

EVENT DESCRIPTION SHEET

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 Please provide one sheet per event (one event = one workpackage = one lump sum).)

PROJECT	
Participant:	Comparative Research Network e.V. (CRN)
PIC number:	949534359
Project name and acronym:	Powering Citizens — POWERINGCITIZENS

EVENT DESCRIPTION	
Event number:	1
Event name:	Input Seminar on Energy Democracy
Type:	Conferences
In situ/online:	In situ
Location:	Germany, Berlin
Date(s):	1st of October
Website(s) (if any):	https://poweringcitizens.eu/powering-citizens-at-the-democracy-action-days/ https://crnonline.de/event/energy-democracy-input-seminar/ https://crnonline.de/event/2nd-democracy-action-days/
Participants	
Female:	31
Male:	40
Non-binary:	3
From country 1 (Germany)	21
From country 2 (Poland)	15
From country 3 (Italy)	12
From country 4 (Estonia)	4
From country 5 (France)	4
From country 6 (Finland)	4
From country 7 (Sweden)	2

From country 8 (Netherlands)	2		
From country 9 (Romania)	2		
From country 10 (Hungary)	1		
From country 11 (Belgium)	1		
From country 12 (Kosovo)	1		
From country 13 (Greece)	1		
From country 14 (Austria)	1		
From country 15 (Albania)	1		
From country 16 (Ukraine)	1		
Total number of participants:	74	From total number of countries:	16

Description

Provide a short description of the event and its activities.

The event

The event, organised by the Comparative Research Network, took place at the European House Berlin and was part of the Democracy Action Days, a broad two-day event focused on democracy and citizen participation. The event was divided into two parts: the first part was a discussion presenting the energy situation in Germany, Denmark and Albania with an accent on energy poverty and what it encompasses. The second discussion was led by members of the POWERINGCITIZENS' consortium. Each speaker introduced their organisation and their work related to the goals of POWERINGCITIZENS, particularly in terms of fostering citizen engagement and encouraging community involvement in tackling energy poverty.

Part 1, Input session:

The representative of the Europäisches Haus in Berlin opened the session, emphasizing the necessity of initiatives that promote accessibility and active participation for citizens such as POWERINGCITIZENS. The opening speech was followed by a panel on energy democracy in Europe, where experts from different countries discussed the state of citizen participation in energy generation and decision-making. Invited experts presented the energy and energy poverty situation, solutions and innovation in Germany, Denmark and Albania, as well as specific case studies.

The first speaker presented the Climate Adaptation Strategy of Luckau, with a focus on the key planning challenges and participatory processes related to renewable energy and district heating in Luckau. A major issue is the legal allocation of sufficient land for renewable energy projects while balancing competing land-use priorities and varying levels of public acceptance. A proposed solution involves developing a fair system to distribute financial benefits from these projects to all residents. Another challenge is the implementation of cost-efficient district heating networks, which faces financial barriers due to the willingness and capacity of residents to invest. Innovative "island energy" solutions were discussed as a potential approach to creating sustainable and widely accepted local energy systems.

The talk also covered public participation in planning processes in Germany, explaining different levels of engagement, from direct decision-making to co-designing projects and providing feedback. Public involvement is seen as essential for transparency and community support. However, economic disparities, social tensions between urban and rural areas, and political conflicts between local and higher-level administrations create obstacles to cooperation. Overcoming these divides is crucial for developing an inclusive and sustainable climate adaptation and energy transition strategy.

The second speaker introduced the Danish Model of Wind Energy, a historical case study from the late 1970s to illustrate patterns of citizen engagement and decentralized energy production. This model was also very relevant to the POWERINGCITIZENS project, as it highlighted the role of citizen empowerment in shaping local decisions. Several challenges linked to the model were also presented: the decentralization of energy production and consumption, ensuring local acceptance of renewable initiatives, and managing the excess power generated by fluctuating renewable sources.

The third and last speaker presented the overall energy situation in Western Balkans while focusing on the Albanian case. One of the pressing issues in the region is the need for decarbonisation, particularly in the building sector. The speaker emphasised the importance of creating financial models and participatory frameworks to involve citizens, especially those from low-income households, in energy democracy and energy citizenship processes. These concepts focus on shared energy resources and citizen involvement in energy policy and decision-making. However, challenges remain, including the need for legal frameworks and better public awareness. There's a need for both top-down and bottom-up approaches to empower citizens and support the transition to clean energy, especially in regions still reliant on coal. Indeed, in the context of the Balkans region, there are still significant challenges in terms of establishing the legal and regulatory frameworks to enable true energy democracy and community-owned energy projects.

Part 2, Panel discussion:

The last speaker's introduction of the situation in Albania and Western Balkans smoothly transitioned the meeting to the second part of the event where the discussion was held by the consortium of POWERINGCITIZENS. Project partners from various European countries discussed the pressing issue of energy poverty, examining the situation in their respective nations, barriers to citizen involvement, and strategies for empowering energy-poor citizens through joint actions. The discussion highlighted both shared challenges and unique regional circumstances, showing the need for coordinated efforts to address energy poverty across Europe.

Current state of Energy Poverty in partner countries

Energy poverty is a significant challenge across the Western Balkans. In Albania, 37% of households struggle to heat their homes adequately, while in Kosovo, the number rises to 40%. Many financial support mechanisms are outdated, and energy-poor citizens often face structural barriers that prevent them from fully participating in decision-making on energy, housing, and climate policies. The Environmental and Territorial Management Institute (ETMI) in Albania, one of the project partners, is actively working to address these challenges by conducting research, raising awareness, and developing energy efficiency solutions for vulnerable communities. In Kosovo, energy insecurity remains a persistent issue due to an over-reliance on lignite power plants, limited renewable energy production, and economic hardships. Although energy prices are relatively low, affordability remains a challenge. The Balkan Green Foundation (BGF) is piloting Kosovo's first energy community and working with institutions to develop sustainable energy solutions.

In Greece, energy poverty has been exacerbated by the economic recession, the COVID-19 pandemic, and the energy crisis. By 2023, 19.2% of the population reported being unable to afford sufficient heating. The greek organisation INZEB has been studying energy poverty since 2016, publishing research and providing technical assistance to municipalities through the Energy Poverty Advisory Hub (EPAH). They are focusing efforts on policy development and citizen engagement.

Similarly, in Italy, energy poverty has become a growing concern, driven by economic decline following the 2007-2008 financial crisis and rising energy costs. Regional disparities in energy prices and the lack of a national classification for building energy performance further complicate the issue. Hidden energy poverty—where households limit energy use to avoid unaffordable bills—remains difficult to track. Research institutions, such as the Energy Systems Group at Università Politecnica delle Marche (UNIVPM), are working on innovative solutions, including multi-energy systems, microgrids, and hydrogen technologies, to support the energy transition and reduce reliance on energy imports.

Citizens involvement & limitations

Across all partner countries, ensuring that energy-poor citizens actively participate in decision-making remains a major challenge. Many affected individuals lack access to information, legal support, and financial resources, which prevents them from engaging in policy discussions. Language barriers, digital exclusion, and a lack of trust in government institutions further discourage participation.

To address this, organizations like INZEB in Greece and BGF in Kosovo have been working on educational programs and outreach initiatives to empower citizens with the knowledge they need to participate in energy discussions. Energy cafés, community forums, and advisory boards are being explored as potential solutions to create inclusive decision-making platforms. Financial incentives,

such as utility discounts and grants for energy-efficient upgrades, have also been proposed to encourage greater engagement.

Empowerment and Long-Term Sustainability

The discussion emphasized the importance of joint energy actions as a means of empowering energy-poor citizens. Community-based energy projects, such as solar cooperatives, energy-sharing initiatives, and microgrid development, were highlighted as effective strategies for lowering energy costs and giving citizens greater control over their energy supply.

Long-term sustainability requires institutional support through clear regulatory frameworks, subsidies, and financial mechanisms such as green bonds and revolving loan funds. Partner organizations stressed the need for policy alignment with EU energy directives, particularly in Albania and Kosovo, where regulatory gaps still exist. Investments in energy literacy programs, smart grid technologies, and energy-efficient housing were also identified as key factors in ensuring the success of energy citizenship initiatives.

The meeting concluded with a shared wish and commitment to strengthening collaboration between civil society organizations, public institutions, and local communities to drive a more equitable and sustainable energy future across Europe. Discussions highlighted how community-driven approaches can enhance citizen participation in both local and national decision-making. Emphasizing the need for long-term solutions, the event showed that true progress goes beyond financial incentives, focusing instead on building trust, ownership, and active engagement among citizens.

HISTORY OF CHANGES		
VERSION	PUBLICATION DATE	CHANGE
1.0	08.10.2024	Initial version (new MFF).

Comparative Research Network:

Input Seminar on Energy Democracy Report



Empowering energy citizenship among energy-poor people
through joint actions

PROJECT CODE: **101147083-POWERINGCITIZENS-CERV-2023-CITIZENS-CIV**

DURATION: **01/06/2024 to 30/05/2026**

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Summary

Project

The POWERINGCITIZENS project is an EU-funded project, funded through the CERV initiative. Launched in June 2024, it tackles the pressing issue of energy poverty, which affects millions across Europe. Rising energy costs have made necessities like heating unaffordable for many, leaving households, particularly vulnerable groups like single-parent families, in precarious situations. Through research and training, the project aims to raise awareness on the topic in the six partner countries, especially focusing on Western Balkans.

Event

POWERINGCITIZENS partners took part in the Democracy Action Days, a two-day conference organised in Berlin in October 2024. The event was divided in two parts: an overview of Energy Democracy in Europe through case studies (in Germany, Denmark and Albania) and a panel discussion of the current state of energy, with a specific input on energy poverty, in the partners' countries. One of the core challenges identified during the event was that many energy-poor citizens in partner countries lack the ability and resources to participate in energy, housing, and climate policy discussions. This gap in participation shows the need for inclusive approaches that empower communities.

Report

This report is part of the POWERINGCITIZENS Deliverables (D.1.1). It aims to be used as an overview of the first project's event while remaining introductory and complementary to further research, especially informing D2.1.

The first part presents the event and its context, leading to the first discussion on the current state of Energy Democracy in Europe through case studies, followed by an overview of energy poverty in the consortium's countries, therefore offering perspectives, solutions and limitations to such issues.

Powering Citizens at the Democracy Action Days

At the beginning of October, the whole Comparative Research Network (CRN) team and their project partners gathered at the Europäisches Haus in Berlin, for a two-day event, the Democracy Action Days, aimed at promoting democracy and citizen participation. The POWERINGCITIZENS project was featured in the first morning session to discuss energy democracy, community involvement, and solutions to energy poverty.



Photo 1. Panel on energy democracy in Europe, from the left: Maxine Salmon–Cottreau (CRN), Jerome Haßler (Luckau's Climate Adaptation Manager), Anna Krenz (NFC), Meivis Struga (ETMI) and Dr. Kamila Franz (CRN).

Panel on Energy Democracy Across Europe

Gosia Binczyk, Deputy Head of the Representation of the European Commission in Germany (Europäisches Haus Berlin), opened the session, emphasizing the significance of initiatives that promote accessibility and active participation for citizens. Her inspiring speech was followed by a panel on energy democracy in Europe, where experts from different countries discussed the state of citizen participation in energy generation and decision-making.

Jerome R. Haßler, Climate Adaptation Manager of Luckau (Germany), presented insights on the city's participatory strategies for climate adaptation. He highlighted planning challenges related to the topic, such as land-use priorities and district heating networks, that require innovative solutions and the general public's acceptance.

Anna Krenz, from the Nordic Folkecenter for Renewable Energy (Denmark) introduced the Danish model of a decentralized approach to wind energy with citizen-led energy initiatives, showing how local engagement can build strong foundations for sustainable energy practices.

Mevis Struga from the Environmental and Territorial Management Institute (Albania) focused on the specific barriers and potential solutions in the Balkans region, where coal dependency remains a significant challenge. He underlined the importance of aligning legal frameworks with participatory approaches to promote energy democracy.



Photo 2. Opening session, Gosia Binczyk, Deputy Head of the Representation in Berlin of the Europäisches Haus.



Photo 3. Panel on energy democracy in Europe, from the left: Maxine Salmon–Cottreau (CRN), Jerome Haßler (Luckau's Climate Adaptation Manager), Anna Krenz (NFC), Mevis Struga (ETMI) and Dr. Kamila Franz (CRN).

Roundtable: The Feasibility of Energy Democracy Projects

The event concluded with a roundtable discussion that raised an essential question: Can projects like POWERINGCITIZENS make a tangible difference in addressing energy poverty and promoting democratic participation in energy transitions? During the session, partners from INZEB, ETMI, BGF, ECREC and UNIVPM introduced their organizations, highlighted the actions they take in the energy and energy poverty field, and provided insights into the general situation in their respective countries. The conversation revolved around lessons learnt from current projects, the importance of both bottom-up and top-down strategies, and the need to build trust among communities for long-term success.

Conclusions

Overall, the event highlighted that solutions must go beyond short-term financial aid, focusing instead on education, public involvement, and supportive policies. By integrating youth engagement and citizen participation, POWERINGCITIZENS and other projects can ensure broader acceptance and sustainable impact.



Photo 4. Combatting energy poverty in Europe: current state in partners' countries - Kosovo, from the left: Fiona Bakija (BGF), Jerome Haßler (Luckau's Climate Adaptation Manager), Anna Krenz (NFC) and Mevis Struga (ETMI).

Situation of Energy Democracy in Europe

JUST ENERGY TRANSITION AT THE LAUSITZ-REGION

Jerome Haßler, Climate Adaptation Manager, City of Luckau

Luckau, located in the Dahme-Spreewald district of Brandenburg, Germany, has a rich history as one of the most significant towns in Lower Lusatia, particularly before the Thirty Years' War. From the 15th century until 1993, it served as an administrative center for various districts. Today, it remains an important cultural and historical site as a member of Brandenburg's association of towns with historic centers.

As part of Lower Lusatia, Luckau is situated within a broader historical and geographical context. The Lusatia region spans 11,727 km² across Brandenburg and Saxony, with a population of approximately 1.3 million residents. Its population density of 99 residents per square kilometer is significantly lower than Germany's national average of 230. The rural character, combined with a unique cultural heritage and diverse landscapes, shapes the region's socio-economic development, bringing together urban and rural communities.

Covering 207 km², Luckau ranks among Germany's largest municipalities by area, even surpassing Stuttgart. It has around 9,600 permanent residents and comprises 21 districts, including one urban center and 20 former villages. The town lies about 80 kilometers south of Berlin, blending historical charm with a diverse natural environment. It stretches along the northern edge of the Lusatian border wall and is traversed by the Berste and Wudritz rivers, which flow into the Spree. The highest point, Mühlenberg, reaches 120 meters above sea level. Much of the town's southern territory lies within the Niederlausitzer Landrücken Nature Park, while between the districts of Schlabendorf am See and Fürstlich Drehna, the landscape is marked by the former Schlabendorf-Süd lignite mine, part of the Lusatian coalfield.

Energy Transition and Climate Adaptation in Luckau

As part of its commitment to sustainability, Luckau is actively developing a Climate Adaptation Strategy to address climate challenges and ensure a just transition to renewable energy. This initiative includes drafting a climate adaptation plan in 2025, followed by a city council decision on its adoption, and a three-year implementation phase from 2026 to 2028.

The Lausitz region has historically been a center of Germany's energy production, particularly in coal mining. As the country transitions away from fossil fuels, the region faces significant economic and social changes. With a largely rural population and relatively low density, Lausitz

faces unique challenges in balancing environmental sustainability with economic resilience. In Luckau, population trends between 2006 and 2023 show relative stability, fluctuating between 9,000 and 10,200 residents. These demographic patterns influence local labor markets, urban development, and the overall capacity for renewable energy expansion.

Luckau has made substantial progress in integrating renewable energy sources, particularly wind power, solar photovoltaics, and biogas. To support the transition, Luckau has allocated 906 hectares—approximately 4.38% of its total land area—to renewable energy development. However, finding the right balance between land use for energy production, agriculture, and conservation remains a key challenge. The success of the transition also depends on public acceptance, as opposition from local communities can slow down or even halt projects. One proposed solution is the fair distribution of financial benefits from renewable energy investments, ensuring that economic gains are shared among all residents.

Another major challenge is the planning and implementation of district heating networks. Luckau aims to develop an efficient and affordable heating system, but financial constraints and residents' willingness to participate pose obstacles. Many households may struggle with the upfront costs of connecting to centralized heating infrastructure. To address this, Luckau is exploring decentralized "island energy systems," which could provide flexible, community-driven heating solutions.

Public participation and governance

Energy planning in Germany involves both formal and informal public participation processes. However, in Luckau, several social and political divisions have complicated citizen engagement. Differences in perspectives between the city administration and higher levels of government, as well as tensions between urban and rural communities, have created obstacles to decision-making. Additionally, divisions within the local government have impacted public trust, making it more difficult to achieve consensus on energy transition projects. Strengthening communication strategies, fostering more inclusive decision-making frameworks, and improving collaboration between different stakeholder groups will be essential in overcoming these challenges.

Luckau's structured approach to climate adaptation and energy transition ensures that progress remains on track. Beginning in 2025 with the development of a comprehensive adaptation plan, the initiative will proceed with city council deliberations in autumn 2025 and the submission of a follow-up application for a three-year implementation phase from 2026 to 2028. By integrating lessons learned from the broader Lausitz energy transition, Luckau aims to create a resilient and sustainable model for other municipalities.

The town's transition to renewable energy presents both opportunities and challenges. While significant strides have been made, land-use conflicts, financial constraints, and governance issues continue to pose obstacles. The long-term success of this transformation will depend on

Luckau's ability to foster community engagement, implement fair economic models, and embrace innovative energy solutions. By adopting an inclusive and participatory approach, the town seeks to establish a sustainable energy system that benefits all its residents.

COMMUNITY POWER

The DANISH MODEL

Anna Krenz, Nordic Folkecenter for Renewable Energy

The Nordic Folkecenter for Renewable Energy was established in 1983 with the goal of democratising and increasing the use of renewable energies. The centre offers a space in Denmark for projects, education, workshops, research and development towards the creation of a sustainable future with renewable energies for Denmark.

Denmark, with a population of 5.8 million, has a highly developed energy system, particularly in district heating. About 2.6 million households use district heating, which is supported by an extensive network of 60,000 km of pipes. This system heats 64% of all Danish homes and an impressive 98% in Copenhagen. The ownership of district heating systems typically lies with municipalities or consumer cooperatives.

Since 1980, Denmark has not permitted the construction of conventional power stations. This has led to a unique energy landscape characterized by:

- A high share of Combined Heat and Power (CHP), making up 60% of energy production.
- Extensive use of district heating, covering 63% of energy needs.
- A significant share of wind energy, reaching 41% in 2014.

Looking ahead, Denmark faces several energy challenges, including phasing out coal in central power stations, utilizing agricultural waste for energy, and shifting the transport sector toward renewable sources.

Denmark's electricity supply has evolved significantly. Until 1975, the country relied entirely on imported oil. To reduce this dependency, Denmark diversified its energy sources, focusing increasingly on renewables. Although atomic energy was initially prioritized, nuclear power plans were cancelled in 1985. Instead, Denmark focused on decentralizing its energy supply, establishing strong AC and DC transmission links with neighboring countries, including Sweden, Norway, and Germany.

In Denmark, district heating is largely community-owned, with 64% of all Danish heating provided through systems owned by 350 consumer cooperatives and 50 larger municipal, non-profit companies. In 2019 alone, 67,700 new consumers connected to these systems. Around 60% of the energy for district heating now comes from renewable sources like biomass, solar, geothermal energy, and heat pumps, with combined heat and power (CHP) accounting for 70% of the production. Danish legislation ensures these heating systems maintain their non-profit status, while municipal guarantees on loans make district heating affordable for consumers.

For many years, Denmark focused on centralizing energy production, building larger power plants up until 1990. In the 1980s, however, a shift began towards decentralization. This new approach promoted cooperatively owned, grid-connected wind power and gas-fueled combined heat and power (CHP) plants, especially within district heating cooperatives. Since around 1998, changing regulations, such as the opening of the electricity market and the end of feed-in tariffs, have made conditions less favorable for cooperatives. As a result, fewer cooperative wind turbines are being established, and local CHP plants are increasingly closing.

Challenge: Decentralized Energy Production and Consumption

To fully transition to renewable energy, Denmark will need to integrate its various energy systems through hybrid solutions. Small wind turbines, when combined with other heating system components, can meet 100% of household energy needs. Additionally, solar district heating systems are playing a growing role in meeting household heat demand across the country. Denmark's success in utilizing solar energy for heating shows that countries with even stronger solar resources could achieve similar or greater results. Integrating these decentralized, renewable systems is key to creating a sustainable energy future.

Many local residents who oppose wind turbine projects often cite environmental impacts, such as aesthetics and noise, as reasons for their opposition. However, evidence shows these factors are not the primary causes of resistance. In some areas of Denmark, previous wind turbine projects faced strong opposition and were even cancelled. Yet, in recent years, similar projects using larger turbines have gained full acceptance from the same residents who previously opposed them.

This shift demonstrates that the real issue lies in the balance of benefits and inconveniences; those affected by the projects often feel they don't share the advantages. Community ownership provides a solution, as it ensures that the benefits of renewable energy projects are distributed throughout the local community. When local residents have ownership or a stake in these projects, it fosters support and reduces opposition, creating a more collaborative approach to renewable energy development.

Community Ownership: Middelgrundens Vindmøllelaug I/S, Copenhagen, Denmark

Middelgrundens Wind Farm, located 3.5 km offshore from Copenhagen harbor, is a leading example of how citizens can take ownership in large renewable energy projects. Established in 2000, the wind farm consists of 20 turbines, each with a capacity of 2 MW. Ownership is split equally: 50% is held by the local utility owned by the City of Copenhagen, while the remaining 50% is owned by Middelgrundens Vindmøllelaug I/S, a citizens' cooperative.

Shares in the cooperative were initially sold for 4,250 DKK (€567), giving each investor a 1/40,500 stake in the partnership, equating to an annual production of approximately 1,000

kWh. Membership is open to anyone, and the cooperative operates on democratic principles, with each member holding one vote in the Partnership Assembly. This model demonstrates how community ownership can involve citizens directly in sustainable energy projects and foster a sense of shared benefit and responsibility.

Challenge: Fluctuating Renewable Energy and Excess Power

In Denmark, around 75% of household energy demand is for space heating and hot water. As renewable energy sources like wind fluctuate, managing this variability becomes essential. Household wind turbines, paired with electric boilers, heat pumps, and hot water storage, could potentially meet 100% of household energy needs, addressing this demand locally.

With more variable renewable energy in the grid, spot market electricity prices are often lower. Given that Denmark's heat demand is three times its electricity demand, integrating electricity and heating systems can bring multiple advantages. This approach helps balance the power supply, improves the economics of renewable energy, lowers heating costs, and supports the decarbonization of Denmark's heating sector.



Photo 5. Panel on energy democracy in Europe, from the left: Anna Krenz (NFC), Meivis Struga (ETMI) and Dr. Kamila Franz (CRN).

Combating energy poverty in Europe: current state in partners' countries



A) Albania

1. Energy poverty in Albania

Energy poverty remains a pressing issue across the Western Balkans, with many households struggling to afford adequate heating and access to energy services. In Kosovo, 40% of households—approximately 200,000 homes—report being unable to keep their living spaces warm. In Albania, the situation is similar, with 37% of households (over 1.1 million homes) facing the same challenge. Montenegro sees energy poverty rates ranging between 8% and 15%, reflecting broader regional disparities. Many financial support measures designed to protect vulnerable citizens remain outdated, failing to adapt to the changing economic and energy landscape.

Additionally, structural barriers prevent energy-poor citizens from fully participating in decision-making processes related to energy, housing, climate policy, and fiscal planning. Limited access to legal rights and information on energy prices and available solutions further exacerbates their exclusion.

Within this broader regional context, Albania stands at a crossroads in its energy transition, grappling with the challenge of aligning its policies with European decarbonization goals. The country still relies heavily on traditional energy sources, with coal remaining a dominant part of the regional energy mix. Despite growing efforts to promote clean energy, the lack of regulatory frameworks, financial models, and public participation continues to slow progress toward a just transition.

One of the most urgent issues is the building sector, responsible for 70% of the country's greenhouse gas emissions. Energy efficiency measures remain underdeveloped, and few financial mechanisms exist to support citizens—particularly low-income households—in improving the energy efficiency of their homes. High energy costs and outdated infrastructure leave many households struggling to reduce their energy consumption, deepening the cycle of energy poverty.

2. Energy democracy in Albania

The concept of energy democracy, which promotes community-driven energy initiatives, remains largely unexplored in Albania. Energy cooperatives, which could allow citizens to generate and share renewable energy, are rare due to the absence of a clear legal framework. While some initiatives encourage public participation, many citizens lack access to information or resources, preventing them from actively influencing energy policy. Decision-making remains top-down, with government institutions shaping policies without sufficient consultation with the people most affected by energy poverty. Without greater public engagement, the transition to clean energy risks widening economic disparities, as wealthier individuals are more likely to benefit from renewable energy initiatives while low-income households remain marginalized.

A significant barrier to progress is the lack of comprehensive energy regulations that support energy communities and ensure equitable access to renewable energy. To create a functional and inclusive energy system, Albania must align its policies with the EU Energy Efficiency Directive and establish financial mechanisms that make clean energy accessible to all—not just those with higher incomes. Currently, there is no institutional framework that facilitates energy-sharing initiatives or supports the community-level adoption of renewable energy projects. Without these foundational legal and financial structures, progress remains slow, and the transition to sustainable energy remains out of reach for many.

Civil society organizations play a critical role in advocating for energy democracy and pushing for policy reforms. They work to educate citizens, provide technical support, and engage with policymakers to create a fairer energy system. However, their efforts require stronger collaboration with public institutions and a shift in governmental approaches to enable genuine citizen participation. Across the Western Balkans, an energy citizenship model is emerging as a promising strategy to empower energy-poor citizens. This approach includes tailored energy advice, participatory spaces such as energy cafés, and open dialogue where communities can voice their concerns and gain a clearer understanding of energy poverty measures. Through these initiatives, individuals are better equipped to take action and contribute to shaping a more inclusive and sustainable energy future.

3. The path to Just Transition

Key challenges remain to the path of Just Transition in Albania, particularly in aligning with European policies on decarbonization. The meeting reflected on lessons from the Paris Agreement and the broader European context, emphasizing that Albania faces similar struggles in its shift toward cleaner energy.

One of the critical areas for action is the building sector, which is responsible for approximately 70% of greenhouse gas emissions. Despite ongoing efforts, there is still a lack of structured financial models to support citizens in adopting energy-efficient solutions. Additionally, public participation in shaping energy policies remains limited in Albania.

Despite efforts to promote clean energy, Albania and the wider region still rely heavily on coal-based energy, which continues to dominate the local energy landscape. Civil society

organizations play a crucial role in advocating for change, pushing for regulatory reforms, and ensuring that citizens are empowered to take part in decision-making.

Furthermore, while bottom-up approaches (engaging citizens and grassroots organizations) are essential, a top-down approach is also necessary. Government institutions must establish a regulatory framework that enables the development of energy communities and aligns with the EU's Energy Efficiency Directive. However, achieving full compliance with EU policies remains a challenge.

4. Potential solutions

a. A need for energy normalcy and energy citizenship

Steps towards a fair transition require the inclusion of the concepts of energy normalcy and energy citizenship. While energy normalcy stands for ensuring that people have access to specialized energy systems and financial mechanisms that allow them to participate in energy-sharing initiatives, energy citizenships stands for encouraging active participation in energy-related decision-making, so that communities—not just policymakers—play a role in shaping the transition.

These concepts remain underdeveloped in the region, requiring significant work to create inclusive policies and legal frameworks.

b. A need for energy cooperatives and inclusive access

Currently, energy cooperatives, which allow citizens to collectively produce and share renewable energy, are not yet widespread in Albania.

There is a need for strong legal and policy frameworks to ensure equitable access to renewable energy, particularly for low-income households. Energy transition policies must not only benefit wealthier citizens but also include vulnerable communities that often lack access to information and financial support.

c. Research & educational mechanisms: the case of ETMI

Environmental and Territorial Management Institute (ETMI) is working actively to address these challenges. Established in 2014, ETMI is committed to sustainable development, environmental justice, and democratic participation. The organization plays a crucial role in conducting research on energy poverty, promoting public awareness, and supporting policy development in Albania. ETMI collaborates with environmental experts, public institutions, and local communities to develop solutions that enhance energy efficiency, improve access to renewable energy, and support vulnerable households. Through its educational programs, consultancy services, and participation in regional and international projects, ETMI works to empower citizens, advocate for policy reforms, and ensure that energy transition efforts are both inclusive and sustainable. By fostering greater community involvement and pushing for systemic change, ETMI contributes to building a future where energy is accessible, affordable, and environmentally responsible for all.

Conclusions

To move forward, civil society must continue to work alongside public institutions, bridging the gap between policy and citizen engagement. The focus should be on both short-term incentives and long-term energy efficiency measures to ensure a just transition. By reducing overall energy consumption and improving efficiency, citizens can secure not only lower energy costs but also improved living conditions.

B) Greece

1. Energy poverty in Greece

Greece has long struggled with high rates of energy poverty, a situation that worsened due to the financial recession that began in 2010, followed by the COVID-19 pandemic and the ongoing energy crisis. Many households face difficulties in meeting basic energy needs, particularly during the winter months.

In 2023, nearly one-fifth of the population reported being unable to keep their homes warm. According to the most recent National Energy and Climate Plan, over half a million households—approximately 12.4% of the total—were classified as energy-poor in 2021.

This persistent issue has profound social, economic, and environmental implications, making it a critical challenge that requires immediate action at both the national and European levels.

2. Fighting energy poverty in Greece

a. Research & assistance, the involvement of INZEB

Since 2016, INZEB has been actively involved in studying and addressing the problem of energy poverty in Greece. Through extensive research and analysis, the organization has produced numerous reports that highlight the complexity of the issue and propose innovative solutions. These publications have not only examined the social and economic consequences of energy poverty but have also fostered public debate on the need for systematic intervention.

As the designated technical expert for Greece in the Energy Poverty Advisory Hub, an initiative of the European Commission, INZEB has provided direct technical assistance to municipalities across the country, supporting efforts to develop policies and programs that alleviate the burden on vulnerable communities. Additionally, the organization has been a key participant in European projects such as POWERPOOR, a Horizon 2020 initiative aimed at developing tools and strategies to empower energy-poor citizens.

b. Involving citizens in processes: solutions & limitations

Ensuring that those affected by energy poverty can actively participate in decision-making processes remains a major challenge. Governments and organizations must create structures that allow these citizens to have a voice in shaping energy and climate policies. This can be achieved by incorporating them into advisory boards, engaging them in public consultations, and ensuring that information is communicated in an accessible and relatable manner. Complex policy discussions must be simplified, using clear language and visual materials, while outreach

efforts should rely on trusted local intermediaries to bridge the gap between policymakers and affected communities. Financial and non-financial incentives, such as utility discounts, can also encourage participation by offsetting some of the economic barriers that prevent people from engaging in policy discussions.

One of the most effective ways to empower energy-poor citizens is through joint energy actions, such as community-led solar projects or energy cooperatives. By participating in collective energy initiatives, citizens not only reduce their energy costs but also gain more control over how energy is produced and distributed in their communities. These initiatives provide direct financial relief while also fostering a sense of ownership and self-sufficiency. Moreover, engagement in such projects helps build energy literacy, equipping communities with the knowledge and technical skills needed to advocate for better policies and manage their own energy resources. By amplifying the voices of marginalized groups, joint energy actions can enhance their political influence and push for more inclusive energy policies.

Despite these efforts, several obstacles continue to hinder meaningful participation. Many energy-poor citizens are preoccupied with meeting their immediate needs, leaving little time or energy for advocacy. Limited knowledge of energy systems and climate policies further prevents them from engaging effectively in discussions. Additionally, restricted access to digital tools and platforms makes it difficult for many to take part in online consultations while a history of governmental inaction has led to scepticism and a lack of trust in institutional initiatives.

For these initiatives to have a lasting impact, long-term sustainability must be a priority. Governments need to institutionalize joint energy actions by creating supportive regulatory frameworks, offering subsidies, and providing financial incentives that encourage widespread participation. Sustainable financing models, such as green bonds and revolving loan funds, can ensure the continued operation of these initiatives. Integrating joint energy actions into broader sustainability efforts—such as affordable housing programs and sustainable transportation policies—can further strengthen their impact. Technological advancements, including smart grids and decentralized energy systems, also play a crucial role in optimizing efficiency and reducing costs, making community-led energy solutions more viable in the long run.

C) Kosovo

1. Energy & Energy Poverty in Kosovo

Kosovo, with a population of 1.8 million, is a small, developing country in the Western Balkans. As a post-war society, progress in achieving energy security has been slow. Poverty affects 18% of the population, with 5% living in extreme poverty. These rates are disproportionately higher among minority groups and female-led households.

The country's energy production consistently falls short of demand, making Kosovo heavily reliant on imports during peak periods. Last year, out of a total energy production of 5,698 GWh, 4,931 GWh came from lignite power plants, while only 768 GWh were generated from renewable energy sources. In the same period, energy consumption reached 6,695 GWh, with households accounting for 45.5% of usage [1]. Despite low energy prices—7.12 cents per kWh—affordability remains a challenge for many, and these prices hinder a faster transition to renewable energy [2].

2. Research & involvement: Balkan Green Foundation's work

Balkan Green Foundation (BGF) is addressing energy poverty through research and by piloting Kosovo's first energy community. They actively engage with institutions and stakeholders to promote sustainable energy solutions and advocate for a more equitable energy system.

BGF's work ensures that energy-poor citizens actively participate in energy and climate decision-making. This requires targeted strategies to address their specific challenges and amplify their voices such as raising awareness and capacity building to address citizen's lack of access to information about energy policies, climate initiatives, and their potential role in these processes. Additionally, BGF organises inclusive decision-making platforms such as forums, local councils or community groups, ensuring citizens have a platform to express their needs and influence decisions.

Joint energy actions can empower energy-poor citizens by directly addressing their energy needs while involving them in the process of creating and implementing sustainable energy solutions. These actions can help shift the focus from mere aid to fostering ownership and participation. By engaging citizens in the planning and execution of energy communities, efficiency measures schemes and similar initiatives, BGF thrives to create a sense of empowerment and encourage long-term commitment to energy citizenship.

3. Kosovo's' institutional efforts

Energy-poor households often face financial barriers to implementing energy efficiency measures. However, the recent targeted subsidies and grants designed by government institutions to help them increase energy performance have proven successful.

Both the Ministry of Economy and Kosovo Energy Efficiency Fund have launched supporting schemes for energy efficiency measures in public and private sector buildings, offering subsidies for household appliances, and insulation of buildings. The most recent one being a call open for subsidizing up to 50% of expenses for insulation of private homes, with a special focus on vulnerable groups. Considering that energy-poor citizens prioritize their basic needs over engaging in complex policy discussions, and their knowledge about energy and climate issues is limited, this prevents them from understanding their rights and opportunities for involvement.



D) The Netherlands

1. Energy Poverty in the Netherlands

In 2023, approximately 400,000 Dutch households representing 4.8% of all households, faced energy poverty. This marks an increase of 70,000 households compared to 2022, primarily due to high energy costs and inefficient housing.

Despite these challenges, the Netherlands has historically performed better than the EU average regarding energy poverty indicators. In 2018, only 2.2% of the Dutch population reported being unable to keep their homes adequately warm, compared to the EU average of 7.4%. Similarly, 1.5% of the population faced utility bill arrears, while the EU average stood at 6.6% [3].

2. A path to Just Transition

The goal is for the Dutch economy to be completely circular by 2050. In general, the Dutch government has initiated several initiatives concerning the energy transition including solar parks in the North Sea and on land that produce electricity for household and industrial purposes.

Around 30% of all family houses in the Netherlands have solar panels on their roofs. This is stimulated by fiscal tax reduction when buying solar panels. There are also subsidized funds for heating pumps and solar boilers. Next to that, the Dutch government has closed the gas fields in Groningen and is working on a transition towards new housing without gas (only electricity is provided).

In Sint Eustatius (one of the Dutch Caribbean Islands), the local electric energy, during daytime, is fully provided by solar panels. Only during the night is the local electric power plant providing electric power.

In 2024, the percentage of new electric cars was 34% of all new cars bought in the Netherlands. The charging infrastructure in the Netherlands for electric cars is one of the best in Europe. Possibilities to charge electric cars are available at almost every gas station, on average not further than 100 meters from citizens' homes.

Conclusions

To conclude, lots of solutions towards energy transformations are put forward by the Dutch government but they don't seem to be specific to combat energy poverty.

It is recommended to establish a multi-indicator framework for measurement, develop specific policies targeting energy-poor households, and integrate these policies into broader social, energy, and housing strategies. Such an approach ensures that the benefits of the energy transition are equitably distributed, preventing vulnerable households from being left behind.

E) Italy

1. Energy poverty in Italy

Over the past two decades, Italy's economy has declined, largely due to the 2007-2008 financial crisis, which caused a liquidity shortage and a corporate credit crunch. Despite efforts to curb public debt, global GDP fell by 2.2% in 2009, leading to wider deficits and increased poverty in Italy. According to ISTAT, absolute poverty rose from 4% in 2009 to 6.9% in 2020.

Energy poverty has since become a major concern. Italy introduced incentives to improve energy efficiency, but lacks a national classification for building energy performance. Energy poverty remains a significant issue in Italy. In 2016, approximately 2.2 million Italian households, representing 8.6% of the total, were affected by the issue. This figure has remained relatively stable since 2012, when estimates indicated that between 5% and 20% of households experienced energy poverty [4, 5].

2. Solutions

a. Building Fuel Poverty Index (BFP)

The Building Fuel Poverty Index (BFP) in Italy was developed by Kristian Fabbri, a researcher from the Department of Architecture at the University of Bologna. In his 2015 study titled "Building and fuel poverty, an index to measure fuel poverty: An Italian case study", Fabbri introduced the BFP as a tool to assess fuel poverty by correlating it with building energy performance. Indeed, it merges income, energy prices, and Energy Performance Certificates (EPCs), therefore identifying buildings in need of intervention. Fabbri's research emphasizes the importance of addressing both economic and structural aspects of fuel poverty to develop effective policies. However, his analysis has only been conducted in one region, failing to capture the national picture [6].

Regional disparities in energy prices exist due to factors like energy source availability and proximity to power plants. ARERA reported a 50% increase in fixed energy costs, leading to higher bills nationwide. Consequently, energy poverty varies across regions, manifesting as either an inability to pay higher bills or reduced consumption, known as hidden energy poverty.

b. Energy Systems Group at Università Politecnica delle Marche (UNIVPM)

The Energy Systems Group at Università Politecnica delle Marche (UNIVPM) develops multi-energy systems to support the energy transition. Comprising professors, researchers, and Ph.D. students from the Department of Industrial Engineering and Mathematical Sciences (DIISM), the group optimises energy system design to reduce financial and environmental costs. Their research integrates electricity, heating, cooling, water, electric vehicles, and hydrogen while contributing to European and national projects such as MUSE GRIDS, INTERFACE, eNeuron, GRETHA, PORH2, and "RdS Elettrico Nazionale."

Demonstration projects like the Osimo microgrid and UNIVPM's smart-campus microgrid showcase their innovations in renewable energy, microgrid technology, and electric mobility.

Specialising in hydrogen technology and Battery Energy Storage Systems (BESS), the group models and validates alkaline and PEM electrolyzers and fuel cells using different software and collaborating with Italian research centers to explore hydrogen's role in energy systems. Additionally, the group uses different optimisation algorithms for BESS design to enhance grid flexibility and energy independence, integrating photovoltaic systems to boost self-sufficiency and reduce reliance on imports. Through cutting-edge research and practical applications, the group advances renewable energy and decarbonisation efforts across local, national, and European levels.

Comparative
Research
Network:

F) Germany

1. Energy Poverty in Germany

Germany faces a growing energy poverty crisis, exacerbated by rising energy costs, inefficient housing, and socio-economic disparities. Despite being one of Europe's largest economies, a significant portion of the population struggles to afford adequate heating and electricity.

The issue has intensified in recent years, particularly following the European energy crisis. Between 2.7 and 6.5 million households are affected by energy poverty, with around 10% of households unable to afford sufficient heating during the winter months. While energy poverty traditionally affected lower-income groups, the crisis has now spread to the middle class, particularly those with incomes between 60% and 80% of the median. The situation worsened dramatically between 2022 and 2023, with the number of energy-poor households rising to 43%. Urban areas experience higher energy costs, though they have better access to assistance programs, whereas rural areas often struggle with older, inefficient housing stock. Eastern Germany, with its lower average incomes, has higher rates of energy poverty compared to other regions [7].

Germany lacks an official definition of energy poverty, making it difficult to implement targeted policies. However, indicators such as disconnection rates, high energy costs relative to income, and the inability to pay utility bills reveal the severity of the problem. Vulnerable groups, including single-parent households, pensioners, unemployed individuals, and migrant families, are particularly at risk. More than 80% of energy-poor households live in multi-family buildings and are renters, which limits their ability to invest in energy efficiency improvements [8].

2. Solutions

To combat energy poverty, Germany has introduced various policy measures. Social assistance programs cover heating and household energy costs for low-income individuals, while legal protections prevent disconnections if partial payments are arranged. The government has also implemented price caps on electricity and gas, expanded housing benefits, and introduced subsidies for energy-efficient renovations. Programs such as the Berlin Relief Package offer targeted support, including financial aid for energy debts and subsidies for heating costs [9].

Long-term solutions focus on improving energy efficiency and expanding renewable energy sources. The Climate Protection Act and Energy Efficiency Act set ambitious targets to reduce energy consumption and promote sustainability. Financial incentives for solar panel installations, insulation upgrades, and smart energy solutions aim to make housing more energy-efficient.

3. Local initiatives

Additionally, local initiatives, such as balcony solar panel subsidies and community-based energy programs, help households generate their own energy and reduce costs.

Despite these efforts, challenges remain. Energy costs have decreased since their peak but remain higher than pre-crisis levels, continuing to burden low- and middle-income households. While relief measures provide short-term support, structural reforms are needed to ensure energy security for all. Expanding affordable energy access, investing in energy-efficient housing, and strengthening financial support programs will be crucial in addressing energy poverty in Germany in the long term [10].

Comparative Research Network (CRN) is a Berlin-based NGO working to raise awareness and promote long-term solutions. Based in Germany, CRN provides information, training, and educational opportunities to empower individuals and foster environmental awareness. Through international projects, CRN engages both youth and adults in discussions on climate justice, energy transition, and social inclusion, encouraging their active participation in democratic processes. CRN plays a key role in promoting energy literacy and sustainability by facilitating non-formal education programs, intercultural learning, and dialogue between local citizens and policymakers. By inspiring young people to take part in shaping a carbon-neutral society, CRN contributes to building resilience against energy poverty and ensuring that communities have the knowledge and resources to transition towards a more sustainable future.

Conclusions and foresight

Energy poverty remains a significant challenge across Europe, disproportionately affecting vulnerable communities and impeding progress toward a just energy transition. The discussions during this event highlighted not only the urgent need for structural policy reforms but also the importance of inclusive citizen engagement, innovative financial mechanisms, and collaborative energy initiatives to tackle energy poverty effectively. While efforts such as renewable energy projects, energy cooperatives, and national support programs are steps in the right direction, more work is needed to ensure long-term sustainability and equitable access to clean energy.

This event served as a crucial step in informing our ongoing research on energy poverty, helping to refine our approach and deepen our understanding of the challenges, solutions, and policy implications across different European and Western Balkan countries. The detailed findings from this discussion will contribute to the research report (D2.1), which will be published in May 2025, providing an in-depth analysis of energy poverty, national and local energy policies and case studies. The report will include a global, European, and Western Balkans overview of energy poverty, explore the indicators used to assess energy poverty, and present country-specific analyses focusing on Albania, Greece, Italy, Kosovo, Germany, and the Netherlands. Each country's analysis will examine national energy and climate policies, reduction targets, local challenges, and site-specific case studies.

Looking ahead, the research report and the following steps will provide a comprehensive roadmap for action, offering insights into best practices, policy recommendations, and innovative solutions that can be adapted to different national contexts. By bridging the gap between research, policy, and citizen engagement, POWERINGCITIZENS aims to create a stronger foundation for energy democracy and empower communities to take an active role in shaping their energy future.

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