



SunSharing

SunSharing - Supporting Solar Energy Communities in SEE

Citizen Energy Communities in Croatia: A Practical Guide

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1. Introduction

Citizen Energy Communities (CECs) are a transformative model for energy generation and distribution that places power directly in the hands of local communities. This approach not only democratizes energy systems but also enhances sustainability, reduces costs, and strengthens local resilience.

Key Features of CECs

1. **Decentralized Energy Systems:** Localized energy production and management reduce reliance on centralized systems.
2. **Collaborative Governance:** Community members participate equally in decision-making.
3. **Environmental Responsibility:** Encourages the adoption of renewable energy, cutting carbon emissions and protecting the environment.
4. **Economic and Social Benefits:** Provides cost savings, creates local jobs, and strengthens social cohesion.

2. Step-by-Step Guide to Establishing a CEC

1. Assess Community Needs and Goals

Identify local energy challenges and opportunities, such as the need for affordable energy or potential renewable energy sources. Define clear objectives to address these needs—whether reducing energy costs, achieving energy independence, or fostering environmental responsibility.

2. Engage the Community

Raise awareness through workshops, public discussions, and partnerships with local organizations. Community buy-in is essential for building trust and ensuring participation in the project.

3. Choose a Legal Structure

In Croatia, options include cooperatives, associations, or companies. Cooperatives are especially suitable for CECs due to their emphasis on democratic governance and equitable benefit-sharing.

4. Register with HERA

Submit an application to the Croatian Energy Regulatory Agency (HERA) for official recognition. Include details of membership, organizational structure, and project goals.

5. Plan and Finance the Project

Develop a business plan detailing technical, financial, and operational aspects. Secure funding through subsidies, EU grants, or innovative mechanisms like crowdfunding.

6. Implement and Monitor



Start with manageable projects such as rooftop solar installations. Establish monitoring systems to track energy production, environmental impact, and financial performance. Share regular updates with members to maintain transparency.

3. Guidelines for Local Governments

Local governments (LGs) are critical facilitators of Citizen Energy Communities. Their involvement can provide credibility, resources, and administrative support, accelerating the establishment and success of CECs.

Key Actions for Local Governments

1. Educate and Inform:

- Organize workshops to explain renewable energy benefits and the role of CECs.
- Publish guides on available subsidies, regulatory requirements, and project opportunities.

2. Facilitate and Support:

- Simplify administrative procedures for permits and approvals.
- Provide financial support, such as grants or co-financing for renewable energy projects.

3. Initiate and Lead by Example:

- Install renewable energy systems on public buildings like schools and municipal offices.
- Demonstrate feasibility and benefits, inspiring citizens to participate.

4. Collaborate with Stakeholders:

- Partner with NGOs, energy experts, and local businesses to maximize project impact.
- Build regional networks to share knowledge and best practices.

5. Address Energy Poverty:

- Design projects that include low-income households, ensuring access to affordable, clean energy.
- Use profits from renewable energy projects to subsidize energy costs for vulnerable populations.

6. Promote Education and Awareness:

- Promote renewable energy and sustainable topics from a young age (in kindergartens, schools, and colleges).
- Foster a culture of energy responsibility and community participation.

4. Crowdfunding for Renewable Energy Projects

Crowdfunding provides a powerful platform for financing renewable energy initiatives. It enables communities to pool resources and build public support while overcoming financial barriers.

Steps for Crowdfunding Initiatives

1. Develop the Idea:

- Clearly define the project, highlighting its social, economic, and environmental benefits.
- Example: A solar power system for a school or market benefiting the entire community.

2. Conduct Feasibility Analysis:

- Perform technical and economic assessments to ensure the project's viability.
- Include expected energy savings, potential returns, and environmental impact.

3. Build the Team:

- Assemble a team of experts in energy, finance, and communications.
- Engage local leaders to boost trust and participation.

4. Create a Communication Plan:

- Use clear, transparent messaging to explain the project's goals and benefits.
- Leverage social media, local events, and traditional media to reach potential contributors.

5. Launch the Campaign:

- Choose a suitable crowdfunding platform (or create a local one).
- Set realistic funding goals and offer incentives such as reduced energy costs or community recognition for contributors.

6. Secure Funding and Transparency:

- Provide detailed updates on campaign progress and fund allocation.
- Ensure all investments translate into measurable benefits for the community.

7. Implement the Project:

- Begin installation or construction, using local resources and expertise.
- Highlight community involvement during the implementation phase.

8. Maintain Engagement Post-Campaign:

- Report on the project's outcomes and long-term benefits.

- Engage contributors in follow-up initiatives, fostering sustained community involvement.



Figure 1 Forum of the energy communities in Croatia - national level meeting

5. Benefits of Citizen Energy Communities

Economic Benefits

- Reduced energy costs through collective investments.
- Revenue generation from selling surplus energy to the grid.
- Job creation in renewable energy sectors.

Environmental Benefits

- Significant reduction in greenhouse gas emissions.
- Promotion of renewable energy adoption.
- Enhanced resilience to climate change.

Social Benefits

- Strengthened community bonds through shared goals.
- Reduced energy poverty by providing affordable energy solutions.
- Increased public awareness and education on sustainable energy practices.

6. Examples in Practice

ZEZ Sunce: A notable example of a successful crowdfunding initiative in Croatia. This project gathered €140,000 in under 10 days to fund a 200 kW solar installation on a local market roof in Križevci. The initiative demonstrated the effectiveness of community-driven energy projects, fostering collaboration and transparency.



Figure 2 ZEZ Sunce team

Local Government Leadership: Municipalities across Croatia are increasingly integrating renewable energy into public infrastructure, inspiring citizens to participate in the energy transition. By following these detailed guidelines, communities, individuals, and local governments in Croatia can establish Citizen Energy Communities and leverage crowdfunding to build a sustainable, resilient energy future.