Strengthening
Social Economy Networks
for Impact and Resilience

Co-funded by the
European Union

# Policy Lab "Policy solutions for a fairer energy future, powering communities and the social economy"

**25 November, 9.30-13.00**

***Nordic House, Region of Västra Götaland, Rue du Luxembourg 3 (1st floor), B-1000 Brussels***

With the climate crisis on one hand, and current geopolitical tensions on the other, energy security, clean power, and affordable bills are top priorities for governments and a central topic of recent election campaigns.

EU policies like the Renewable Energy Directive and the Electricity Market Directive actively promote citizen-led energy transitions through the formal creation of Renewable Energy Communities (RECs) and Citizen Energy Communities (CECs). Article 22 of the Renewable Energy Directive obliges Member States to enable final customers, particularly households, to participate in renewable energy communities on an equal footing with other market participants.

Though rarely recognized as such, the social economy has proven to be a key pioneer and player in this field, with cooperatives as the most common legal structure for renewable energy communities.

According to the 10th State of the Energy Union report, there are more than 8,000 energy communities across the EU. Still, it is not yet possible to determine what percentage of the Union's produced energy comes from energy communities. In Belgium - one of Europe's pioneer countries for citizen-led renewable energy initiatives - social suppliers account for an estimated 1.38% of total energy supplied in the country (source: Statista).

What prevents renewable energy communities from growing at a higher pace, even in countries and regions that have properly implemented these directives?

This policy lab builds on the previous work done by REVES, including REVES member cities and regions, EURICSE, DIESIS and Social Economy Europe across different European Union countries. While primarily designed for local, regional, and EU policymakers and administration, the lab is also open to social economy organizations, civil society, academics, and other interested stakeholders.

**The lab will analyse and discuss two main topics:**

- **Local Community Involvement: How to engage local residents, with a strong focus on including vulnerable members of society.**
- **Policy Integration: How to build stronger bridges between social economy and energy policies.**

Discussions aim to:

- explore the different challenges within these two core topics,
- identify practical, strategic pathways forward, and
- help improve existing policies or stimulate the creation of new, targeted policies in the field.

## Agenda and Focal Points

### 9.30 Welcome and introduction

by REVES

### 9.45 Part I:

### Aligning citizens and energy justice: who benefits from community energy?

Community energy does not automatically reach those most in need. Participation can depend on different aspects.

Key issues that remain difficult to address in this regard are, amongst other aspects:

1. **Social Networks and Meeting Places**: Not all citizens - especially vulnerable groups - are equally integrated into local communities. They often lack social networks that help them join groups or connect with local players. Personal networks are vital, but so are (physical) meeting places where participants experience a sense of inclusion and confidence.

   *How to reach out to those most in need?*

   *Which are basic conditions for a successful involvement of vulnerable parts of the population and how could they be met better by public policies, the social economy and local partnerships?*

2. **Knowledge, Know-How and other type of capacities**: Creating and managing renewable energy initiatives is a complex and competitive task. It requires skills in areas that groups of citizens or new stakeholders may not fully master yet. This capacity also requires specific education and training. Another aspect not to be underestimated is time.

*Is it possible to envision forms of phased support provided by public agencies? Which types of coaching and mentoring programmes could be developed for this purpose – e.g. inspired by existing inter-municipal initiatives - and how could the needs of different segments of the population (such as time availability and educational level) be better taken into account? Which types of partnerships between the social economy, public authorities and other actors could be established in this context?*

3. **Finance and other type of resources.** Setting up and operating a renewable energy community requires substantial resources, particularly given the high cost of advanced technology and infrastructure.
   Moreover, in particular disadvantaged households or younger generations do not always have the financial capacity to fund their share, contribute with a part of their savings, let alone with private infrastructure such as suitable rooftops.
   Important here is not only the question of quantity, but also of the quality of resources and/or related policies. Financial support for example should encompass diverse and differentiated financial products from both public and private sources.

   *Is it possible to establish public guarantee schemes for energy communities organized as social economy enterprises? If so, with what funds (European? national?) and/or through which kind of partnerships?*
   *How to incentivize alternative investment, including citizen finance, in energy communities organized as social economy enterprises – which role could for example tax incentives or local tax exemptions play? Which type of support could be given for vulnerable groups/households?*

4. **Tradition and Culture.** Over the past century or so, while energy demand has increased at an unprecedented rate, a deeply rooted mindset has emerged that energy should only be produced by large players, making the strict separation between supplier and consumer seem like an immutable fact. This is obviously false, but fostering a new culture is essential to support communities in building their own operational capabilities.

   *How do we design public awareness campaigns that help citizens fully understand the benefits of renewable energy communities? How to integrate the topic into educational programmes, starting at the earliest grade level? Which type of partnerships could be developed between public authorities, the social economy, educational players and others?*

**Invited for impulse statements:**

- EYEN - Youth Energy
- Innova eG (Germany)
- City of Eeklo (Belgium)
- RESCOOP
- FEBEA

11.30 Break

**11.45 Part II: Connecting energy and social-economy policies**

In some Member States and regions, authorities treat community energy strictly as an energy policy tool. They overlook its nature as a collective economic organization that also delivers significant social and societal value. In other cases, governments support community energy primarily through social economy policies and strategies, which can isolate it from broader energy market frameworks.

Most public administrations and governments still lack a coherent bridge between energy policy and social economy fields. This division prevents holistic governance and support for local projects.

Some of the main obstacles in this context - in part already largely recognized - are the following:

- Knowledge Gaps: Policymakers and civil servants often lack the intersectional training and capacity needed to navigate both fields.
- Data Deficits: There is an absence of shared data and joint methods for data collection.
- Information Silos: Departments lack shared communication channels and unified information pools.
- Political and Administrative Resistance: There is often a missing institutional willingness among administrations and political leaders to cooperate intensively across departmental boundaries.
- Budgetary Divisions: Funding and resources remain locked within separate departmental budgets rather than being pooled.

*In an era of growing focus on preparedness, resilience, and energy security, how should we re-examine the relationship between energy, enterprise development, and social cohesion? Where can we find the connections between different policies? Furthermore, how can these insights be translated into new inter-departmental cooperation and policy frameworks? Is it feasible to create preferential administrative access for energy communities structured as social economy enterprises?*

**Invited for impulse statements:**

- European Commission/DG Energy and DG EMPL
- Energycities

**12.45 Conclusions**

***Places are limited. Please register HERE until 17 November 2026.***

*The SENIR project (Strengthening European Networks for Impact and Resilience in the Social Economy) aims to reinforce the capacity, visibility, and connectivity of social economy networks across the EU and its macro-regions. It responds to key challenges identified in the Social Economy Action Plan (SEAP) and the Council Recommendation on social economy framework conditions, such as uneven ecosystem development, fragmented cooperation, and limited access to finance, data, and policy engagement. Through a mix of capacity building, peer learning, policy input, awareness-raising, and investment mobilisation, SENIR will improve the resilience and policy relevance of the social economy. Focus topics include renewable energy, care, housing, preparedness, and others. Actions will be grounded in territorial needs and monitored through a robust indicator framework tracking impact at both local and EU levels. Expected results include strengthened national and transnational networks, improved policy uptake, enhanced access to tailored finance, and increased visibility of EU tools and opportunities.*