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TOGETHER AT FULL POWER

CONTRIBUTIONS TO THE ANALYSIS OF THE POTENTIAL FOR THE
DEVELOPMENT OF ENERGY COMMUNITIES IN CROATIA



FAST FORWARD
ENERGY COMMUNITIES PROJECT

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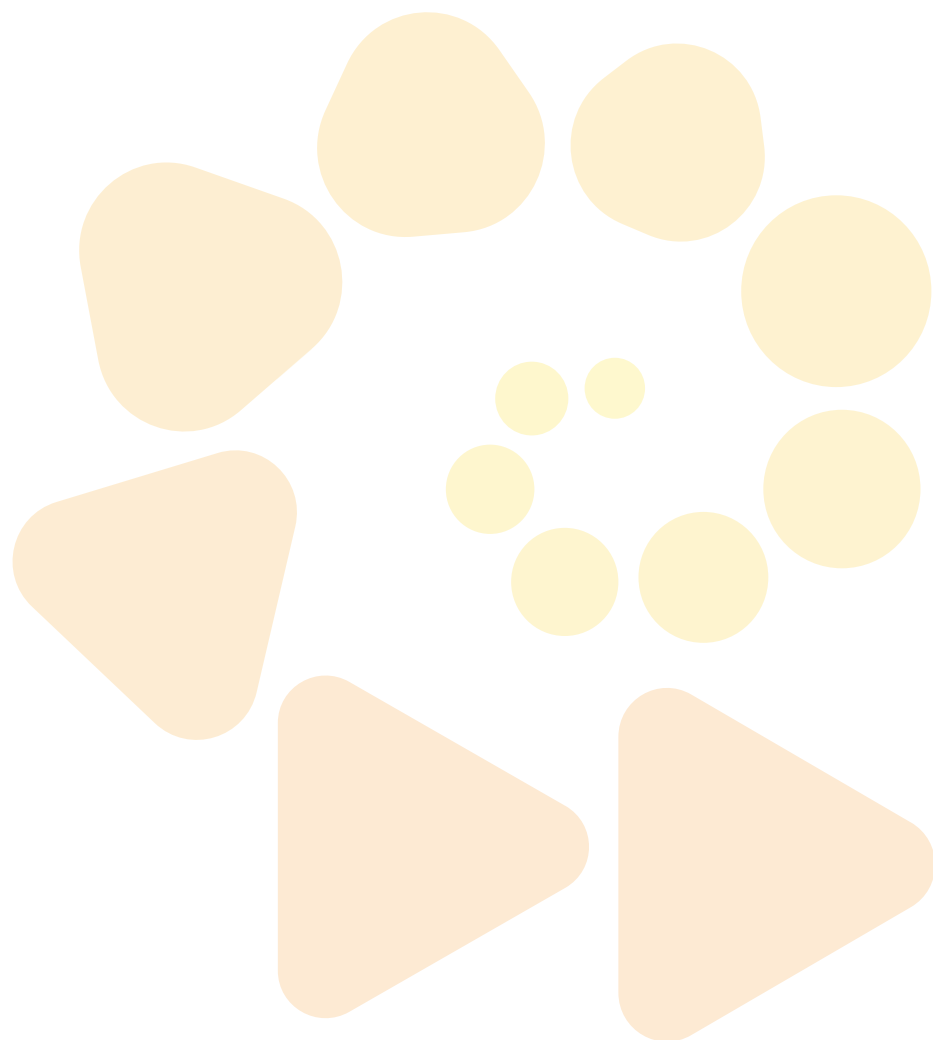
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INTRODUCTION

For at least a decade, energy communities have been a key instrument for the active involvement of citizens in the energy transition to renewable energy sources across Europe. Through energy communities, citizens come together and become directly involved in the local production of electricity, thereby strengthening the security of energy supply, local resilience and local community development. Citizens are no longer merely consumers; they also take part in electricity production. In this way, citizens benefit directly from new technologies, increasing the security of their own energy supply, reducing their bills and helping to protect vulnerable groups.

In Croatia, however, things have stalled. Although the necessary regulations were adopted back at the end of 2021, only three energy communities have been registered in Croatia to date. Moreover, even these existing energy communities cannot actually begin operating, as the state has still not enabled energy sharing in practice. As a result, citizens themselves have so far had little motivation to become involved in setting up energy communities, since using their own energy through a sharing model within an energy community remains the main motivation for citizens to join. There are somewhat more energy cooperatives, but unlike in other European countries, they are currently not entitled to register as energy communities because of the state's (mistaken) interpretation.

In this publication, we offer two important contributions to the public debate on energy communities in Croatia. The first consists of the results of a representative survey on citizens' attitudes and motivations regarding so-called citizen energy projects. No such survey had previously been conducted in Croatia, and its results certainly deserve the close attention of all those who wish to accelerate the energy transition in Croatia. The second consists of conclusions drawn from a series of conversations with the main actors and advocates of citizen energy in Croatia, which deepen and broaden our understanding of the opportunities and challenges they encounter in promoting energy communities in Croatia.

PART ONE RESULTS OF THE SURVEY ON PUBLIC PERCEPTION OF CITIZEN ENERGY

In January 2026, we examined how present the topic of citizen energy is in the Croatian public sphere, how familiar Croatian citizens are with it and how willing they are to come together, through a **survey on energy and energy communities conducted on a sample of 800 Croatian citizens**, representative by gender, age and region for the Republic of Croatia.

The survey was carried out by the agency *Karika koja nedostaje d.o.o.*¹ for the commissioning partners of the *Fast Forward Energy Communities Project in Croatia* co-financed by the German Federal Environmental Foundation (DBU), the European Climate Foundation (ECF) and the Friedrich Ebert Foundation. These are the survey results.

AWARENESS OF ENERGY COMMUNITIES

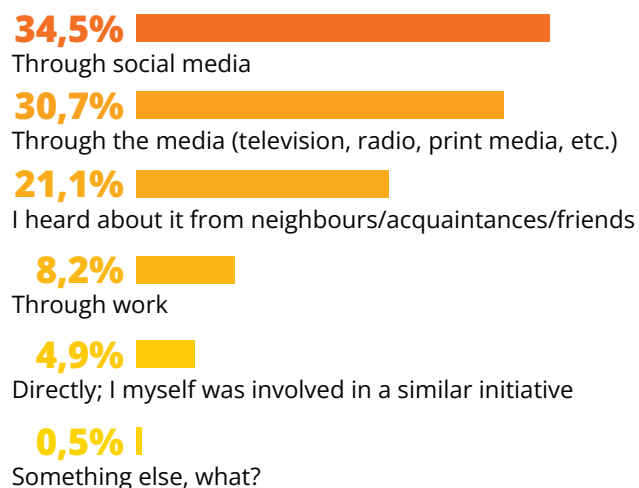
Almost half of Croatian citizens say they have heard of energy communities, whether through the media, social networks, neighbours, acquaintances, friends or work. Five per cent of respondents say they have been directly involved in a similar initiative.

¹ <https://karika.com.hr/>

Have you heard of energy communities, energy cooperatives or citizen energy?
(Energy communities encompass different types of initiatives that bring together citizens who wish to produce their own energy or provide energy-related services.)



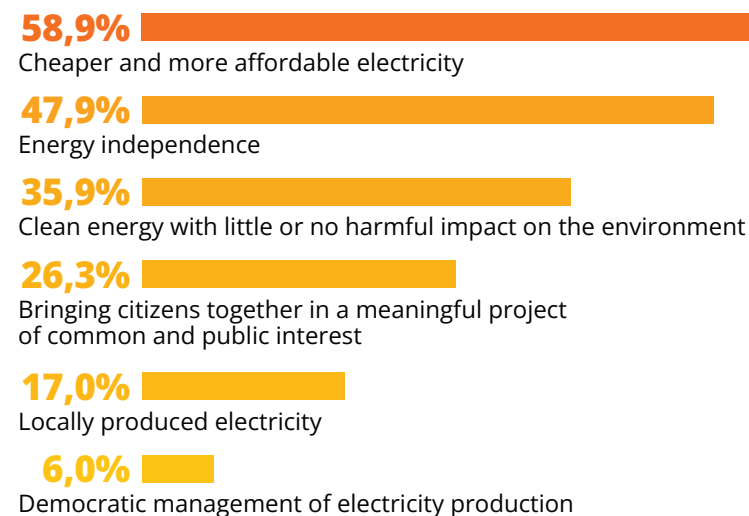
How and where did you come across information about energy communities and citizen energy?



THE ROLE AND BENEFITS OF ENERGY COMMUNITIES

Citizens who said they had heard of energy communities were then asked what they considered to be the most important role of energy communities in society. The largest number of responses supported the statements that citizen energy communities are a good way for citizens to become actively involved in producing energy for their own needs, and that they are a good way to strengthen local resilience and energy independence. The benefits highlighted by respondents are cheaper and more affordable electricity, energy independence and clean energy with little or no harmful impact on the environment.

Which BENEFITS of citizen energy projects and energy communities would you highlight?



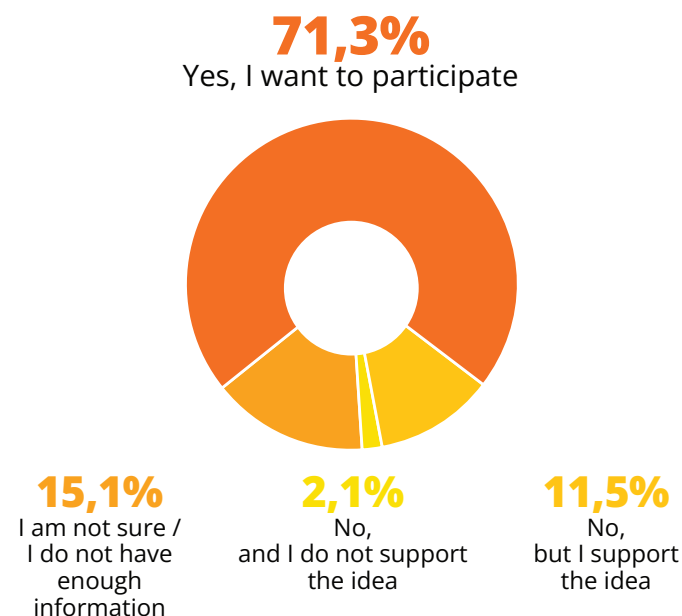
AWARENESS OF SUCCESSFUL EXAMPLES OF CITIZEN ENERGY IN CROATIA

Most citizens are not aware of successful examples in Croatia; those who said they were familiar with them were asked to name them. Their responses show that most of them already perceive their own rooftop solar power plant as a form of citizen energy, while only around twenty had actually heard of genuine examples of citizen energy in Križevci, on the islands of Krk and Cres, and of the Green Energy Cooperative, which has been actively leading citizen energy in Croatia for the past 12 years.

MOTIVATION AND WILLINGNESS TO JOIN A LOCAL ENERGY COMMUNITY

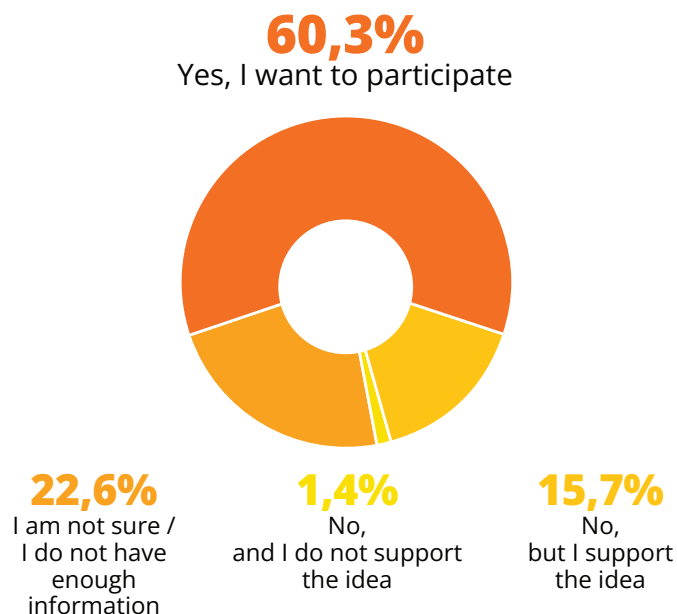
Of all survey respondents, almost three quarters of citizens would like to participate in a citizen energy initiative by producing energy with their neighbours for their own needs from a shared installation on a roof or plot of land, provided that this were administratively simple.

Imagine that you could use energy from a shared solar installation with your neighbours, without having to establish a legal entity, but simply through a straightforward contract. Would you be interested in participating in such an initiative on a shared roof/plot of land, especially if your house/building cannot have its own solar power plant installed, or if that power plant does not meet your needs?

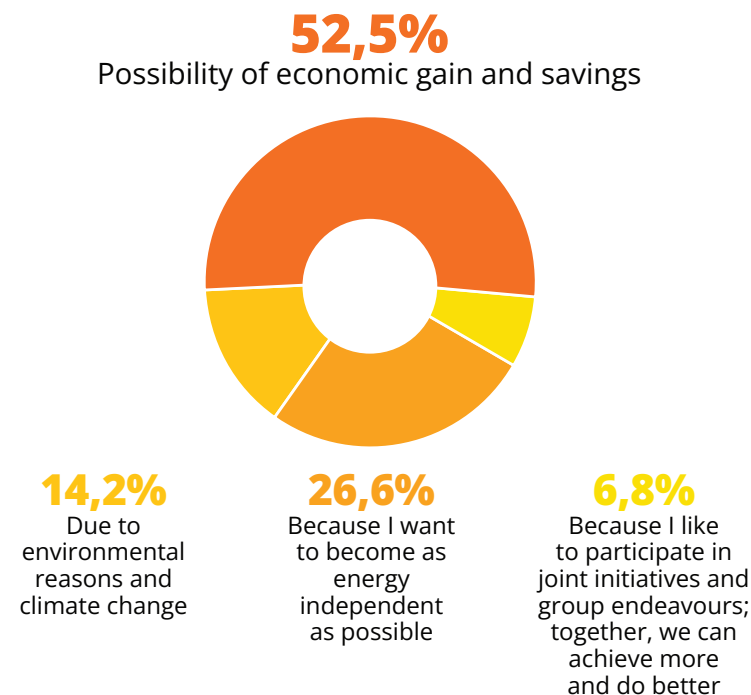


Furthermore, a large majority of citizens are willing to invest and be part of a community that builds renewable power plants, in return for a share of the revenue from the sale of energy or direct savings on their electricity bills. Their primary motivation is the possibility of economic gain and savings, as well as energy independence.

Imagine that you are part of a community that builds renewable power plants, for example solar power plants in your town or city. You invest, and in return you receive a share of the income from the sale of energy, or direct savings on your electricity bill from the energy produced by the power plant. Would you participate in such an energy community?



Why would you participate in such an initiative? Select the answer that best reflects your original motivation.



We asked all survey participants what motivates them to take part in joint efforts to prepare for future instability and crises affecting energy prices and availability. Most of them singled out the fact that they want to see a clear impact, i.e. the results of their efforts, and that information should be more readily available on where they can get involved and how they can help.

Several reasons/motives are listed below that would make you more willing to participate in joint efforts to prepare for future crises/instability affecting energy prices and availability. Select the TWO answers that would personally motivate you the most.

54,6% 

If I could see the impact of my work (that my efforts lead to results)

38,5% 

If information on where and when I can help were more readily available

23,2% 

If I had more free time

22,3% 

If I had the opportunity to learn new skills

21,1% 

If I myself felt that it was my responsibility

18,9% 

If someone from the community asked me to participate

16,2% 

If I could use the skills I have

2,6% 

None of the above would motivate me

The strongest motivator for joining an energy community is the security and profitability of the investment; citizens are not particularly willing to take risks. Another motivator, and a condition, is bringing together a sufficiently large group of people who will make a positive and visible difference in their local environment.

Which of the conditions listed below would most motivate you to join an energy community in your local area or town/city?

53,7% 

Provided that my investment would be profitable and safe
(I am not willing to take risks or lose the amount invested)

18,5% 

Provided that there would be enough of us to make a positive difference in our local area

14,4% 

If I had trust in my fellow citizens, neighbours and other investors or users

11,1% 

If I had enough information about the environmental and social benefits of our joint initiative

2,1% 

None of the above conditions would motivate me

0,2% 

Something else, what?

Survey respondents believe that the crisis and unstable energy prices have had some impact on their financial situation, while only a smaller proportion have felt this very strongly. (The effect of subsidised energy prices as a social measure introduced by the Government of the Republic of Croatia is evident; the Government reports that EUR 9 billion has been spent on these subsidies since 2021, an amount equal to Croatia's allocation from the EU Cohesion Fund.)

To what extent have the crisis and instability in terms of energy availability and prices affected your financial situation?

38,3%
They HAVE affected my financial situation to a lesser extent



16,6%
They HAVE significantly affected my financial situation

12,7%
They have NOT affected my financial situation at all

32,3%
They have mostly NOT affected my financial situation

PERCEPTION OF BARRIERS TO CITIZEN ENERGY AND CITIZENS' EXPECTATIONS FOR THE FURTHER DEVELOPMENT OF ENERGY COMMUNITIES

Respondents who said they had heard of energy communities were asked what they saw as the two greatest disadvantages of energy communities in terms of their establishment and sustainability. The answers were almost evenly distributed between a lack of understanding and reluctance on the part of the state and public companies, the need for significant financial resources for establishment, and demanding administrative procedures.

As the most important element for the growth of energy communities, most citizens highlighted financial support, as well as the need for education and support centres.

Citizens' expectations and perceptions regarding the role of the public sector clearly show that a large majority believe that nothing will move from the current standstill unless the state, or HEP, opens the door wide to citizen energy. The majority also expect cities and municipalities to do much more in the field of citizen energy, thereby increasing their own resilience.

In your opinion, what are the TWO greatest shortcomings of energy communities in terms of their establishment and sustainability?

42,2%

The reluctance, lack of knowledge and lack of understanding of the state, public companies and agencies in the energy sector are preventing the development of energy communities in Croatia

38,6%

Establishing energy communities requires significant financial resources at the very beginning

36,7%

The administrative procedure for establishing energy communities is complicated and demanding

35,1%

Energy communities are being held back by larger market players

29,3%

The business model of energy communities is unclear, as are the benefits for the members themselves

12,1%

The further growth and development of energy communities is prevented by the inability to share energy among members

3,0%

I do not know / I do not have enough information about energy communities

Which of the elements listed below are most important for the growth of energy communities?

57,2%

Financial support needs to be enabled

48,3%

Education and support centres for citizens need to be provided

39,3%

Technical support for citizens needs to be provided

28,3%

Energy sharing among members needs to be enabled

23,1%

Mandatory quotas need to be set for the purchase of energy from energy communities

1,6%

I do not know

0,5%

Something else, what?

Although energy communities are an integral and essential part of the energy transition and the shift to renewable energy sources within the EU, progress has stalled here despite the existence of the necessary legislation. What do you think needs to be done to break the deadlock? Select the two statements you agree with most strongly.

64,9%

Until the state/HEP opens the door to this, nothing will happen

58,1%

Cities and municipalities hold the power to do much more, thereby increasing their own resilience

34,3%

Energy insecurity is increasing due to geopolitical tensions. In times of crisis, more and more citizens will turn to local energy production

28,8%

Massive pressure from citizens is necessary, the transition to renewable energy sources is in the public interest

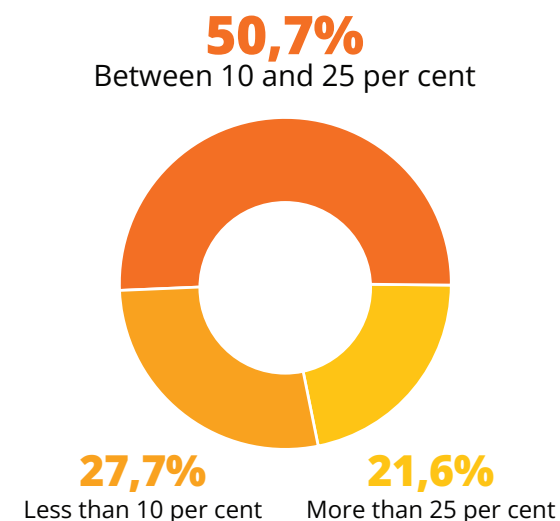
13,9%

It is necessary to fight using legal means; no progress can be made without initial judgments and litigation

CONCLUSION AND SUMMARY OF THE MAIN SURVEY INSIGHTS

Despite the perceived barriers, at least every second Croatian citizen expects that, in 20 years' time, as much as a quarter of electricity in Croatia will be produced through energy communities and similar citizen energy projects, while one in five expects the share to be even higher. This fact can and should provide strong momentum for supporting the development of citizen energy in Croatia.

If you were to imagine Croatia in 20 years' time, how much electricity in that vision would be produced through energy communities and similar citizen energy projects?



The survey insights indicate that citizens are ready to come together and produce energy jointly, but the state is not. Citizens clearly recognise the benefits of energy communities: more affordable electricity, energy independence and clean energy with less harmful impact on the environment.

Three quarters of them are willing to participate in a citizen energy initiative and produce energy with their neighbours for their own needs from a shared rooftop installation, provided that this is simple and clearly economically viable. More specifically, if it is defined by a simple contract, without the need to establish a legal entity, and provided that the investment is profitable, citizens are not willing to risk losing the amount invested.

A large majority of citizens are willing to invest and be part of a community that builds renewable power plants, in return for a share of the revenue from the sale of energy or direct savings on their electricity bills. For more than half of citizens, the primary motivation is the possibility of economic gain and savings, as well as energy independence.

Citizens expect the state to provide financial and technical support, as well as education and support centres for citizens. However, a large majority believe that nothing will happen without the state's green light, while they also expect cities and municipalities to do more in the field of citizen energy, thereby increasing their own resilience. Citizens see the reluctance, lack of knowledge and lack of understanding on the part of the state, public companies and agencies in the energy sector as the greatest shortcoming in the process of establishing and sustaining energy communities.

The survey insights largely confirm the practical field experience of the initiatives gathered in the Energy Communities Forum and the Forum's advocacy positions². Just as importantly, they show that Croatian citizens are open to cooperation and to joining forces with other citizens around the joint production and sharing of renewable energy.

² <https://www.zez.coop/forum-energetskih-zajednica/>

PART TWO OPPORTUNITIES AND CHALLENGES FOR ENERGY COMMUNITIES IN CROATIA

The results presented above clearly show that most citizens in the Republic of Croatia have high expectations of citizen energy, primarily in relation to localised and joint electricity production through energy communities. Citizens clearly recognise the benefits of citizen energy: more affordable electricity, energy independence and clean energy with less harmful impact on the environment. As many as three quarters of citizens in Croatia are willing to participate in a citizen energy initiative and produce energy with their neighbours for their own needs from a shared rooftop solar power plant, provided that this is simple and financially viable. Furthermore, according to the survey findings, a large majority of citizens in Croatia are willing to invest and be part of a community that builds renewable power plants in order to receive, in return, a share of the revenue from the sale of energy or achieve direct savings on their electricity bills. In this case, their primary motivation is savings and energy independence.

Citizens also expect the state to provide financial and technical support, education and support centres for citizens, but a large majority believe that nothing will happen without the state's green light. A significant number of citizens see the reluctance, lack of knowledge and lack of understanding on the part of the state, public companies and agencies in the energy sector as the greatest shortcoming in the process of establishing and sustaining energy communities, as these actors are thereby preventing the development of energy communities. They expect cities and municipalities to do more in the field of citizen energy, thereby increasing their own resilience.

At a time of increasingly devastating consequences of climate change, global energy insecurity, inflation and growing economic inequalities,

energy communities represent an enormous opportunity and untapped potential for social and economic development, alongside environmental benefits and local resilience. In order to gain deeper insight into the opportunities offered by energy communities in economic, environmental and social terms, we present here the main research findings obtained through conversations with key actors in citizen energy in Croatia.

ENERGY COMMUNITIES – A KEY INSTRUMENT OF THE ENERGY TRANSITION

Citizens are the main lever and driving force of the energy transition and the shift to renewable energy sources, while energy communities are becoming one of the key instruments of the energy transition in Europe. But what are energy communities, in fact?

Energy communities are legal entities that enable citizens to jointly produce, share and use energy from renewable sources. The idea stemming from European Union regulation is not for citizens to be passive consumers, but active participants in energy production in their local environment, thereby accelerating the transition from fossil fuels to renewable sources. By bringing together a number of citizens, craft-people, entrepreneurs and public institutions, more favourable procurement of equipment can be achieved, along with joint control over the price of energy and the retention of the value created within the local community. At a time marked by the devastating consequences of climate change and an insecure energy supply chain due to shortages of raw materials and resources, it is essential to enable citizens to organise themselves through citizen energy projects.

Energy communities encompass different types of initiatives that bring together citizens who wish to produce their own energy or provide energy-related services. This legal right of citizens to self-generate and self-consume energy, either individually or by joining together in energy communities, was introduced by the 2019 EU Directive on common rules for the internal market for electricity (2019/944).³ As a new legal form, the Directive introduced Citizen Energy Communities (CECs) as vol-

³ Directive (EU) 2019/944 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 5 June 2019 on common rules for the internal market for electricity and amending Directive 2012/27/EU (recast)

untary, open organisations in which decisions are taken democratically. The Directive requires that citizen energy communities be provided with an enabling legal framework for their growth and development, fair and equal treatment on the market, and defines their rights and obligations.

The legal basis for citizens to join together is also provided by the Renewable Energy Directive, which introduced Renewable Energy Communities, namely RED II, Directive (EU) 2018/2001⁴ of the European Parliament and of the Council of 11 December 2018 on the promotion of the use of energy from renewable sources (recast). It has been succeeded by the latest version, RED III, whose full title is Directive (EU) 2023/2413⁵ of the European Parliament and of the Council of 18 October 2023 amending Directive (EU) 2018/2001, Regulation (EU) 2018/1999 and Directive 98/70/EC as regards the promotion of energy from renewable sources, and repealing Council Directive (EU) 2015/652; its transposition into Croatian legislation is yet to follow.

“INTERFERENCE IN TRANSMISSION”

The Directive has been copied into Croatian law, but not transposed in a way that makes it implementable in practice. Namely, citizen energy communities are defined by the 2021 Electricity Market Act, which was amended in 2023 without any significant improvements in favour of energy communities. Since then, over a period of five years, only three energy communities have been registered in Croatia.

Despite the administrative obstacles, there are somewhat more citizen energy initiatives in Croatia, and twenty expert organisations and initiatives have come together in the Energy Communities Forum⁶. For several years now, the Forum's members have been actively working to establish their own energy communities or have otherwise been contributing to the development of energy communities in Croatia through their expertise and advocacy work. The Forum forms the core of the establishment of a network of local energy communities across Croatia, which will give their members access to sustainable, renewable and affordable energy.

⁴ <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/HR/TXT/PDF/?uri=CELEX:32018L2001>

⁵ <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/eli/dir/2023/2413/oj>

⁶ <https://www.zez.coop/forum-energetskih-zajednica/>

A number of laws and regulations are also relevant to the process of registering energy communities:

- ▶▶ Electricity Market Act,
- ▶▶ Renewable Energy Sources and High-Efficiency Cogeneration Act,
- ▶▶ Ordinance on Licences for the Performance of Energy Activities and on Keeping the Register of Issued and Revoked Licences for the Performance of Energy Activities.

The competent authorities for the registration process are:

- Ministry of the Economy; Croatian Energy Regulatory Agency (HERA)

A number of laws and regulations are relevant to the (im)possibility of sharing energy with members of the community:

- Electricity Market Act; Renewable Energy Sources and High-Efficiency Cogeneration Act; Ordinance on the General Conditions for Network Use and Electricity Supply; Methodology for Determining Tariff Items for Electricity Distribution; Methodology for Determining the Fee for Connection to the Electricity Network; Distribution System Network Rules; Rules on Connection to the Distribution Network.

The competent authorities for enabling energy sharing are:

- Ministry of the Economy, HEP-ODS, HERA⁷

⁷ <https://www.zez.coop/pravni-okvir-za-energetske-zajednice/>

Barriers to Launching Energy Communities

The Energy Communities Forum, led by the Green Energy Cooperative and bringing together initiatives, cooperatives and experts in the field of renewable energy and the energy transition, identifies several levels of barriers to launching energy communities.

- ▶▶ The first is regulatory and operational: the laws recognise energy communities, but the energy sharing system – how it is measured, billed and how value is distributed among members – is still not sufficiently clear, defined or standardised.
- ▶▶ The second level is operational complexity: energy communities involve multiple stakeholders – citizens, local government, the network operator and investors. Without a clear coordination structure, the process can easily become complicated.
- ▶▶ The third level concerns the perspective of citizens themselves: they want to know what exactly they will gain, what the risk is, what the return on investment will be and how simple the entire process is.⁸ None of these dimensions have yet been resolved in Croatia, while the state, as regulator, does little to help untangle them and further complicates processes that ought to be quick and simple. Because climate change does not wait.

Energy sharing within energy communities in Croatia is currently blocked or significantly delayed, despite the legal obligation to enable it, because HEP-ODS (the Distribution System Operator) has not yet technically enabled the commercial sharing of surplus electricity. As of 1 April 2026, a testing phase for energy sharing with three energy communities began. It remains to be seen how this pilot phase will develop, whether it will become fully operational and whether it will become an applicable model for other citizen energy communities. Energy sharing now represents the main “bottleneck” for the development of citizen energy, including solar energy in multi-unit residential buildings.

⁸ <https://lumbarda.hr/dijeljenje-energije-u-hrvatskoj-krece-od-1-travnja-2026-sto-to-znaci-za-gradane/> See also <https://h-alter.org/planet-zemlja/kome-smeta-demokratizacija-energetskog-sustava/>

HOW DID IT ALL BEGIN?

Ideas about the potential of citizen energy in Croatia did not appear only with the introduction of the aforementioned regulation. “The first more significant gathering took place back in 2014 on the island of Krk, when the future members of the Green Energy Cooperative brought together advocates of citizen energy and experts in the energy transition, giving momentum to this new idea,” recalls Zoran Kordić, manager of the Green Energy Cooperative (*Zelena energetska zadruga, ZEZ*), currently one of the leading organisations in the field of citizen energy in Croatia.⁹ “Back then, on Krk, we connected existing initiatives and launched the wave of citizen energy in Croatia,” Kordić states. “A few years later,” he continues, “in the town of Križevci, we designed and implemented the first citizen energy project, ‘Križevci Solar Roofs’.”¹⁰

Created as a collaboration between the Green Energy Cooperative and the Town of Križevci, the projects were implemented in 2018 and 2019 through crowd-investing campaigns to raise investment for the installation of photovoltaic power plants on two public buildings in Križevci. These projects made a significant contribution to positioning Križevci as one of the leaders in the energy independence of cities in Croatia, particularly in terms of promoting citizen energy in local communities and beyond. The projects also resulted in the establishment of KLIK, a local citizen energy initiative which today runs the Energy and Climate Office of the Town of Križevci, the first of its kind in Croatia. After that, Kordić also mentions numerous gatherings held at various locations in Croatia under the title “Dobra energija” (“Good Energy”),¹¹ which continued to promote citizen energy solutions throughout Croatia. At this point, Kordić is cautiously optimistic as he awaits the legislative amendment on energy sharing expected in spring 2026.

“Energy sharing is a prerequisite for more initiatives to emerge in practice, especially in the case of multi-unit residential buildings. Sharing can be that flywheel if it is simple and, ultimately, financially viable, attractive and straightforward,” he adds. A separate financial mechanism

is also needed, one that could help launch new initiatives and support preparatory activities for energy communities. HROTE, for example, has opened the way and set quotas for renewable energy communities, but HERA has not provided clear parameters. A great deal depends on their coordination, which is often lacking and slows down the process.”

Through its direct and continuous work with citizens, the Green Energy Cooperative has been observing for years that this idea still remains rather intangible and is not necessarily linked to environmental challenges. According to Kordić, the economic calculation is the primary motivation for citizens to consider these options, including price, affordability and savings, which sometimes distances citizens from the environmental or social motive for becoming involved in projects of joint and local energy production.

This is a specific segment of the energy sector for which the state has shown neither understanding nor interest. Pressure from the European Union for the state to engage in development in this direction is still too weak to trigger and strengthen capacities for a deeper understanding of this topic. In this respect, Kordić says, citizen energy requires a separate track, specific instruments and models that are not placed in the same basket as conventional and traditional formats in the energy sector, nor made to compete with large companies that have far greater resources. Figuratively speaking, if energy communities are cyclists, then in order for them to develop more significantly and on a larger scale, investment is needed in good cycle lanes that allow them to progress at their own pace and reach the destination safely, rather than forcing them to compete with cars and lorries on fast roads or motorways.

Cities and municipalities can also play an important role, but at present it is clear that this is not their priority. Cities are interested in technical solutions, but less so in social change. Without the participation of the community itself and of citizens, it is difficult to create the resilience that cities will increasingly seek, says Kordić. The wave of citizen energy also needs to be joined by people from other backgrounds, including entrepreneurs and craftspeople, which requires the creation of broader and more numerous alliances capable of presenting a convincing and powerful image of change based on joint efforts and deeper cooperation.

⁹ Interview with Zoran Kordić, manager of the Green Energy Cooperative, January 2026.

¹⁰ <https://www.zez.coop/projekt/krizevacki-suncani-krovovi/>

¹¹ <https://ipe.hr/aktivnosti/dobra-energija-na-otoku-visu/>

BREAKING THE ICE

ZEZ is based in Zagreb, although it cooperates with a number of similar and related organisations throughout Croatia through the Energy Communities Forum. One such organisation is the Northern Adriatic Energy Community, one of the first registered energy communities to hold an operating licence from the regulator. Although they have met all the requirements for operation and are waiting in the starting blocks, they have been standing still for quite some time due to the impossibility of energy sharing, explains Damir Medved, vice-president of the Northern Adriatic Energy Community, based in the city of Rijeka.¹² “We are standing in the waiting room, even though we already have around 30 members and 240 kW of installed solar capacity, including companies, craftspeople and citizens. We have robust and ready-to-use software and supporting technologies, including smart metering, which we are constantly improving,” Medved states. “There is a great deal of interest, but we have not increased the number of members until energy sharing is enabled,” he explains. “With this in mind, we have also opened a so-called one-stop shop, which provides support and basic education to interested citizens, and we are also focusing on neighbouring towns such as Kastav, Delnice and Opatija, because we see great potential in establishing energy communities involving municipal utility companies. There is no point in pushing them into this now, while energy sharing has not been enabled, but just imagine the potential that lies there. For now, however, the model starts and then stops, and we are breaking the ice here. Through energy communities, cities can become more self-reliant, independent, resilient and self-sustaining, and far better prepared for various crisis situations and disasters. If HEP allowed us to do so, we would be ready to move forward immediately and start working with several cities,” says Medved, explaining that the Northern Adriatic Energy Community is gaining insight into numerous good practices through various forms of international cooperation.

“There is very serious interest among municipal utility companies. One area of interest revolves around critical infrastructure, water management and energy, and the integration of these systems. Another is linked to the circular economy, such as waste, and public transport. For example, part of that energy could be supplied by citizens, enabling them to participate

directly in the transformation of municipal infrastructure. In other words, solar panels on citizens’ roofs could power their local bus. The moment HEP allows this, we can install charging stations and charge vehicles belonging to members of the community, while a municipal utility company, for example, could also be a member of the energy community. This is particularly relevant for peripheral parts of the city, where small vans run to the main terminals,” Medved illustrates.

“The greatest success is that a large number of people in Rijeka and the surrounding area already know what we are talking about,” he continues. “People are most interested in savings, autonomy and security. That is why we are increasingly considering technological solutions related to storage and batteries,” he explains. “At this moment,” Medved states, “there is no reasonable explanation as to why everything has come to a halt. HEP-ODS claims that energy sharing cannot yet be enabled due to a lack of technical and IT solutions, but we know that this is not the case. We simply cannot believe that, and therefore we suspect that, at the very least, they are giving these issues low priority, if not that they simply lack the necessary competences. HEP has a legal duty, and every other duty, to get this in order,” he continues, “while HERA has done what it needed to do, and the framework is sufficiently well set up for us to start sharing energy. The obstacle is that HEP-ODS has not done what it was supposed to do, and no one takes any notice of our comments and proposals or gives them due consideration. They are keeping the door closed for reasons that are not entirely clear to us. The obstacles are not technical, but administrative. What they are doing is simply not in the public interest, because energy sharing is in the public interest. Once sharing is allowed, we will focus more attention on charging stations and storage so that we can continue developing the system. But HEP must allow this and remove the obstacles it is creating,” Medved claims. “Until recently, while the price of energy was low, this was not an issue. As long as fuel is cheap and parking is cheap, nobody wants to use public transport. Is HEP waiting for that to happen before allowing energy sharing?” Medved asks.

“Ideally, we need around 500–700 members to be economically viable, and 1,000 members for it to remain viable and for the membership fee to stay low,” says Medved. “Neither the activist nor the expert approach has borne fruit; the only thing left for us is to consider legal measures and litigation. Perhaps only then will they change their tune,” he explains.

¹² Interview with Damir Medved, vice-president of the Northern Adriatic Energy Community, February 2026.

KINDERGARTEN SOLAR ENERGY FOR PUMPING WATER FROM LAKE VRANA

Not far from Rijeka, in the nearby Kvarner region, on Cres and Mali Lošinj, the Apsyrtides energy cooperative, established in 2021, has been operating for several years. “While working on local energy transition plans, we quickly realised that a location on Cres was ideal for a 465 kW solar power plant. Very quickly, in just a few weeks, we raised the money, around EUR 100,000, and began setting up the energy cooperative. Our goal was to launch a solar power plant in Filozići. Among the founders were citizens, legal entities, a local self-government unit, and almost 70 members of the cooperative,” says Franjo Toić, manager of the Apsyrtides energy cooperative¹³. Toić explains that the procedure is still ongoing and that the documentation is being dealt with, sharing his concern about the slow pace, which is eating away at both time and the motivation of members. “We knew it would be difficult, but now we are treading water. Finding an outlet for the electricity is what worries us most,” he continues.

“In addition, we secured funding for a 20 kW solar power plant on a kindergarten and involved the museum and the kindergarten so that we could register as an energy community. The Town of Cres is also part of the cooperative; we are all rowing in the same direction. But we are still caught in an administrative vortex because of the new clarifications and additions being requested of us. We are still waiting for HERA’s opinion,” says Toić, noting that this project could significantly increase local resilience by integrating the energy generation function at the kindergarten with the function of pumping water from Lake Vrana, which consumes a great deal of energy. In summer, for example, the kindergarten operates less and consumes less energy, and this surplus energy could be redirected to the energy consumption associated with water pumping, which increases in the summer.” He notes that the participation of the Town of Cres played a key role and gave the entire initiative a boost.

“Most cooperative members invested in this project for economic and financial reasons, in order to make savings. Cres is a smaller community where people generally live well, and there is trust within the local com-

¹³ Interview with Franjo Toić, manager of the Apsyrtides energy cooperative based on the island of Cres, February 2026.

munity. Energy literacy is also high and people are up to speed. We even have town councillors with direct experience in this area,” Toić explains. “There are many people in HEP who help us and are accommodating, but the decision has to be made somewhere ‘higher up’. It seems that those who make the decisions believe we are too small for the network to be adapted for us. I think that only the European Commission can force the Government to enable energy sharing and simplify registration procedures for energy communities. Or it will take a significant increase in energy prices, at which point HEP will be forced to share that burden with citizens,” says Toić.

SIMPLIFYING THE REGISTRATION PROCEDURE

Maja Bratko is a senior expert associate at the Society for Sustainable Development Design, based in Zagreb, who has been following the development of citizen energy in Croatia for almost ten years, especially at the level of smaller local communities interested in local energy production. She too believes that what arouses the greatest interest among citizens is cheaper and more affordable energy. “Cities and municipalities in Croatia often have much bigger problems that matter more to them, so projects like this fall into the background. In addition, their orientation is short-term and the administration is often sluggish, which demotivates citizens,” she explains¹⁴. She also argues that there are instances whose aim is not for citizen energy to expand, nor for citizens to become more autonomous or independent in terms of electricity production; rather, citizens are preferably seen as buyers and consumers.

“Citizen energy could be launched very easily with a little more will and better cooperation and coordination. HERA can adopt secondary legislation that facilitates the registration of energy communities, while HEP can enable energy sharing and billing. In cooperation with the Ministry of the Economy, they could play a decisive role in opening the door to citizen energy,” Bratko states. “In addition to them, regional energy agencies can speed up the provision of information on energy communities, while small and medium-sized enterprises have a strong interest in participating in the sharing of surplus energy produced,” she continues.

¹⁴ Interview with Maja Bratko, senior expert associate at DOOR, February 2026.

“Even if energy sharing were enabled tomorrow, the state would still be obliged to simplify the registration procedure, which currently requires 18 documents. Moreover, none of these attempts and pilots would be possible without EU funding, which enables them to be launched. Once sharing begins, I expect such projects to become easier to finance, because citizens’ funds, such as savings, will be mobilised more quickly and on a larger scale,” says Bratko. Every larger local community should also consider launching one-stop shops that can speed up the provision of information on the registration procedure and existing initiatives.

“There seems to be a perception in some circles that energy communities would threaten the current business model in the energy sector. Because of this way of thinking, the great potential they represent remains untapped. In addition, there is a deep lack of understanding among some policymakers, who interpret the directive restrictively or incorrectly, meaning that it cannot be successfully implemented,” says Enes Ćerimagić, vice-president of *Zelena akcija* (Green Action). “This keeps us at the micro level of individual household power plants, where the Green Energy Cooperative in particular has done a great deal of work in recent years. However,” Ćerimagić emphasises, “the motivation of users and potential members remains primarily economic, while the projects remain investment-based, without a real community.”

“The role of energy communities in Croatia is still not properly understood, but this is not surprising, because the country does not have a progressive energy policy driving the energy transition. Capacities for new trends are not being developed, and the only minimal progress that does occur happens when there is a penalty, public pressure or deadlines for the implementation of individual directives. Only the bare minimum is done and fulfilled,” Ćerimagić continues.

“HERA, for example, is well acquainted with the technical and legal aspects, but there is no understanding of the economic, social and environmental benefits of local energy production through energy communities. This is not particularly surprising, given that every model, as a living instrument, develops through interaction among those involved. HEP itself, however, does not seem to want to see this development,

because it thereby becomes competition to its business model, if such a thing exists. Although divided into different components, HEP is still part of the same ecosystem, in which the same interest prevails, and energy communities are in a sense seen as a threat to that interest,” Ćerimagić continues. The discussion thus develops between unrealistic extremes: either it is claimed that greater implementation of such models would overload the network, or it is claimed that the contribution of energy communities would be insignificant and minor, and therefore not a sufficient reason to adapt the network.

INVESTMENT ALONE DOES NOT BUILD TRUST

“Interest in energy communities can be managed. They are a model that makes it possible to bring existing decentralised capacities together into a single system. The role of the state is to provide an enabling framework for the establishment of new energy communities and to optimise their production and consumption. At the same time, it should be emphasised that the so-called insufficient liberalisation of the energy sector is not necessarily an obstacle, if the state were to see energy communities as its priority,” Ćerimagić points out. The City of Zagreb, for example, is missing an extraordinary opportunity here, since it has the capacities and resources to get involved and connect different actors within the system, ultimately also partly addressing the issue of energy poverty. According to Ćerimagić, the City of Zagreb could be a leader in the energy transition in cooperation with citizens. It should recognise its own interest and the fulfilment of its programme, rather than relying on REGEA, the North-West Croatia Regional Energy and Climate Agency, which in this context fosters a distinctly investment-led approach, rather than citizen energy rooted in the community. Through an investment-led approach, he believes, trust in the community is neither nurtured nor created.

The already mentioned Town of Križevci, which is far smaller than Zagreb, has made significant strides in recent years by opening the door to citizen energy and has become almost a model example of citizen energy in practice. In 2020, the KLIK energy cooperative, the Križevci Climate Innovation Laboratory, was established and now cooperates with ZEJ on numerous citizen energy projects. Through cooperation with the town and other organisations, a one-stop shop was also launched two years ago.

15 Interview with Enes Ćerimagić, vice-president of Zelena akcija (Green Action), February 2026.

CAN A SINGLE STAIRWELL IN A BLOCK OF FLATS SET UP AN ENERGY COMMUNITY? DIFFICULT, FOR NOW!

“Through the Danube Energy Communities Accelerator project, we are developing support models for energy communities: how to establish them, how they should work with their members, and a complete methodology for developing an energy community from start to finish. Through other projects, we also help citizens plan energy renovation, the installation of photovoltaic power plants, and analyse their needs and financial capacities. In the field, we also cooperate very well with the local HEP,” says Martina Nemčić, project manager at KLIK.¹⁶ She also argues that one-stop shops play an important role in the energy renovation of citizens at risk of energy poverty, and that they are a support structure that should be subsidised by the state.

Hrvoje Seleš, manager of KLIK, returned from the private sector a year ago and chose KLIK because he wants to participate in the energy transition, in which Križevci is emerging as a leader. “We intend to work with citizens to create better conditions for joint investments in the construction of photovoltaic power plants. We have just launched a pilot energy community project in a multi-unit residential building, which will be based on solar energy. It is very important that the town is participating through subsidies for the installation of new capacity. Although these subsidies have been reduced this year, the Town has nevertheless committed itself to continuing in this direction,”¹⁷ says Seleš. “In the long term, we see this as the decentralisation of energy production at regional level, where municipalities and towns can share energy among themselves. That is one step further. But for something like that, we need several thousand members, and that could in fact be a major problem for HEP because its infrastructure is allegedly not that flexible,” says Seleš.

Petar Fabijan from KLIK says that last year alone they consulted more than 100 citizens and installed 450 kW of photovoltaic pow-

er plants on family houses. “Citizens say that they would not have been able to do this on their own, and they confirm the importance of our work every day. Nevertheless, the situation regarding the registration of energy communities is still such that it prevents a single stairwell in a block of flats from registering an energy community, because under the current criteria it is necessary to employ one person”¹⁸, he adds.

Nemčić emphasises that examples of good practice and successful pilot projects will further motivate people, and that with those who are already waiting in the starting blocks, this will be a real boom. Energy communities, she continues, are based on people, and the whole point is to develop the local community and retain the value created within it for the quality of life of that community.

¹⁶ Interview with Martina Nemčić, project manager at KLIK, February 2026.

¹⁷ Interview with Hrvoje Seleš, manager of the KLIK cooperative, February 2026.

¹⁸ Interview with Petar Fabijan, associate at KLIK, February 2026.

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