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Abbreviations

ACCE	Access to Capital for Community Energy
CEFS	Community Energy Financing Scheme
WP	Work Package

Final Publishable Report: Access to Capital for Community Energy (ACCE)

1. Executive Summary

Citizen-led financing is already emerging as a powerful driver of Europe's energy transition. Across the continent, communities are pioneering innovative collective financing mechanisms that connect citizens directly with renewable energy projects. These Community Energy Financing Schemes (CEFS) not only mobilise underutilised citizen capital, but also generate broad public support, strengthen energy security, and ensure that the benefits of clean energy stay local.

The Access to Capital for Community Energy (ACCE) project (2022–2025) has identified, tested, and scaled some of the most promising CEFS models in Europe. Pilot projects in Croatia, Romania, Germany, Spain, Belgium, and the Netherlands demonstrate the versatility and impact of CEFS—ranging from collective rooftop solar and community heating funds to ethical bank partnerships and bulk procurement schemes. Together, they show that citizen financing is not a niche instrument but a central enabler of Europe's climate and energy goals.

CEFS achieve what conventional financing tools often cannot:

- pooling projects to overcome financing thresholds;
- diversifying and reducing risk through portfolio approaches and blended finance;
- combining funds from different financing institutions;
- transferring knowledge and expertise to level the playing field for energy communities.

To unlock their full potential, however, enabling conditions are essential. ACCE partners call for three priority measures:

1. Targeted technical assistance to support communities in designing and managing financing schemes;
2. Policy makers should transpose relevant directives, creating favourable legal frameworks for energy communities, including viable business models;
3. Secondary structures of energy communities (e.g., Federations) provide invaluable support for the set up an operation of CEFS. They should be acknowledged and structurally supported by policy makers and financial institutions.

Based on its pilots, ACCE has developed a comprehensive toolbox—including a Financial

Handbook, Self-Management Guide, and RES Development Guide—and conceptualised a European Intermediary, embedded in REScoop.eu, to provide long-term support and facilitate replication of CEFS across Europe.

With the right policies and partnerships in place, CEFS can be scaled dramatically—mobilising billions in citizen capital, creating thousands of local projects, and making Europe’s energy transition both more democratic and more resilient. By the middle of 2024, the project had already successfully mobilized and triggered a total of €738 million, reflecting its significant scale and impact.

2. Introduction

Community energy is a cornerstone of a just, inclusive, and secure energy transition. By enabling citizens, small businesses, and municipalities to invest in and co-own renewable energy and efficiency infrastructure, it not only democratizes the energy system but also reduces dependence on imported fossil fuels—thereby strengthening Europe’s energy security. Despite this potential, access to finance remains one of the most pressing barriers for energy communities.

To address this issue, the ACCE project focused on designing Community Energy Financing Schemes (CEFS). These are financial instruments that bridge the gap between citizen investors and the capital requirements of renewable energy and energy efficiency projects. By tailoring financial products to the specific characteristics of community energy initiatives, CEFS play a crucial role in unlocking local investment potential, scaling up renewables, and driving demand-side savings.

The ACCE project set out to identify best practices, standardise successful approaches, and replicate CEFS models across different national contexts. Between November 2022 and October 2025, a consortium led by REScoop.eu collaborated with ten partner organisations to achieve this goal.

3. The Financing Challenge for Community Energy

Community energy initiatives face a paradox. On one hand, the European Union estimates that citizens could contribute up to €176 billion to the energy transition by 2030. On the other hand, many energy communities struggle to access the capital needed to develop their projects.

Several barriers explain this disconnect. Firstly, energy communities often operate on a small scale, making it difficult to attract traditional financing. Secondly, regulatory hurdles such as prospectus requirements and uncertainties around State Aid create legal and administrative burdens. Finally, the funding landscape is fragmented, and many public funding schemes are either inaccessible or unsuited to citizen-led projects.

This not only slows down the energy transition but also represents a missed opportunity for financial institutions. Well-managed energy cooperatives typically have strong repayment records and long-term community backing, making them relatively low-risk borrowers. Yet because suitable financing channels are lacking, banks are unable to connect to these projects, leaving large volumes of citizen savings underutilised. Even capturing a small share of the estimated €176 billion in potential citizen capital would represent a significant and stable investment opportunity for lenders.

These challenges underline the rationale for CEFS. By pooling citizen capital and designing financing mechanisms that reflect the social, environmental, and local value of community energy, CEFS provide a concrete solution to the financing gap—mobilising citizens, enabling banks to engage, and accelerating Europe’s transition.

4. The ACCE Approach

Concept of CEFS

Community Energy Financing Schemes (CEFS) are citizen-led financing mechanisms designed to channel resources into community-driven renewable energy projects. Unlike conventional finance tools, CEFS are at least partially controlled by citizens and are structured to maximise social and environmental impact rather than purely financial return. They directly address key barriers faced by energy communities —such as lack of access to capital, regulatory hurdles, and fragmented funding landscapes— by providing tailored, collective solutions.

CEFS added values

The ACCE project identified several ways in which CEFS create added value for the community energy movement:

- **Pooling projects to overcome financing thresholds:** Small projects often fall below the minimum investment size of banks or institutional investors. CEFS bundle multiple projects together, thereby reaching the critical mass needed to attract financing.
- **Pooling risks across a portfolio / enabling blended finance:** By diversifying across projects and technologies, CEFS reduce the exposure of each community to individual project risks. This makes them more attractive to financiers and helps overcome the absence of tailored risk mitigation products.
- **Pooling funds from different financing institutions:** CEFS can combine capital from ethical banks, public funds, and citizen investors, bridging the gap between local communities and institutional finance that is often fragmented or inaccessible.

- **Transferring knowledge and creating a level playing field:** By standardising contracts, procedures, and financial practices, CEFS help energy communities navigate complex regulations such as prospectus requirements and state aid rules. This knowledge transfer lowers transaction costs and addresses the lack of institutional awareness of community-led models.

Methodology and project phases

The ACCE project advanced CEFS development through three interconnected phases:

- **Research and standardisation:** Over 50 existing CEFS were mapped and analysed to extract key success factors and best practices. This phase responded to the knowledge gap and lack of market data that hinder financial planning for community energy.
- **Replication and expansion:** Pilots were launched in five countries to test and adapt CEFS models to different regulatory and market environments, directly addressing barriers such as fragmented national frameworks and limited institutional awareness.
- **Exploitation and scaling:** Based on pilot experiences, ACCE partners developed business cases, policy recommendations, and replicable models to enable CEFS to expand and become mainstream solutions to Europe's community energy financing gap.

Key tools and outputs developed

To support communities and policymakers, the project delivered a set of practical tools:

- The ACCE Toolbox (<https://acce.rescoop.eu/resources>) : A comprehensive resource library that offers curated tools, written materials, and webinars to guide stakeholders in developing effective CEFS. The toolbox addresses both introductory and advanced needs: from explaining what CEFS are, to enabling communities to design their own financing mechanisms and overcome regulatory or contractual barriers. Importantly, it is structured around three tailored entry points for the project's main audiences:
 - Public institutions — Guidance on how to lower financing barriers through direct funding, guarantees, and enabling frameworks. Case studies show how public funds can leverage citizen and private capital, sometimes achieving a factor of 40.
 - Private finance organisations — Resources on aggregation, risk mitigation, and standardisation, which help unlock new market opportunities and reduce due diligence costs. The toolbox also provides examples of partnerships between CEFS managers, ethical banks, and mainstream financial institutions.
 - Energy communities — Practical guides and peer-learning materials on how to design and manage CEFS, complemented by examples of successful citizen-led schemes across Europe. These resources build financial literacy and provide step-

by-step frameworks to address common barriers.

By providing these stakeholder-specific pathways, the toolbox not only disseminates knowledge but also strengthens multi-stakeholder collaboration —helping to bridge the gap between citizen capital and institutional finance.

- **Financial Handbook and Business Case:** Practical investment guidance and case studies that show how CEFS can overcome financing barriers such as lack of scale, high transaction costs, or perceived risks.
- **Policy and Enabling Framework Analysis:** An in-depth assessment of EU and national regulations, providing recommendations to reduce administrative burdens and create a more supportive legal environment for community-led finance.

Together, these elements show how the ACCE approach not only piloted CEFS in diverse contexts but also built a replicable framework to overcome structural barriers to community energy finance.

Country Case Studies

France

In France, Energie Partagée has developed innovative financing solutions to support the scale-up of energy communities. The aim was to address the growing needs of communities expanding into heat production and distribution. A proof-of-concept financing offer was created to meet the crucial short-term financing needs of energy communities replicating small-scale district heating networks.

Within the ACCE project, more than seven citizen-led operators were supported, resulting in the financing of over 15 heating projects. Through Energie Partagée Investissement, a total of €3.58 million was assessed and approved, of which €2.06 million has already been disbursed to the selected energy communities.

This represents a novel approach, as it supports not only the projects themselves but also the scaling-up and market readiness of the communities behind them. It helps to lower the barriers these communities face when financing portfolios of projects, especially as they take on greater risks during the development phases. Importantly, Energie Partagée provides strategic guidance and financial expertise to help communities design effective financing strategies. In parallel, it offers hands-on technical support to standardize processes and develop scalable project models.

Looking forward, this approach should be expanded to other technologies—in particular, mid-size power generation projects—to evolve into a viable and replicable financing product for energy communities. This would enable a transition from an innovative offer within an existing CEFS to a stand-alone, scalable CEFS model, capable of driving broader community-led energy development.

Spain

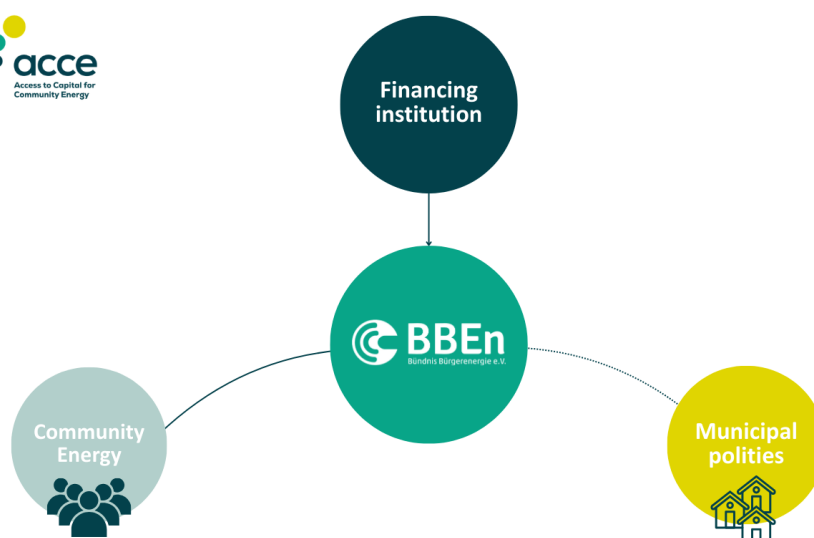
In Spain, the cooperative Goiener partnered with ethical banks Coop57 and Fiare Banca Etica to support citizen-led solar projects. Goiener acts as a technical partner, assisting with both grant and loan applications and lowering the risk for lenders. Their financing model has mobilised over €500,000 across eight communities, demonstrating how targeted technical support and ethical finance partnerships can catalyse local investment.

In addition, Goiener developed a public concession model whereby an Energy Community in the Basque Country will promote and manage collective self-consumption facilities in municipal buildings for 30 years, as well as offering additional services to residents, all in exchange for an annual payment and part of the energy generated by these facilities, which will be consumed by members of the Energy Community. The financing will once again be provided by ethical credit institutions.



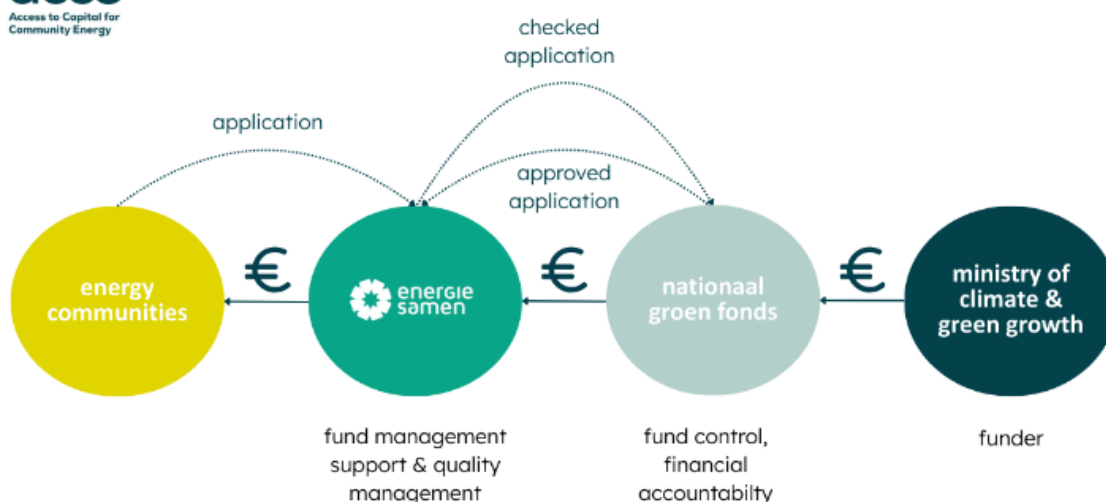
Germany

In Germany, the ACCE pilot focused on overcoming institutional and financing barriers to larger-scale community energy projects. By exploring models involving blended finance and municipal collaboration, German partners are setting the stage for CEFS tailored to higher-impact, integrated renewable initiatives.



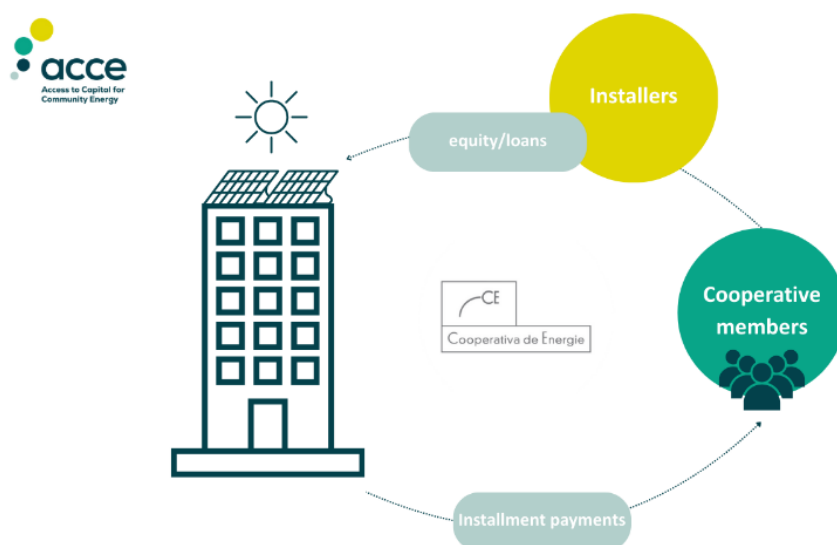
Netherlands

In the Netherlands, Energie Samen launched a €25 million development fund dedicated to community-led district heating projects. This fund offers phased support—starting with early-stage feasibility and engagement funding, and progressing to co-investment with municipalities and utilities. Importantly, Energie Samen provides hands-on technical assistance, helping to standardise processes and build replicable project models.



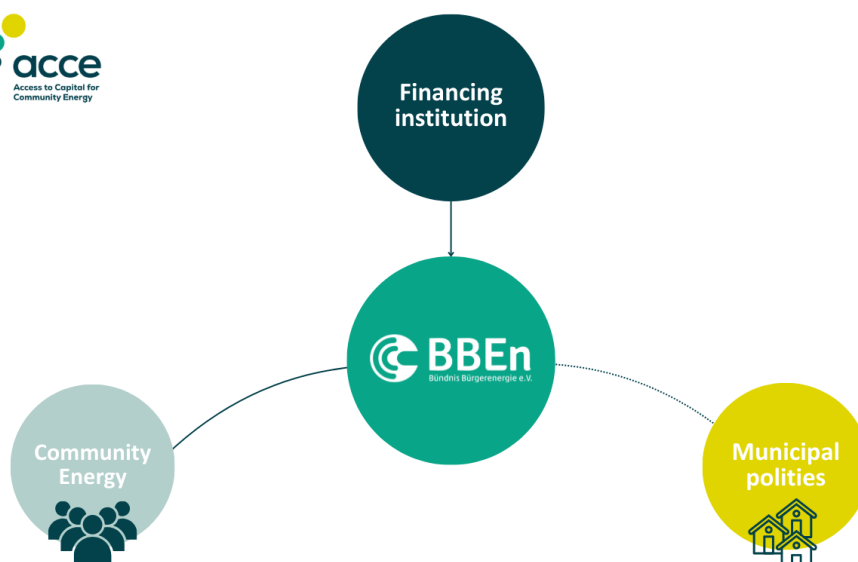
Romania

In Romania, the cooperative Cooperativa de Energie developed a CEFS model to facilitate solar installations for apartment buildings and municipalities rooftops. The scheme enables residents to repay their share of the investment through savings on electricity bills. Funding is sourced from cooperative members, acting as both investors and lenders. Though still at a formative stage, this model shows strong potential, particularly when supported by municipalities.



Germany

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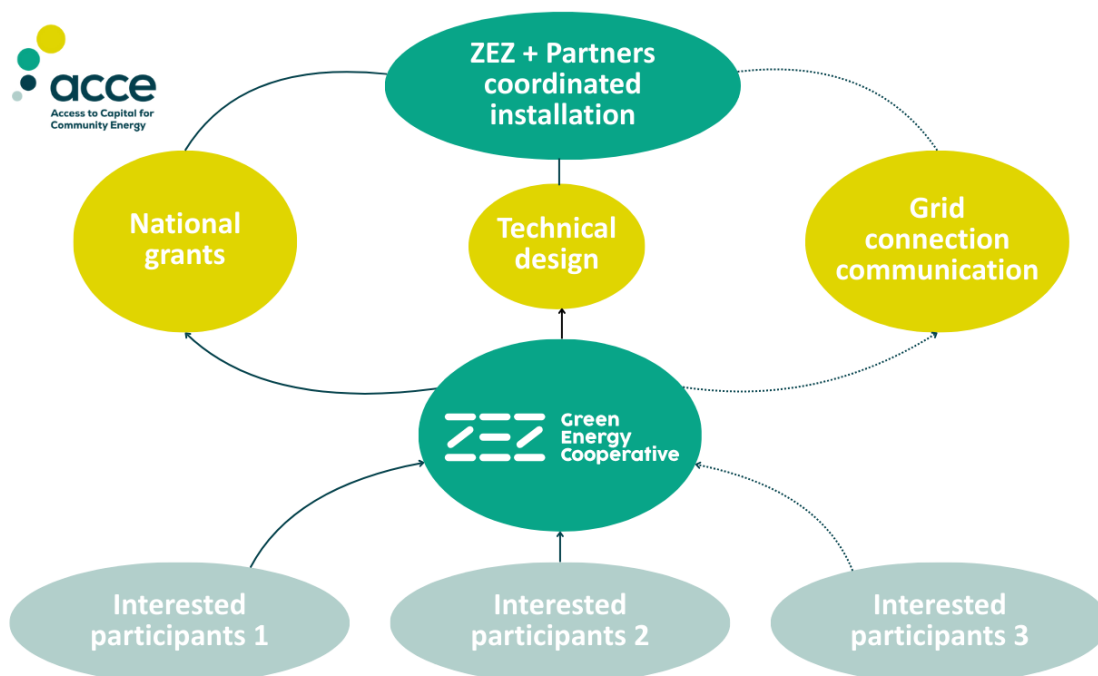
Belgium

In Belgium, a CEFS has been developed by Ecopower and umbrella organization REScoops Flanders to finance the development of heat networks. To date, there is no financial support for this from the government. Given the government's goals, it can be expected that such support will be forthcoming.

Thanks to ACCE, additional development became possible at a European CEFS. REScoop MECISE, based in Belgium, was strengthened with the knowledge of ACCE. This provided a first major collective (re)investment.

Croatia

In Croatia, the Green Energy Cooperative implemented a collective purchasing programme for solar panels. By negotiating bulk discounts and collaborating with banks for favourable loan terms, the scheme has helped citizens access national grants and install rooftop PV systems. This model is an early step toward a full CEFS structure, and efforts are underway to expand it in light of changing net metering policies.



6. Lessons Learned

The implementation of CEFS across diverse contexts revealed several common success factors. Chief among them is the presence of strong secondary structures —such as federations and support networks— that provide guidance, capacity-building, and advocacy. Cooperation with ethical financiers and local authorities also proved essential for creating trust and unlocking financing opportunities.

At the same time, several barriers consistently emerged. These include the complexity of prospectus regulations, limited institutional awareness of community energy models, and the absence of tailored financial products. In the ACCE pilots, these challenges were mitigated through strategic partnerships, pooled project portfolios, and the establishment of revolving funds that reduce individual project risks.

Building on these experiences, further insights were drawn from the analytical work in D4.2 and D4.3:

- **Maturity of the sector matters.** The ability to implement large-scale CEFS depends heavily on the maturity of national community energy movements. In some countries, the sector is

ready to manage large-scale funds, while in others entry-level financing schemes and financial literacy training are more appropriate starting points.

- **New CEFS vs. improving existing solutions.** In certain contexts, it is more effective to adapt and strengthen existing financing tools rather than create entirely new CEFS. Choosing the right pathway requires assessing market maturity, legal frameworks, and community needs.
- **Role of initiators.** CEFS can be driven either by individual energy communities or by umbrella organisations and federations. The latter often play a catalytic role by aggregating demand, standardising processes, and providing policy advocacy alongside financing.
- **Different pathways to scale.** Contrasting methodologies emerged for CEFS expansion: some schemes benefit from pilot investments that demonstrate proof of concept, while others require a longer lead time to gradually build trust, partnerships, and capacity.
- **Data gaps.** A persistent lack of reliable market data for community energy makes financial forecasting and risk assessment difficult. This increases transaction costs and highlights the need for better data collection at national and European levels.
- **Federations as enablers.** Developing CEFS goes hand in hand with building strong national federations. Financing initiatives often uncover regulatory and structural barriers that require coordinated policy advice, knowledge sharing, and innovation —all functions best carried out by federations.
- **Capacity-building as a foundation.** In less mature contexts, strengthening financial literacy and developing entry-level financing schemes are essential first steps before moving toward more complex CEFS structures.

In sum, CEFS cannot be viewed in isolation from the broader ecosystem of community energy. Financing tools both depend on —and contribute to—the development of strong federations, enabling policies, and capable project pipelines. The ACCE pilots showed that while there is no single blueprint, CEFS can be tailored to diverse contexts if grounded in local realities and supported by secondary structures that combine finance, policy, and capacity-building functions.

7. Policy and market recommendations

For CEFS to flourish, **an enabling legal and regulatory framework is necessary**. In countries that have not (or only partially) transposed the Renewable Energy Directive and the Electricity Market Directive,¹ energy communities are constrained by lack of available legal forms, viable business

¹ <https://www.rescoop.eu/policy/transposition-tracker>

models, and an uneven playing field against large market actors. Energy communities need a strong legal, institutional, and governance framework that secures their role and participation in energy markets. Energy communities should be acknowledged for both the social, economic and environmental impact they bring.² This includes access to policy and financing decision-making processes, favourable regulations, and the ability to maintain control over their projects.

Another key determinant for the growth of CEFS is **access to knowledge**. Dedicated capacity building programs, targeting energy communities, managing authorities of (EU) funds, and policy-makers, can significantly help the movement grow. One-Stop Shops (OSS) could be an important instrument within this capacity-building landscape. By serving as dedicated knowledge hubs, they provide targeted technical, legal, and financial guidance to energy communities and at the same stay close to institutional actors. Such OSS services are increasingly offered by national and regional Governments, helping citizens set up energy communities with viable and financially sustainable business models. Member States should move towards establishing national or regional One Stop Shops, as called for by the revised Energy Efficiency and Energy Performance of Buildings Directives.

Capacity building should be geared towards financial institutions, so that they also understand the unique models of energy communities. The example of the Realisation Fund in the Netherlands shows that banks can step in and help create a viable CEFS, backed with adequate standardisation of documents, risk mitigation, and technical assistance by an expert organisation for energy communities, such as Energie Samen.

Oftentimes expert organisations in community energy (e.g., a national federation or coalition of energy communities, hereby referred to as 'secondary structures') step up to fill the role of knowledge-broker, providing peer-to-peer support. **Secondary structures are present in all 7 countries of the ACCE project, and provide invaluable capacity building and policy recommendation support.** The EU and national governments should recognize and support these secondary structures, ensuring they are involved in strategic decisions related to community energy development, such as future legislation and financing opportunities. Already examples from France,³ and Wallonia,⁴ indicate that national and regional governments have dedicated structural funding to secondary structures, thus recognising their value in helping the movement grow.

Technical assistance and capacity building are often geared towards helping energy communities access (EU) funds. The most successful CEFS identified in the ACCE project (e.g., the Development

²<https://www.rescoop.eu/news-and-events/news/the-social-impact-of-energy-communities-ten-benefits-they-bring>

³<https://www.rescoop.eu/news-and-events/stories/success-story-ensuring-eu-funds-reach-local-energy-communities>

⁴<https://www.lalibre.be/dernieres-depeches/2025/07/03/la-wallonie-designe-cinq-federations-representatives-des-entreprises-deconomie-sociale-ONAJEAOUZND5JAOUNL747MFXIE/>

Fund in the Netherlands), include a first-mover/first-loss capitalisation by public funds. **Therefore, public funds can play a key role to help set up a CEFS.** This is also shown in the Spanish CEFS that was set up as part of the ACCE project, whereby energy communities that have qualified for funds from the Recovery Facility, are able to access bridging loans from ethical banks, facilitated by the expert organisation Goiener.⁵

Lastly, partnerships are essential to grow the community energy movement. Municipalities play a crucial role in supporting energy communities, although the maturity of these relationships varies across countries. Local authorities are inclined to collaborate with community energy groups to provide affordable and clean energy to citizens. Collaboration between energy communities and private developers is also a field that can be further explored. While 100% citizen-owned renewable energy projects should remain the standard, partnerships with renewable energy developers and local authorities can be mutually beneficial as long as there are strong safeguards to prevent corporate capture.

In summary, there are multiple and overlaying regulatory and market conditions that can favour the creation of a CEFS.

Suggested actions for key stakeholders:

Policymakers

- The legal framework at the national level should explicitly clarify state aid regulations to enable energy communities to access public and private funding without undue restrictions.
- Fully transpose the relevant EU Directives to create an enabling framework for energy communities to grow;
- Mobilise financial institutions to create a network of 'ethical and alternative financiers' that could support energy communities by helping capitalise CEFS at the national level. The European Investment Bank can create a dedicated guarantee mechanism to unlock cheaper financing for energy communities at national levels⁶;
- Acknowledge and structurally support secondary structures of energy communities, as they can provide the right technical know-how to establish a CEFS;

⁵ <https://acce.rescoop.eu/news/connecting-ethical-finance-with-citizen-energy-a-spanish-cefs>

⁶ <https://www.rescoop.eu/toolbox/fit-for-communities-ensuring-the-next-eu-budget-can-support-citizen-energy-projects-effectively>

- EU funds, including the Social Climate Fund⁷, should be leveraged to support energy communities. Existing programs, such as Horizon and LIFE should keep earmarking resources for community energy projects.
- Provide capacity building programs, including through a dedicated OSS service, to help get community energy projects off the ground. Increasing the number of energy communities can create robust pipelines for new CEFS;
- Encourage partnerships between energy communities, municipalities, and private developers. This may include dedicated citizen-participation criteria in public procurement procedures. Financial support for large renewable energy developers, including through the Competition Fund, should be conditioned on measures that increase citizen participation. This could include share offerings, donations to local energy communities, or the creation of revolving community energy funds.

Overall, CEFS can be an invaluable tool to crowd in private capital at scale to the (democratic) energy transition. They should be acknowledged by policy makers, and integrated into broader energy and climate strategic planning (as is for example the case in the Netherlands).

Financial institutions

- Develop networks of ethical and alternative financiers to support CEFS.
- Create and expand tailored financial instruments—guarantees, bridging loans, and risk mitigation products—that recognize the unique models of energy communities.
- Collaborate with expert organizations and secondary structures to improve the standardization and accessibility of finance.

Energy communities

- Engage actively with capacity-building programs and OSS services to develop viable, sustainable business models.
- Participate in strategic partnerships with municipalities and private developers, ensuring citizen ownership remains central.
- Advocate for legal and financial support, emphasizing the social, economic, and environmental benefits of community-led energy projects.

⁷ <https://www.rescoop.eu/policy/financing-tracker/social-climate-fund>

8. Outlook and future steps

The ACCE project demonstrated that CEFS are not only feasible but essential for a fair and democratic energy transition. To ensure their continued growth and impact, the project partners propose the creation of a European Intermediary embedded in REScoop.eu. This entity will serve as a facilitation and coordination body, offering services such as project pipeline development, funding matchmaking, technical assistance, and monitoring.

The next phase will focus on replicating CEFS in additional countries, particularly in Eastern and Southern Europe where enabling conditions are less developed but interest in community energy is growing. This includes working with municipalities to create conducive local policies, supporting the formation of new cooperatives, and developing financing tools adapted to local markets.

The ACCE partnership will continue to refine and promote the ACCE Toolbox, expand its network, and advocate for CEFS integration into EU and national energy and climate strategies. Stakeholders from all sectors are invited to contribute to this collective effort to reshape the energy system from the bottom up.

9. Call to Action: How private financiers can engage

Community Energy Financing Schemes (CEFS) offer private financiers a unique opportunity to invest in sustainable, citizen-led projects that generate measurable social, environmental, and economic returns. As CEFS continue to grow in number and scope, they need mission-aligned financial partners who can contribute to unlocking their full potential.

Every euro invested in a Community Energy Financing Scheme can crowd in 40 to 60 euros of additional (private) capital, as shown in the cases of the Netherlands and France. Financiers contributing to a CEFS can benefit from reputational advantages, access to a new market segment (the community energy movement), as well as improve their Environmental Social and Governance credentials.

- **Environment:** community energy projects enhance renewable energy and energy savings, thus contributing to CO2 reduction
- **Society:** community energy projects promote multi-stakeholder participation, as well as the inclusion and empowerment of vulnerable groups
- **Governance:** community energy projects promote democratic participation and governance in the energy transition

We invite financial institutions, ethical banks, and impact investors to collaborate with ACCE and its partners in the following ways:

1. **Co-design tailored financial products:** Work with CEFS initiators to develop accessible debt instruments, subordinated loans, or blended finance mechanisms suited to small-scale, community-driven projects.
2. **De-risk citizen investment:** Contribute to guarantee funds or co-investment facilities that reduce perceived risks and improve bankability for energy communities.
3. **Join the European Intermediary Network:** Engage in dialogue and knowledge exchange with ACCE partners to build a robust pipeline of projects and scale collective financing tools.

By partnering with CEFS, financiers can access a growing and underexplored market, diversify their portfolios with low-carbon community infrastructure, and support Europe's transition to a more democratic and resilient energy system.

To explore partnership opportunities or learn more, contact the ACCE coordination team via REScoop.eu or visit acce.rescoop.eu.