pearce, B., & Djinev, V. (2022). Action-based online modules. ENCLUDE deliverable 6.1. <https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.7319479>; Dimitru, A. et al. (2023). “Empowerment toolkit and knowledge

repository”. EnergyPROSPECTS Deliverable 3.6, European Commission Grant Agreement No. 101022492.; Enclude academy for energy citizenship leadership; and EC<sup>2</sup> Community Energy Academy.

<sup>36</sup> See for example, the single point of contact set up by the Sustainable Energy Authority of Ireland.

### Pathway III: Creating a supportive ecosystem for inclusive energy citizenship

A series of measures could fruitfully be implemented to establish a more supportive environment at various levels (EU, member states, regions, local authorities) for initiatives aimed at enhancing energy citizenship. Overall, three overarching recommendations could help shifting the power-balances of the current energy system to pave way for both individual and collective citizen inclusion in the energy transition: redefining energy as a public service; redistributing profits from incumbent energy actors; and shifting the profit-maximising paradigm to a sufficiency paradigm.

This pathway of creating a supportive ecosystem for inclusive energy citizenship is relevant to specific aspects of the challenges described previously and further identifies opportunities and recommendations to address these challenges. To respond to the “am I able to take part in a citizen-based energy transition?” challenge, we provide recommendations which would represent strong leverages toward a citizens-friendly ecosystem in the energy domain.

#### Recommendations

▷ **Increase the support targeted towards vulnerable households by raising the financing envelope for the Social Climate Fund**, for example through the earmarking of more revenues from the European carbon markets<sup>37</sup>. *[European Institutions]*

▷ **‘Rewire’ the current financial models and funding schemes to be more accessible and flexible.** This depends on the removal of bureaucratic hurdles and improve support, for example through one stop shops for REC/CEC, as well as the removal of non-sustainable subsidies and the redirection of funds and resources towards citizen-led and community-based initiatives that support local action and employment opportunities. *[European Institutions, Member States]*

▷ **Speed up and adapt further the transposition of Renewable Energy Communities (REC) and Citizen Energy Communities (CEC) frameworks and support structures at the national level.** Adapt the legislative and regulatory framings to the diversity of local and regional contexts, to ensure that laws relating to energy are coherent at all levels of government, and also with related legal areas, such as property and spatial planning law, by involving more substantially regional and local governments. Ensure that the transposition limits cooptation of these models by incumbent businesses.

▷ **Create a European Facility for Citizen Involvement to support citizens involvement** in all kinds of energy transition initiatives. This facility could serve to complement the Energy Communities Repository by supporting initiatives beyond energy communities, for example led by public actors (at the local or regional levels), NGOs, citizen-based organisations, or businesses, and provide tools, recommendations, and best practices on how to involve citizens in local initiatives and enhance energy citizenship values in such endeavours.

▷ **Strengthen support to enhance environmental sustainability aspects within innovative energy transition initiatives**, for example by enhancing competencies to calculate carbon emissions impacts of projects and sharing of best practices. *[Member States, local and regional authorities]*

#### Recommendations targeting publicly run initiatives

▷ **Increase direct citizens’ involvement and control capacities within publicly led projects**, for instance through the systematic creation of some “citizen co-decision structure” within initiatives that target the citizens. This needs to be done with respect and care for the citizen-based approach to avoid local and regional authorities appropriating citizen-based mechanisms. *[Member States, Local and regional authorities]*

▷ **Increase the innovation capacity of local and regional authorities.** This means creating a suppor-

<sup>37</sup> Defard, C. (2022). The need for a socially-just European Green Deal. Policy paper. Jacques Delors Institute.

tive innovative environment where new types of energy transition projects with citizen-involvement can be tested and developed, by ensuring adequate human resources, competencies, and financial capacities to experiment. *[Member States]*

▷ **Support the development and replication of innovative financial tools** (such as the Haut-de-France Pass Renovation third party financing scheme) through networks where best practices can be shared, and support can be given for their implementation. *[European Commission, Member States]*

▷ **Develop tailored and dedicated legal measures and political efforts to counteract dynamics of exclusion of marginalised socio-economic groups** in an attempt to increase representation and tackle energy poverty. This could include, for instance, targeted financial support, regulatory changes, or communication strategies. With regards to regulatory changes, the draft law currently discussed in Germany concerning tenants' rights to plug-in solar devices is an interesting example.

▷ Develop strategies for boosting energy literacy within and beyond innovative energy transition initiatives through **"Next Door Energy Literacy"**, i.e. by operating on a citizen-to-citizen level to raise interest and appeals to citizens' everyday lives and challenges. *[Local and regional governments]*

### **Recommendations targeting organisationally based initiatives**

▷ **Create an enabling environment within local and regional business ecosystems** to increase innovative capacity and promote partnerships between the private sector, public sector, and citizen-led organisations. *[Member States, local and regional governments]*

▷ **Support capacity-building, professionalisation, and exchange structures/networks** to share knowledge and good practices, such as the Selbstbau.solar network.

▷ **Support the creation of solidarity structures among organisations** that could mutualise resources to enhance the resilience of the organisations' ecosystem in situations of crisis (e.g. Covid crisis).

▷ Enable (legally) and support (financially) **alternative financing tools and funding models** to enable social innovations' viability over time.

### **Recommendations targeting community-based initiatives**

▷ **Earmark EU-funding and technical assistance for continuous support of citizen-based organisations**, for example in initiatives like the Green Assist project and the Energy Poverty Advisory Hub. *[European Commission]*

▷ Support community-based organisations in improving energy citizenship values in their projects. *[Member States, local and regional authorities]*

▷ **Enhance environmental sustainability aspects of initiatives**, for example, by providing recommendations and support on how to carry out carbon emission calculations and facilitating the sharing of best practices.

▷ **Co-developing strategies and diffusing best practices for participation beyond financial contribution** and toward the inclusion of the most vulnerable or minorities that are currently under-represented (women, migrants, etc.).

▷ Offering training on intercultural sustainability communication and gender diversity within and beyond organisations can help in the integration of epistemic justice values.

## Energy citizenship in the making

Across all our projects, we find a common thread in understanding energy citizenship and how to make it a meaningful concept. That is, people are people rather than "just" energy citizens. They have lives filled with many of their own concerns. They live in a technical, political, and social system that does not always recognize their challenges. Under these circumstances, it is hard to act, even if they recognize the importance of the energy transition.

Therefore, **a human-centred approach to governance and decision-making processes would approach a complex challenge with empathy, especially to those who may already be struggling with existing stresses of daily life.** This means that diverse needs and values of the populace are considered in decision-making processes. It is an approach that would inherently account for distributional, procedural and recognitional forms of justice.

An energy citizenship approach to the European energy transition recognises that **everyone needs a place in the transition**, and also acknowledges the differentiated responsibilities that people can take on, considering that not everyone wants or has the capacities to participate in the same way. Euro-

pean policy makers therefore need to ensure that the changes that result from the energy transition are transparent, accessible, and affordable, taking particular care of the most vulnerable. Policy makers should also aim to make it simpler for those citizens who want to contribute more to changing the status quo. They could do this by, for example, by adapting and simplifying legislation, providing administrative support, provide network opportunities and ensuring access to financing for collective energy citizenship initiatives.

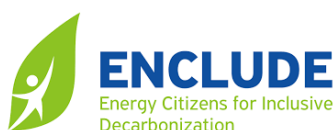
Such an approach is needed to make it possible for citizens to take an active role in the energy transition, to be the catalysts of change, rather than merely react to change. Supporting the capacity to act on information requires creating spaces for engagement and providing the conditions which make it feasible for people to join in. To do this, however, **policy makers have an important role in creating conditions in which all people have the capacity to join in the effort and to ensure that these efforts will have real impact in shaping their own and our collective future.** The policy recommendations introduced in this brief provide policy makers with pathways that mark important steps towards an inclusive European energy transition.



## The energy citizenship projects



**EC²** explored barriers and enablers to energy citizenship from a psychological, legal, and economic perspective. The research has involved municipalities, energy communities and citizens in the attempt to get a comprehensive and multi-dimensional perspective on energy citizenships and its potential to foster and accelerate the shift towards a people-based energy transition. Finally, EC² developed tools and methodologies aimed at supporting the mainstreaming of energy citizenship and community energy initiatives. The main methods used were experimental lab and field studies, experiments, case study research, co-creation workshops, and a survey based on around 16,000 citizens.



**ENCLUDE** aimed to understand the diverse expressions of energy citizenship, as well as to operationalise and mobilise the concept by co-producing and co-creating knowledge with citizens themselves. The project engaged 850 energy citizens to create a typology of energy citizenship. We incorporated these expressions of energy citizenship in agent-based models and an integrated assessment model to consider the decarbonisation potential of diverse collective actions at multiple scales of policy and decision-making. The project also created the ENCLUDE Academy for Energy Citizen Leadership, a global program for leadership development based on design and system thinking to help mobilise bottom-up participation in citizen engagement in Africa and the EU. At this last stage of the project, we will be launching the ENCLUDE Interactive Policy Platform, which will collect, visualise, and help transfer learnings from diverse energy citizenship initiatives for more people and places.







**EnergyPROSPECTS** examined how energy citizenship can contribute to a more just, democratic, and sustainable energy transition through inter- and transdisciplinary research. Both a conceptual framework and a typology allowed to capture the whole breadth of energy citizenship, including its actual and potential, as well as its latent and manifest forms, the related issues, and the way they all take part in the energy transition. This was followed up by the identification of the enablers and barriers for the development of energy citizenship at the EU-level and in the 9 partner countries. 596 cases of energy citizenship were mapped, of which 40 were studied in-depth. The project drew on a wide range of social science and humanities disciplines, such as geography, governance studies, and social innovation and transitions research. The main methods used were case study research, co-creation workshops and a survey with participation of 10,000 citizens across Europe.



The key focus of **DIALOGUES** was the co-creation of energy citizenship innovations that integrate the perspectives of groups currently on the margins of the energy transition such as women, low-income households, the energy poor, ethnic minorities, but also wealthy households. The central methodological pillar of DIALOGUES was grounded in tested inter- and transdisciplinary techniques, with a spotlight on open innovation and co-design of the research process through nine novel Citizen Action Labs in eight countries. To support the policy and research communities, DIALOGUES aimed to move the idea of energy citizenship forward to an operational concept and to offer actionable policy insights, applied research tools and a unifying theory for citizen-oriented energy research.






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