



A comprehensive policy paper on facilitating collective actions

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List of acronyms

CEC	Citizen Energy Communities
DSO	Distribution system operator
IC	Implementation Champion
OSS	One-Stop-Shop
REC	Renewable Energy Communities

1. Introduction

The aim of the UP-STAIRS project was to accelerate the development of energy communities by providing a common framework for their development. The UP-STAIRS project sought to remove barriers to citizen participation in the transition from the consumer market to the 'prosumer market' by supporting and accelerating the development of energy communities. In addition, the project aimed to enable cooperation between local authorities and citizens.

Community support was provided through a compendium of energy tutorials on key topics, including behaviour change, supporting renewable energy prosumers, collective action and its benefits to consumers, and what it means to become an energy citizen in a sustainable energy community.

One of the tasks of the project was to identify and evaluate regulatory barriers for collective and cooperative actions aimed to facilitate the legal and administrative processes involved in the implementation of joint projects. This would consider the progress made in other ongoing and previous Intelligent Energy Europe and Horizon 2020 projects (such as [RESCoop](#) 20-20-20 and CO-POWER) and existing literature. It also analysed the incentive system in each partner country to identify best practices and extract relevant information influencing public opinion and bodies responsible for collective action.

The project carried out a detailed review of the legal, administrative and incentive frameworks for collective action in different countries. The available frameworks were indicated and the missing aspects from Member States frameworks that should be added to the existing documents were suggested.

There were also 3 [workshops](#), at different stages of the development of One-Stop-Shops, which discussed, among other things, the barriers and challenges encountered so far during the creation and development of One-Stop-Shops; possible ways to overcome barriers and challenges; recommendations of participants; the best ways to persuade citizens to participate in collective actions and energy communities.

One of the most important activities was the preparation of a [document](#) for citizens that will help them to familiarise themselves with the activities of the various energy communities focussed One-Stop-Shops, in particular, the one(s) operating in their region, and to provide them with an overview of the facilitations and incentives available. The citizen-oriented approach was important because One-Stop-Shops are designed to help citizens, and the detailed framework available is a significant resource for citizens to access a lot of important information in one document. The activities carried out under this task were aimed at both individual citizens and energy communities, local and national authorities, and companies that could participate in individual activities related to collective actions and energy communities.

2. The availability of legislative, administrative and incentive framework

In the EU, there have been initiatives related to collective actions and different types of energy communities for a long time, but only relatively recently changes in EU legislation, which recognise renewable energy prosumers and active consumers working together, as well as the recognition of CECs and RECs, have led to their dissemination and formal role.

In many countries, however, there is still no appropriate legislation that defines and formalises energy communities and joint activities of residents related to energy efficiency or renewable energy sources. However, even in countries where energy communities are included in the legislation, there is still a lack of detailed descriptions and targets for them. Of all the partner countries participating in the project: Austria, Bulgaria, Germany, Ireland, Latvia, Poland and Spain, only Austria and Ireland have existing legislation that covers energy communities in most of the important aspects, but even the supports and details in those countries are still lacking. In other countries, there is still a need to include energy communities and collective actions in legislation in order to create a formal and easy-to-implement structure.

When it comes to the availability of collective action incentives in individual countries, in the pilot countries there are incentives from the most important category, i.e. financial, which allow for the introduction of different technical solutions, depending on the country and the type of support. In the pilot regions of Austria, Bulgaria, Ireland and Spain, the creation of OSSs also provides support at technical, organisational and legal levels, depending on the business model of the particular OSS.

The project [report](#) describes in detail the legal framework in the partner countries involved in the UP-STAIRS project.

3. Lessons learnt

During the whole project, many conclusions were drawn related to the creation, development and operation of the OSS:

- OSS services should be aimed at a wide group, not narrowed down, as this results reduces the engagement levels and interest;
- Increasing the willingness and trust of residents to the activities of the OSS is possible by increasing their knowledge and awareness, e.g. by organising webinars, meetings or preparing information materials;
- It is important to find an Implementation Champion with the right knowledge and/or experience so that they can provide adequate support to the residents;
- The interest of the inhabitants will be greater if there are financial incentives for collective actions;
- All processes, activities and information should be easy to understand and transparent for residents, so that they do not treat participation in a collective action as an obstacle and a problem;
- OSSs should work with various stakeholders to be able to run a complex business, i.e. banks, local and national authorities, Distribution System Operators (DSO);
- The best way to raise citizens' awareness is to present real success stories;
- The existence of comprehensive legislation on energy communities and collective actions will encourage citizens to participate, eliminating uncertainty of the undertaking.

All these findings can be helpful in the development of future collective actions, both in the partner countries and in other member states, and can be used to support informing citizens and building their trust which needs to be a priority.

4. Challenges and barriers

The overarching aim of the UP-STAIRS project was to address barriers related to the creation of energy communities and collective actions and accelerate their proliferation. Individual barriers and challenges have been identified since the beginning of the creation of OSSs. Depending on the stage of OSSs development, some barriers and challenges have been addressed, some remained unresolved and new ones identified.

OSS Formation Stage	
Barrier/Challenge	Proposed solution
Lack of support or capacity to support OSS from the authorities	Development of comprehensive cooperation between OSS and the municipality – providing municipalities with an understanding of the operation and benefits of the OSS
Lack of sufficient knowledge among citizens and lack of willingness to cooperate	Conducting communication campaigns, direct meetings with residents, organization of information events, involvement of various groups, e.g. sports clubs, information materials
Creation of an OSS with appropriate staff to provide comprehensive support to residents	Training of employees in technical, organizational, administrative and financial aspects and cooperation of OSS with relevant authorities and other stakeholders
Lack of clear and detailed legislation on collective actions and energy community	Prepare an overall OSS business model that is modified for each region, which takes into account the most important aspects and available capabilities, and which then coordinating the OSS through a single platform common to all pilot regions.
OSS Development Stage	
Barrier/Challenge	Proposed solution
Still not sufficient awareness of the citizens	Educating citizens in economic, environmental, legal and technical fields; dissemination of more information materials and organization of meetings with residents
Reluctance on the side of the citizens	Presenting success stories and possible benefits of participating in OSS activities, creating more incentives, mainly financial
Lack of relevant legislation	Creating a clear and easy-to-understand legislative framework that will enable the development of energy communities
Lack of willingness to cooperate on the part of DSO	Formalise the participation of DSOs in the creation and development of energy communities, in view of their key role in providing essential resources to communities
OSS Operation Stage	
Barrier/Challenge	Proposed solution
Gaps between the planning and implementation stages	Modification of the original business model

Still no relevant legislation or new legislation that is not fully understood	Creating easy-to-understand and comprehensive legislation that focuses on energy communities
Ownership issues, i.e. who owns which elements of the infrastructure when creating a community, too many decision makers	A detailed description of the principles and details of the creation of energy communities, creating different archetypes that could be realised depending on the individual circumstances of the community
Spreading the awareness of the citizens to other regions	Going beyond the pilot region with an educational campaign and promoting collective action in other areas
Lack of appropriate technologies, e.g. digital platforms, that could facilitate the management of projects related to energy communities	Creating a unified system or other type of platform to manage all energy communities in a country or city/region to avoid information gaps and ambiguities
Limited area covered by OSSs activities	Expand OSS operations or create a new service desk in a different region
Excessive paperwork related to both the creation of collective actions and communities, as well as obtaining funding	Preparing easy-to-read and detailed instructions for creating collective action and energy communities, moving documentation to an online platform and reducing the number of documents needed by residents
Sole focus of OSS activities being put on online activities which could exclude some residents from participating	Running OSS both in-person and online

Some barriers and challenges were present at all stages of OSS, but the proposed solutions changed slightly. Along with the development of OSSs, new barriers were noticed, but also new solutions that were not noticed when the project began. In addition, during the entire project, meetings were held with different stakeholders and each of them noted different problems, and also different solutions.

5. Conclusions and policy recommendations

The countries where pilot regions have been set up unanimously indicate that the lack of adequate, easy-to-understand and harmonised legislation on energy communities is one of the key barriers slowing down the process of their dissemination and understanding. Along with the lack of financial resources and the lack of awareness of the inhabitants in the field of energy, the lack of a clear law which discourages citizens from taking action was highlighted. Residents fear that participating in the community will only be a burden and not bring any benefits.

Legislation and regulatory frameworks should be created in all pilot countries that support the participation of collective actions and energy communities. The framework should include provisions for:

- Rules for their creation, including organizational, administrative and legal aspects;
- The role of the energy community and OSS, including obligations and rights;
- The role of individual stakeholders, both in the process of creating a collective action and its functioning, including ownership and decision-making aspects;
- Creating funds available to energy communities and collective actions;
- Opportunities for them to operate and obtain funding and manage funds and resources within the community;
- Education related to collective actions for energy efficiency and renewable energy sources;
- Introduce nationwide strategies related to energy communities, but flexible enough to be adapted to regional conditions;
- Describe and formalise the relationship of DSOs with energy communities. This may include regulatory incentives to support the development of appropriate, collaborative relationships between DSOs and energy communities. This is crucial as most regulatory environments actively discourage DSOs from engaging with energy communities. Instead, regulatory incentives need to be put in place to facilitate the more complex engagement required for energy communities to engage with DSOs and maximise the potential positive impact on the power system and minimise any potential negative impacts. This approach will accelerate the grid connection process for energy communities and potentially renewable energy in general within a jurisdiction;
- The development of technologies, including digital platforms, which will facilitate the management and integration of all energy projects;
- Monitoring of the activity, in order to ensure that the funds are used for the declared objectives;
- Periodic monitoring of the activities of energy communities in order to assess their functioning and possibly indicate the direction of improvement or further development.

All EU countries should implement such provisions into their laws and thus formalise the role of energy communities in the energy transition.