

# Towards a European energy transition driven by citizen action

European Commission Grant Agreement No. 101022492.



## The key role of intermediary actors and intermediation for enabling energy citizenship initiatives

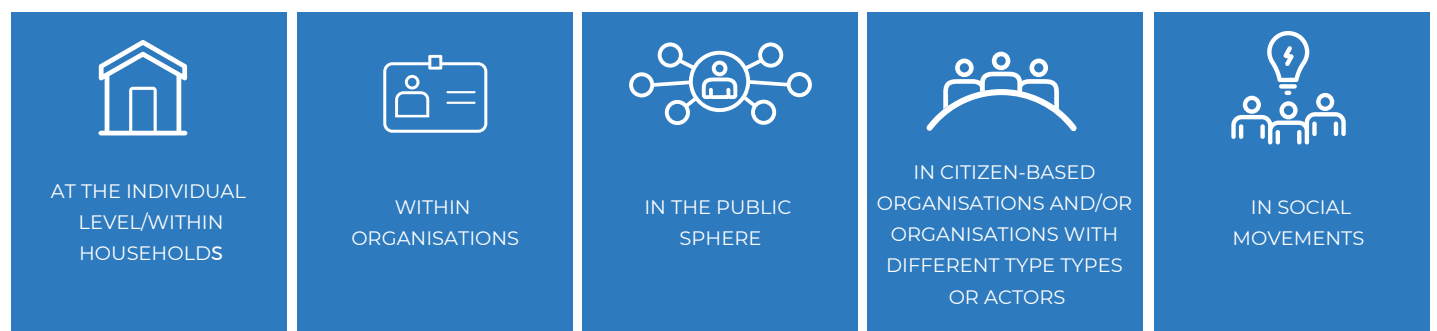
### Synthesis brief 5

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Energy citizenship, understood as various forms of civic involvement and engagement that pertain to the development of more sustainable and democratic energy systems and transitions, is a key lever for a just energy transition in Europe. It can be practised at different levels of action and through different constellations of actors (see illustration below<sup>1</sup>), related to energy production, consumption and governance. The fourth EnergyPROSPECTS synthesis brief took stock of the diversity of energy citizenship practices that exist through the 596 initiatives that the project team mapped across Europe<sup>2</sup>. Importantly, these initiatives do not exist in a vacuum. **This fifth synthesis brief underlines the importance of intermediary actors and intermediation for energy citizenship** and highlights the rich ecosystem of actors that enable and provide support for energy citizenship initiatives<sup>3</sup>. To that end, **intermediaries and intermediation are a central part of emerging ‘new’ forms of governance aimed at accelerating the energy transition by helping energy citizenship initiatives to achieve their goals.**

### Energy citizenship can be practiced:



<sup>1</sup> The typology has been simplified in WP6. To learn more about our typology of energy citizenship, please see: Debourdeau, Ariane; Schäfer, Martina; and Thalberg, Karin. 2022. Synthesis Brief 2: [What do we mean when we talk about energy citizenship? Ten tentative types of citizen involvement in the energy transition](#). European Commission Grant Agreement No. 101022492.

<sup>2</sup> Thalberg, Karin; Vadovics, Edina; and Szollossy, Anita. 2023. Synthesis brief 4: [Taking stock of energy citizenship in Europe - 596 examples of how citizens engage in the energy transition](#). European Commission Grant Agreement No. 101022492.

<sup>3</sup> The analysis is based on a mixed-data collection consisting of desk-research and in-depth interviews with key informants of 34 cases in Ireland, the Netherlands, Belgium, Germany, France, Spain, Latvia, Hungary and Bulgaria. The research question the analysis sought to answer was: “what kinds of intermediation is or has been required for energy citizenship initiatives to achieve their goals?”. An interdisciplinary mapping tool was furthermore developed that showed the depth and breadth of the intermediaries in the context of their respective energy citizenship initiative.

## What are intermediary actors and what types of intermediation do they carry out?

Many energy citizenship initiatives face a range of obstacles to get their activities or projects up and running. Examples include a lack of knowledge, skills or resources, time-constraints, information asymmetry or communication problems. This is where intermediaries come into the picture. **Intermediary actors can act as bridge-builders and help initiatives overcome the diverse barriers they face.**

Key intermediaries in energy citizenship initiatives are grouped as:

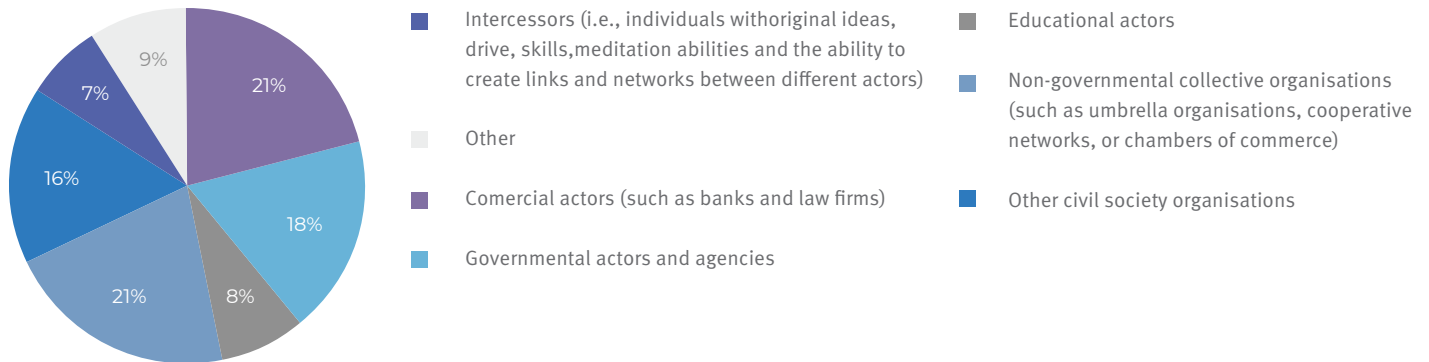


Figure 1. Distribution of types of intermediary actors in the analysis, by percentage (N34)

These types of intermediaries perform a wide range of services:

- **Organisational intermediation** such as setting up the legal statues of an initiative, providing capacity building or negotiating with administrative authorities;
- **Financial intermediation** such as capitalisation and resource mobilisation;
- **Scientific-technic intermediation** in the form of technical and scientific expertise provided by for example planners, architects, photovoltaic or wind power specialists or project management specialists;
- **Networking intermediation** that enables cooperation, exchange and networking between similar actors;
- **Information and communication intermediation** that can help make the case known, provide mediation or consultation services;
- **Regulatory and lobbying intermediation** mainly to undertake lobbying activities directed towards regulatory processes and decision-makers.

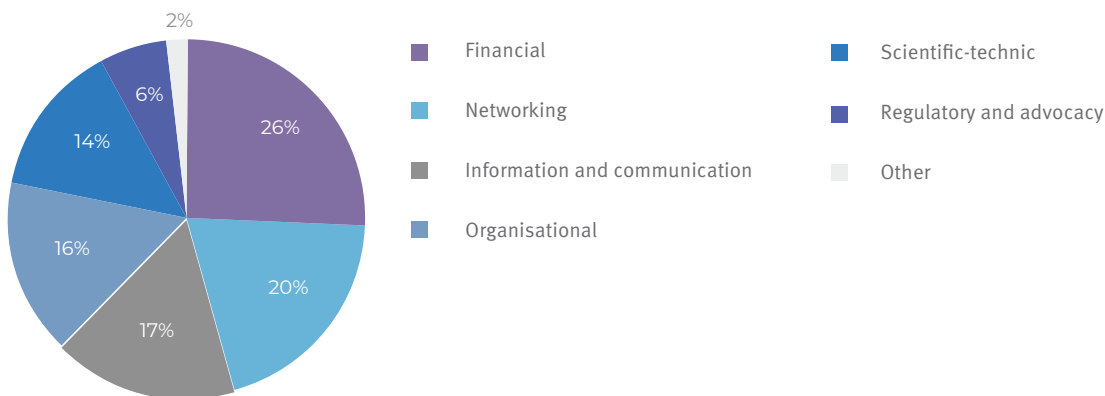


Figure 2: Distribution of the intermediation/services provided by the intermediary actors in the analysis, by percentage (N34)

## Main take-aways:

### Why is it important to further support energy citizenship ecosystems?

The analysis shows that a combination of intermediations were needed for energy citizenship initiatives to achieve their goals, providing diverse services across the development stages of the cases studied in Energy-PROSPECTS. More than 60% of the intermediations listed across the 34 cases were furthermore considered of high importance for the functioning of the cases, across all types. However, no two cases are identical, as each case is embedded into a unique and complex ecosystem of intermediation. Nonetheless, long-term, positive relationships with key intermediaries were found to be at the core of the cases' development over time.

**Financial and organisational intermediation were found to be the two most important types of intermediation across the cases and seem to go hand-in-hand.** Both kinds of intermediation are crucial in the early stages of the cases, to provide initial capital for the initiatives' activities and support organisational set-up, such as legal statues, registration and communication with authorities and funding organisations. For each kind of intermediation, some intermediary actors were found to be especially salient. For financial intermediation, those were governmental actors (33%) and commercial actors (23%). Regarding organisational intermediation, non-governmental collective actors were found to be especially important (39%).

**At the European level, the European Commission and REScoop were found to be especially influential in the goal achievement of energy citizenship initiatives.** The European Commission primarily acts as a financial intermediary via the funds and subsidies it provides, while REScoop provides valuable networking and knowledge exchange intermediation. On the one hand, this illustrates the importance of EU funds for the creation of cases, for example by providing initial capital, or for further development of cases through the participation in EU project consortiums. On the other hand, the administrative burden of accessing EU funding and projects was mentioned as a key barrier for many initiatives.

**Intermediation is not always successful or neutral.** In some instances, intermediary actors may champion certain innovations or represent certain interests that are influenced by their funding. This can negatively impact energy citizenship cases' contribution to a more democratic energy system, as they may be forced to adapt their activities and projects according to that vision. Furthermore, the analysis showed relationships with commercial intermediaries could be challenging. Oftentimes, the requirements of commercial banks are not adapted to the organisational structures and activities of energy citizenship initiatives, which makes it difficult for them to secure loans. Relationships with different levels of government were also found to be troublesome at times. In some cases a lack of appropriate support for the management of cooperatives and start-ups was found, in other cases the start of new projects was delayed or even blocked by the administrative burden of permitting, restrictions or state guarantees. In certain cases, the relationship with one civil servant or elected representative was found to be a crucial component to the success of projects. This finding points to the fragility of certain initiatives, as their success can depend on the willingness and stability of a single relationship.

To further support ENCI initiatives, more strategic support is needed to build their capacities, alleviate institutional barriers, and open up the system for their uptake and acceptance<sup>6</sup>. In this regard, intermediaries are a key part of the solution in accelerating the development and impact of energy citizenship initiatives. Intermediation is part of the increasingly polycentric governance of the energy transition, where new forms of governance are emerging to intervene in the transformation and decentralisation of energy systems. However, **intermediary work is often invisible. This analysis is one part of rendering the central role of intermediation for collective citizen action visible, but it is clear that energy citizenship initiatives will require transformative support in order to achieve their full potential and become viable alternatives to the ‘status quo’ of the current energy system.** How this transformative support can be configured will be covered in our upcoming Policy Briefs.

## Coming up from EnergyPROSPECTS

- Case reports of 40 in-depth case studies in Belgium, Bulgaria, France, Germany, Hungary, Ireland, Latvia, the Netherlands and Spain
- An empowerment toolkit for citizens and practitioners
- An exploration of business and social innovation models in energy citizenship initiatives and strategies for their further development
- Co-created prospective scenarios for the development of energy citizenship in the EU
- Policy recommendations aimed at the local, national and EU-level

Deliverable 4.1 – Strategic collective system building and institutional change: The nature and role of intermediation in making actors cooperate and transact with each other

Markantoni, Marianna; Debourdeau, Ariane; Craighton, Ali; Kemp, Rene; Vadovics, Edina; and Szöllőssy, Anita. 2023. 'Strategic collective system building and institutional change: The nature and role of intermediation in making actors cooperate and transact with each other'. EnergyPROSPECTS Deliverable 4.1, European Commission Grant Agreement No. 101022492.

<sup>6</sup> Warbroek, B. et al. (2018) 'The role of intermediaries in supporting local low-carbon energy initiatives', Sustainability, 10(7), p. 2450.

