

Rural Energy Community Advisory Hub



The Rural Energy Community Advisory Hub (RECAH) was an initiative of the European Commission, which aimed to **accelerate the development of sustainable energy community projects in European rural areas.**

Rural energy communities are key to advancing the European Green Deal, however they face a variety of challenges and barriers:



Interconnectivity



Socio-economic



Technical



Knowledge sharing



Engagement

The main activities of the initiative have been:

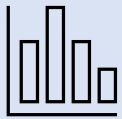
- **Identification of 20 best practices**
- **Development of over 10 guidance documents**
- **Provision of technical assistance to 28 energy communities**
- **Networking opportunities** to the energy communities and local stakeholders.

Link to RECAH Resources:
https://wayback.archive-it.org/12090/20240322085555/https://rural-energy-community-hub.ec.europa.eu/resources_en

The Crucial Role for Rural Energy Communities in the EU Energy Market



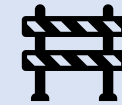
EU Energy market snapshot



Countries in the **EU produce around 40%** of the energy they use, while the remaining **60% is being imported**



Approximately **35 million EU citizens** (approximately 8% of the EU population) **were unable to keep their homes adequately warm in 2020** (pre-energy crisis)



Social acceptance of renewable energy technologies **remains low** in many EU Member States

Opportunities for rural energy communities



Rural Energy Communities provide the opportunity for local action to encourage experimentation, learning, and new business models



New technological developments open the pathway to increase renewable energy generation and storage to meet EU climate targets

Challenges for rural energy communities



Internal Challenges:

- Limited technical expertise in renewable energy requires ongoing training and capacity building.
- Recruiting and retaining effective leadership is essential but challenging.
- Internal conflicts and differing priorities can hinder community cohesion, particularly around shared energy resource governance.
- Projects require significant initial investment, and access to affordable financing options can be limited.
- Ensuring sustainable revenue or funding streams is critical for long-term success.

External Challenges:

- Building societal and political support is difficult due to skepticism around rural energy innovations.
- Flexibility in technical assistance is needed to handle disruptions like weather or political shifts.
- Navigating complex regulatory frameworks, including conflicts between national and EU laws, demands legal support.
- Changes in government policies or political leadership can create uncertainty for long-term projects, leading to disruptions or scaling back of support.
- Integration into national grids or local markets is challenging for rural communities, particularly with limited infrastructure.

Lessons learned and key takeaways



- **Effective stakeholder engagement** is key to overcoming external challenges and is essential for the success of technical assistance programs. This includes involving local authorities, community leaders, and external experts.
- **Clear and coherent regulatory framework** is needed throughout Europe to facilitate the effective implementation and expansion of energy communities.
- **Developing innovative financing mechanisms** (e.g., crowdfunding, low-interest loans, cooperative models, P2P lending) can reduce reliance on external funding and create self-sustaining energy communities.
- **Local authority support is often key to overcoming challenges** (e.g., planning permits, funding applications)

Key drivers and barriers for energy communities



Category	Drivers 	Barriers 
Group 	Committed individuals to drive a project forward; strong organisation capable of building momentum and overcoming setbacks.	Lack of clear direction and management in the group, resulting in inaction.
Project 	Adequate time, information, skills, finances, and material resources to carry out the project.	A lack of necessary skills, information, finances and material resources.
Community 	Project design meets your community's needs; successful engagement strategies increase participation and build trust.	Lack of public interest and mistrust of new energy systems, resulting in low engagement and participation.
Network 	Effective partnerships with local authorities, neighbouring energy communities, businesses, farmers and other relevant actors.	Lack of cooperation and transfer of knowledge.
Policy 	A supportive national policy context, with local authorities involved.	Unsupportive and inconsistent policy setting; hard-to-access grants; difficulties with planning and legal issues.