

A photograph of three people (two men and one woman) smiling and holding up large, stylized lightbulbs. The image is partially covered by a large blue diagonal shape that contains the title text.

Energy Citizenship:

A missing piece to the energy transition puzzle?

The concept of Energy Citizenship concerns rights and responsibilities for each citizen and is considered an important step towards energy transitions in a wider European energy policy context. As the first in a series of policy briefs for the EC² project, this brief unpacks the *concept* of Energy Citizenship. It delves into the source and extent of the rights and responsibilities that come with Energy Citizenship, and situates this concept within the wider European energy policy context.





The insights contained herein are based on the transdisciplinary research results of the citizen engagement conducted as part of the EC² project.

Our approach incorporates economic, legal and psychological elements and perspectives. These scientific insights capture and synthesise the knowledge co-created with citizens, energy communities, and municipalities in Spain, Poland, Italy and the Netherlands.



KEY INSIGHTS:

1. Member states have an obligation to create an **enabling environment** for active citizen involvement in the energy transition (an inherent part of EU citizenship).
2. This extends beyond democratic participation and access to energy, to also include **co-creation and ownership** of different forms of production and consumption.
3. The **Clean Energy Package** partly **recognises this**, by adding new energy community actors and citizen rights and responsibilities to more direct involvement in the transition.¹
4. Yet the wider European level regulatory and economic **framework still largely reflects a top-down producer-consumer relationship**, with inadequate active involvement of the public.²

Keywords:

#EnergyCitizenship #EnergyTransition
#EnergyDemocracy #CoCreation
#CoOwnership #EnergyCommunities
#Empowerment

¹ See European Commission *Clean energy for all Europeans package* (2019). Available [here](#).

² With such neo-liberal, consumer-based approaches also continuing to prevail at the national level.



DEFINITION:

“Energy citizenship is people's rights to and responsibilities for a just and sustainable energy transition.”³

Nature & Scope of Energy Citizenship

Energy Citizenship can be viewed as an *additional new layer* of EU citizenship, adding to the latter's multi-layered political and market dimensions. It is akin to freedom of movement, **existing regardless of whether or not someone makes use of their rights**. Therefore, one's individual or collective energy citizenship can be viewed as less a binary than a spectrum of weak to strong citizenship.⁴

Energy citizenship emphasises that **member states have an obligation to create an enabling environment** for citizen involvement in the energy transition. This goes further than democratic participation, by also emphasising empowerment of individuals and communities to engage in energy policies (decentralisation of power) and agency relating to different forms of production and consumption.

This builds on the wider EU policy landscape. The *EU Pillar of Social Rights* encompasses access to essential services *including energy*,⁵ while the *EU Green Deal* has a specific focus on combating energy poverty - strengthening the conception of energy as a right.⁶ The *Clean Energy Package* has also added new opportunities for democratic citizen participation and co-creation, thereby highlighting the importance of co-ownership of the energy transition by individuals and communities.

The possibility to establish and **participate in an energy community** can be seen as a particularly **promising and empowering example of energy citizenship** (in addition to more fundamental aspects such as basic supply and combating energy poverty).⁷ However, energy citizenship could also include various different forms of consumption and production from renewables, as well as co-creation of the energy ecosystem - all with particular emphasis placed on *localising* production and involving local communities.⁸



³ See EC² project Deliverable 2.1 *Interdisciplinary understanding of energy citizenship* (2022). Hereafter 'D2.1'. Available [here](#).

⁴ D2.1 § 2.7.

⁵ See European Commission *Establishing a European Pillar of Social Rights* (2017). Available [here](#).

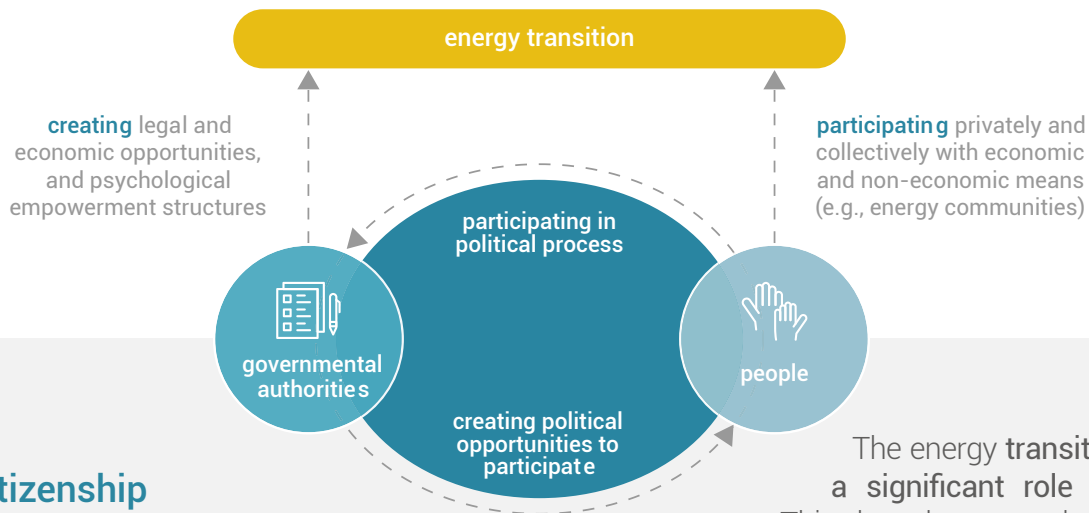
This is fleshed out in a more specific universal service obligation - [Directive 2009/72/EC](#) of the European Parliament and of the Council 143 (the Electricity Directive).

⁶ European Commission *Delivering the European Green Deal* (2020). Available [here](#).

⁷ D2.1 §§ 3.3 & 2.7.

⁸ Including at individual, household, and local community level.

Energy citizenship as a co-responsible process



Source of Energy Citizenship

The term “energy citizenship” is not explicitly stated, but is implicit in the web of EU norms encapsulated in EU law - creating a picture of citizens as proactive *players* in the energy transition⁹. For example, RED II and IMED¹⁰ speak to just transition factors such as supporting vulnerable customers, addressing energy poverty, and enabling energy communities. The Aarhus convention also works towards more participation of individuals and civil society in climate policy, including within the energy transition.¹¹

Taken together, these paint a **dual picture** of Energy Citizenship - encompassing both **specific rights and duties** for everyone (including individuals), and a **general commitment to a (just and sustainable) energy transition**.¹² While this commitment stems from the EU level, rights and duties should also include local, regional or national level content. Energy citizenship can be considered stronger in instances where more such rights and duties exist and are supported.

Yet the decision to strengthen Energy Citizenship is not unanimous. **In the Clean Energy Package tensions exist** between two worldviews.

The energy transition requires a significant role of citizens.

This has been partly recognised with the admission of new actors in EU law (most notably citizen energy communities and renewable energy communities) and a host of new rights surrounding participation, production, access, and co-creation.¹³ **On the other hand these continue to exist within a wider regulatory and economic framework which still largely reflects the traditional neoliberal economic model** centred on a top-down producer-consumer relationship.¹⁴

The introduction of these new actors and rights alone is unlikely to spark the kinds of profound change and engagement anticipated.¹⁵ Current **energy systems are structured in a way that provides little agency to the majority of citizens**. What is required are concrete steps to support citizen involvement through enabling **policies which** address issues of exclusion and inequality head-on and **provide citizens with the resources to actively participate** (see examples listed at the end of this brief). Only then can people build strong psychological energy citizenship and actively engage in a just and sustainable energy transition. In this regard, it is worth noting that the EC² project has also developed a psychological measure by which energy citizenship can be monitored in specific contexts - an *Energy Citizenship Scale*.¹⁶

⁹ Encapsulated in, *inter alia*, primary and secondary law, EU policy papers, communication of the European Commission, and relevant international conventions.

¹⁰ Renewable Energy Directive 2018/2001/EU (RED II) & Directive on Common Rules for the Internal Market for Electricity 2019/944/EU (IMED).

¹¹ Convention on Access to Information, Public Participation in Decision-making and Access to Justice in Environmental Matters (1998), 2161 U.N.T.S., p.447 (The Aarhus Convention), to which the EU is a signatory.

¹² See D2.1 § 2.5.3.

¹³ As summarised in D2.1 § 3.8: “People have the rights to (...) an access to sustainable energy and clean environment (...), to produce and organise sustainable energy; to co-create (...) the sustainable energy transition, to equal rights to access the energy market, and the responsibilities for the co-creation of a sustainable energy transition (...).”

¹⁴ See D2.1 § 3.1.

¹⁵ Such as the establishment of at least one renewable energy community per municipality above 10,000 residents by 2025. See the European Commission EU solar energy strategy (2022). Available [here](#).

¹⁶ See EC2 D2.3 Energy Citizenship Scale – Validation Study (2021). Available [here](#).

See also the Energy Citizenship Quiz (2022) for self-assessment using this scale. Available [here](#).

Relevance of Energy Citizenship

What does this new concept add to the current energy transition debate? Primarily, it strengthens the argument that **policymakers cannot expect ambitious energy targets to be met**, and for the public to play its part, **unless an enabling environment is created** in which people can participate. Research highlights that the switch to renewable energy is not happening quickly enough. This, despite studies suggesting that 80% of EU households have the potential to be active players in the energy system by 2050.¹⁷

In the context of renewable energy communities we see concerns being raised about a “copy-paste” approach to transposition of the EU’s Renewable Energy Directive, without paying attention to national and local contexts. The enabling frameworks that have so far been developed in the EU member states are generally not yet sufficiently advanced to comply with the minimum requirements of the Directive.¹⁸

These mismatches prevent or hinder policies to trigger effective and concrete actions locally, such as supporting citizens to set up and join energy communities. Energy Citizenship helps to **provide specific insights into how a holistic and context-specific enabling environment can be achieved**. Two examples are the focus on **legislative coherence** extending to other domains *beyond energy law*, and the far greater guiding role required from **intermediaries** – particularly local and regional governments, but also civil society actors and local communities.

Energy Citizenship also contributes to wider policy debates.¹⁹ It strengthens arguments for a more holistic, systemic approach to tackling energy poverty, with both emphasising the idea of energy as a *right*. It further argues for broadening our conception of energy communities beyond the narrow understanding of EU law. It therefore adds to voices calling for the **better mobilisation (inclusion) of already existing collective energy actions** that are arguably equally capable of contributing to the EU’s overarching goals regarding the energy transition.²⁰



FURTHER RESOURCES:

- ✓ Academic article based on EC² deliverable D2.1:
[*An interdisciplinary understanding of energy citizenship: Integrating psychological, legal, and economic perspectives on a citizen-centred sustainable energy transition \(2023\)*](#).²¹
- ✓ EC² paper:
[*Catalogue of potential legal and economic barriers or facilitators of energy citizenship*](#) (2022).
- ✓ DECIDE position paper:
[*Energy Communities and Collective Actions*](#) (2022).
- ✓ EC² project
[*Energy Citizenship \(online\) quiz*](#) (2022).
- ✓ Dialogues project:
Pathways to energy citizenship and their connection with ownership, participation, and conflict (2022).

¹⁷ See EEA *Energy prosumers in Europe - Citizen participation in the energy transition* (2022). Available [here](#).

¹⁸ See COME RES *Comparative Assessment of Enabling Frameworks for RECs and Support Scheme Designs* (2022). Available [here](#).

¹⁹ Including achieving climate goals with better efficiency and speed, reducing energy dependence on centralised actors, increasing energy autonomy, etc.

²⁰ See EC2 D2.1 § 2.3.1; DECIDE *Energy Communities and Collective Actions* (2022). Available [here](#).

²¹ Hamann, K. R. S., Bertel, M. P., Ryszawska, B., Lurger, B., Szymanski, P., Rozwadowska, M., Goedkoop, F., Jans, L., Perlaviciute, G., Masson, T., Fritsche, I., Favaro, T., Hofer, A., Eisenberger, I., Gutschi, C., Grosche, C., Held, J., Athenstaedt, U., & Corcoran, K. (in press). *An Interdisciplinary Understanding of Energy Citizenship: Integrating Psychological, Legal, and Economic Perspectives on a Citizen-Centred Sustainable Energy Transition*. Energy Research and Social Science (2023).

This is the first in a series of Policy Briefs aimed at exploring the concept of Energy Citizenship and its requirements. The series shares key insights on how the concept can be used as an effective tool for accelerating the renewable energy transition, together with citizens. The EC² project aims to support policy and decision makers through a series of actionable recommendations, targeted primarily at policy makers - from the European through to the local level.



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