

MORE WOMEN IN RENEWABLES AND ENERGY COMMUNITIES: SAFEGUARDING AN ENABLING POLICY FRAMEWORK

BRIEFING

This briefing gathers highlights from an event organised during the EU Sustainable Energy Week 2022, by three EU-funded projects and one organisation. The full event recording is available by scanning the QR code. Nota bene: in the briefing, we use RES for Renewable Energy Sources, and RECs for Renewable Energy Communities.



Putting communities in charge of their local renewable (bio)energy generation, by providing the necessary conditions and support tools for unlocking the underlying market potential of community bioenergy.

www.becoop-project.eu

Women4RES aims at scaling-up the involvement of women in the market deployment and uptake of Renewable Heating and Cooling solutions via replicable support measures tested and validated across 8 European countries.

www.w4res.eu

Coordinates the roll-out of a scheme of household cooperation in energy management where they jointly exploit household-level electricity generation and battery storage capacities and optimise energy efficiency and expenditures.

www.ecrew-project.eu

Women Engage for a Common Future (WECF) is an international NGOs striving for sustainable and (gender) just environmental solutions.

www.wecf.org





Yiannis Konstas, Q-PLAN

We gathered expert panellists involved in the energy transition as well as gender equality and women empowerment, these topics being related and needed.

One approach that can surely reshape the energy market is the energy communities idea.



WECF award of transformational solutions to empower women won in 2021 by the organisation Solar Age, empowering refugee women through solar engineering.

Many examples at local and international level show we have business models driven by women in the renewable energy sector, we need to make them visible, fundable/bankable and realise them in a large scale.

There is a higher awareness that we need more women in the energy sector but the progress is still too low. Tools, policy recommendations are there but need to be accelerated.

Slow progress can be attributed to the structural, personal, cultural barriers faced by women in the energy field. The labour market is just the tip of the iceberg: the gender gap exists at all level, education, training, unpaid care work, unequal access to resources, lead to a widespread under-representation of women in the sector. It means that an enormous potential of female professionals in technical functions remains untapped and that is a high cost for society.

Transformation from a centralised fossil fuel-based to a decentralised renewable energy system, just and inclusive, offering new chances to women to join the race in all fields of the energy transition.

Gender just energy communities with more women can fulfil targets of a sustainable energy system. Important to exchange knowledge and experience.



Katharina Habersbrunner,
WECF

More women in renewables and energy communities:

- Less inequalities and financial, structural and personal barriers to enter the energy sector
- More power and influence will mean a faster energy transition, using the transformational potential of having more female actors, more expertise, more engagement
- Higher participation increases the acceptance and cooperation
- Diverse teams are more successful, better decisions are taken in the short and long terms, they also ensure creativity (key to develop long lasting sustainable solutions)
- Women are excellent innovators!



Christine Lins,
Global Women's Network for the
Energy Transition

The energy transition would be faster and more inclusive if there were more women in the space.

(Only) around 4 out of 12 million people working in RES are women, to increase to 42 million by 2050 (source: IRENA). The industry will only succeed if the best talents are attracted, from all genders.



Karina Knaus, Austrian
Energy Agency

The energy sector is not the only one where women are under-represented: we don't always have the right policy mix to address women needs. There is a clear need to integrate women in decision making processes in the energy sector, and in policies to make them more diverse. But what can we do?

- Better and more communication: businesses and municipalities need to ensure the communication channels are targeted to women, with the messages, pictures addressing them.
- Energy communities need to make room for women to speak up and voice their opinions (to feel welcome, free and safe to be heard).



Kathrin Goldammer,
Reiner Lemoine Institute

Kathrin's workplace gender parity is ensured at all levels (from students and interns up to executive level). Few steps to get there: a key step for change was to acknowledge the will and need to change the management or organisation of the institution and make all aware of this need / sharing experience of what it is to work in energy as woman / non-binary person.

Zero-power distance principle applied: everyone can change something about the organisation, all ideas are welcome.

A societal approach to gender equality in RES & RECs: perceptions, motivations & needs. Diving into survey results to draft better policies.



Katharina Habersbrunner,
WECF

- The share of women in these sectors is too low, **women are still more visible in the administrative work than at the management level.**
- Reproductive work: women have more care work, difficult to combine with full time jobs >> Policies need to address all sectors with **social policies on top of energy policies.**
- This is **not only a generational or feminist issue:** it is an issue for the whole society.
- STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics) programmes at universities make the numbers rise. We have to accelerate.
- More women in Boards attract more women to follow.



Yiannis Konstas, Q-PLAN

- **Generational aspect:** different perceptions, when younger generations recognize gender-balance should happen but is not happening enough, older generations don't.
- **Cultural aspect:** we need more data for countries overview.
- Increasing number of **role models and success stories** for women, especially in academia and the public sector, where they are the driving force for local communities to embrace RES investments and municipalities to support RESCoop initiatives.
- We need to **showcase these stories:** equality and inclusivity are more profitable for all in the long-term, not only is it 'just' - **it makes business sense.**
- Growing realisation in both RES and RECs that attracting and upgrading the participation of women will allow them scale-up their membership: help them participate as members, integrate them in decision-making processes.



Johannes Slacik,
Energy Institute, JKU Linz

- **The energy transition is female:** women are underestimated so far as a driver in the energy transition.
- ECHOES survey from 2018-2019 on gender-related energy choices and behaviour, almost 50-50 male/female for the survey, shows how important it is to integrate women in energy communities. Women feel more personally-obligated to be energy efficient and are more enthusiastic to change energy-consumption behaviour.
- **Share and be transparent about own energy consumption:** we all consume energy but women are more conscious, open and willing to focus on an environmentally-friendly environment and efficient transition.
- **The energy transition is an opportunity to connect women and men,** to work hand in hand, using both qualities, feminine innovation and energy flow.

Financial & legal framework status - how can the societal approach feed into better gender-balanced policymaking?

We discussed recommendations for policymakers, energy utilities and municipalities on how to integrate women. What type of support would be the most relevant? What is the most urgent policy measure / framework to implement?



Jutta Paulus,
EU Parliament

- At EU level, we are doing well on paper, but there's **still room to manoeuvre**.
- As a group, the Greens have always had strong demands on gender equality and women **participation in decision-making processes and climate change decision bodies**. They want to see **solid financing and more multiyear programmes**. In the RED (Renewable Energy Directive), they tabled an amendment asking specific attention to gender balance as well as under-represented minorities. In the EED (Energy Efficiency Directive), **the Efficiency 1st principle should consider a gender perspective**.
- If you look at socio-eco data, **women are more affected by energy poverty**, so we need the right indicators there too.
- **Under representation of women in energy communities**.
- We need policies to empower women, on a holistic level.
- Women need to understand they fit and have the skills. Have special **programmes / pilot projects to make women lose their fears, break stereotypes**. At the COP25 in Madrid, example of Saudi Arabia where women putting solar on roofs of families are generating trust by playing with stereotypes: "if this technology can be installed by women, it must work".
- Jutta proposes "**Girls just wanna have Sun**": with apprenticeships in the solar sector, mentoring and much more!



Hemma Bieser, avantsmart-
OurPower

- If we talk about gender in politics, we often talk about **quotas**. Simple measure instrument that works, in Austria quota for advancement of women in the government, with **more balanced leadership teams**. There is awareness.
- Other example with quotas, since 2018, equality of women and men in the Austria 10 big utilities supervisory boards, with 30% of women. But it **doesn't apply to the boards of directors**... Still room for more change!
- In OurPower, cooperative since 2018, one guiding principle is not to fight the existing but to **design and create better alternatives in cooperatives for gender equality** (2 men and 2 women in supervisory board + gender equality in board of directors).
- Recommendation of measure: let's have **EU-wide mentoring programmes for women + international exchange programme of employees across countries**.

Financial & legal framework status - how can the societal approach feed into better gender-balanced policymaking?



Saska Petrova,
University of Manchester

- **En(gendering) energy community governance:** work on energy injustices, especially with focus on the energy demand side, energy poverty/precarity.
- More policies mentioning inclusiveness, diversity: the **Equality Platform**, a forum to discuss equality-related issues and share concrete actions that contribute to achieving equality in the energy sector. Language used, more gender sensitive and inclusive. Gender (social construct) and sex (biological) used interchangeably, so good to see that for instance organisations such as RESCoop have a **Gender Power working group**, mentioning non-binary people, talking about gender in broader terms. In June 2022, the EU Commission welcomed a **political agreement on Gender Balance on Corporate Boards**.
- How do we **translate these policies into our everyday lives?** Big variety of situations across EU countries, especially for energy communities, in centralised and decentralised energy systems or energy governance systems. Since 2008, we seem to be living in a time of crises, so **move to a long-term horizon to define policy and governance responses to make more resilient energy systems including principles of inclusiveness and diversity**.
- What is really the technical knowledge level needed to govern energy communities? **Decision-making and managing RECs don't need specialised technical profiles!**
- **"Energy injustices should not be seen only through gender as a singled-out category, but rather through the intersection with other forms of social difference such as class, ethnicity, race, disability and age."**
- Existing policies can be more inclusive, such as **NECPs/National Energy and Climate Plans** (language used in different countries can be more inclusive, so do the mechanisms implemented, dialogues, etc.).
- **Policy opportunities** are needed to provide support to the cultural change/understanding (if there is no paternity leave, no space for women to work...).



Yiannis Konstas, Q-PLAN

- Quotas not very popular in Greece, however when applied, real change was seen. **Quotas provided the opportunity for hidden talents to expose themselves**, then it stops being an issue.
- Across the political spectrum, in the public sector, this is changing.
- More difficult in the private sector but this is important for women to lead initiatives. **Women are often discouraged to be entrepreneurs, especially if they don't come from wealthy families. RECs offer this opportunity.**
- We need to not only focus on capacity building, mentoring, financial support, awareness raising, but also **ensure a cultural shift** (example of Denmark providing a family care system which can support women emancipation that has been effective because both parents can share the family mental load and chores, vs Greece where deep anchoring of mentalities).

How can the projects and other initiatives support getting women more present and engaged in RES and RECs?



Marilys Louvet, WECE

- There is a lot of **interest, energy, commitment and engagement** from women to join in the energy transition, it is just difficult to find open doors, to know where to start, how to find networks and connections (lack of access and information). Important to acknowledge this, presenting all benefits of joining RECs, having **info sessions**.
- There are many entry points for more women in the sector, **female mentoring programs, gender training** (for all), **role models, gender tools** (gender analysis, communication, quotas, etc.), networks, but it is important to **find the entry points that fits to you**, your objectives and level of expertise and many projects are here to guide you, such as W4RES.



Hemma Bieser, avantsmart-OurPower

- Transformation process of the energy sector/system happening now, and **the new RECs established across EU offer new possibilities for women to take part in the energy transition**.
- It's not about technical knowledge: **we need new roles and responsibilities for women** (strong management and social skills are needed to manage energy communities, not technical). We need to encourage women to take the **role of energy community manager** (job profile that still needs to be created).
- **Importance of communication** (more social communication, translation of technical terms to the language of citizens/people) > again a new role!



Johannes Slacik, Energy Institute, JKU Linz

- **How to be energy efficient? How can I be a part of it? Potential at community level + growing digitalisation.**
- We hear the word **community**, as the communion of people and we talk about energy consumption / efficiency, which concerns everybody.
- A lighthouse in the eCREW project shows that **digitalization** can help women: everybody uses apps. Energy flows reading in meters can show the daily energy consumption in an easy way, turn on appliances when people want, unburdening in a way and integrating people.



Yiannis Konstas, Q-PLAN

Initiatives at EU and Ms levels to attract women in STEM and to get trained on specific technical profiles include:

- **High5Girls** (DK), for 13-18 teenagers connected to role models,
- **W4RES** mentoring or the
- **BeCoop** tools.

Very positive trend and evolution from a few years when this was not even a topic and now we have research, events digging into the issue, we look at how to develop processes and policies further. Higher awareness and more policies shows the improvement, yet we should be careful with ensuring coherence.

This is key to upscale the tools we develop in our projects, involve energy utilities, the industry, etc.

W4RES and WECE
webinar

"How to empower women in the RHC sector: what concrete actions are available?"



A podcast for Energy Cities:

Balancing unjust power relations through energy communities in which Katharina shares about different tools supporting the creation and monitoring of energy justice.

The full event recording is available by scanning the QR code.

