

PUBLIC INCLUSION TOOLBOX FOR RENEWABLE ENERGY

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1.0 What this toolbox is for

The public inclusion toolbox for renewable energy, announced in the Communication on the [European Grids Package](#), aims to support Member States' authorities in enhancing public participation in renewable energy projects, facilitating engagement and increasing public acceptance for renewables.

There is no one size fits all solution to promote social and public acceptance of renewable energy projects. However, many good practices already exist in the EU. To support Member States in setting up their own legal and policy framework, the toolbox outlines some key principles and conditions and showcases best practices introduced in some Member States. By highlighting them, we aim to guide Member States in the design of their public participation measures to accelerate the deployment of renewables, in line with Article 15d of the Renewable Energy Directive (RED).

1.1 Introduction

1.1.1 EU policy context at a glance

Europe's clean energy transition is now at a decisive phase. With technology improving and costs of installation declining, renewable energy is key to keep energy affordable, secure supplies and meet climate goals. Seeking public acceptance – the lack of which can delay or block projects – can make an important contribution to the effort to make permitting simpler and faster, hence to accelerate the build-out of renewables. As deployment of renewables speeds up, and has to accelerate even more with the current geopolitical situation and high energy prices, a key challenge emerges: how to ensure that the clean energy transition is widely accepted, especially in the areas where projects need to be built.

While 88% of EU citizens support EU action to increase renewables ([2025 Eurobarometer](#)), opposition may arise in the local context depending on the specificities of each project. Many sites with high renewable potential are in rural areas, where conflicts might arise over impacts on landscape, land use and the environment. Recent studies¹ confirm this trend. Across Europe, renewable energy projects face increasing delays because of concerns around siting and participation, both in the context of planning and permitting procedures.

Public inclusion and acceptance matter, and promoting them is needed for Europe to meet its climate and energy targets and enhance its competitiveness with homegrown clean energy, while reducing reliance on imported fossil fuels and impacts of price spikes.

¹ The Horizon [2020 WinWind project](#) (Deliverable 4.3, 2020) demonstrated that conflicts around fairness and trust explain more variance in project outcomes than technical or financial design. Similarly, [Eurelectric \(2025\)](#) highlighted that while over 90% of Europeans support the principle of expanding renewables, opposition surges when concrete projects touch upon communities' sense of place, control, or perceived fairness. [CAN Europe \(2025\)](#) further documents how benefit-sharing mechanisms and genuine participation schemes can mitigate conflict, but only when designed inclusively and backed by credible institutions. Recent Horizon projects such as [JustWind4All](#) and [WIMBY](#) underline that the challenge is increasingly about designing governance and participation models that communities can genuinely support.

1.1.2

The goal of public inclusion and participation: public acceptance

Public acceptance refers to the willingness of a local community and other key stakeholders to support a renewable energy project. Hence, it facilitates a faster and fairer deployment of renewables, enabling Member States to be ambitious in their National and Energy Climate Plans (NECPs) and to comply with the Renewable Energy Directive target of 42,5% by 2030 and building further trust in the energy transition. Public opposition often means projects that take much longer to get permitted, entailing costs associated with delays and re-designing of the initial project. In some cases, projects may be blocked after the permit has been granted, with costly and lengthy legal disputes in Court. Examples around the EU show the order of magnitude of the cost of public opposition, leading for instance to strong local resistance, protests, conflicts among authorities and legal appeals causing a significant slowdown in renewable project approvals and, in one case, the judicial suspension of permits for more than 3 GW of capacity.

Hence, even though public acceptance measures may initially entail costs for developers and Member States, they save costs in the long run by avoiding delays, legal battles, social conflicts, reputational damages and distrust. Well-designed public engagement can boost support for renewable energy projects and reduce the cost of public opposition.

To achieve public acceptance, **public inclusion** and **participation** are necessary. The participation deficit is particularly large amongst low-income households and the energy poor, because their precarious living situation can strongly impact their potential for engagement if they are not supplied with adequate information, financial assistance and support in the process. They are however inclined to behavioural change and to invest in renewables if they have the possibility to do so. Hence, different stakeholders and segments of consumers with different income levels or living in rural versus urban areas may have different needs and can be addressed more effectively through different public inclusion measures. The toolbox offers specific measures that Member States can tailor to these consumers to ensure inclusiveness.

In addition to financial and procedural participation measures, covered in the Toolbox, there are other practices that can help achieve wider acceptance levels, such as designing nature-friendly projects, and projects allowing for multiple use of space or combining different technologies (so-called hybrid projects). The focus of this toolbox is however on public participation measures, in line with the requirements under RED Article 15d.

1.1.3

The EU legal framework at a glance

In line with the Aarhus Convention, Member States have to ensure public participation in renewable energy projects which are subject to an environmental impact assessment procedure (see EIA Directive, Article 6). The same is true for plans and programmes which are subject to strategic environmental assessment (see SEA Directive, Article 6). For this purpose, the EIA Directive includes a definition of the 'public concerned' (see Article 1 (2) e)).

RED Article 15d deals with public participation in renewable energy planning and in renewable energy projects, including where they are not subject to an EIA or SEA. It has two distinct components, with Article 15d (1) focussing on procedural participation in the elaboration of plans designating renewables acceleration areas, while Article 15d (2) requires measures to promote public acceptance of renewable energy projects, whether those are located in renewables acceleration areas or outside, by means of direct and indirect participation of local communities. The term local communities is not further defined in the Directive and may at least encompass citizens living in

proximity of the projects as well as municipalities. Member States can therefore design the measures in various ways, choosing the target group as appropriate.

The target group for public participation under Article 15d (1) is defined in accordance with the Directive on Strategic Environmental Assessments and thus includes the public affected or likely to be affected by the plan.

Article 15d (1): “Member States shall ensure public participation regarding the plans designating renewables acceleration areas referred to in Article 15c(1), first subparagraph, in accordance with Article 6 of Directive 2001/42/EC, including identifying the public affected or likely to be affected.”

Article 15d (2): “Member States shall promote public acceptance of renewable energy projects by means of direct and indirect participation of **local communities** in those projects.”

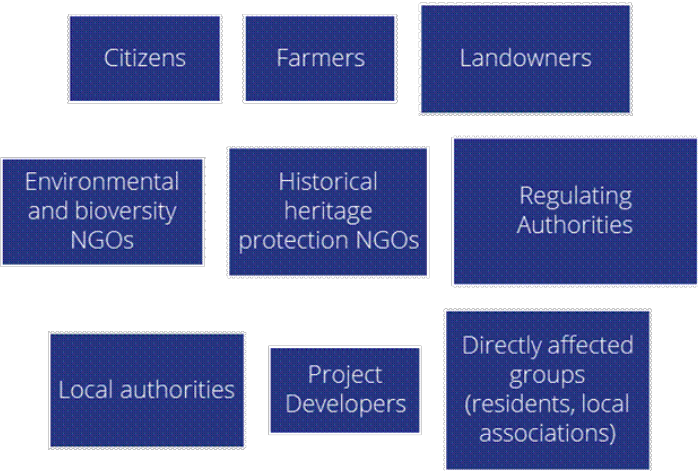
This toolbox offers various options that Member States may use in their implementation of RED Article 15d, as currently in force.

As part of the [European Grids Package](#), the Commission proposed to further elaborate the provisions in RED Article 15d. The proposal adopted on 10 December 2025 and currently under negotiation includes elements to support benefit-sharing for larger renewable energy projects and the possibility of a facilitator that can be called upon by local communities or project developers to ease dialogue on the ground.

1.1.4 Relevant stakeholders

Choosing the right target group within the broad concept of “local communities” is a key aspect of designing effective public acceptance measures. Public acceptance of renewable energy projects depends on engaging diverse stakeholders, each with different priorities, concerns and incentives. Success comes from tailored public acceptance tools that are perceived as credible, balanced, and relevant to local realities. The following table provides an overview of different stakeholders, while their specific needs are described in Annex 2.

Figure 1. Public Acceptance stakeholders



Source: RES and other public goods study (see footnote 3)

1.2 Key types of policy measures enabling public participation

Measures to promote public acceptance through participation can be grouped based on the:

- ✓ Type of intervention, that is, what the measure does.
- ✓ Timing of intervention, that is, at what point of the lifecycle of the project the measure is applied.

The measures that Member States apply to promote public acceptance in renewable energy projects should be designed to capture all type of projects, regardless of how they are financed (supported through auctions or market-based).

1.2.1 Two main types of intervention: procedural and financial participation

1.2.1.1 Procedural participation and trust-building measures

When citizens are involved at an early stage, they are more likely to trust the process and support the outcome. Involving them can also lead to less controversies in siting decisions, fewer environmental conflicts, and more efficient implementation. It helps renewable energy projects move faster, face less resistance, and deliver outcomes that are more broadly accepted, environmentally sound, and economically viable. These measures can be grouped into:

- **Direct procedural participation measures**, through which citizens actively shape outcomes via for example early-stage consultations, participatory forums or local referenda. When linked to tangible project adjustments, these measures can pre-empt opposition by demonstrating responsiveness.
- **Indirect procedural instruments** rely on transparency and sectoral rules. They foster trust through engagement and transparent communication. Indirect participation is built into rules, standards, and incentives through certification schemes or through the inclusion of social criteria in auctions. Their success depends largely on credibility and monitoring and enforcement.

1.2.1.2 Financial participation and benefit-sharing measures

Benefit-sharing measures in renewable energy projects ensure that local communities or stakeholders receive direct and tangible value from renewable energy projects. Under this type of measures, the developer or operator of a renewable energy plant will redistribute some of the revenues obtained from the energy produced to locals. This mitigates the risk of costly legal disputes and speeds up project development.

The benefits stemming from these measures can be:

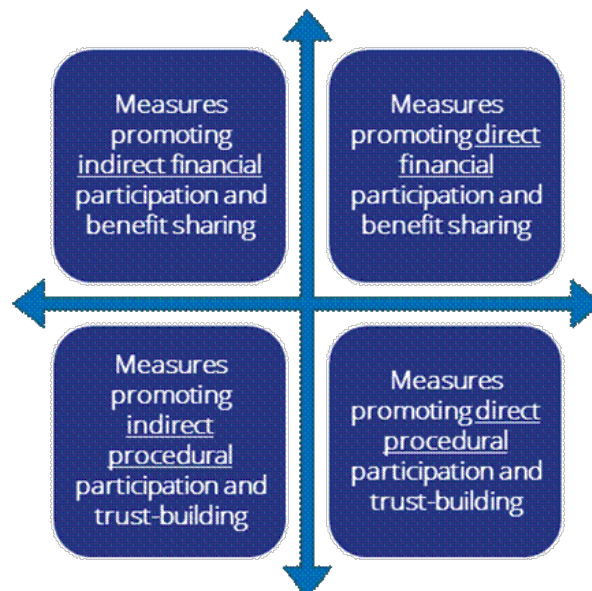
- **Financial benefits:** direct income (e.g., lease payments, dividends, compensation); reduced energy costs (discounted electricity); public revenues (taxes, fees to municipalities)
- **Economic benefits:** job creation (construction, operation, maintenance), business opportunities for local suppliers, increased local investment and economic activity
- **Social benefits:** community funds for schools, healthcare, or cultural projects, improved infrastructure (roads, utilities), training and education programs

- **Environmental benefits:** support for conservation or biodiversity programs, local involvement in sustainability initiatives, reduced reliance on fossil fuels.

Benefit sharing measures can be categorised as:

- **Direct financial participation measures**, through which citizens share ownership and gain a direct and tangible stake or revenue stream, such as through energy cooperatives, co-investment schemes, crowdfunding platforms or sale-and-lease-back models. The advantage of this type of measures is that they transform local residents into co-owners, aligning project success with community prosperity.
- **Indirect financial participation measures**, through which the benefits are redistributed to local communities without ownership, such as through compensation schemes, community funds, infrastructure upgrades or reduced electricity bills for households. These measures are easier to implement at scale and can address objections, but without procedural engagement, they risk being perceived as insufficient.

Figure 2: Measures by type of intervention



Source: RES and other public goods study (see footnote 3)

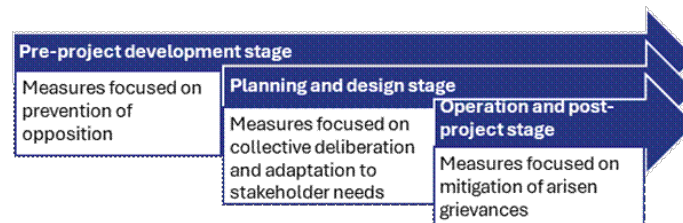
1.2.2 Timing of intervention

The impact of measures promoting public acceptance depends on when they are applied. Early intervention prevents conflict, while late intervention has limited impact in this regard.

1. **Pre-project stage measures** (highest preventive impact) include strategic mapping of suitable areas, awareness raising campaigns, and embedding public acceptance criteria into auctions.
2. **Planning and design stage measures** include proactive consultations, facilitation by a neutral party and the introduction of ownership offers or co-investment schemes. These allow the feedback of the community to translate into tangible project modifications, changes in siting, adjustments in scale, or negotiated benefit packages.

3. **Post-project or operational stage measures** include compensation schemes, maintenance of shared infrastructure, and long-term monitoring of the project and its potential impacts. These measures are valuable for addressing residual grievances and sustaining a project's legitimacy over time, but are not adequate for conflict prevention and can be perceived as transactional.

Figure 3: Measures by time of intervention



Source: RES and other public goods study (see footnote 3)

1.2.3 Focus on procedural participation tools

Direct procedural participation measures influence how decisions are made and whether citizens feel heard. These measures encompass different levels of participation and result in varying degrees of influence. They include consultation (limited influence), co-development (real influence) to co-decision (high influence). **What matters the most is communicating clearly and upfront** towards citizens the level of procedural participation. This helps manage expectations and ensures alignment between what is promised, and what can actually be influenced.

- ✓ **Consultation (limited influence)**
 - Goal: collect opinions
 - Tools: surveys, questionnaires, public consultations, local consultative referenda.
 - Level of influence: input may or may not be considered
- ✓ **Co-development (real influence)**
 - Goal: build solutions together
 - Tools: workshops, working groups, participatory sessions enabling discussion of concerns, trade-offs, and alternatives, usually leading to shared outcomes.
 - Level of influence: input is taken into account in the outcome
- ✓ **Co-decision (high influence)**
 - Goal: decide together
 - Tools: citizens' panels, participatory budgeting, shared governance bodies, local referenda with binding outcomes. They can ensure a strong democratic legitimacy and encourage a fair benefit-sharing solution.
 - Level of influence: shared decision-making power

Independent facilitators or mediators constitute a neutral third party (an individual or organization) that can help design and manage the participation process without any direct financial stake connected to the developer or to the community where the renewable energy project is located. In particular for large projects where different

needs are at stake, independent facilitators and mediators can promote dialogue and build consensus among the relevant parties throughout the process and avoid legal disputes.

What is the difference between a facilitator and a mediator?

- Facilitator: designs participation to inform, engage, and co-create policy/project solutions
- Mediator: designs processes to resolve conflicts and negotiate acceptable outcomes for all involved parties

There are also differences regarding their professional qualifications:

- There is no single EU certification scheme for mediators. Hence, this figure will vary depending on national regulations. Certified mediators are bound by formal professional and ethical requirements (e.g., strict confidentiality, neutrality, informed consent, and sometimes legal recognition depending on the country).

Facilitators are generally not subject to regulated frameworks and follow stakeholder engagement practices.

Examples from good practices (for more detail see Annex 1):

The **Dialogue and Service Point for Renewable Energy** (Dialog und Service Stelle) at the Saxony Energy Agency GmbH (SAENA) provides citizens, municipalities and businesses in Saxony (Germany) with **expert advice and information** and **conflict-resolution support**. It provides information material and advice, organises workshops, supports the implementation of information events, networking with other stakeholders to share experiences and provides tools for successful communication on the ground.

The **Wind Energy Service Point in Thuringia (Germany)** supports citizens, municipalities and project promoters with various offers and aims to promote transparency and regional added value. It is established at the ThEGA (Federal State Energy Agency) on behalf of the Land Government of Thuringia.

The region of **Burgenland (Austria)** has implemented successful **spatial planning processes involving the public**. For both wind and solar, the spatial plan was developed jointly with developers and NGOs and was followed by a participative zoning process. It can be regarded as a mediation process, anticipating possible conflicts and involving relevant parties and affected local communities at the zoning stage.

In **France**, the Renewable Energy Acceleration Law (APER), adopted in March 2023, established a bottom-up planning approach: **municipalities designate acceleration zones (ZAERs)** to demonstrate development potential for national, regional, and local energy targets. These areas reflect municipal views and encourage local involvement. While it is not mandatory for municipalities to participate in this bottom-up approach, many have already done so, with around one million areas having been identified by the beginning of 2026, mostly for solar projects.

Indirect procedural instruments rely on transparency and sectoral rules. They foster trust through engagement and transparent communication. They include:

- **Certification schemes** - formal labels or frameworks that require developers to meet social and environmental criteria. They provide accountability and comparability across projects, building trust with investors and communities.
- **Local value mapping** - mapping local jobs, supply chains, biodiversity impacts, community priorities and needs. This helps designing better projects and benefit sharing measures, aligning them with local needs and expectations.

- **Inclusion of public acceptance criteria in auctions** – including non-price criteria when awarding renewable energy contracts is increasingly common. When acceptance criteria are included, they can successfully embed public participation into auction design.
- **Awareness raising actions** - one-way communication from developers or municipalities to the public, for instance through websites, brochures, public notices or info sessions. They are useful to level the playing field and combat disinformation. They are often not sufficient on their own to build strong acceptance.

Examples from good practices (for more detail see Annex 1):

<u>Certification scheme</u>: The Seal of Excellence in Sustainability² is a voluntary certification scheme created by the Spanish Photovoltaic Union (UNEF) in 2019. It rewards solar projects that exceed legal permitting requirements by integrating strong ecological safeguards, community benefit-sharing measures, and local engagement. Certified projects have encountered fewer conflicts and benefit from higher reputational value. <u>Local value mapping</u>: The ‘smart siting’ initiative piloted by Nature Conservancy in Portugal in 2024-2025 enables local participation in the designation of suitable areas for the deployment of renewable energy projects. It balances renewables deployment, biodiversity conservation and local communities’ priorities, thereby integrating technical, ecological and social factors to identify areas with good development prospects and low conflict potential. This model incorporates social value mapping using publicly available data on cultural heritage and social media to assess community attachment to landscapes. <u>Awareness raising</u>: Luxembourg has taken an innovative approach with the aim to activate its citizens, businesses and municipalities for the deployment of solar PV. The national Climate Agency launched (twice so far) the so-called Solar Challenge, in which municipalities compete with each other and get support to overcome barriers.

1.2.4 Focus on benefit-sharing measures and tools

Direct financial participation measures involve **direct monetary returns or ownership stakes** for individuals or communities and may take different forms and show different effectiveness levels depending on the national and regional context.

The main options include:

- **Shared ownership schemes** enable communities to invest in new (commercial) renewable electricity generation being developed in their area. Citizens, local businesses, or municipalities invest together, co-own the infrastructure and share the profits, energy, or savings. They are also referred as **equity-based instruments**.
- **Debt-based instruments** consist instead in lending money to the project, and may for instance entail offering subordinated loans to residents.
- **Crowdfunding schemes**, through which individuals invest small amounts in renewable energy projects and receive returns (interest or dividends).
- **Sale-and-lease-back models** let renewable energy project owners obtain capital by selling their assets while continuing to use and operate them under a lease. If combined with energy cooperatives or community bonds, they can increase public acceptance with the community acting as buyer or lender.
- **Energy sharing schemes** - allow citizens to share self-generated electricity with their neighbourhood (or even beyond) on a contractual basis. Self-production and energy sharing mean greater autonomy and

² <https://www.unef.es/en/sello-sostenibilidad>

stable access to affordable and more stable prices. It can be used as a tool to share the benefits of renewable energy projects, under certain conditions.

Examples from good practices (for more detail see Annex 1):

Sale-and-lease-back model: The **'Solar Power Plant Community initiative in Austria'** enables citizens to finance solar PV systems on public buildings via a sale-and-lease-back model. It is considered one of Europe's largest citizen participation projects. It aims at installing 20MW of PV systems on all buildings owned by the federal state of Lower Austria (about 150 buildings), corresponding to an investment of around 46 million Euros. The power plant operator (municipality) sells PV modules to citizens and then leases/rents them back.

Shared ownership: Regional governments in the **Canary Islands and Balearic Islands** introduced rules requiring large renewable energy projects to offer **20% local ownership** through equity or crowdfunding. In the **Balearics**, the 2019 Climate Change and Energy Transition Law obliges projects above 5 MW to allocate at least **20% ownership to local residents** or entities, while in the **Canaries** a 2024 draft decree extended the rule to projects above 2 MW.

In the same way, indirect financial participation and benefit-sharing measures may take different forms and show different effectiveness levels depending on the national and regional context.

The main options include:

- Promotion of **contracts and job creation** for the local communities, including **training programmes**. Renewable energy projects create permanent jobs with maintenance and operations, beyond trainings and temporary local jobs during construction. Both jobs and trainings can be targeted to the the most vulnerable and energy poor in the community.
- **Community benefit funds:** developers provide a fund to support local communities, projects and initiatives. The level of fund contribution could be based on installed generation capacity or on actual generation output. Ideally, communities should have a say on how the funds are used. For this purpose a fund administrator or facilitator can be established. The scheme must be transparent and accountable.
- **Financial compensations** to local communities in proximity of the project - direct cash payments to nearby residents to compensate for possible visual, noise, or environmental impacts. For instance, in wind projects, these are usually set according to each Member State specific setback distances.
- **Tax benefits for the hosting municipality**, often municipalities receive taxes/levies from the renewable energy projects that they are hosting.
- Construction and maintenance of **public infrastructure** in proximity of the project. Building a renewable energy project would create positive spillovers such as upgrading roads, grid connections, or investments in digital and transport infrastructure.
- Discounts in the **price of electricity – local households could benefit from discounts** on electricity tariffs as long as they are in line with the Electricity Market Directive (Directive (EU) 2019/944), to avoid discrimination against other consumers.
- **Support for vulnerable customers** and people affected by energy poverty: benefits can be earmarked to support the most vulnerable customers, who are often excluded from direct financial benefit sharing due to their limited investment capacity. For instance, they could get priority access to locally generated energy or be supported by capacity building or education programmes.

Examples from good practices (for more detail see Annex 1):

Financial compensation: The **"Value-loss compensation" scheme in Denmark** guarantees compensation for residential property owners whose homes lose value due to nearby renewable projects. It mandates that RES developers fully compensate property owners if the installation of wind turbines, solar parks or hydroelectric

installations causes a decrease in property value exceeding 1%. The evaluation is conducted by a designated authority, which considers factors such as visual impact, noise, and distance from the installation.

In **Estonia**, the Environmental Board (public body) has been collecting **wind turbine fees** since 2023 from all new onshore wind turbines taller than 30 meters that received operating permits after this date. The collected fees are distributed as compensation payments to municipalities and households located near the turbines.

Community benefit fund: As part of the Irish auction-based renewables support scheme (“RESS” – Renewable Electricity Support Scheme), **Ireland** introduced **Community Benefit Funds**, which are funded by **mandatory financial contributions** (minimum of €2/MWh) made by renewable energy projects supported by the scheme. These funds **support local initiatives and payments to households close to the projects**. Communities decide how to spend the funds through a public application process and the decisions taken by the Fund Committees.

Electricity discounts: In **Greece**, under a Ministerial Decision adopted in August 2024, developers of renewable and hybrid projects share a certain part of the benefits with local residents, in the form of **reductions on their electricity bills**, and with local communities. According to the Decree, 40% of the special levy is passed on to electricity consumers living in proximity of the installation through their suppliers and the remaining 60% go to the local authorities for the execution of **environmental actions, local development projects and social support**

Energy communities are the most advanced form of citizen engagement in renewable energy projects. Direct and indirect benefit-sharing is an in-built feature of these communities which bring together citizens, local authorities and small businesses to jointly invest in energy projects, underpinned by co-ownership and shared governance. Article 15d (2) of the RED targets the participation of local communities in renewable energy projects beyond this advanced form of direct participation. The untapped potential of energy communities is huge, especially in rural areas. More guidance and good practices can be found in the Staff Working Document accompanying the Recommendation on empowering energy communities and self-consumption, both available [here](#).

1.3 Key principles and conditions for an effective public participation framework

Based on the study RES and other public goods³, the following eight key principles and conditions can enable an effective public participation in renewable energy projects and strengthen acceptance at community level.⁴

- No one-size-fits-all approach
- Combination of procedural participation and benefit-sharing
- Institutional support and clear governance
- Meaningful and transparent participation

³ European Commission: Directorate-General for Energy, *Study on good practices in siting renewable energy installations taking into account the interactions with other public goods, Final report*, 2026, Publications Office of the European Union, <https://data.europa.eu/doi/10.2833/8791877>

⁴ A similar set of principles developed by ICLEI in its Fast and Fair Initiative may also serve as a useful source of inspiration.

- The degree of inclusivity, benefit-sharing mechanism fairness and transparency
- The role of impartial intermediaries
- Developer commitment as an informal and powerful enabler
- Monitoring and reporting the impact of public acceptance measures

1.3.1 No one-size-fits-all approach

Public participation is most effective when it reflects the local context and the project specific circumstances. This calls for national frameworks with clear minimum requirements, while leaving room for adaptation.

Actions Member States can take

- Set minimum national standards for public participation (e.g. in terms of early procedural involvement or financial benefit-sharing), while allowing regional and local adaptations.
- Provide a set of measures – such as different types of benefit-sharing measures – from which public authorities can choose rather than one mandatory model, explaining which tools/measures are best suited to specific stakeholders, technologies, territories and project/policy stages.
- Recommend stakeholder mapping and local value mapping at an early stage, before siting choices are fixed, to help authorities and project promoters better tailor participation and benefit-sharing measures to community needs.
- Strengthen the role of municipalities and trusted intermediaries in adapting national guidance to local circumstances
- Note that some measures are most easily adaptable across contexts, such as toolkits, mapping methods, certification approaches, and clear compensation frameworks.

Why this principle matters

- **Local needs differ.** While principles at national level help ensure consistency, delivery should reflect regional and local realities.
- **Measures should fit the realities of stakeholders involved.** Citizens, landowners, farmers, municipalities, NGOs and developers have diverse concerns or incentives. Participation is more effective when Member States require early mapping of affected groups and their needs.
- **Project/policy stage matters.** Early engagement can still influence siting, project design and benefit packages. Late-stage measures may reduce objections, but they rarely build consent.
- **Measures should fit the project's specificities.** Approaches need to reflect the place, the technology, and the likely impacts.

Examples from good practices

- **Participatory process in Vojtěchov (Czech Republic).** This example illustrates why tailoring public participation to local context matters and how consent can be built locally. In this rural wind project, the municipality, supported by LAG Hlinecko, combined public meetings and a local referendum. The process led to very high support and a tailored local benefit model, showing that early and tailored dialogue can work well.

- **The ‘smart siting’ initiative piloted by Nature Conservancy (Portugal).** In 2024-2025 this initiative enabled local participation in the designation of suitable areas for the deployment of renewable energy projects. It balanced renewables deployment, biodiversity conservation and local communities’ priorities, thereby integrating technical, ecological and social factors to identify areas with good development prospects and low conflict potential. This model incorporated social value mapping using publicly available data on cultural heritage and social media to assess community attachment to landscapes

1.3.2 Combining meaningful public participation and financial incentives

The most effective approaches for improving the public acceptance of renewable energy projects combine **procedural participation** (giving people a real say early on) with **distributive participation** (ensuring that local communities also see financial and other benefits from projects).

Actions Member States can take

- **Integrating procedural participation and benefit-sharing into a single, cohesive process:** allowing communities help decide what benefits are offered, who receives them and how they are managed.

Why this combination matters

- **Procedural participation builds legitimacy.** Early consultations, participatory forums, local referenda or other forms of dialogue give citizens a real possibility to influence project design, siting and mitigation measures. This strengthens trust and reduces the perception that projects are being imposed on them.
- **Benefit-sharing builds ownership.** Co-ownership, local investment, compensation, community funds, local jobs or in-kind benefits give communities a stake in the projects and visible local benefits.

Examples from good practices

- **The Dutch Climate Agreement of 2019 (Netherlands).** Stakeholders co-created Regional Energy Strategies through broad procedural participation involving governments, citizens, businesses, and civil society. These strategies identified renewable energy sites and timelines, with adoption, monitoring, and iterative updates across 30 regions, exceeding the 35 TWh target for 2030. They also embedded benefit-sharing by aiming for 50% local ownership of wind and solar projects, giving communities a direct stake in energy developments.
- **Participatory discussions enabled by LAG Hlinecko - Vojtěchov (Czech Republic).** A Local Action Group facilitated early dialogue and a local referendum before the wind project was fixed. The process led to 94% support and helped shift the project from a developer-led proposal towards a community-backed initiative, with local benefit options also envisaged.
- **The Seal of Excellence in Sustainability (Spain).** Launched by Spain’s UNEF in 2019, this seal certifies solar projects that surpass permit requirements through robust ecological protections, community benefit-sharing, and local participatory processes. Co-designed by 30 experts and backed by NGOs like WWF, it tackles public resistance by embedding procedural fairness and tangible local benefits, with 61 projects (4,725 MW) certified by 2025, reducing conflicts and boosting developer legitimacy.

1.3.3 Institutional support and clear governance

Institutional support ensures that procedural participation and benefit-sharing are consistent, credible and accountable, and part of a predictable framework that both communities and project promoters can rely on. National frameworks should align roles, responsibilities and capacities across governance levels (national, regional, local).

Actions Member States can take

- Define **clear governance frameworks** for public participation and benefit-sharing, with specific roles for national, regional and local authorities. Ensure coordination across these different levels of governance.
- **Match interests, responsibilities and resources**, ensuring that authorities have the legal mandate, staff and budget to deliver meaningful engagement.
- Strengthen the role of local and regional authorities as **trusted intermediaries**, while supporting them to ensure effective implementation.
- Make accountability visible to the public, clarifying **who decides, who potentially facilitates and where objections can be addressed**.

Why this principle matters

- **Clear institutional roles build trust.** Public acceptance is stronger when citizens and local stakeholders know **who decides what, how decisions are made, and where to raise concerns**. When responsibilities are transparent and consistent across national, regional and local levels, participation feels more credible and legitimate.
- **Coordination across governance levels is essential.** National authorities can provide **legal certainty and set minimum standards**; regional authorities can adapt their implementation to territorial realities; local authorities often act as the **key link to communities**. When these levels work together, public participation becomes cohesive and effective.
- **Capacity gaps can undermine good frameworks.** Even where a national framework exists, local and regional authorities may lack the staff, expertise or financial means to organise meaningful participation, mediate conflicts or oversee benefit-sharing.
- **Strong institutional backing supports long-term legitimacy.** Measures that are backed by stable institutions outlast individual projects, political cycles or developer initiatives, making them easier to scale up.

Examples from good practices

- **Value-Loss Compensation Scheme (Denmark).** This is one of the clearest examples of strong institutional backing. The scheme is managed under a clear legal framework by the Danish Energy Agency with the support of an independent Valuation Authority, making compensation predictable, transparent and credible for residents.
- **UNEF Seal of Excellence in Sustainability (Spain).** The UNEF Seal shows how a measure can gain legitimacy when it is anchored in a **recognised institutional framework** with **clear criteria, independent NGO backing and public endorsement**.
- **Strategies for Local Acceptable Solutions Toolbox (Germany).** This case illustrates the value of **national guidance** combined with local implementation. Developed by the **German Environment Agency (UBA)**

and implemented by municipalities, it shows how institutional anchoring can connect national standards with local conflict-management capacities.

- **Participatory process in Vojtěchov (Czech Republic).** This is a strong example of institutional anchoring at **local level**, supported by a **trusted intermediary**. The municipality launched a participatory process with the support of **LAG Hlinecko** that helped structure the dialogue between residents, the municipality and the developer, showing that institutional backing can also come from credible local facilitation, not only from formal state structures.
- **Public consultations for Solar PV Parks in Miroslava Commune (Romania)** This case shows the importance of **proactive municipal leadership**. The municipality anchored participation in a visible local process, which helped reassure residents, connect the project to local public value and avoid opposition.
- **Wind turbine compensation fee (Estonia).** The success of this case relies on Estonia's robust institutional framework, particularly the Environmental Board's capacity to administer and redistribute payments. The clarity of the legal mandate provides certainty for both developers and residents.

1.3.4 Meaningful and transparent participation

National frameworks should set out public participation processes that ensure that stakeholders can engage in an informed and proportionate way.⁵

Actions Member States can take

- **Require participation in the early stages.** Engagement should begin before siting and design choices are fixed, so that local input can influence project design. Early engagement is more effective than late-stage mitigation.
- **Set minimum standards for transparency and accessibility.** Member States should require that project information, expected impacts, trade-offs and participation opportunities are communicated in clear, non-technical language and through accessible formats. A facilitator could be engaged to improve the accessibility of information in complex situations.
- **Make participation outcome-oriented.** Authorities and developers should be expected to explain how stakeholder input is to be/has been considered, what changed as a result, and why some proposals were not followed. This helps turn consultation into a credible decision-making process.
- **Keep participation manageable by avoiding overly complex processes that could overwhelm developers, municipalities or communities.** Use stakeholder mapping to focus efforts effectively, identifying the most affected groups and preventing exclusions.

Why this matters

- **Legal frameworks often rely on formal processes that do not always enable stakeholder influence over decisions.** Additionally, many participatory practices fall short in transparency regarding how the results of the consultation are incorporated.
- **Participation must be accessible and proportionate.** Overly technical, inaccessible, or burdensome processes can exclude ordinary citizens just as effectively as no participation at all. The complexity of

⁵ See also Commission Recommendation on speeding up permit-granting procedures for renewable energy and related infrastructure projects, available [here](#).

renewable energy projects makes it difficult for people to engage without adequate support and understandable information.

- **Transparent participation means making disagreement visible.** Participation may backfire if it is organised to manufacture consensus or conceal differences. Lasting legitimacy comes from acknowledging trade-offs, disagreements and uncertainties openly.

Examples from good practices

- **Vojtěchov (Czech Republic): early, structured and trusted dialogue.** The participatory process in Vojtěchov combined preparatory meetings, open public discussions and a household referendum, facilitated by the neutral intermediary LAG Hlinecko. More than 94% of households in a local referendum afterwards supported the project. The case shows that participation works best when it takes place at an early stage of the project, enables trust, and provides influence over project outcomes and benefits.
- **Strategies for Local Acceptable Solutions Toolbox (Germany)** It illustrates the value of giving municipalities and local actors practical tools to facilitate meaningful participation.
- **Miroslava Commune (Romania): participation going beyond the minimum legal requirements.** In Miroslava, the municipality organised open consultations, involving NGOs and residents, and letting them shape project aspects. As a result, there was strong local support for the project and no major conflicts arose.

1.3.5 Inclusivity and transparency in public participation

Member States have an obligation to promote public acceptance through direct and indirect participation of local communities. Public participation is most effective when it's inclusive and transparent. National frameworks may lower barriers to participation, ensure visible local benefits and provide clarity on how funds and benefits are allocated.

Actions Member States can take

- **Lower barriers to participation**, for example through low entry thresholds, clear non-technical information and accessible formats. Tailored support may be needed for low-income households, less organised communities and people with limited administrative capacity.
- Ensure that national frameworks allow for different **benefit-sharing options**, such as co-ownership, local investment, community funds, compensation, reduced energy costs, local jobs or in-kind benefits.
- **Promote benefit-sharing mechanisms that are proportionate and inclusive in practice.** Member States should encourage models that do not exclude participation through high entry thresholds and should complement investment opportunities with indirect benefit-sharing options e.g. compensations.
- **Ensure benefits are visible, local and relevant**, such as through community funds, local ownership, reduced energy costs, jobs or infrastructure improvements. Member States should encourage benefit-sharing models that respond to local priorities and show clearly how host communities will gain from project development.
- **Ensure that benefit-sharing obligations are not only defined in law but effectively enforced in practice**, guaranteeing equal treatment between local communities for example through systematic monitoring.

- **Require transparency on the use of funds** so that communities can see how local revenues and benefit-sharing schemes are allocated and spent. This can include simple reporting obligations for municipalities or developers, clear governance rules for local funds, and public communication on how benefits are used in practice.

Why this principle matters

- **Inclusivity builds acceptance and ownership.** Renewable energy projects are more likely to gain support when all communities can participate and benefit. If access is limited or benefits go to only a few, opposition may grow.
- **Rural inclusion is critical.** Typically, rural areas constitute the most suitable land in the EU for renewables. The success of the energy transition will therefore greatly depend on the acceptance of rural communities in decision-making and benefit-sharing.
- **Transparency builds public acceptance.** When applying benefit-sharing models, communities must see what benefits exist, who decides, and how revenues or funds are used. Without transparency, even well-designed schemes may be perceived as opaque or unfair.
- **Enforcement is essential for credible benefit-sharing.** Even where legal frameworks require developers to share benefits with municipalities or local stakeholders, weak enforcement can erode credibility and lead to unequal outcomes between local communities.

Examples from good practices

- **Irish auction-based Renewable Electricity Support Scheme (Ireland).** This example illustrates how local communities can decide how the funds are used through open applications and Fund Committees, ensuring direct influence over benefit-sharing priorities. Under this scheme, renewable projects must contribute to **Community Benefit Funds** that support local social, environmental, and economic initiatives. These funds are financed through mandatory payments from developers (at least €2/MWh) and can also include direct support to nearby households.
- **Miroslava Commune (Romania): transparent consultation linked to local value.** The municipality combined open consultation with clear communication on local benefits, helping build trust and avoid major conflict.
- **Solar power plant community initiative (Austria):** enabling citizens to finance solar PV systems, even with small investment options which ensured inclusivity.

1.3.6 The role of impartial intermediaries

Public participation works best when supported by trusted and impartial intermediaries, particularly in contexts of low trust or limited local capacity. To make this effective, national frameworks should ensure proportionate access to independent facilitation where it adds value.

Actions Member States can take

- **Provide access to facilitators and/or mediators** for projects where impacts are sensitive and local capacity is weak, focusing on early dialogue or alternative solutions to legal procedures.
- **Use intermediaries strategically,** assessing their **added value against existing governance structures** to avoid duplication and guard against conflicts of interest.

- **Clarify purpose and timing.** Member States should define when to use **facilitation** (pre-conflict) and when to use **mediation** (to resolve disagreements), ensuring the right support matches the stage.
- **Ensure that facilitation processes remain proportionate:** Avoid unnecessary complexity for the administration and for project promoters and avoid creating additional bureaucracy that could delay the approval of projects.
- **Ensure that facilitation/mediation processes are well defined.** Member States should establish clear, well-defined missions that outline the third party's role and mandate, and ensure their impartiality and neutrality, along with transparency on funding, process structure, and expected outcomes. Communication should be consistent before, during and after the process. Procedures should remain practical and streamlined.

Why this principle matters

- **Impartial intermediaries can balance power dynamics.** Trusted third parties can reduce information asymmetries between developers, authorities and local communities. By simplifying complex information and ensuring fairer dialogue conditions, they can strengthen procedural legitimacy and improve participation quality.
- **Impartial intermediaries are especially valuable in low-trust or low-capacity settings.** They help when communities feel uninformed about projects, local authorities lack facilitation capacity, or stakeholder relations are strained, preventing disagreements from becoming major conflicts.
- **Most effective when used early and appropriately.** Impartial facilitators succeed best when integrated into a well-designed and not overly complex participation process, with clear goals, realistic timelines and a defined target audience, ensuring dialogue is credible and balanced.

Examples from good practices

- The **Dialogue and Service Point for Renewable Energy** (Dialog und Service Stelle) at the Saxony Energy Agency GmbH (SAENA) provides all citizens, municipalities and businesses in Saxony (Germany) with a wide range of **expert advice and information** and **helps resolve conflicts**.
- The **Wind Energy Service Point in Thuringia (Germany)** supports citizens, municipalities and project promoters with various offers and aims to promote transparency and regional added value
- A **hydropower mediator** was introduced in **France** to solve conflicts around hydropower, playing the role of an impartial mediator. The role of the mediator is to remedy the difficulties or disagreements encountered by project promoters by seeking amicable solutions.

1.3.7 Developer commitment as an informal and powerful enabler for public acceptance

Public participation is more likely to facilitate public acceptance when developers engage early, communicate transparently, and build long-term relationships with local communities.

Actions Member States can take

- **Encourage developers to develop early and tangible community engagement plans** that clearly outline how they will identify and communicate with stakeholders, gather feedback, and maintain dialogue throughout the project lifecycle. These plans should begin before key project choices are locked in.

- **Reward good practices through public policy tools**, for example by reflecting community engagement and local value creation in tender criteria or certification schemes, so that it becomes a strategic advantage as opposed to a voluntary 'extra'.
- **Require transparency on impact**. Developers should explain how community input shaped the project including the concerns raised, the changes made and limitations. This separates genuine engagement from empty consultation.

Why this principle matters

- **Developer commitment shapes participation's credibility**. Research⁶ shows the most successful cases stemmed from developers voluntarily exceeding compliance with minimum requirements
- **Developer commitment is proven through actions**. What matters is whether promoters start engagement early, listen genuinely to concerns, explain trade-offs, communicate transparently notably over benefit-sharing and remain willing to adjust elements of project design or benefit-sharing based on local preferences. Where developers take these steps, projects start being perceived as something communities can influence.
- **Trust requires long-term engagement**. A single consultation is rarely enough to build lasting support. Trust builds when the engagement with the developer continues beyond the permitting stage and remains active during construction, operation, repowering or extension of the project. When trust is undermined, it's not just harm the project in question, but can damage the entire sector's credibility.

Examples from good practices

- **UNEF Seal of Excellence (Spain): recognising developers that go beyond compliance**. The Spanish example shows how frameworks can support and reward stronger promoter behaviour by recognising projects that exceed minimum requirements on engagement, local value and legitimacy.
- **Vojtěchov (Czech Republic): developer willingness turned participation into consent**. In this case, the developer went beyond formal requirements, engaged in an open process with the municipality and intermediaries, and showed willingness to adapt the project. This helped transform initial hesitation into very high public support.

1.3.8 Monitor and report the impact of public acceptance measures

There is a clear need to assess more systematically and communicate, and report on the impact of public acceptance measures. National frameworks should encourage monitoring, benchmarking and continuous improvement across projects and regions.

Actions Member States can take

- **Include monitoring and reporting in national public acceptance frameworks**, so that projects are assessed against a common set of practical indicators and results can serve as benchmarks over time.

⁶ European Commission: Directorate-General for Energy, *Study on good practices in siting renewable energy installations taking into account the interactions with other public goods, Final report*, 2026, Publications Office of the European Union, <https://data.europa.eu/doi/10.2833/8791877>

- **Use a limited but meaningful set of key performance indicators in addition to some qualitative explanations,** covering issues such as number of actors engaged, response to community queries, use of facilitation/mediation, benefit distribution, grievances and legal procedures.
- **Use reporting to drive learning and improvement,** not just compliance. Monitoring should help refine guidance, improve project design and spread good practices across regions and technologies.
- **Reporting should remain practical and proportionate.** This is particularly relevant for smaller projects or local authorities with limited capacity.

Why this principle matters

- **What is measured is more likely to be improved.** Key data gaps include notably how engagement processes are put in place, stakeholders involved, grievances and benefit sharing outcomes, and legal recourse.

1.4 ANNEX 1: Good practices in terms of policy measures

1.4.1 Good practices on procedural participation:

- Germany (Saxony) – SAENA Dialogue and Service Point in Saxony (publicly sponsored facilitator – direct procedural participation)

In short:

The **Dialogue and Service Point for Renewable Energy** (Dialog und Service Stelle) at the Saxony Energy Agency GmbH (SAENA) provides citizens, municipalities and businesses in Saxony (Germany) with **expert advice and information** and **conflict-resolution support**. It provides information material and advice, organises workshops, supports the implementation of information events, networking with other stakeholders to share experiences and provides tools for successful communication on the ground.

Tell me more:

The Dialogue and Service Point also offers **free-of-charge support to individual municipalities** through a pool of accredited and specialised external service providers on communication issues regarding onshore wind and photovoltaic projects. This support can be used to moderate citizen engagement events, mediate conflicts, **mapping exercises** or training in **public acceptance communication** (advice and coaching). Municipalities select the service provider and are responsible for the implementation.

The Dialogue and Service Point also helps municipalities in carry out **survey at local level on ideas and opinions regarding financial participation** in renewable energy projects.

- Germany (Thuringia): Service points wind and solar energy Thuringia (direct procedural participation)

In short:

The **Wind Energy Service Point in Thuringia (Germany)** supports citizens, municipalities and project promoters with various offers and aims to promote transparency and regional added value. It is established at the ThEGA (Federal State Energy Agency) on behalf of the Land Government of Thuringia.

Tell me more:

The **Wind Energy Service Point** supports relevant and informed dialogue and aims to help citizens, municipalities and project promoters benefit jointly from the wind farms and to ensure that the added value of wind energy remains largely in Thuringia. The service point provides **free technical support for municipal councils**, assistance in setting up **interest groups of landowners** or **advice on citizen participation models**. It also organises and moderates **regional dialogue events**, helps find conflict mediators and awards the **'Fair Wind Energy' label** to companies that abide by commitments to fair contracts, transparency and public participation.

In parallel, the **Solar Energy Service Point** advises municipalities, businesses and citizens on the possibilities of using solar installations. This includes advice on availability of public financial support for photovoltaics and solar thermal installations and on citizen participation in solar projects.

- **Austria (Burgenland) – successful direct procedural participation in strategic zoning for wind and ground-mounted solar PV**

In short:

Burgenland is a small, rural state with 400.000 inhabitants in Austria. It reached a 100% renewable energy share in its electricity mix already in 2013 and had 465 wind turbines in operation in 2024. The electricity production in the region exceeds its consumption. This has been achieved thanks to a successful spatial planning process involving the public. The spatial plan was developed jointly with developers and NGOs and was followed by a participative zoning process. It can be regarded as a mediation process, anticipating possible conflicts and involving relevant parties and affected local communities at the zoning stage. Zoning is a broad-based process involving the regional independent environment attorney, NGOs, representatives of World Heritage, developers, municipalities, experts in permitting, and authorities subsequently involved in the permit-granting procedure. Public involvement in the zoning stage has enabled building trust with NGOs over time, resulting in the absence of objections and a record speed of approval of environmental impact assessments.

Tell me more:

The region of Burgenland aims to reach 100% RES in its overall energy consumption 2030. Significant ground-mounted PV deployment is underway to close the gap when wind-based electricity generation is low and it will be complemented with energy storage. The participative approach has been applied again for ground-mounted solar PV expansion, as the regional government decided to define in advance suitability zones for photovoltaics to implement the expansion in a structured manner and in harmony with local communities and landscape protection. 1300ha of suitability zones were defined by mid-2021, followed by legal approval for projects totalling 340ha only one year later. Following the adoption of a regional renewable energy acceleration law of 2022, it is no longer necessary to change the land use plan for larger projects (wind farms from 15MW and open space PV from 10ha).

- **Czechia - Participatory process in Vojtěchov – direct procedural participation and trust-building at pre-project and planning stage, with a neutral facilitator**

In short:

In this rural wind project, the municipality, supported by LAG Hlinecko, combined public meetings and a local referendum. The process led to very high support and a tailored local benefit model, showing that early and tailored dialogue can work well where trusted local facilitation exists. This is a **project-level**, real-life example demonstrating how structured participatory processes can achieve local acceptance for wind projects. The process resulted in a mutually agreed solution with strong community backing, formalised through a consultative referendum. Citizens directly participated in public discussions, surveys, and final voting that influenced project design and local benefits distribution. The Local Action Group Hlinecko maintained the flow of communication serving as main contact point between citizens and developers, acting as a neutral facilitation body. However, the process was **voluntary**, as Czech legislation does not mandate such early or structured consultation, highlighting its innovative character. The initiative resulted in **strong public acceptance**, confirmed by the final household referendum (over 94% approval). Initially planned as simple grant-based benefits, it evolved to include one turbine dedicated to municipal ownership (managed by a new municipal company) and potential energy community benefits. It built foundations for long-term trust between residents, the municipality, and the developer, creating a foundation for future energy initiatives and avoided conflict: unlike comparable Czech projects without participation, no legal or social opposition has arisen.

Tell me more:

Besides the presence of a neutral facilitator, success factors included municipal willingness to integrate community input into decisions and developers being open to adapting project design based on local preferences.

The participatory strategy followed a **multi-step process**:

1. Feasibility phase and preparatory meetings:
 - Initial bilateral discussions between the mayor and the investor.
 - Joint meetings with LAG, investor, and neighbouring mayors.
 - Inclusion of participation experts to refine facilitation strategies.
 2. Public meetings (held in a local pub to ensure familiarity and comfort):
 - First meeting: general education on climate change, renewable energy, and decentralised energy. This included data presentations and a panel discussion.
 - Second meeting: focused on wind energy specifics, energy communities, and local potential, using "world café" small group dialogues.
 - Third meeting: deliberated concrete cooperation models between the investor and the town, including grants, energy community models, and direct ownership. Concluded with an informal referendum voting.
 3. Communication tools:
 - Dedicated project website with unique login codes for each household to ensure transparent and private access to information.
 - Personalised invitations delivered by the mayor to all 106 households.
 - Public posters in communal spaces.
 4. Inclusivity mechanisms:
 - Meetings attracted approximately 100 participants each, representing over 25% of the total village population (390 inhabitants), with final voting achieving 100% turnout: each household having one vote, resulting in overwhelming approval (100 yes vs 6 no).
- **France: designation of suitable areas at municipal level (direct procedural participation)**

In short:

The French Renewable Energy Acceleration Law (APER), adopted in March 2023, established a bottom-up planning approach. Municipalities designate acceleration zones (ZAERs) to demonstrate development potential for national, regional, and local energy targets. These areas reflect municipal views and encourage local involvement. While it is not mandatory for municipalities to participate in this bottom-up approach, many have already done so, with around one million areas having been identified by the beginning of 2026, mostly for solar projects.

Tell me more:

Factors considered in the designation of these "acceleration zones" include renewable energy potential, projected demand, infrastructure availability, and contribution to renewables targets. Certain protected areas are excluded. Projects can still be developed outside the "acceleration zones" and unlike renewables acceleration areas in the sense of the Renewable Energy Directive, there are no implications for environmental permitting.

To support the 35,000 municipalities in France in decision-making, the government has created a [renewable energy mapping portal](#) with open-access geographic data layers - about 130 in total - covering various renewable technologies, constraints and energy related data. Municipalities draw acceleration zones making use of the portal, which are aggregated at the regional level to assess the achievement of regional and national targets. Projects outside these acceleration zones also contribute to target achievement. The renewable energy mapping portal includes a public consultation tool for acceleration zones, once approved by the local authorities. To help address

resource constraints at the municipal level, the government provides webinars, guidance, and direct support via the portal's website. Local administrations (regions and departments) also assist municipalities, especially smaller ones. Some regions propose handling the process for municipalities that lack resources.

- **NGO initiative in Portugal – Good practice on identification of suitable areas in dialogue with local communities (social value mapping – indirect procedural participation)**

In short:

The 'smart siting' initiative piloted by Nature Conservancy in Portugal in 2024-2025 enables local participation in the designation of suitable areas for the deployment of renewable energy projects. It balances renewables deployment, biodiversity conservation and local communities' priorities, thereby integrating technical, ecological and social factors to identify areas with good development prospects and low conflict potential. This model incorporates social value mapping using publicly available data on cultural heritage and social media to assess community attachment to landscapes.

Tell me more:

The pilot has revealed that mainland Portugal has over five times the low conflict land needed to meet its 2030 target for ground-mounted solar. For wind, up to 70% of the onshore wind energy target in the Portuguese National Energy and Climate Plan can be met on low-conflict sites. The remaining capacity could be achieved by adopting strong mitigation measures such as upgrading existing wind farms and, where necessary, developing projects in moderate conflict zones.

The **social value mapping** combined landscape aesthetics (leveraging the spatial distribution of user-generated photographs to map areas of perceived scenic, recreational, or cultural value, as well as a digital surface model to delineate zones where renewable energy infrastructure would be most visible and potentially contentious), cultural heritage (based on national datasets of cultural heritage and archaeological sites, including classified monuments, protection zones, documented archaeological sites, and public interest trees), and coastal dynamics. The data mining was validated with community engagement in a pilot municipality, where participants were asked to identify places that were important to them, be it for cultural, aesthetic, biodiversity, agricultural, or economic/tourism value.

- **Luxembourg: solar challenge (indirect procedural participation)**

In short:

Luxembourg has taken an innovative approach to activate its citizens, businesses and municipalities for the deployment of solar PV. The national Climate Agency launched (twice so far) the so-called Solar Challenge, in which municipalities compete with each other across four categories within a given timeframe: 1) number of solar installations < 30 kWc (relative to the number of residential buildings), 2) increase in installed solar capacity < 200 kWc, 3) increase in installed solar capacity compared to the municipality's potential as defined under the Climate Pact, and 4) raising awareness of solar energy issues among local stakeholders. The results are published on the website of the competition.

Tell me more:

Throughout this challenge, the national Climate Agency provided valuable support to overcome barriers, make full use of their resources and give visibility to their results. The main objective was to significantly increase solar energy production across the country. The competition on increase of solar capacity compared to the

municipality/s potential shows a significant variance in progress between the participating municipalities – one municipality reached above 50% of its potential, while others remained below 10%.

1.4.2 **Good practices combining procedural and financial participation:**

- **Industry initiative in Spain: UNEF Seal of Excellence in Sustainability- Spain (combination of indirect procedural participation and benefit sharing measures)**

In short:

UNEF (Spanish Union for Photovoltaic)⁷ has issued a set of **guidelines for project developers** outlining how to foster public acceptance by introducing **participatory tools** in their project planning. The focus is on the social integration of the projects, suggesting a series of **benefit-sharing** mechanisms that facilitate public acceptance. The guidelines provide advice on **consistent and transparent dialogue** with local communities.

Tell me more:



Figure 1. UNEF Seal. Source: UNEF

The **Seal of Excellence in Sustainability⁸** is a **voluntary certification scheme** created by the **Spanish Photovoltaic Union (UNEF)** in 2019. It rewards solar projects that exceed legal permitting requirements by integrating strong ecological safeguards, community benefit-sharing measures, and local engagement. It was developed collaboratively by 30 experts and endorsed by five leading environmental NGOs (including WWF⁹ and SEO Birdlife¹⁰). The Seal was explicitly designed to **address increasing public opposition** to solar expansion and to **help developers build legitimacy**. By 2025, 61 projects have been certified, representing 4,725 MW.

The Seal has proven effective in improving both industry standards and public acceptance. **Certified projects have encountered fewer conflicts and benefit from higher reputational value**. Moreover, the presence of independent NGO endorsement adds credibility to the certification.

UNEF's strong industry position, the involvement of independent environmental organisations, and the existence of transparent criteria have all contributed to the success.

Constraints: The **voluntary nature** of the scheme has limitations, as developers unwilling to go beyond compliance may opt out. Monitoring and updating criteria require sustained resources and the credibility of the Seal may depend on continued NGO support.

⁷ Guidance available here: <https://www.uneef.es/en/recursos-informes>

⁸ <https://www.uneef.es/en/sello-sostenibilidad>

⁹ <https://www.wwf.es>

¹⁰ <https://seo.org>

- **Netherlands: Climate Agreement and regional energy strategies (procedural participation and benefit-sharing through direct financial participation))**

In short:

To achieve the measures set out in the Dutch Climate Agreement of 2019 (involving 100 stakeholders), public authorities, residents, businesses, grid operators, energy collectives and social organisations are working together to define so-called **Regional Energy Strategies**. The strategies contain the most promising **locations and projects** and a **schedule** for implementation. The first set of Strategies for the **30 energy regions** in the Netherlands had to be adopted by local, provincial and waterboard councils by July 2021, followed by progress reports every two years and recalibration as needed. Collectively, these energy regions had to reach at least 35 TWh of generation in large-scale sustainable electricity on land in 2030 (a goal which has been exceeded in the first set of strategies). In addition, the Climate Agreement set an ambition for all governments to aim for **50% local ownership** of new wind turbines or solar projects, offering local residents and entrepreneurs a say in the projects. A national programme was set up to support tendering authorities in contributing to this goal, which is monitored on an annual basis.

Tell me more:

The Regional Energy Strategies serve to reach a consensus on **energy planning** decisions. Where are suitable locations for generating sustainable energy? And how much? From which renewable energy source? Is there a connection to the electricity grid and can it cope with the energy? What heat sources are there that can be used to make neighbourhoods and buildings fossil gas-free? The strategies also look at energy savings, **support among parties** involved, co-production and benefit-sharing with citizens and financial viability. All these considerations together form the Regional Energy Strategy.

The projects and plans in the Regional Energy Strategies are **integrated into official spatial and environmental policy**, including local, provincial and national strategies on spatial planning and the environment. Public participation is possible in all plans and projects, including the identification and **designation of renewables acceleration areas**. The Regional Energy Strategies were developed as a reaction to public resistance to previous planning approaches, which were perceived to be top-down and disconnected from local feasibility. The new approach puts local and regional governments in the driver's seat, requiring enhanced knowledge and capacity on their part.

Tools for public participation in sustainable energy generation are presented on a [dedicated website](#), including tips to make participation more diverse, inclusive and representative.

Moreover, the government provides yearly support to the "**Participation Coalition**" which consists of five non-profit organizations that support energy cooperatives by fostering collaboration between local residents, municipalities, and developers to ensure that renewable energy projects are community-driven and locally owned. They provide guidance on establishing clear roles and agreements, aiming for 50% local ownership in wind and solar projects, as outlined in the Dutch Climate Agreement 2019.

1.4.3 **Good practices on financial participation:**

- **Spain (Canary and Balearic Islands): Project-level benefit-sharing mechanism through direct participation, requiring at least 20% local ownership in renewable projects.**

In short:

Regional governments in the Canary Islands and Balearic Islands introduced rules requiring large renewable energy projects to offer local ownership through equity or crowdfunding.

Tell me more:

In the **Canary and Balearic Islands**, regional governments have introduced **mandatory local ownership requirements for large-scale renewable energy projects**. In the Balearics, the 2019 Climate Change and Energy Transition Law¹¹ obliges projects above 5 MW to **allocate at least 20% ownership to local residents** or entities, while in the Canaries a 2024 draft decree extended¹² the rule to projects above 2 MW. Developers must organise public meetings to present participation options, which can take the form of **equity shares or crowdfunding**.

The measure has generated early evidence of uptake. In the Balearics, the Santa Eulalia project achieved 40% local participation, and pilot schemes using the Fundeen¹³ platform raised over 1 million euros from citizens. These results suggest that mandatory ownership can foster acceptance and provide new financing channels. However, **developer resistance and inclusivity challenges remain**.

Political commitment at the regional level and clear legal requirements were essential enablers. The crowdfunding model lowered administrative barriers and increased transparency, demonstrating the importance of accessible participation mechanisms.

Constraints: Mandatory ownership can generate opposition from developers, who view it as reducing profitability and complicating financing (having multiple owners is more complex than having a single owner). Minimum investment thresholds may exclude low-income households, creating equity concerns. Implementation in the Canary Islands remains at an early stage, and clear compliance procedures are needed to ensure consistent application.

- **Germany: Strategies for local acceptable solutions Toolbox - Strategic-level procedural participation tool offering municipalities and developers practical guidance for inclusive planning.**

In short:

The **Toolbox for Local Acceptable Solutions**¹⁴ is a digital guidance tool commissioned by the German Environment Agency (UBA). It serves as a **guideline for municipalities to enhance public acceptance** of renewable energy projects by addressing conflicts, improving stakeholder participation, and ensuring transparent communication.

Tell me more:

The Toolbox for Local Acceptable Solutions¹⁵ is a digital guidance tool commissioned by the German Environment Agency (UBA) that was launched in 2021. The tool **provides municipalities (particularly in rural areas)** with structured **strategies to anticipate and manage conflicts** around renewable energy siting. The toolbox seeks to address identity-based and fairness-related concerns that often drive opposition at the local level.

The tool has been positively received and has been increasingly used by municipalities, sometimes in simplified forms. **Feedback from local communities indicates that it helps local decision-makers structure participation, anticipate conflict, and improve transparency.** The measure strengthens the municipal capacity to anticipate and solve disputes, and complements national legislation.

¹¹ <https://www.boe.es/buscar/act.php?id=BOE-A-2019-5579>

¹² https://www.boe.es/diario_boe/txt.php?id=BOE-A-2024-23635

¹³ <https://www.fundeen.com>

¹⁴ <https://stories.umweltbundesamt.de/energiewende-vor-ort>

¹⁵ <https://stories.umweltbundesamt.de/energiewende-vor-ort>

Institutional support from the UBA lends legitimacy as it shows support for public acceptance measures, while its digital format enhances accessibility. This adaptability allows municipalities to tailor it to their specific context. Key conditions for successful application of such a measure include openness to participatory governance, stakeholder awareness among municipal officials, and availability of facilitation resources.

Caveats: The toolbox is **not legally binding**, and its uptake depends on municipal willingness and capacity. Impact may therefore depend on resources for training, facilitation, and monitoring.

- **Denmark: Value-loss compensation fee Denmark- Strategic-level benefit-sharing instrument through indirect financial participation in wind projects, compensating residents for property value losses.**

In short:

The “**Value-loss compensation**” scheme in **Denmark** guarantees compensation for residential property owners whose homes lose value due to nearby renewable projects. It mandates that RES developers fully **compensate property owners** if the installation of wind turbines, solar parks or hydroelectric installations causes a decrease in property value exceeding 1%. The evaluation is conducted by a designated authority, which considers factors such as visual impact, noise, and distance from the installation. **If the evaluation confirms a loss exceeding 1%**, the developer is required to pay the determined compensation to the affected property owner.

Tell me more:

Denmark’s Value-Loss Compensation Scheme¹⁶ guarantees **compensation for residential property owners** whose homes lose value due to nearby renewable projects (wind, PV, hydro, or hybrid systems). Developers are obliged to finance compensation based on independent assessments by the Valuation Authority¹⁷, under the oversight of the Danish Energy Agency¹⁸. Residents are notified formally and invited to public meetings, ensuring transparency and accessibility.

The scheme has compensated hundreds of households, primarily around wind projects, **typically averaging around ten households per new renewable energy installation**. It has helped prevent disputes and reduce litigation by addressing concerns about property values. Surveys conducted in 2013 found widespread perceptions of fairness, and a new evaluation in 2025 will provide updated evidence.

Key enablers include Denmark’s strong institutional framework, the existence of an independent valuation authority, and mandatory legal provisions that guarantee enforcement. The central role of the Danish Energy Agency ensures consistent communication and monitoring.

Caveats: Compensation addresses fairness concerns but does not generate ownership or active support. Occasional mismatches between assessed and actual market values have been reported, which may undermine confidence in individual cases. Replication elsewhere depends on the presence of strong administrative institutions to avoid inconsistency or capture.

- **Austria: Solar Power Plant Community Initiative Project-level benefit-sharing measure for PV projects through direct financial participation, enabling local joint ownership of solar panels.**

¹⁶ <https://www.regionsjaelland.dk/klima-og-miljoe/jordforurening/for-grundejere/vaerditabsordningen>

¹⁷ <https://www.taksationsmyndigheden.dk>

¹⁸ <https://ens.dk/en>

In short:

The 'Solar Power Plant Community' initiative **enables citizens to finance solar PV systems on public buildings** via a sale-and-lease-back model. It is considered one of Europe's largest citizen participation projects. It aims at installing 20MW of PV systems on all buildings owned by the federal state of Lower Austria (about 150 buildings, including town halls, sports facilities, sewage treatment plants, etc.), corresponding to an investment of around 46 million Euros. The federal state government launched a campaign to motivate the **citizens to purchase shares in a planned PV system** and thus contribute to the realization of the system. The power plant operator (municipality) sells PV modules to citizens and then leases/rents them back.

Tell me more:

The **Solar Power Plant Community Initiative¹⁹**, coordinated by the Energy and Environment Agency of Lower Austria²⁰ (eNu), **enables citizens to finance solar PV systems on public buildings via a sale-and-lease-back model**. Residents invest in panels installed on schools, sports centres, and other municipal infrastructure, receiving guaranteed annual returns before ownership reverts to the municipality after around ten years. Each share costs about 900 EUR. The citizens then receive a fixed annual interest on the rental – a leasing rate of 1.75% per annum. After the leasing contract expires (after circa 10 years), the PV panels become the property of the municipality again.



Figure 2. Picture from one of Wolkersdorf auctions. Source: Sonnenkraftwerk Website

The initiative supports regional energy targets, prevents land-use conflicts, and encourages broad citizen participation. It has been **highly effective in mobilising local support and finance**. In the municipality of Wolkersdorf, one of the implementing areas, all four published funding rounds went oversubscribed within hours, with more than 200 citizens participating and no withdrawals. Public acceptance has been strong and the scheme has generated indirect economic benefits by stimulating local installation companies.

Strong institutional coordination by eNu, clear administrative procedures, and Austria's supportive legal framework were crucial enablers. The pre-existing culture of cooperative participation existing in the area facilitated citizen engagement. Guaranteed returns provided financial incentives while ensuring municipal ownership and long-term public benefit.

Caveats: Entry costs for participation may exclude lower-income households, limiting inclusivity. The model also requires a regional coordination body and legal clarity.

¹⁹ <https://www.sonnenkraftwerk-noe.at>

²⁰ <https://www.enu.at/english-summary/>

- **Estonia: Wind turbine compensation fee Estonia - Strategic-level benefit-sharing measure through indirect financial participation for wind installations, providing mandatory payment to affected households.**

In short:

Since July 2023, the Environmental Board of Estonia (public body) has been collecting **wind turbine fees** from all new onshore wind turbines taller than 30 meters that received operating permits after this date. The collected fees are **distributed as compensation payments to municipalities and households located near the turbines**. The compensation can amount to up to six minimum wages per year, depending on proximity and turbine size.

Tell me more:

Since July 2023, **Estonia** has introduced a **legally binding compensation fee²¹** for all new onshore wind turbines **taller than 30 meters**. Developers are required to pay an annual fee to the Environmental Board²², **a public national entity supervising the environment**, which **redistributes funds to municipalities and households within a 2-3 km radius of the turbines**, depending on their height. Payments can amount to several times the national minimum wage, creating predictable compensation. The scheme is embedded in amendments to the Electricity Market Act and applies only to projects commissioned after its entry into force. The measure does not apply retroactively to wind farms that were already operational before July 2023.

The scheme has improved transparency and created guaranteed benefits for residents and municipalities near turbines. Early evidence suggests that acceptance has improved in some areas by **reducing perceptions of unfairness**. Developers have largely adapted to the measure, treating the fee as a standard operating cost. However, NGOs caution that compensation alone does not build long-term legitimacy nor trust, and the restrictive eligibility rules have limited the number of beneficiaries.

Success relies on Estonia's strong institutional framework, particularly the Environmental Board's capacity to administer and redistribute payments. The clarity of the legal mandate provides **certainty for developers and residents alike**. Political support for embedding fairness into siting policy was another critical enabler.

Caveats: The scheme risks being perceived as superficial if eligibility remains narrow or if compensation is seen as substituting for genuine dialogue. Financial payments may reduce grievances but cannot replace participatory processes.

- **Ireland: Community Benefit Funds (benefit-sharing through indirect financial participation)**

In short:

As part of the Irish auction-based renewables support scheme ("RESS" – Renewable Electricity Support Scheme), Ireland introduced **Community Benefit Funds**, which are funded by **mandatory financial contributions** made by renewable energy projects supported by the scheme. These funds **support local initiatives and payments to households close to the projects**. Communities decide how to spend the funds through a public application process and the decisions taken by the Fund Committees. The mandatory contribution is set at a minimum of €2/MWh for all generation projects to be used for the wider economic, environmental, social and cultural well-being of the local community.

²¹ <https://www.keskkonnaamet.ee/en>

²² <https://www.keskkonnaamet.ee/en>

Tell me more:

Community Benefit Funds are subject to the following rules:

- **Direct Household Payments:** A payment of 1 000 EUR is allocated annually to each household located within a 1 km radius of onshore wind projects, as well as payments under that amount for households between 1 km and 2 km of wind projects.
- **Sustainable Development Initiatives:** At least 40% of the fund supports local projects focusing on initiatives aligned with the 17 United Nations Sustainable Development Goals. Projects are selected through a public and open process where initiatives are proposed by local clubs, societies and other entities.
- **Administration Costs:** Up to 10% of the fund may be used for administrative purposes to ensure effective governance and operation of the fund.

Projects are now required to maintain their Community Benefit Funds for 15 years even if the renewable project exit the support scheme. This means that a 10 MW onshore wind project will contribute a total of 800 000 EUR in real terms (adjusted for inflation) to their community in 15 years.

Sustainable Development Initiatives supported via Community Benefit Funds in Ireland are made public by the Sustainable Energy Authority of Ireland through a [national register](#), through a map and dashboard as well as case studies.

- **Greece: reduced electricity costs for local communities (benefit-sharing through indirect financial participation)**

In short:

Under a Ministerial Decision adopted in Greece in August 2024, developers of renewable and hybrid projects share a certain part of the benefits with local residents, in the form of **reductions on their electricity bills**, and with local communities. According to the Decree, 40% of the special levy is passed on to electricity consumers living in proximity of the installation through their suppliers (on the basis of data provided by the distribution system operator). The remaining 60% go to the local authorities and is allocated exclusively for the execution of **environmental actions, local development projects and social support**. At least 60% of this share of the levy for local authorities is allocated to the municipality in which the RES project is located, while the rest can benefit projects and actions in the wider region.

Where projects are located within the administrative boundaries of more than one municipality, the amounts of the special fee are equally distributed among them.

1.5 ANNEX 2: Public Acceptance stakeholders

Stakeholder	Key perspectives, needs, and concerns
Citizens	Citizen concerns include: trust in developers, real influence over project design through meaningful and effective consultations, and access to clear local benefits (e.g., lower energy bills, better local services); assurance that projects will not harm the local identity or wellbeing and transparency on how renewables contribute to meet climate goals.
Farmers	Farmers' key concerns relate to the impact of renewable energy projects on agricultural activity, such as on land-use, noise, shadowing, impact on crop yields and biodiversity. They are generally receptive to models that enable dual land use (e.g., combining farming with renewable production through agrisolar installations). If engaged constructively, farmers can become supportive of renewable energy projects.
Landowners	Landowners' priorities focus primarily on how projects affect land value and use. They value transparent information on compensation schemes, revenue-sharing opportunities, and legal guarantees regarding land management. Acceptance increases when they see clear opportunities to participate in projects as investors or beneficiaries, and when project siting and design take into account their concerns over landscape change, noise, and environmental impact.
Environmental and Biodiversity NGOs	These actors highlight the need to safeguard ecosystems, biodiversity, and protected areas. They expect transparent impact assessments, strong ecological safeguards, and genuine inclusion in project planning. Their constructive involvement can lead to higher-quality projects that align climate targets with environmental protection.
Historical Heritage NGOs	These groups are particularly concerned by the visual and cultural impacts of renewable energy projects. They expect early involvement when sites of historical or cultural interest are concerned, and clear communication about integration of renewable projects into broader cultural and tourism strategies.
Regulating Authorities	Authorities at national and regional level need transparent processes, clear roles and consistent implementation. Their main challenge is ensuring a balance between harmonised rules across territories (to avoid uncertainty) and allowing regional flexibility. They are expected to deliver frameworks that enable the rapid deployment of renewable energy projects and ensure public trust, while enabling monitoring and enforcement mechanisms that also guarantee credibility.
Local Authorities	Local governments have a dual role: they regulate land use (unless already regulated at regional or national level) and represent community interests. They expect fair local benefits from projects and need resources to run inclusive public engagement. Their legitimacy depends on balancing national

	targets and guidelines with local acceptance, becoming crucial mediators in preventing or resolving conflict.
Project Developers	Developers are responsible for planning, financing, building, and operating renewable energy projects. They seek predictable, streamlined procedures, to reduce risks of delay and costs. They value transparency and legal certainty in permitting and compensation schemes. At the same time, they need to achieve social acceptance to avoid litigation and reputational costs. Their concerns include: administrative redtape, legal uncertainty, and opposition campaigns. They are willing to engage when frameworks create incentives (financial, reputational, or procedural) for proactive measures on acceptance.
Other directly affected groups (residents, local associations)	Groups living in the immediate vicinity are typically the most vocal in debates. Their concerns include landscape change, noise, health impacts, and effects on income from local economic activities (for instance tourism or farming). They need early access to clear, understandable information, as well as direct participation in decision-making. Compensation or benefit-sharing schemes are essential but must be perceived as fair and inclusive to avoid reinforcing distrust.

Source: RES and other public goods study (see footnote 3)

1.6 ANNEX 3: Facilitator vs Mediator

When to call a facilitator or a mediator based on the different project/policy stages and level of conflict?

Both facilitators and mediators help structure procedural participation, ensure an inclusive and balanced dialogue (between the developers, local communities, local authorities, NGOs, etc.), and maintain neutrality. Their roles differ based on the stage of the project or the policy developed and conflict intensity.

Key differences by project stage and level of conflict

Early stage (site identification, initial consultations, feasibility - low conflict)

Facilitator:	Mediator:
• Designs procedural participatory processes (from consultation to co-decision). • Helps stakeholders understand the project and voice their expectations. • Focuses on transparency and trust-building	• Rarely needed unless there is pre-existing strong opposition (e.g., past projects or sensitive locations). If involved, monitors early conflict signs and ensures safe expression of concerns.

Mid-stage (permitting, impact assessments - moderate conflict)

Facilitator:	Mediator:
• Structures focused dialogue (benefits-sharing, noise, visual impact, etc.) • Keeps discussions productive while not intervening in disagreements between stakeholders.	• Actively intervenes if tensions between stakeholders rise (e.g., between developers and local residents or municipalities). • Designs processes to address disagreements between stakeholders (e.g., targeted negotiation sessions). Helps build consensus.

Late stage (project approval, construction, operation - high conflict)

Facilitator:	Mediator:
• Limited effectiveness if opposition is entrenched or legal disputes arise (e.g., organized resistance to a wind farm).	• Leads dispute resolution and designs structured mediation processes (such as bilateral meetings, joint negotiation sessions). Aims for mutually acceptable outcomes.