

Selection criteria for energy communities: a practical checklist



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E U funds provide an exceptional opportunity for Member States to support the development of the community energy movement by implementing ambitious financing programmes through the Cohesion Fund, the Recovery and Resilience Facility and the Modernisation Fund. However, despite significant progress in promoting renewable energy, energy communities still face significant barriers to accessing finance.

The collaboration between REScoop.eu and Climate Action Network Europe has led to the development of a Public Financing Tracker,¹ which illustrates how 19 EU Member States are using public financing – including the Recovery and Resilience Facility, cohesion policy funds and the Modernisation Fund – to support energy communities. Despite the steady growth of the community energy movement in recent years as well as the availability of EU provisions to foster its development, the tracker shows that certain Member States lack specific legislation and/or enabling frameworks to support energy communities. The appropriate use of EU funds for this purpose can also vary across Member States. For more information

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¹ REScoop.eu, <u>Financing tracker</u>, *REScoop.eu*, May 2023.



Based on the research and analysis of the first calls for proposals in Italy and Poland, we found that Member States, and specifically managing authorities responsible for EU-funded programmes, still lack an understanding of the energy community concept. To address this gap, we have created a set of practical recommendations for developing successful calls for proposals, including suitable selection criteria that can boost the growth of the community energy movement across central and eastern Europe. This briefing aims to provide practical guidance that can be incorporated into national legislation. We call on managing authorities to make concerted efforts to develop criteria that consider the specific needs of energy communities, ensuring they align with national and regional contexts.

Energy communities are essential for a just and sustainable energy transition

An energy community is a group of citizens that works together on an energy transition project, which is typically driven by solar or wind power involving the installation of wind turbines or solar photovoltaic systems. These communities can also engage in a wide range of other activities, such as energy efficiency measures, building renovation and electric vehicle sharing.

The legal recognition of energy communities at the EU level came into effect in 2019 with the introduction of the Clean Energy for All Europeans package, in particular through the revised Renewable Energy Directive (RED II) and the Internal Electricity Market Directive. Both pieces of legislation established a legal framework by recognising Renewable Energy Communities (RECs) and Citizen Energy Communities (CECs) respectively, and a set of criteria that must be met for a group to be defined as an energy community. These criteria include ownership, governance principles and the non-commercial purpose of the community.

The upcoming revision of the Electricity Market Design creates an opportunity to further strengthen an equitable and bottom-up energy system with energy communities at its centre. However, as the European Community Power Coalition recognises,² the current proposal is far from satisfactory in that it lacks adequate support for the growth of community energy projects. It also fails to properly recognise the essential role of local ownership in renewable energy production and supply, a vitally important element in helping communities to protect themselves from the effects of energy crises.

In the context of today's highly unpredictable energy sector, marked by supply shocks and price volatility, energy communities are essential for building decentralised, renewable, clean and efficient energy systems that put citizens first. Relying solely on a market-based approach has proven unsatisfactory in achieving a successful energy transition driven by renewable energy sources. Therefore, by empowering people to take control of their energy sources, these communities can play a significant role in the transition away from fossil fuels while also strengthening resilience to spikes in energy prices.

Social benefits

Energy communities provide a wide range of social benefits. According to an analysis by the European Energy Network,³ they play a key role in empowering local communities to take ownership and directly

² European Community Power Coalition, <u>Reform the Electricity Market Design legislation to empower citizens in the energy transition – Letter</u>, *European Community Power Coalition*, 15 December 2022.

³ European Energy Network, <u>Energy agencies and renewable energy communities: a new path for energy decentralization</u>, *European Energy Network*, November 2022.



participate in the development of renewable projects. Energy communities also have an important part to play in raising awareness and increasing public acceptance of renewable energy sources. Additionally, they typically provide education and training for their own members and the general public on topics such as reducing energy consumption, improving energy efficiency, generating renewable energy, taking action to halt the climate crisis, living sustainably, exploring democratic forms of organisation and developing soft skills. Finally, many energy cooperatives have developed poverty alleviation programmes, using profits from renewables to support the most vulnerable members of their communities.⁴

Economic benefits

Energy communities propel economic development in affected regions by creating new local jobs. Additionally, they contribute to the development of local and regional manufacturers and reinvest revenues in community projects. Moreover, energy communities play a vital role in reducing the cost of energy bills, a particularly significant impact given the current context of rising electricity costs. By investing in rural areas, they reverse the trend of rural depopulation and create opportunities for young people in smaller towns and villages.

Climate and environmental benefits

Community-owned energy projects can significantly reduce carbon emissions, help mitigate the effects of climate change, and increase resilience and independence by providing local energy solutions. They also act as a counterbalance to the current energy system, which heavily depends on incumbent utilities run by profit-driven corporations. By placing renewable energy resources in the hands of the community, the system can be reconfigured to better serve people, the environment and the climate. Shifting towards a community-based approach in transitioning away from fossil fuels nurtures the development of a more sustainable, democratic and decentralised energy system. This empowers people to produce, consume and share renewable energy. Beyond promoting the use of local renewable energy production and lowering private energy consumption, this approach can yield other environmental benefits. These include improved resource management and the use of appropriate technologies and innovation based on a holistic view of the environmental impacts of these initiatives.

Checklist for developing effective energy community criteria

Robust criteria are needed to ensure energy communities can deliver these multiple benefits, counter corporate capture, ensure citizen participation, and make effective use of public funds in line with EU objectives. The following checklist provides an easy-to-use overview of the criteria that managing authorities should consider when preparing calls for proposals for community energy projects. The checklist is divided into four main sections based on anticipated benefits for society, the economy, the climate and the environment, and governance. The section on governance has been included to underline the essential role of meaningful citizen participation in the selection process. Inclusivity and transparency should be at the heart of public consultation and all decision-making processes.

⁴ CEE Bankwatch Network, <u>Energy communities: A brief explainer for managing authorities in central and eastern Europe</u>, *CEE Bankwatch Network*, 5, 4 May 2022.





Compliance with the EU's definitions of Citizen Energy Community (CEC) and Renewable Energy Community (REC)



Does the call include eligibility criteria for local stakeholders such as citizens, municipalities, nongovernmental organisations (NGOs), associations, and small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) whose main area of work is not in the energy sector? Does it incorporate principles of participatory and horizontal decision-making?



Does the call have the capacity to implement citizen participation according to the principles of the International Cooperative Alliance (ICA)?⁵

- Voluntary and open membership
- Democratic member control (1 member = 1 vote)
- Economic participation of members
- Education, training and information
- Cooperation between cooperatives
- Concern for the community

Promotion of community models that are inclusive and transformative



Is the call designed in a way that ensures effective control and ownership by the community itself? Does it promote the active participation of different types of local stakeholders, such as citizens, SMEs and associations, in the proposed initiatives?



Is the call designed in a way that minimises the risk of corporate capture, such as by prohibiting the presence of dominant shareholders (with more than 33 per cent of the ownership) and/or the reservation of seats on the board of the energy community for specific entities?



Is the call designed to address the cultural and demographic challenges of the territory by promoting the governance of the REC and CEC definitions through the active involvement of women, youth and migrants in community management?



Does the call consider the participation of a diverse range of local groups in the cooperative, including youth, women, older people and disadvantaged groups, such as those living in low-income households or facing other social or economic challenges?

⁵ International Cooperative Alliance, <u>Cooperative identity, values & principles</u>, International Cooperative Alliance, 2018.



Transparency and public participation



Does the call for proposals encourage meaningful engagement with local communities, including public consultation and participation in decision-making processes through channels such as websites, public meetings and awareness-raising events?



Social benefits

Reducing energy poverty



Is the call designed to assign higher scores to projects that recognise the role that energy communities can play in alleviating energy poverty and improving the living conditions of low-income and vulnerable households?

Community-building and awareness-raising measures



Is the call designed to assign higher scores for projects that commit to building capacity and raising awareness among the community or in other regions that might benefit from their experience?



Does the call have the potential to provide high-quality educational and cultural services?



Climate and environmental benefits

Reducing environmental impacts and ensuring no significant harm is done



Does the call exclude the use of fossil fuels and prioritise climate-proofing measures based on sustainable renewables?



Does the call meet the objectives of the EU Taxonomy Regulation?

Contributing to sustainable goals through technological innovation



Does the call prioritise projects focused on reducing overall energy demand, particularly through measures such as energy efficiency, energy storage and other grid flexibility services?





Does the call focus on projects that strive to improve the management of local resources and promote circular economy principles?



Economic benefits

Improvement of economic viability

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Does the call have the potential to improve the economic viability of local businesses?

Does the call have the potential to boost local employment, particularly among marginalised groups?



Does the call recognise the essential role of local businesses and their contribution to community energy projects?

Does the call encourage the reinvestment of a portion of the project's profits into local community initiatives that have a social and/or ecological value?

Examples of existing calls for proposals

POLAND

Introduction

Poland's recovery and resilience plan will be supported by an estimated EUR 23.9 billion in grants and EUR 11.5 billion in loans from the Recovery and Resilience Facility. Out of the grant portion, only 0.4 per cent (EUR 97 million) will be allocated for investment B2.2.2 focusing on RES installations operated by energy communities. The investment is implemented through a pre-investment and investment support programme covering existing energy communities or entities intending to establish such communities.

The investment incorporates the contained in Poland's Act on Renewable Energy Sources (2015), even though it does not fully comply with the EU's definitions of Citizen Energy Community (CEC) and Renewable Energy Community (REC). The description of the investment also contains a reference to the Renewable Energy Directive:

The objective of the investment is to incentivise the development of local renewable energy sources carried out by energy communities (including energy clusters, energy cooperatives and other energy communities resulting from the implementation of RED II), grouped



prosumers (collective and virtual prosumers), with a particular focus on the role of local governments (in particular municipalities and associations of municipalities) forming such local energy communities and communities.⁶

Investment B2.2.2 - Renewable energy source installations operated by energy communities

In October 2022, Poland's Ministry of Economic Development and Technology began consultations⁷ on the criteria for selecting projects related to investment B2.2.2 focusing on RES installations operated by energy communities. The consultations are provided for under the pre-investment support programme. However, the consultation period lasted only two weeks, in breach of the principles of consultation adopted by the Polish government in 2013.⁸ According to these principles, a minimum of 21 days is required to allow citizens sufficient time to review the documents for consultation. During the shortened consultation period, a total of 13 responses were received.

Resulting from the consultations on the project selection criteria, the Ministry published a consultation report along with new draft criteria on 30 December 2022. Under Action A.2 specified in the detailed criteria (see Table 1 below), four scoring criteria apply to the development of energy communities operating in the field of RES: the number of municipalities participating in the project; the installed capacity is of renewable energy source (RES) installations connected to power grids; the number of prosumer installations; and compliance with the Recruitment Regulations.

Table 1. Development of new energy communities operating in the field of RES – stage I⁹

CRITERIA FOR SCORING POINTS

Maximum number of points - 12 points

Minimum number of points required to receive funding – 6 points

Reserve list – 2-6 points

municipalitiesof municipalities participating in the participating in1 municparticipating inproject.	cipality – 1 point
the project More th Scoring (1-2) in the S	an 1 municipality, municipal tion or metropolitan association ilesian Voivodeship, county

⁶ EUR-Lex, <u>Proposal for a COUNCIL IMPLEMENTING DECISION on the approval of the assessment of the recovery and resilience plan for Poland</u>, EUR-Lex, 75, 1 June 2022.

⁷ Ministry of Economic Development and Technology, <u>30.12.2022 - zakończenie konsultacji kryteriów wyboru przedsięwzięć (część przedinwestycyjna) i konsultacje wskazówek dot. koncepcji rozwoju, Ministry of Economic Development and Technology, 30 December 2022.</u>

⁸ Ministry of Digital Affairs, <u>Jak prowadzimy konsultacje?</u>, *Ministry of Digital Affairs*, 18 December 2017.

⁹ Translated and adapted from a table in an attachment outlining the detailed criteria for Investment B.2.2 published by the Ministry of Economic Development and Technology. For the original file, see <u>Załącznik nr ... do Regulaminu naboru Inwestycji B2.2.2 – Część A: Wsparcie przedinwestycyjne społeczności energetycznych</u>, *Ministry of Economic Development and Technology*, 8, 30 December 2022.



		(powiat) or city/commune with county rights – 2 points
Installed capacity of RES installations connected to low-voltage (LV) and medium- voltage (MV) power grids Scoring (1-5)	The reference point for assessment will be the total capacity of RES installations, expressed in kilowatts of electrical power (kWe), connected to the distribution grid with a nominal voltage lower than 110 kilovolts (kV) in the territorial self-government units participating in the project, as of the date of application submission. The assessment will be based on the applicant's declaration. The applicant will be required to specify the types of installations, ownership structure, and sources of information regarding the declared capacity of the RES installations.	 1 point – up to 100 kWe or up to 300 kW for combined heat and power co- generation 2 points – over 100 and up to 500 kWe or over 300 and up to 1,500 kW for combined heat and power co-generation 3 points – over 500 and up to 1,000 kWe or over 1,500 and up to 3,000 kW for combined heat and power co-generation 4 points – over 1,000 and up to 2,000 kWe or over 3,000 and up to 6,000 kW for combined heat and power co-generation 5 points – over 2,000 kWe or over 6,000 kW for combined heat and power
Number of prosumer installations Scoring (1-5)	The reference point for assessment will be the number of prosumer installations in the territorial self- government units participating in the project as of the date of application submission. The assessment will be based on the applicant's declaration. The applicant will be required to specify the types of installations and sources of information regarding the declared number of prosumer installations.	1 point – up to 100 installations 2 points – 101-200 installations 3 points – 201-500 installations 4 points – 501-1,000 installations 5 points – over 1,000 installations
Compliance with the Recruitment Regulations	The verification will assess whether the project meets the conditions specified in the Recruitment Regulations.	

As a result of the criteria consultations, the Ministry decided to publish an additional draft document on guidelines for developing a concept of energy communities, which also underwent a consultation process. The Ministry received responses from eight energy clusters, energy cooperatives and local government units, who submitted a total of 50 comments.



Both the project selection criteria and the concept guidelines incorporate two permissible legal forms: energy clusters, which are business entities, and energy cooperatives. However, there is a notable bias in favour of energy clusters, as evidenced by their greater promotional support, four times higher than that provided to energy cooperatives. The bias also manifests in the criteria themselves, which prioritise technical and business considerations over social impacts.

The narrow focus of the criteria also neglects the crucial social dimension that lies at the very heart of community energy projects. The potential of energy communities to address energy poverty by engaging households in crisis situations has been completely overlooked in this investment. It is crucial for an energy community to generate positive outcomes both for the community as a whole and for the individuals within it. Therefore, the selection criteria should be inclusive and transformative, recognising a wide range of groups that can participate in the proposed initiatives, such as citizens, small and medium-sized enterprises and associations.

Additionally, the scheme should be adjusted to address the cultural and demographic challenges of the area in question, enabling the participation of groups that are typically underrepresented in these projects, such as women, youth, migrants and disadvantaged households. Creating a fully inclusive framework that fosters broad community engagement and reaps the maximum benefits for all participants is essential.

In this particular case, the ministerial authorities responsible for the implementation of this investment have failed to deliver selection criteria that unlock the full potential of energy communities. This is likely to result in significant negative consequences. Firstly, it may limit the potential for community empowerment and social cohesion. Secondly, it could result in missed opportunities for developing innovative and effective solutions to energy and environmental challenges. The misunderstanding of the concept of energy communities can further result in the risks of corporate capture, misuse of funds and project failures. These outcomes could result in less acceptance and support for energy communities. Overall, this concerning development highlights the importance of developing inclusive and transformative selection criteria that holistically consider the social, economic and climate benefits of community energy projects. Only through the implementation of such criteria can these projects be successfully deployed.



Introduction

Italy's recovery and resilience plan has allocated EUR 2.2 billion for investments in the creation of renewable energy communities. The objective is to achieve a target of 2,500 gigawatt hours (GWh) of clean energy through community-led initiatives. These efforts will focus on municipalities with less than 5,000 inhabitants. The Italian government transposed the Renewable Energy Directive and Internal Electricity Market Directive into national legislation in November 2021, albeit with a delay of five months. The secondary legislation required for the implementation of these directives was adopted in October 2022.



One significant obstacle that still hinders the implementation of this investment under the recovery and resilience plan is the pending ministerial decree.¹⁰ This decree is set to establish the premium tariff for 'shared energy' and define the legal framework for combining this incentive with potential non-refundable financing schemes, including those from the recovery and resilience plan and other regional programmes.

Once launched, the community energy measure could become a very important instrument in supporting smaller scale energy community projects. Under the measure, eligible expenses range from technical and technical-scientific assistance to the procurement of essential components for energy production, distribution and sharing facilities. This also includes the purchase costs associated with storage systems and the provision of legal and administrative assistance for defining agreements.

In addition to the Recovery and Resilience Facility, numerous regional operational plans under the EU cohesion policy's programming period for 2021 to 2027 include explicit provisions for establishing renewable energy communities as a specific objective. These plans also allocate funds to promote these communities. Several calls for proposals, aimed at conducting feasibility studies and providing technical assistance, have already been launched. This will allow community energy initiatives to reach an advanced stage of development by the time the legislative framework is completed.

Lazio Region: Support programme for renewable energy communities¹¹

The Lazio Region, which oversees a population of 5,755,700 inhabitants and a coverage area of 17,252 square kilometres (km²), has implemented a support programme for renewable energy communities. The support programme consists of three types of REC creation activities:

- 1. Scheme carried out in collaboration with Sapienza University of Rome to raise awareness and facilitate the creation of RECs through capacity-building events.¹²
- 2. Support for feasibility studies and legal costs for the creation of renewable energy: grants of EUR 1 million will be made available for this purpose.
- 3. Support for new renewable energy community installations: grants of EUR 20 million will be made available for this purpose.

Details of support applications for technical-economic feasibility studies and legal costs for establishing RECs

Criteria for beneficiaries:

The present call is open to established or prospective renewable energy communities, as defined in Article 2, paragraph 1, letter p) of Legislative Decree no. 199 dated 8 November 2021.

¹⁰ Ministry of the Environment and Energy Security, <u>Comunità Energetiche, il viceministro Gava annuncia: "A breve pubblicazione del decreto,</u> <u>indipendenza energetica è obiettivo di questo Governo"</u>, *Ministry of the Environment and Energy Security*, 20 January 2023.

¹¹ Information provided in this section is adapted and translated from a public notice on the realisation of technical-economic feasibility studies of RECs in Lazio published by the Lazio Region. See <u>Avviso Pubblico per la realizzazione di studi di fattibilità tecnico-economica delle Comunità</u> <u>Energetiche Rinnovabili nel Lazio</u>, *Regione Lazio: Transizione Ecologica e Trasformazione Digitale*, 22 December 2022.

¹² Regione Lazio: Transizione Ecologica e Trasformazione Digitale, <u>Rinnovabili: 100 comunità energetiche in 100 comuni entro 2022</u>, *Regione Lazio: Transizione Ecologica e Trasformazione Digitale*, 25 May 2022.

- 1. Pursuant to Article 31, paragraph 1, letter b) of Legislative Decree no. 199 dated 8 November 2021, a renewable energy community is an autonomous legal entity, and the exercise of control powers is exclusively granted to natural persons, small and medium-sized enterprises, territorial entities, and local authorities, including municipal administrations. It also includes research and training bodies, religious bodies, third-sector organisations, environmental protection bodies and local administrations listed in the public administrations' roster published by the Italian National Institute of Statistics, as provided for in Article 1, paragraph 3 of Law no. 31 December 2009, no. 196.
- 2. Companies participating in the programme must not be principally engaged in the production, distribution and marketing of energy.
- 3. Renewable energy communities made up exclusively of business entities are not eligible under the programme.

Formally admitted applications for support are assessed on the basis of the following evaluation criteria and related objective sub-criteria (see Table 2 below):

- 1. Size and organisation of the renewable energy community (number of members, governance mechanisms and overall organisational set-up)
- 2. Energy benefits (projected renewable energy production capacity, the expected contribution to local energy supply, the efficiency of energy production and distribution systems)
- 3. Social benefits (job creation, community involvement, educational initiatives and environmental awareness campaigns)

Criteria	Sub-criteria	Value	Max. score for sub-criteria	Max. score for criteria*
Size and	Number of entities involved	From 2 to 7	5	30
the renewable		From 8 to 20	10	
energy community		Above 20	15	
	Participation of citizens (households)	yes/no	3	
	Participation of small and medium-sized enterprises	yes/no	3	
	Participation of local authorities	yes/no	3	

Table 2. Evaluation criteria, sub-criteria and respective scores



	Participation of other entities (associations, etc.)	yes/no	3	
	Registered REC	yes/no	3	
Energy benefits	New installable RES capacity (kW)	Up to 50 kW	8	40
		Between 51 and 200 kW	14	
		More than 200 kW	20	
	Projected coverage of electricity consumption by the self- generation of new RES plants (%)	Up to 10%	8	
		Between 11 and 30%	12	
		Above 30%	20	
Social benefits	Participation of households experiencing economic hardship (number) and/or physical hardship (number) as of 31/12/2021; presence of couples under the age of 35 (number) out of the total number of persons affected (%)	Up to 10%	10	30
		Between 11 and 30%	20	
		Above 30%	30	

* The maximum score that can be assigned to each support application cannot exceed 100 points. Support applications that do not achieve an overall score of 65 points will not be accepted.

The size of the grant provided for technical assistance is determined based on the amount of energy produced. There are three categories based on the production of energy by renewable energy communities, each of which corresponds to a specific grant amount:

- 1. For energy production up to 300,000 kilowatt hours (kWh) per year, the grant amount is set at EUR 6 000.
- 2. For energy production between 300,000 kWh and 1,000,000 kWh per year, the grant amount is increased to EUR 9 000.
- 3. For energy production above 1,000,000 kWh per year, the grant amount is set at EUR 14 000.

The total available resources for financial allocation amount to EUR 1 million.

Emilia-Romagna Region: Support programme for renewable energy communities

The Emilia-Romagna Region has been allocated EUR 2 million from the European Regional Development Fund (2021–2027) to support the development of renewable energy communities.¹³ Up to 80 per cent of the expenses incurred for the establishment and organisation of RECs, including feasibility studies, are eligible for a non-repayable grant. It should be noted that the funding percentage can be increased to 90 per cent depending on the expected results. The maximum contribution is EUR 50 000.

Selection criteria	Declination of the criterion	Score*
Quality of the proposal in terms of definition of objectives, methodology, and implementation procedures of the intervention	Considering the completeness and clarity of the documentation presented regarding the objectives of the REC (environmental, social, economic) and the project implementation procedures (including any authorisation procedures and installation timelines for REC service facilities).	Max. 20 points
Management model envisaged for the energy community	Considering the organisational model of the REC in relation to energy needs, energy production and sharing, potential presence of storage systems, and the economic management of the facilities and the functioning of the REC.	Max. 20 points
Capacity for aggregation and involvement of participating subjects in the energy community	Considering the number and type of involved subjects and potential subjects to be involved, with reference to the location of the proposed project regarding the location of electrical substations and facilities, as well as their capacity. Additionally, the mechanism of 'opening' the REC and any actions to involve and activate potential participants will be taken into account.	Max. 20 points
Project capacity to contribute to carbon neutrality	Considering the new installed capacity of renewable energy sources, the amount of renewable energy production, and the resulting reduction in CO ₂ equivalent emissions. Furthermore, any additional	Max. 25 points

Table 3. Scoring criteria for eligible applications¹⁴

¹³ Regione Emilia-Romagna, <u>Sostegno allo sviluppo di Comunità energetiche rinnovabili</u>, *Regione Emilia-Romagna*, 13 December 2022.

¹⁴ Translated from a table provided in Resolution No. 2151 adopted by the Emilia-Romagna Region. For the original document, see <u>REGIONE EMILIA-</u> <u>ROMAGNA Atti amministrativi GIUNTA REGIONALE Delibera Num. 2151 del 05/12/2022 Seduta Num. 50</u>, *Regione Emilia-Romagna*, 21-22, 5 December 2022.

	actions that can contribute to achieving the objective will be considered.	
Economic and financial quality in terms of economic viability of the proposal (relationship between support amount, undertaken activities, and achievement of objectives)	Considering the relationship between the requested support amount (net of any premiums) and the installed capacity of the REC configuration (a higher score will be given for a lower ratio as described above).	Max. 15 points

* The minimum score for an eligible grant application is 50 points.



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