

Toolbox for civil engagement in municipalities

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

An important part of the transition to climate-neutral and energy-efficient municipalities is the active involvement of citizens. Municipalities sit at the heart of this transition: they are closest to people's daily lives, responsible for local infrastructure, and uniquely positioned to build trust, mediate interests, and translate national and European objectives into tangible local action. This toolbox provides municipalities and their supporting organisations, including consultants as well as regional and national energy agencies, with a practical, adaptable framework for designing and implementing effective citizen engagement processes in the context of local energy and climate transition.

Citizen engagement strengthens acceptance of projects, reduces conflict potential, and improves the quality and longevity of municipal decisions. By integrating local knowledge, values, and lived experience, municipalities can tailor solutions to real community needs, build ownership over projects, and ensure that vulnerable or hard-to-reach groups are not left behind. Importantly, engagement is not merely a communication task: it is a structured process that requires political commitment, clarity of objectives, and sufficient resources.

The toolbox outlines **four-phases of an engagement process** – Preparation, Planning, Implementation, and Reflection – providing step-by-step guidance for each phase. It supports municipalities in clarifying project goals, mapping stakeholders, securing political and financial backing, designing inclusive participation processes, and evaluating outcomes. A strong emphasis is placed on transparency, early involvement, realistic expectations, and continuous communication which are key factors that determine whether engagement efforts build trust or fuel frustration.

A core component is the **method toolbox**, which introduces a range of approaches suitable for different engagement levels - from information provision to co-creation. These include stakeholder analysis, developing a sound communication strategy or informative surveys, creative collaborative formats, and engagement through energy communities. The toolbox helps municipalities select and combine methods according to project type, local context, and available resources. It highlights potential pitfalls, advises on the involvement of underrepresented groups, and underscores the importance of mixing online and offline formats to maximise reach.

To inspire and guide implementation, the report also provides **best-practice examples** from across the LEEAN-CET countries and outlines relevant **European initiatives and programmes** that encourage citizen engagement. These examples demonstrate the practical benefits of citizen engagement and showcase how different municipalities have successfully embedded participation in energy and climate governance.

This toolbox serves as the foundational reference for developing the civil engagement strategies in LEEAN-CET's pilot municipalities. It equips local actors with the concepts and practical tools needed to create inclusive and well-structured engagement processes that strengthen social acceptance and support a just local energy transition.

1. WHY CITIZEN ENGAGEMENT?

Citizen engagement is essential for municipalities to successfully drive the local energy transition. Local authorities play a central role in activating collaboration with citizens and local stakeholders, as many solutions emerge within communities themselves. Effective citizen engagement requires proactive, committed local governments. Key arguments for engaging citizens in local projects and decisions are:

- **Building trust between citizens and local authorities**

Engagement fosters a partnership-based relationship between citizens and municipalities. Visible political commitment, transparency, and responsiveness at the municipal level help strengthen citizens' confidence in local governance.

- **Constructive handling of energy-related conflicts**

Citizen engagement enables structured and well-moderated discussions on sensitive energy and climate topics, such as coal phase-out, renewable energy projects, and social impacts. Transparent dialogue helps prevent polarisation, improve acceptance of measures, and increase the likelihood of successful and sustainable implementation.

- **Municipalities as knowledge hubs**

Municipalities serve as intermediaries between experts and citizens, providing reliable, fact-based information on energy efficiency and renewable energy. Moreover, citizens know the local context, needs, and interests best which provides valuable ideas and input for developing a local project.

- **Reaching underrepresented groups and linking existing initiatives**

Inclusive engagement processes address the needs of hard-to-reach groups and promote social and energy justice. Combining face-to-face formats with digital tools and building on existing local initiatives and NGOs increases participation and understanding of complex decisions.

- **Ease project implementation**

Early involvement of citizens in strategies and projects strengthens ownership and acceptance. It enables a smoother project implementation, as people are more likely to support projects that they are involved in.

2. HOW TO DO CITIZEN ENGAGEMENT – PRACTICAL GUIDE

Citizen engagement is commonly structured in three different levels of engagement:

1. **Information**: Raising awareness of citizens
2. **Consultation**: Considering citizens' feedback
3. **Participation**: Engaging citizens in co-decision making

With each level the extent of engagement increases and citizens are given more opportunity to be involved in decision-making. How strongly to engage citizens into decision-making depends on the project one wants to implement.

For some projects it is sufficient to inform the citizens about planned measures without giving them the possibility to voice their opinion. Other projects, often those which are more controversial, need more involvement of citizens to accommodate their interests and needs. Through consultation policy makers can receive feedback and ideas on planned projects. As consultation is the middle level of engagement, there are no in-depth or interactive discussions with citizens. Citizens are asked about their opinions and ideas through surveys, information events or workshops.

Participation is the most comprehensive level of engagement and requires a dialogue between policy makers and citizens. Participatory methods actively engage citizens in developing measures which requires a thorough preparation of the process and takes time. Often it is useful to combine different levels of engagement when implementing a project as this way different aspects and information needs can be covered. For all levels of engagement, you find useful methods in **Section 3**.

> **There must be a genuine intention to involve citizens.** Only wishing to channel the potential for protest and thus ensure that your project runs as smoothly should not be the motivation to involve citizens. For citizen engagement to be successful, you should have a genuine intention to involve the interests and expertise of citizens.

This section divides engagement of citizens into four phases:

1. Preparation
2. Planning
3. Implementation
4. Reflection

In each phase the necessary steps for putting citizen engagement into action are described. Info boxes give you hints on which aspects are important. At the end of each step, you find a summary of the key tasks in each phase.

2.1 Preparation Phase

To begin with, the coordinator of a participation project must gain an in-depth understanding of the **background of the project and its framework conditions**. They should try to answer the following questions to get a comprehensive picture of the starting conditions of the project which impact its further development.

- What are the objectives of the project? What problems are to be solved?

- Who initiated the project? What interests do those who initiated the project pursue?
- Who could be affected by this project (directly and indirectly) and in what way?
- What framework conditions influence the planning and implementation of the project? (e.g. overarching concepts and plans, political decisions, time constraints)
- How long will planning and implementation take? What stages does the project involve?

Stakeholder mapping and analysis of interests is especially important to forgo conflicts of interest between involved or affected actors. Coordinators should map the different stakeholder and interest groups including their relationships to each other. This is important to understand the social setting the project takes place in. Coordinators must be aware of tensions between stakeholders to allow for an open dialogue during the participation process. Possible sources of information include interviews with key individuals in the municipality and region and researching regional media. For more detailed information see **Section 3**. Following questions can guide the stakeholder mapping:

- Who is affected by the project? (e.g. responsible administrative institutions, landowners, citizens, end users, planners)
- Who can significantly influence the success or failure of the project?
- What are the relationships between the interest groups? Do conflicts exist? Who has alliances?
- What tensions and challenges arise or already exist in connection with the planned project?
- What interests do the stakeholders have towards the project?

In the preparation phase, it is also important to secure **political and financial support** for the project including the participation process. Discussions with political decision-makers are essential to clarify how to proceed. To do so different options for implementation must be assessed. For each option, coordinators should lay out the opportunities, risks and costs and discuss these with policy makers. It is important to also discuss the consequences of not initiating a participation process.

It should be clearly defined what the **political commitment** towards the outcome of the participation process will be. During the participation process, citizens should be clearly informed about how their results and decisions will be used by political decision-makers to prevent disappointment.

> **Involvement of citizens should begin with the design of the project.** It is important that participation does not come too late. The project must still offer sufficient scope to include the proposals of the citizens involved.

Finally, a **concept for monitoring** the project implementation should be discussed at this point to ensure effective data collection throughout the project. Following questions can guide the monitoring concept:

- Which goals do you want to review in the future?
- Which indicators can measure the goals? Qualitative or quantitative?
- (e.g. asking for the satisfaction of the users of the public space)

- What methods can be used to measure the indicators? (e.g. climate analyses, interviews, workshops with citizens, online surveys)
- At what point in time will you review the indicators?
- Who is responsible for monitoring?

Key tasks: Preparation Phase

- Fully understand the project's background and its framework conditions
- Map all relevant stakeholders and understand their interests
- Secure political commitment and financial support
- Develop a concept for monitoring the project

2.2 Planning phase

The planning phase is particularly important for the success of the participation which is why this phase should be considered thoroughly and is time-consuming.

Plan sufficient reserves right from the start. There can always be unexpected situations in a participation process that can result in additional time and financial expenditure (e.g. for additional expert opinions or meetings).

First, coordinators must define the **goals of the participatory process**. This way they ensure that the outcomes of decision-making are realistic and useful. Following questions can guide when defining the goals:

- Collect goals: What exactly do I want to achieve with the participation process?
- Organise goals by topic: What belongs together? What doesn't?
- Rank your goals: Which goals are particularly important to me? Which are less important?
- Review your goals: How realistic is it that I can achieve these goals? Who or what could help me?
- Define your negotiating scope: What are my maximum goals? What are my minimum goals? Where could I compromise to a certain extent?

It is very important to also clarify the **subject of participation** as far as possible in advance. The subject of participation determines which topics will be addressed, who will be involved, how extensive the participation process will be, how long it will take and how much it will cost. The subject of participation should also be agreed in consultation with policy makers.

- Which issues and decisions will the interest groups be involved in, and which will they not be involved in?
- Which topics and issues will be negotiated through participation, and which will be decided in another process?
- What is the range of possible outcomes?
- How binding are these outcomes? How will the outcomes be used afterwards?

Retain a certain openness towards changes of the subject. Often participants question the subject of participation in the initial phase of the process. They might request changes e.g. additional topics, a different focus, additional participants, a shorter or longer process duration. A good balance must be found between arguing for the initially set definitions and retaining a certain openness toward participant's suggestions. If these suggestions seem plausible, it makes sense to adapt the process design accordingly.

The next step is to consider **who will be invited to participate** in the process. Within the stakeholder mapping some important participants have already been identified. Institutions and individuals that are specifically affected by the project and can influence its success or failure need to be invited. Otherwise, they could harm the process from the outside. For those who are only generally interested in the project, it is often sufficient to provide them with regular updates on the progress.

Once the participation process begins, the participant selection should be reviewed together with the participants and modified if necessary. Following question can help for identifying the participants:

- Who is affected by your project or responsible for it?
- Who can significantly influence the success or failure of your project?
- Which stakeholders are difficult for you to reach or might have difficulties in participating in a participation process? Pay special attention to reaching these groups through different channels.

Pay special attention to the involvement of vulnerable groups. Vulnerable groups (e.g. low-income households, the elderly, migrants, single-parent households) are both most likely to be negatively impacted by climate change and the hardest to reach.

After deciding on the objective, subject and participants, the coordinators can design the process and choose **participation methods**. To do so coordinators must reflect upon what level and kind of participation they aim to implement: Information, Consultation or Co-decision making. Different methods for citizen engagement are described in **Section 3**.

Combine online and offline formats where possible. It is helpful to choose a combination of online and offline formats to increase the reach of the process. The option to participate online allows people who are unable to attend physical meetings to get involved.

Finally, a solid **communication strategy** is key for the success of participation. The coordinators must define the communication goals, target groups, core messages, communication channels and timings before the participation process starts. More information on how to design a communication strategy can be found in **Section 3**.

At the beginning of the participation process, participants should be informed about which results they are allowed to communicate externally. This way results can be communicated in a consistent matter. Moreover, contact with relevant media should be established and suitable press releases and images prepared to inform others.

Proactive communication is essential. When organizing public events, it is probable that its content will be shared by the participants. Therefore, coordinators should make the discussed content publicly available.

Key tasks: Planning Phase

- Define the objectives of participation.
- Define what will be discusses during the participation process.
- Choose who to invite to the participation process.
- Select the participation methods you want to use.
- Develop a solid communication strategy.

2.3 Implementation phase

The course of the participation process can be split in the following phases. The design and scale of these phases depends on the type of participation methods which are chosen, see **Section 3**.

Starting phase

The participants get to know each other and receive information about the planned project and its background, the subject of participation, the selection of participants, and the planned process flow. They discuss their motivation for participating and their expectations of the process. They also agree on common goals for the process and rules for cooperation and communication.

Negotiation phase

The participants exchange their positions and interests, discuss the relevant issues and jointly seek viable solutions, i.e. solutions that all participants can live with. Depending on the complexity of the issue and the extent of the differences in interests, the duration of the negotiation phase may vary.

Conclusion phase

The participants agree on joint solutions or recommendations. The results and any remaining differences are clearly formulated, responsibilities and next steps are clarified, and the agreements are documented in writing.

Follow-up phase

The results of the participation process are documented and communicated to all participants and relevant bodies. The outcomes are also made transparent to the public.

Political commitments should be clearly defined. Those involved are often sceptical at first as to whether the results of the process will be taken seriously by the municipal administration and politicians. Therefore, those commissioning the project should make their commitments clear at the kick-off meeting and explain what they will do with the jointly developed results.

During the implementation of agreed upon measures, it is important that those involved in the negotiation process are **informed about the progress regularly**. Often some details cannot be implemented exactly as formerly decided. This may be due to local circumstances or changing conditions. It is important that these changes, along with the reasons are communicated transparently to ensure participants do not feel overlooked.

Key tasks: Negotiation Phase

- Start with introducing the participants to the process and getting to know each other.
- Let participants exchange their positions and interests.
- Jointly agree on solutions and recommendations.
- Document everything that is decided.
- Communicate the results of the participation process internally and to the public.

2.4 Reflection phase

In the final phase, both the implementation of the agreed-upon measures and the participation process itself must be evaluated. The implementation should be monitored in line with the **monitoring** concept developed during the **Preparation phase**. Also, the participation process should be **reflected upon** among the coordinating team and the participants of the process. Following questions can guide the reflections.

- Have we achieved the goals we set at the beginning? What is missing?
- What are the reasons for achieving or not achieving the goals?
- What has proven successful? Why?
- What would we do differently next time?

Key tasks: Reflection Phase

- Monitor the implementation of the agreed-upon measures.
- Reflect upon the participation process.

3. CITIZEN ENGAGEMENT METHODS – TOOLBOX

3.1 Identify target groups and relevant stakeholders

Identifying target groups and relevant stakeholders is a crucial first step in any citizen engagement process. Understanding who the key actors are, which communities are affected, and what social, economic, or spatial dynamics exist helps ensure that engagement activities are inclusive, relevant, and effective.

This chapter outlines a set of methods to gain this understanding, from analysing existing data and mapping vulnerable populations to directly engaging with stakeholders through interviews and focus groups. These methods provide the foundation for informed planning, targeted outreach, and meaningful engagement.

Secondary (Desk) Research

Main purpose: gain an initial understanding of target groups, key stakeholders, and the wider context

- **Approach:** Collecting and analysing existing information from published databases, reports, policy briefs, social media, and the internet.
- **Ideal use/Strengths:** Efficient first step to understand context and target groups and helps prepare for further engagement methods.
- This method is **most effective when combined with other approaches** that capture local and scientific knowledge from key stakeholders, including brainstorming, focus groups, and expert interviews.

Socio-Spatial Analysis

Main purpose: pinpoint areas with more pronounced social challenges and inequalities, thereby enabling targeted engagement activities and supporting the inclusion of underrepresented groups

- **Approach:** Combines geographical and socio-demographic data to map vulnerable populations and spatial patterns, overlaying this information on municipalities, neighbourhoods, or districts to guide engagement activities.
- **Ideal use/Strengths:** Helps target interventions and citizen engagement activities effectively through collaborative planning with experts.
- This method provides a **solid basis for discussions with key stakeholders and for planning engagement activities.** Its application requires collaboration with scientists and/or statisticians.

Focus Groups and Interviews

Main purpose: gather more elaborate insights from affected groups and identify key community multipliers and bridge-builders.

- **Approach:** Includes direct dialogue with target groups and key stakeholders, often alongside previous methods.
- **Ideal use/Strengths:** Builds trust and relationships, provides in-depth understanding of local context, informs context-specific engagement design, and supports inclusive decision-making.
- While conducting interviews, make sure to note the key stakeholders and the organizations they represent, as they may play an important role in later stages of your citizen engagement process. You could **involve them as multipliers or bridge-builders** during the outreach phase or engage them directly in the outreach phase and participation process.

3.2 Develop a sound communication strategy

STEP 1 – Define the target group and communication channels

Start by determining the style of interaction you want with citizens, whether it is primarily a way of information sharing, a two-way dialogue, a participatory style, or a mixture of these approaches.

Next, map your target groups and understand their preferences, capacities, and constraints. Find out which channels they use, how accessible digital tools are, and their level of trust in local institutions. Based on this, decide on:

- the appropriate mix of channels (digital and offline)
- timing
- tone (formal or informal, storytelling versus factual)
- frequency of communication

Using local media can help broadening the communication channels and reaching more people. Be sure to prepare suitable texts and photos that you can share through the local media.

STEP 2 – Define key messages

Frame messages from the perspective of citizens, addressing **"What is in it for me/us?"** rather than only presenting institutional talking points. Use language that is **simple, clear, and relatable**, possibly including examples or stories, while avoiding jargon or overly technical terms.

Distil the essential ideas you want citizens to take away, limiting them to 3-4 core messages to avoid overwhelming your audience. Ensure consistency across communications channels (newsletters, social media posts, town hall speeches) so

that the core messages are reinforced. Nevertheless, consider tailoring core messages to different target groups, recognizing that what works for youth may differ from what resonates with seniors.

Whenever possible, support messages with testimonials and real-life examples to build credibility and make them relatable to the audience. Use a positive visual language to make your messages attractive to the audience.

STEP 3 – Set the communication goals

Clear goals are essential for measuring success and adjusting the strategy accordingly, as without them it is difficult to determine whether communication efforts are effective. Establishing clear goals also ensures consistency, so that all communications contribute to common purposes rather than being sporadic or ad hoc.

> Use the SMART criteria (**Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Relevant, Time-bound**) to define objectives and ensure that communication goals are aligned with broader policy goals or the strategic plans of the municipality or region.

Define metrics or indicators to measure whether the outcomes align with the goals, for example:

- % increase in attendance
- number of feedback
- submissions
- diversity in responses
- number of underrepresented neighbourhoods involved

Set baseline values (where things stand now) so you can compare later, and establish a timeframe for when you expect outcomes, and who is responsible for tracking and reporting as this ensures accountability.

STEP 4 – Plan the communication timeline

After knowing, who you want to reach, how you will reach them and what you want to communicate, you should develop a plan on when you will communicate toward the stakeholders and participants.

It is important to start early with telling your citizens that an event will take place. Start at least 4 weeks in advance with communicating about the process. For more complex processes even more time might be necessary. In this time, try to use different communication channels to reach a diversity of people. Remind people about the invitations and the purpose of the participation a couple of times.

After each event, communicate a summary of the results and the status of the process to the participants. Active communication in this time is essential to ensure everyone has a common picture on where they are standing. In case you discuss sensitive issues at an event find a common understanding with the participants which topics may be communicated to external stakeholders.

When planning the communication timeline make sure that there are **no long gaps of silence** where you do not communicate at all. Regularly informing participants about the process keeps them motivated and interested.

3.3 Provide information effectively

Providing citizens with clear, relevant, and accessible information is a key element of effective engagement. These methods help participants gain the knowledge they need to take part in discussions, make informed decisions, and contribute meaningfully to the process. The following table outlines different approaches for delivering information, highlighting how each method can be applied and its main strengths.

Distribution of Informational Materials

Main purpose: provide citizens with relevant knowledge on specific topics, thereby enabling them to participate in an informed way and engage in interactive consultation.

- **Approach:** Share printed or digital materials such as texts, fact sheets, videos, or podcasts, before, during, or after engagement activities. Content should be scientifically accurate yet accessible and in simple language, helping participants understand key topics and engage meaningfully in discussions.
- **Ideal use/strengths:** This method is effective for preparing participants, offering background knowledge, and addressing areas of personal interest. It strengthens the knowledge base for group discussions and can be used repeatedly throughout the engagement process.

Presentations and Q&A Sessions with Experts

Main purpose: deliver specific knowledge to participants and enable them to engage in interactive consultation.

- **Approach:** Experts present information in simple, accessible language. Q&A sessions allow participants to ask questions directly.
- **Ideal use/strengths:** This method builds trust and transparency while allowing participants to influence the information they receive.

Data-Based Tools

Main purpose: provide simple visualization of specific and complex information.

- **Approach:** Experts can translate outputs into plain language through visualized graphics
- **Ideal use/strengths:** Supports participants in understanding complex issues, ideal for cross-sectoral or technical topics.

3.4 Consult citizens actively

Consulting citizens helps municipalities gather focused feedback, understand local needs more clearly and provide information. These methods offer simple ways for people to share their views and give feedback with a lower threshold than formalized participation meetings.

Online or Offline Survey

Main purpose: collect structured feedback and opinions from citizens to inform municipal planning and decision-making.

- **Approach:** Develop a clear, accessible online and/or printed survey using simple language and visuals. Disseminate through multiple channels (website, social media, newspapers, public buildings). It is important to keep the questions simple and non-technical. Explain how results will be analysed and used, and when citizens will be informed about outcomes.
- **Ideal use/strengths:** With this method municipalities can reach many people at low costs, also participants have low cost to participate as participation is independent from time and place. Through combining online and offline survey and different channels a diversity of citizens can be reached.

Open house or information stands

Main purpose: enable easy and direct exchange with citizens to gather feedback, answer questions, and better understand concerns while building trust.

- **Approach:** Set up an information stand or pop-up booth at well-frequented locations (e.g. market squares, train stations, community festivals). Provide short, accessible materials (flyers, posters) and offer structured feedback tools such as postcards, sticky notes, short question cards, or “idea boxes.” Engage passers-by in brief conversations, explain key aspects of the project, and invite them to leave their opinions or suggestions.
- **Ideal use/strengths:** This method provides a low barrier for participation and therefore can reach people which would not attend a formal workshop. Can be combined with interactive and playful elements.

3.5 Co-create between citizens and local decision-makers

The following methods are designed to collaboratively develop and design climate policies and actions that are both highly effective and socially just. They fit to projects which aim at the highest level of engagement, namely participation. Some of these methods can be applied alongside other approaches within an engagement activity

or process, while others can serve as the main or overarching method for an entire engagement activity.

Silent Discussion

A Silent Discussion is a written or drawn form of discussion that takes place without speaking. Participants respond in writing to a series of questions displayed on large sheets of paper, such as flipcharts or a meta-plan wall. During the activity, they can comment on, refer to, or indicate agreement or disagreement with contributions from other participants.

This method is particularly effective for introverted participants, providing an easy entry point to engage in discussion. It works well as a starter for a first discussion, for introducing a new topic, or for exploring emotions and concerns related to a topic. Questions should be carefully formulated to guide meaningful responses.

Number of participants: 10-30 participants

Duration: 30 min-1,5 hours

Common mistakes:

- Questions are not clearly formulated; participants may not know what kind of input is expected

World Café

The World Café is an effective method for initiating a creative process in a relaxed, coffeehouse-like atmosphere. Its goal is to gather diverse perspectives and ideas on a specific topic, encourage lively exchange among participants, and promote networking.

Discussions take place in small groups of four to five people, with different aspects of the topic explored in parallel. Key points and ideas are recorded on a flipchart or similar. After 20-30 minutes, participants rotate to a new table, while the designated table host stays to brief newcomers on the current discussion. Participants complete three rounds of discussion in total. At the end, the most important insights from each table are collected and shared in a plenary session for reflection and synthesis.

Number of participants: minimum of 15 participants, useful for bigger groups up to 100 participants

Duration: 1-3 hours

Common mistakes:

- not securing a room of appropriate size for the number of working groups
- neglecting acoustics
- underestimating costs for skilled facilitation in case of bigger groups, and necessary materials.

Future Workshop

Future Workshop is a method designed to foster self-organization and democratization. It encourages participants to develop imaginative and unconventional solutions to current challenges in a creative and open atmosphere. This method can be used to design an entire citizen engagement

activity or as a starter for a longer engagement process. Future Workshops are particularly suitable for topics that directly affect citizens, such as climate change or for issues where creativity and decision-making are key.

A Future Workshop typically follows three phases:

1. **Critique Phase**: Participants analyse the current situation and identify problems, which can include providing information and allowing time and space for expressing emotions.
2. **Utopian Phase**: Participants generate creative ideas and proposals, which may initially be utopian and disregard practical constraints. This is the central co-creation phase of the method.
3. **Realization Phase**: Ideas and proposals are structured, their feasibility is assessed, and next steps are agreed upon.

Number of participants: up to 30 participants

Duration: 2-3 days

Common mistakes:

- choosing a room that is too small
- lacking an additional workspace
- not providing enough creative or moderation materials
- underestimating costs due to the long duration and need for professional facilitation

3.6 Engage through energy communities

Energy communities provide a tangible and practical form of citizen participation in the energy transition: residents can see where their energy comes from, co-decide on investments, and directly benefit from local renewable generation. This strengthens trust, boosts acceptance of local energy projects, and increases awareness of energy efficiency and climate topics. Moreover, energy communities contribute to improving energy literacy, helping participants understand how energy prices are determined and where their electricity comes from.

Within an energy community a group of stakeholders come together to **take collective action on renewable energy or energy efficiency**. Members generate, use and sell renewable energy within the community. Citizens, local authorities and municipalities, as well as small and medium-sized enterprises (up to large companies under certain circumstances) can be part of an energy community. Energy communities can vary in terms of ownership, governance, organizational structure, scale and types of activities, and financing mechanisms but their primary purpose is always the same they aim to **provide environmental, economic, or social community benefits to its members and local community** rather than financial profits.

Municipalities can involve in energy communities in different ways. Their involvement can range from making municipal buildings or land available for shared renewable energy installations, to supporting citizens with administrative procedures, becoming a member or initiating an energy community themselves. By offering political backing and acting as a reliable partner, municipalities can significantly reduce the risks and uncertainties that citizens may feel when embarking on collective energy projects.

When municipalities support energy communities in their region it provides citizens with a tangible way to participate in climate action: people can see where their electricity comes from, contribute to local investments, and directly benefit from stable energy prices through shared generation. This **hands-on involvement strengthens acceptance of renewable energy projects**, particularly in cases where new infrastructure, such as rooftop PV, wind turbines or other generation facilities, may otherwise raise concerns.

Moreover, energy communities can also **support social inclusion** in the energy transition. In Austria, for example, several solidarity-driven energy communities have evolved. A growing number of initiatives are pioneering inclusive models that aim to redistribute energy and empower vulnerable groups, including low-income households, single parents, older adults, and migrants. Some initiatives offer a solidarity tariff for vulnerable households which receive energy from the community at a lower price or distribute specific amount of energy for free to households in energy poverty. These communities operate on solidarity: members who generate surplus energy donate it or sell it for a reduced price, and those able to pay higher tariffs help finance reduced rates for others.

A novelty on solidarity driven energy sharing in Austria is that municipalities or other public bodies participating in energy sharing with their own generation assets must ensure that vulnerable households and charitable or social institutions hosting vulnerable end-users have access to the shared energy. A minimum of 10% of the electricity generated annually by the joint facility and fed into energy sharing must be made available to these groups.

The SCCALE 20 30 50 community energy guide gives local authorities information on how they can support energy communities in their region and describes successful examples of collaborations between municipalities and citizens.

4. BEST PRACTICE EXAMPLES

4.1 Residential renovation & engaging local enterprises in Gabrovo, Bulgaria

Engaging Citizens towards the Energy Transition in Gabrovo

Gabrovo Municipality has developed a comprehensive and complex model for engaging citizens throughout the entire process of the energy transition. The approach places strong emphasis on sustainable energy, residential renovation, and active collaboration between the local authority and the community. The communication model integrates awareness raising, capacity building, and community oversight, helping to build trust between citizens, contractors, and the municipal administration. It supports Gabrovo's broader goals of sustainable energy, climate neutrality, and meaningful civic participation.

Leading by example

Gabrovo implements energy efficiency measures in municipal buildings, demonstrating institutional commitment and building public confidence. The municipality is also highly active in the renovation of multi-family residential blocks.

These achievements are made possible through the Municipal Centre for Complex Services. The municipality also engages residents by encouraging them to share their experiences - for example, through a recent survey combined with a raffle ("Energy-Renovated Home" Lottery) that rewarded homeowners with the highest personal contribution to energy efficiency measures. Gabrovo also participated in the Net Zero Hero project, which surveyed homeowners about their attitudes toward adopting various energy efficiency improvements.

Gabrovo supports the creation of energy communities and encourages citizen participation in the energy transition. **Gabrovo is the first municipality in Bulgaria to initiate an energy community with citizens**, with the municipality acting as organizer and procedural facilitator. This model has already been replicated in Burgas and Sofia. Additional educational activities for children promote knowledge about solar energy, environmental protection, and sustainability.

Joint actions with residents in residential renovation

Gabrovo promotes collaborative renovation processes for multi-family buildings, resulting in higher-quality implementation and more transparent communication:

Citizens receive targeted training that empowers them to monitor contractors effectively. Surveys collect feedback on attitudes, expectations, and experiences related to energy renovation.



Figure 1. Training for citizens supporting the energy renovation of residential buildings in September 2025. Source: https://gabrovo.bg/bg/news-article/13783

The municipality maintains a dedicated webpage for those interested in sustainable development, energy efficiency, and renewable energy. Registered users

receive timely updates on financial instruments, national and European funding programmes, new energy-sharing models, and policies related to energy communities.

Regular trainings and seminars are organized for residents. In September 2025, a key training session - delivered with support from EnEffect and the Bulgarian-Austrian Consulting Company (BACC) - marked the start of the new renovation period. It introduced citizens to their rights, responsibilities, and monitoring opportunities during the implementation of energy efficiency measures. The session highlighted good practices and common mistakes in building renovation, focusing on insulation systems, windows, waterproofing, and drainage. Participants received practical guidance on identifying potential issues and responding promptly to irregularities.

This collaborative model fosters a culture of participation and shared responsibility, contributing to long-lasting results, improved home comfort, and enhanced quality of life.



Figure 2. First stakeholder meeting under the Net Zero SMEs project supporting SMEs in the transition to a climate-neutral economy in Nov. 2025. Source: https://gabrovo.bg/bg/news-article/13921

Engaging local enterprises

Local businesses are encouraged to adopt zero-emission technologies and participate in the transition to a climate-neutral economy. A joint initiative between the municipality and local enterprises is underway to develop low-emission industrial zones. In the future, Gabrovo plans to establish a municipal energy efficiency fund that will provide low-cost credit resources for local businesses.

Transparent urban governance

Regular meetings of the Sustainable Urban Development Council keep citizens informed about progress on key urban projects.

Citizen Engagement Methods

- Surveys
- Public meetings
- Seminars/trainings
- On-site visits

Key Results

- Citizens gained a clearer understanding of the renovation process.
- Improved quality of renovation projects through better oversight, communication, and shared responsibility.

Why This Is a Best Practice

Gabrovo Municipality serves as an effective mediator between citizens and contractors, ensuring transparency, accountability, and shared responsibility throughout the renovation process. This approach also strengthens public trust in the

local authority as a reliable partner in sustainable energy initiatives. The model fosters a culture of participation and reinforces community confidence in municipal projects and public initiatives.

Illustrative Activities and Links (incl. pictures)

- **January 2026**: "Energy-Renovated Home" Lottery – share your good example and win a prize
  https://gabrovo.bg/bg/news-article/14073
- **November 2025:** Educational session for children at Kindergarten "Radost" on solar energy and environmental protection
  https://gabrovo.bg/bg/news-article/13950
- **November 2025**: First stakeholder meeting under the Net Zero SMEs project supporting SMEs in the transition to a climate-neutral economy
  https://gabrovo.bg/bg/news-article/13921
- **November 2025:** Information meeting with citizens on the energy renovation of the House of Humour and Satire and the Gabrovo Municipality building
  https://gabrovo.bg/bg/news-article/13960
- **October 2025**: Sustainable Urban Development Council meeting discussing key urban projects
  https://gabrovo.bg/bg/news-article/13906
- **September 2025:** Training for citizens supporting the energy renovation of residential buildings
  https://gabrovo.bg/bg/news-article/13783
- A webpage for everyone interested in learning more about sustainable development, energy efficiency, and renewable energy sources:
  https://gabrovo.bg/bg/page/1757

4.2 Construction of a bicycle path in Lovas & Tordinci, Croatia

Construction of a bicycle path in the Municipalities of Lovas and Tordinci

Within the call for proposals "Construction and Reconstruction of Cycling Infrastructure in Assisted and Hilly and Mountainous Areas", two projects have been implemented.

The first project, located in the Municipality of Lovas, involves the construction of a 2.4 km bicycle path, financed with €502,144.69. The second project, in the Municipality of Tordinci, consists of building a 1,767 m bicycle path, with €516,783.80 allocated for its implementation. Together, these projects form a connected cycling route.



Figure 3. Bicycle path to be built in Vukovar-Srijem County. Source: https://zupan.hr/vijesti/vukovarsko-srijemska-zupanija-u-opcini-lovas-gradit-ce-se-biciklisticka-staza-duljine-18-kilometar/

The bicycle path in Lovas was developed as part of an initiative led by the Vukovar-Srijem County and included in the official county development plans, subject to approval by the County Assembly and the County Prefect Prior to its inclusion at the county level, the project had to be

integrated into the municipal development plan of the Municipality of Lovas. The initial project concept was based on bottom-up initiatives proposed by local residents, sports clubs and civil society organisations, which were actively involved in shaping the project through their planned future activities to be implemented following the completion of the infrastructure.



Figure 4. Bicycle path in construction. © Municipality of Lovas

Key Results

The initiative significantly improves the conditions for safe cycling in the local municipalities, while also encouraging citizens to engage in energy-saving practices and adopt healthier lifestyles.

In total, the project will construct a bicycle path in the municipalities of Lovas and Tordinci and will include the planting of 70 trees along the route. The new infrastructure will provide cyclists with a safe and dedicated space for travel, while the planted trees will help regulate temperatures and reduce the urban heat-island effect.

The project aims to promote physical activity, reduce traffic congestion, and lower emissions of harmful gases. At the same time, it contributes to the implementation of a strategic initiative of Vukovar-Srijem County, as defined in the Vukovar-Srijem County Development Plan 2021–2027, titled “Development of Tourism Infrastructure in Vukovar-Srijem County.”

Why This Is a Best Practice

These projects contribute to a safer and more sustainable traffic, encourage a healthy lifestyle and improve the quality of infrastructure in Lovas and Tordinci taking into account the needs of the local population.

Useful Links

- Article by municipality on construction project: https://lovas.hr/izgradnja-biciklisticke-staze-u-opcini-lovas/
- News article on the project: https://zupan.hr/vijesti/vukovarsko-srijemska-zupanija-u-opcini-lovas-gradit-ce-se-biciklisticka-staza-duljine-18-kilometar/

4.3 The Green Tent initiative in Nagykanizsa, Hungary

Green Tent Initiative – Citizen Engagement for Local Energy Transition

The main objective of the project was to actively involve local citizens in shaping the municipality’s environmental and energy-related policies by creating an accessible, informal platform for dialogue, awareness-raising, and feedback collection during large public events.

The municipality of Nagykanizsa commissioned sustainability experts to set up a “Green Tent” at several high-attendance city events. The initiative combined following citizen engagement methods:

- On-site sustainability and energy efficiency advisory services (e.g. household energy savings, renewable energy options, sustainable lifestyle practices)

- Interactive, face-to-face consultations with citizens
- Structured collection of citizen proposals, concerns, and ideas regarding local environmental and energy issues
- Documentation and formal submission of collected inputs to the municipal leadership
- The informal festival setting reduced barriers to participation and allowed the municipality to reach citizens who may not attend formal public consultations.

Key Results

- Direct engagement with a broad and diverse groups from the local population
- Increased awareness of energy efficiency and sustainable living practices among citizens
- Strengthened communication channel between residents and municipal decision-makers
- Collection of citizen-generated proposals related to local environmental protection and energy transition
- Concrete citizen feedback formally delivered to city leadership for consideration in future planning



Figure 5. Green tent initiative in Nagykanizsa © IMRO

Why This Is a Best Practice

This initiative stands out as a best practice because it brings citizen engagement directly into everyday community spaces, rather than expecting residents to attend formal meetings, and effectively combines awareness-raising with participatory governance. It offers a low-threshold and inclusive method of involvement that makes it easy for a wide range of citizens to participate. At the same time, it ensures that all input collected from residents is systematically documented and communicated to decision-makers, strengthening the link between community voices and local policy.

The “Green Tent” model is also highly transferable, as it can be easily replicated by other municipalities at festivals, markets, or public events with minimal financial investment. Overall, the initiative demonstrates how municipalities can embed practical, visible, and community-oriented participatory approaches into local energy transition processes.

4.4 Floating solar power plant in Šoštanj, Slovenia

Floating Solar Power Plant (PSE Družmirje)

The main objective of the project is to build a floating solar power plant on Družmirje lake as part of the transition from coal to renewable energy. The project aims to use degraded mining land, increase renewable electricity production, and support the long-term economic transition of the region. Following citizen engagement models were applied:

- **Public information and transparency:** The municipality and the project developer publicly shared information about the project through municipal websites, media articles, and official announcements.
- **Public consultation process:** Citizens were able to review the spatial plan and environmental impact assessment during the official public consultation period and submit comments and opinions.



Figure 6. Sketch of floating solar power plant. Source: HSE

- **Public hearings and discussions:** Public hearings were organised where experts presented the project, and citizens could ask questions and express concerns.
- **Active role of the mayor:** The mayor of Šoštanj publicly communicated the municipality's position and clearly stated that the project would only be supported if it brings clear benefits for local residents.
- **Negotiation on local benefits:** The municipality demanded concrete benefits for citizens, such as financial compensation, development of the lake area, and inclusion of citizens in a future local energy community.
- **Direct dialogue with the developer:** The project developer (HSE) organised regular information points where citizens could speak directly with project representatives.

Key Results

Citizens were informed early about the project and its potential impacts, public feedback influenced the municipality's conditions for supporting the project, environmental and social concerns were openly discussed, the municipality strengthened its role as a representative of citizens' interests, the project created a public debate about fair energy transition and benefit sharing.

Why This Is a Best Practice

This project is a good example of citizen engagement because the municipality did not approve the project automatically. Local authorities actively involved citizens, demanded transparency, and required concrete local benefits. The mayor played an important role as a mediator between citizens and the project developer. The process shows how large renewable energy projects can be planned with public participation and social dialogue. This approach can be transferred to other municipalities facing similar energy transition projects.

Useful Links

- Official project information (developer – HSE): www.hse.si/sl/plavajoca-soncna-elektrarna-druzmirje-eden-najcistejsih-in-ucinkovitih-nacinov-rabe-soncne-energije
- Article on municipality conditions and citizen benefits: www.balkangreenenergynews.com/sostanj-authorities-demand-clear-benefits-for-citizens-from-slovenias-first-floating-solar-plant

- Article on public discussions and citizen involvement: www.forbes.n1info.si/posel/soncna-elektrarna-na-jezeru-v-sostanju-kaj-v-zameno-za-podporo-pricakuje-obcina
- Article on public hearing with citizen participation: www.nascas.si/clanek/novice/druzba/68dcf6d421372/javna-obravnava-dpn-za-plavajoco-soncno-elektrarno-na-druzmirskem-jezeru

4.5 Co-financing of residential renovation in Dolyna, Ukraine

Thermal Refurbishment of Residential Buildings through Co-Financing Scheme

The main objective of the project was to engage condominium co-owners in improving living conditions and enhancing the energy performance of their buildings by investing in the thermal refurbishment of multi-storey residential housing. This way the project developed a scalable participatory model to address the broader challenge posed by an ageing and energy-inefficient residential building stock.



Figure 7. Study visit of representatives of Ukrainian municipalities to the refurbished residential buildings in Dolyna © EECU

Thanks to the work of the municipal project team established under former Mayor Mr. Garazd – who had led the development of a new local energy policy within the SECAP framework and clearly understood the core issues – the project application “Reduction of Energy Consumption and CO_2 Emissions in the Multi-Apartment Residential Building Sector of the City of Dolyna” received approval in 2015 from the tender committee of the EU Covenant of Mayors – Demonstration Projects (CoM-DeP) Programme. As a result, the city secured funding to implement the planned activities.

Information about the successful application and EU support was widely disseminated throughout the community through all available communication channels. Residents were also informed that, due to limited funding, works would be carried out only in buildings with established condominium status (i.e., internal self-governance) and that participation required meeting specific criteria, including collecting signatures from at least 75% of residents and fully repaying outstanding debts.

The most significant challenge for the project team was working directly with residents. During numerous meetings, project specialists explained the unique opportunity to modernise their housing under a highly favourable financing model in which four-fifths of the estimated material and labour costs were covered by the project and the city.

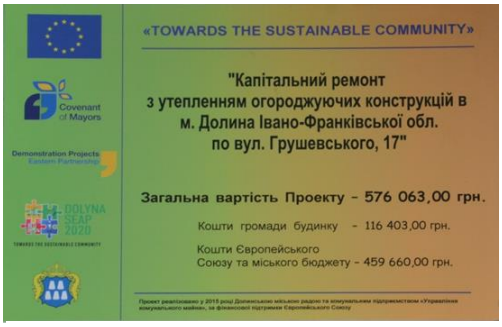


Figure 8. Plaque with the shares of costs from the EU grant, city budget and residents. © EECU

For selected buildings, capital thermal-modernisation works were implemented under a

co-financing scheme: 60% of costs were funded by the EU grant, 20% by the city budget, and 20% by the condominium co-owners. Through this approach, nearly 30% of the community's multi-storey residential sector was refurbished. Notably, the awareness and commitment of co-owners grew to such an extent that, in some cases, residents voluntarily covered debts owed by neighbours to ensure their building could remain eligible for the programme.

After the project was completed, the wider community could directly observe the benefits of renovation: visibly improved façades, enhanced comfort in apartments, and significantly lower energy bills. Interest in the participatory co-financing model for thermal retrofitting subsequently reached unprecedented levels. In response, the city introduced a new financing mechanism (20+20/60), under which residents cover 60% of total costs, while the national Energy Efficiency Fund's "Warm House" programme and the city budget each contribute 20%. Although less financially attractive than the previous scheme, residents willingly accepted these terms, and additional multi-storey buildings underwent thermal refurbishment.

In parallel, the city established a local Energy Efficiency Advisory Centre as part of the CoM-DeP project. The centre provides expert guidance to citizens on the benefits of energy-efficient technologies and supports them in adopting sustainable solutions for their homes.



Figure 9. Refurbished residential buildings in Dolyna © EECU

Key Results

- More than 30% of the community multi-story residential buildings were thermally refurbished which significantly reduced energy costs and CO_2 emissions.
- The population of Dolyna became more aware and could experience the improvement of living conditions achieved by renovation. A targeted and well-planned information and communication campaign and the co-financing scheme were key to this result.
- Awareness of the need to change attitudes toward energy use and to take personal responsibility for improving energy efficiency in co-owned buildings grew to the point that residents were willing to accept a much higher co-financing share than during the original project implementation.

Why This Is a Best Practice

This case shows how citizens can be empowered to take action through targeted awareness raising and communication campaign and a co-financing scheme that supports citizens in financing part of the renovation works. Through making renovation benefits tangible, the active engagement of the local citizens contributes to the overall municipal energy policy implementation.

Useful Links

- https://vikna.if.ua/news/92366/view
- https://bio.ukr.bio/ua/news/15194/
- https://www.greenexpo.com.ua/prezentatsii_spikeriv_2025/Dyriv.pdf

- https://rada-dolyna.gov.ua/documents/pro-vykonannya-prohramy-realizatsiyi-stratehiyi-staloho-rozvytku-v-sferi
- https://enefcities.org.ua/novyny/istori-uspihu-vid-mist---chleniv-asotsiatsi-energoefektyvni-mista-ukrany-dolyna/
- https://drive.google.com/file/d/1zqp1x111GAyWSHqy35qU8FNz205fwfCk/view
- https://www.facebook.com/watch/?v=557592331736583
- https://galtv.if.ua/index.php/video/dolina-dilitsya-dosvidom-termomodernizatsii-zhitlovogo-fondu

5. CITIZEN ENGAGEMENT AT THE EUROPEAN LEVEL

5.1 Net Zero Cities: 100 Climate-Neutral and Smart Cities by 2030 Mission

NetZeroCities serves as the enabling platform for the EU Mission: Climate-Neutral and Smart Cities, supporting over 100 selected European cities on their journey to become climate-neutral by 2030. As part of this mission, cities are guided through the development of Climate City Contracts (CCCs), comprehensive roadmaps co-designed with local authorities, stakeholders, and citizens that outline strategic actions and investments towards climate neutrality.

A core pillar of the platform's support is citizen and stakeholder engagement, recognising that achieving systemic urban transformation requires genuine co-creation with local communities. NetZeroCities provides cities with specialised expertise, tools, and methodologies to strengthen engagement strategies, facilitating deeper participation of residents throughout the planning and implementation phases of climate action. Among these resources are engagement strategy tools that help cities assess local needs and select appropriate services for activating citizens and stakeholders.

To translate engagement into practice, cities are encouraged to adopt participatory formats such as civic ecosystem mapping, collaborative vision workshops, and structured pathways for citizens to contribute to city transition teams. These approaches help cities identify and mobilise local networks, connect grassroots climate actors, and embed citizen-driven ideas into climate planning and decision-making processes.

By fostering ongoing dialogue, co-creation and collaboration with citizens, NetZeroCities not only strengthens local ownership of climate strategies but also cultivates inclusive and resilient urban communities that are better equipped to drive and sustain ambitious climate action from the ground up

5.2 European Energy Award Programme

The European Energy Award (eea) Programme is one of the initiatives that emphasizes the importance of citizen engagement. The EEA methodology has proven successful over 30 years of implementation across various member states. The programme places particular emphasis on citizen engagement through the European Energy Award management tool, a catalogue of standardized measures related to energy and climate protection for every participating municipality.

Citizen engagement is addressed in Section 6: "Communication and Cooperation", which includes measures for cooperation and communication with authorities, industry, business and trade, as well as residents and local multipliers. In particular, Section "6.4.3 Residents and Local Multipliers" highlight the involvement of citizens through working groups, participatory processes, and engagement of consumers and tenants, serving as a bridge between local authorities and the community to enable two-way communication and the co-creation of energy policies.

Furthermore, Section 5.1.2 "Committee" includes measures for citizen engagement by allowing citizens to participate in the formalized EEA energy team, which is especially relevant in smaller municipalities, while the planning processes covered

under Area One encourage and incentivize more intensive citizen involvement throughout these processes.

5.3 Covenant of Mayors

Citizen engagement is equally essential within the framework of the **Covenant of Mayors for Climate and Energy** and in the preparation of the Sustainable Energy and Climate Action Plan (SECAP). As emphasised in the official SECAP guidance, stakeholder involvement represents the foundation for encouraging the behavioural changes required to complement the technical measures embedded in the plan. It enables a coordinated and concerted approach to SECAP implementation, ensuring that climate and energy actions are socially anchored and widely supported. Citizens and stakeholders through their daily activities and environmental impact are directly affected by proposed solutions, yet they also play a decisive role in helping municipalities achieve their targets.

For this reason, their perspectives should be gathered before detailed planning takes place. The Covenant of Mayors framework recognises different degrees of participation, ranging from “informing” at the most basic level to “empowering” at the highest. To ensure a successful SECAP process, municipalities are strongly encouraged to pursue the highest possible level of stakeholder and citizen participation throughout all phases of development and implementation.

5.4 Energy Cities – The European Association of Cities in Energy Transition

The Energy Cities initiative connects more than 1,000 local governments from 30 European countries with the goal of accelerating a fair and sustainable energy transition. It is a network that brings together frontrunner cities and those just starting their energy journey, uniting local authority representatives, technical experts, and policymakers. Energy Cities actively analyses, and synthesis key European policy documents and facilitates dialogue between municipalities and EU institutions to ensure that cities’ interests are considered in the development of EU directives and strategies.

A central aspect of the initiative is the promotion of citizen engagement, encouraging open dialogue between citizens, local leaders, and national and European institutions. Through the exchange of best practices and implementation of concrete projects, Energy Cities empowers communities to develop and test innovative approaches to energy management, strengthening trust, transparency, and public participation in decision-making about their energy future. In this way, the initiative not only supports technological progress but also builds the foundation for a democratic, decentralized, and climate-responsible Europe.

5.5 ICLEI - Local Governments for Sustainability

I**CLEI - Local Governments for Sustainability** is a global network of local and regional governments dedicated to advancing sustainable urban development. Working across local, regional, national, and global levels, ICLEI builds vital connections among diverse actors and policies to create systemic change through five interconnected development pathways that transform urban areas. Its experts

collaborate directly with local and regional authorities to address complex challenges such as urbanization, climate change, ecosystem degradation, and social inequality. By strengthening local capacity and knowledge, ICLEI supports evidence-based decision-making that reflects both scientific insights and local realities.

Knowledge exchange and peer learning are at the core of ICLEI's work, fostering city-to-city and city-to-region cooperation worldwide. At national and global levels, the organization advocates for strong policies that represent local and regional interests while translating global sustainability goals into actionable urban strategies.

Through strategic alliances with international organizations, national governments, academic and financial institutions, civil society, and the private sector, ICLEI promotes innovation and supports the development of sustainable urban solutions. ICLEI Europe provides its members with platforms, tools, and guidance on topics such as urban resilience, sustainable public procurement, smart solutions, integrated management, climate adaptation, nature-based solutions, and sustainable energy and climate action planning.

5.6 FEDARENE: The European Federation of Agencies and Regions for Energy and the Environment

The European Federation of Agencies and Regions for Energy and the Environment (FEDARENE) is a cooperation network bringing together regional and local energy agencies, as well as ministries and public authorities, that implement, coordinate, and support sustainable energy and environmental policies. As one of the founding partners of the Covenant of Mayors for Climate and Energy, FEDARENE plays an important intermediary role, connecting local and regional authorities with European institutions.

Through its activities, FEDARENE supports capacity building, market facilitation, effective policy implementation, and the replication of best practices across regions. It also promotes approaches that strengthen citizen engagement in the energy transition.

5.7 Energy Behaviour Forum

The **Forum for Local Action on Energy Efficient Behaviour** supports local and regional authorities in promoting energy-efficient behaviour. It serves as a knowledge sharing platform where local and regional authorities can exchange experiences related to energy efficiency projects and awareness campaigns. It provides tools, good practices and capacity training for local and regional authorities to help them build effective strategies, initiatives, and projects.

These initiatives specifically target engagement with citizens and private sector stakeholders to boost energy efficient behaviour and, ultimately, overall energy efficiency. The platform has been developed in close cooperation with both local and regional authorities, as well as behavioural and energy efficiency experts.

Complementary to the Energy Behaviour Forum, the European Energy Network (EnR) publishes every two years a Best Practice Catalogue on initiatives that tackle the topic of behaviour change. The 2025 edition of the catalogue captures a diverse range of initiatives that demonstrate how understanding human behaviour can accelerate the uptake of energy efficiency, renewable energy, and sustainable

lifestyles. These examples show the power of collaboration between behavioural science, policy design, and citizen participation.

5.8 Smart Cities

The European Smart Cities initiative brings together a partnership of cities committed to creating and enhancing accessible urban services that improve the quality of life for all citizens while contributing to sustainable, liveable urban environments. The initiative places a strong emphasis on citizen engagement and collaboration, with commitments in several key areas:

- raising awareness among citizens about the potential benefits and opportunities offered by smart city projects
- facilitating leadership in citizen participation to ensure communities play an active role in urban development
- developing and leveraging collaborative models, both new and existing, to foster joint problem-solving and co-creation
- promoting the use of open data and ensuring appropriate access for all relevant stakeholders
- encouraging open innovation and open science to empower citizens as informed, active participants in shaping smart cities

Through these measures, the initiative aims to create cities that are not only technologically advanced but also inclusive, participatory, and responsive to the needs and expectations of their residents.

6. FURTHER READINGS

Citizen Engagement Manual for Climate Action and a Just Transition by LOCALISED Horizon project (2025): www.localised-project.eu/wp-content/uploads/2025/06/Citizen-Engager.pdf

Citizen engagement in EU collective action energy projects by Shortall, R., Mengolini, A.M. and Gangale, F in SUSTAINABILITY, 14(10), (2022), JRC126762: https://www.mdpi.com/2071-1050/14/10/5949

Cities and citizens in search for energy democracy. An inspiring journey on how to share power by Miriam Eisermann, Energy Cities (2025): www.energy-cities.eu/cities-and-citizens-in-search-for-energy-democracy

Community Energy Municipal Guide by SCCALE 20 30 50 Horizon project (2023): www.energycommunityplatform.eu/resources/community-energy-municipal-guide

Energy communities: an overview of energy and social innovation. JRC Science for Policy report (2020): www.publications.jrc.ec.europa.eu/repository/handle/JRC119433

EnR Catalogue of Best Practices in Behaviour Change 2025 by European Energy Network (2025): www.enr-network.org/catalogue-behaviour-change-2025

IN-PLAN Practice – Support Structure for Sustainable Energy, Climate & Spatial Planning by FEDARENE (2024): www.fedarene.org/publication/introducing-the-in-plan-practice-a-new-support-structure-for-sustainable-energy-climate-and-spatial-planning

People-Centered Climate Action: A Just Transition Guide for Cities and Regions by ICELI (2026): www.iclei.org/e-library/people-centered-climate-action-a-just-transition-guide-for-cities-and-regions

European Initiatives:

- Net Zero Cities and the 100 Climate-Neutral and Smart Cities by 2030 Mission: www.netzerocities.eu
- European Energy Award Programme: www.european-energy-award.org
- Covenant of Mayors: www.eu-mayors.ec.europa.eu/en/home
- Energy Cities – The European Association of Cities in Energy Transition: www.energy-cities.eu
- ICLEI – Local Governments for Sustainability: www.iclei-europe.org
- The European Federation of Agencies and Regions for Energy and the Environment: www.fedarene.org
- Energy Behaviour Forum: www.energy-behaviour-forum.ec.europa.eu
- The European Smart Cities Initiative: www.eu-smartcities.eu

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