

# Rural Energy Community Advisory Hub: Value Propositions for Stakeholder Engagement

## Why energy communities are key to advancing the European Green Deal

The European Green Deal sets out to make Europe the first climate neutral-continent by 2050. A key component of this goal is the decarbonisation of the EU energy system via the Clean Energy Package, which has at its heart the engagement, empowerment and mobilisation of citizens in the transition to cleaner and more efficient energy.

Energy communities have an essential role in this transition: they contribute holistically to the initiatives and objectives of the Green Deal, encompassing renewable energy production and supply, building renovation, and promoting energy efficiency and flexibility. They also entail active citizen engagement and boost positive social norms, thus combatting energy poverty and fostering solidarity to assure a just and inclusive energy transition.

Recent crises like the COVID-19 pandemic and the Russian invasion of Ukraine further underline the necessity to assure energy accessibility, resilience and security, especially at the local level. Energy communities are also significant for generating local revenue, jobs and industries and driving research and innovation.

## Rural energy communities: an understanding and their particularities

Energy communities, including both renewable energy communities (Article 2(16) Recast Renewable Energy Directive) and citizen energy communities (Article 2(11) Recast Internal Electricity Market Directive), have been defined in several pieces of EU legislation, which commonly describe them as:

- A legal entity, based on open and voluntary participation
- Controlled by members or shareholders, those being natural persons, municipalities or small enterprises
- Have the primary purpose of providing environmental, economic or social community benefits
- Engages in the generation, distribution, and consumption of renewable energy

Rural energy communities are especially significant to the EU's climate objectives. They involve the active participation of local authorities and citizens, the operationalisation of local development plans and help to ensure rural areas are not left behind in the energy transition. These communities entail valuable intersections with this involvement of local authorities and key policies related to the common agricultural policy, rural development, and farm modernisation.

Rural energy communities can be defined as those satisfying the conditions listed above, with the addition of being situated in a rural area. Rural areas are those classified as such by the DEGRURBA (Degree of urbanisation) system, which specifies them to be where at least 50% of the population live in rural grid cells.

Due to their rural specificities, these communities face challenges and barriers, often confronted with physical constraints and interconnectivity limits. These can be varied in nature, relating to socio-economic, technical, or information concerns or those related to actors or institutions.

## What the Rural Energy Community Advisory Hub is for

The Rural Energy Community Advisory Hub is an initiative of the European Commission, that aims to accelerate the development of sustainable energy community projects in European rural areas.

The main activities of the initiative will be to support the energy communities selected to participate, by:

- Identifying best practices
- Providing technical assistance
- Providing networking opportunities

Building on the work of the Energy Communities Repository and the Covenant of Mayors, the project will provide important information for European institutions and national, regional and local authorities. It will also disseminate best practices to support local authorities, businesses, farmers and citizens to set up rural energy communities.

## **Value propositions: why and how to participate in the Rural Energy Community Advisory Hub (RECAH)**

We invite all relevant stakeholders (i.e. academics/experts, local & regional authorities, farmers, policymakers, SMEs, citizens, NGOs as well existing or prospective energy communities, etc.) to follow and actively take part in the RECAH. Below we set out four value propositions demonstrating how you can benefit from the initiative and how the initiative can benefit from your participation.

### **Value proposition 1: *Directly benefit from knowledge and services on offer by RECAH***

Through your participation, you, your members and your organisation/initiative may be able to take advantage of:

- The technical assistance and mentoring on topics ranging from identification of financing/investments, technology and systems-related advice, legal/regulatory support and communication support
- Benchmarking and in-depth best practice examples of how diversely located and different forms of rural energy communities have overcome barriers to become successful models
- Utilise innovative guidance documents, toolbox and factsheets about rural energy communities

### **Value proposition 2: *Contribute towards understanding and awareness of Energy Communities as drivers of a just and inclusive energy transition in Europe***

Through your participation, you will be able to further encourage the practice of energy communities, with specificity to rural areas and their importance in transforming the energy systems:

- Spread the message of (rural) energy communities to EU policymakers and citizens across Europe, and thereby raise awareness at the EU level of the cruciality of rural energy communities in the energy transition.
- Identify best practices when it comes to successful activities and outcomes, highlight those easily replicable for other communities, and gain feedback to improve your ongoing activities.
- Support the essential task of mapping rural energy communities across Europe, creating a valuable resource and network for both communities and EU policymakers.

### **Value proposition 3: *Showcase and enhance your existing initiative/activities/projects***

Through your participation, you will be able to share the successes of your work on the RECAH website, our newsletter and by being invited to attend and participate relevant conferences organised by RECAH or the European Commission. This will bring the following benefits:

- Promoting the usage of research, analysis, tools and methodologies already developed, or to be developed, by your projects, activities and initiatives
- Update and enhance your understanding of what challenges (rural) energy communities are facing
- Test the relevance and feasibility of any new ideas, approaches and activities with the rural energy communities which will receive support

### **Value proposition 4: *Join a thriving and diverse network of practitioners on Energy Communities***

Through your participation, you will join an exciting and dynamic network of fellow rural energy community stakeholders. In doing so, you can:

- Facilitate peer-to-peer exchanges of information between energy communities to their mutual benefit and encourage innovation
- Gain exposure at the European level and engage with policymakers on a pioneering and evolving dimension of the energy transition
- Participate in events, workshops and training sessions to further build capacity and exchange with others
- Apply to the call for experts and benefit from the opportunity to sell your expertise as part of the technical assistance

