
COMMUNITY &
LOCAL BENEFITS
from electricity grid development
Renewables
Grid Initiative

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INTRODUCTION

Electricity grids are the backbone of the European energy transition. Building new grids and enhancing existing ones is more essential than ever to support the fast growth of renewable energy and electrification. However, undertakings as large as grid projects cannot be planned and implemented without considering the context they are built in and the environments and communities they affect. Ideally, the public is brought along for every step of the grid building process and affected local communities are able to experience meaningful benefits stemming from electricity infrastructure projects.

The importance of public engagement is expressed in the European Commission's 2023 Pact for Engagement, a pan-European voluntary agreement by Member States, regulators, transmission and distribution system operators, civil society (including RGI) and other actors to advance engagement in electricity grid development. Benefit sharing in grid development is an essential part of this agreement, stating that:

> *There is a need to reinforce the engagement framework towards the public into a regular and meaningful collective effort that harnesses trust and participation in grid development, softens the impact on communities and nature, **redistributes benefits** and enhances nature protection.*

For many years, the understanding of benefit sharing and community gains related to grid projects have largely focused on monetary compensations for landowners who are directly affected by projects, or direct community payments.

The aim of this brochure is to show the value of a more holistic approach to community and local benefits (CLB), considering value creation from social, environmental, and economic aspects, as well as fairness and legitimacy, rather than focusing on monetary considerations only. Following our previous work on community payments, this publication presents key elements which support a more wide-ranging approach to community and local benefits, backed by existing best practices from European grid operators.

While this publication only reflects RGI's positions, it also contributes to our joint efforts to implement the EU Pact for Engagement alongside the European Commission (DG ENER) and the EU Agency for the Cooperation of Energy Regulators (ACER), providing evidence on how community and local benefits schemes support meaningful stakeholder engagement and how they can allow for faster implementation of electricity grid projects. It builds on RGI's continuous work on public engagement, as well as on dedicated research and data collection on community and local benefits surrounding the development of electricity grid infrastructure (*see a selected list of resources on page 28*).

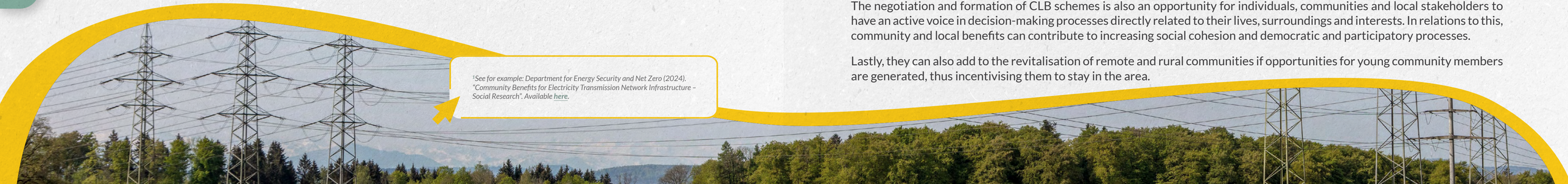
DEFINING
COMMUNITY & LOCAL BENEFITS

Community and local benefits (CLB) developed in the context of electricity grid infrastructure refer to measures implemented primarily by, but not limited to, electricity grid operators that bring added value to communities affected by the infrastructure in their vicinity. These benefits aim to improve the economic, social, and/or environmental conditions of communities and individuals, including, but not limited to, targeted compensations in response to the direct impact of a grid project. Measures can include monetary and non-monetary benefits. These measures, as well as the processes leading to them should be transparent, inclusive, and flexible to best meet communities' needs. Ideally, these benefits are developed in cooperation with local residents and as early as possible in the grid development process.

UNDERSTANDING
COMMUNITY & LOCAL BENEFITS SCHEMES

Planning and implementing community and local benefits is not without its challenges. It is possible that conflicting interests emerge among community members or between the community and project promoters. Over time, as projects evolve, there might also be changes in needs and preferences of community members and other stakeholders. Or, there may be claims that the benefit schemes are an attempt to "bribe" local communities to support a certain grid project[1]. There are many ways to overcome challenges such as these, for example by creating a clear, transparent and inclusive process that explains the need for a grid project while also highlighting the opportunities for the community (*more info on this on pages 10/11 of this brochure*).

The pursuit of meaningful community and local benefit approaches can yield a wide range of positive results for all stakeholders involved. Both project promoters and local stakeholders can benefit greatly from their implementation.



[1] *See for example: Department for Energy Security and Net Zero (2024). "Community Benefits for Electricity Transmission Network Infrastructure – Social Research". Available here.*

Why are community and local benefits important for grid operators?

For grid operators, community and local benefit schemes can have a positive effect on public and local acceptance of electricity infrastructure projects. Recognising the importance of participatory processes and teaming up with communities to jointly work on the development and implementation of CLB schemes can be a way to strengthen communication with local stakeholders and build trust.

Community and local benefits can help foster a local "culture of sustainability" by aligning project developers' corporate sustainability efforts with broader community development goals, while also strengthening public understanding of—and support for—the energy transition. Such activities have an effect beyond any specific grid project and can be very useful for future projects as well as contributing to the reputation of grid operators as sustainable leaders.

Why are community and local benefits important for communities?

CLB schemes can provide additional funds for community development beyond (mandated) compensations, improving thereby social and environmental well-being in the area. Investing in schools and playgrounds, educational programmes or nature protection are some tangible examples of this practice.

The negotiation and formation of CLB schemes is also an opportunity for individuals, communities and local stakeholders to have an active voice in decision-making processes directly related to their lives, surroundings and interests. In relations to this, community and local benefits can contribute to increasing social cohesion and democratic and participatory processes.

Lastly, they can also add to the revitalisation of remote and rural communities if opportunities for young community members are generated, thus incentivising them to stay in the area.

EMPOWERING COMMUNITY & LOCAL BENEFITS

Community and local benefits are more likely to reach their full potential if they receive buy-in form both local stakeholders and project developers. The following elements can increase the likelihood of buy-in from both groups:

Community empowerment

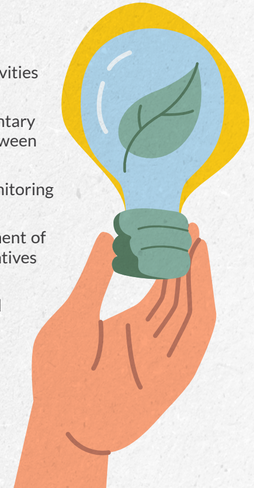
- Community and local benefits schemes should target a community as much as possible, rather than individuals. This will likely increase acceptance of the process as well as the outcomes, building a relationship of trust between the grid operator and locality.
- Legitimacy can be increased if benefits represent the interests of different groups within a community, especially those people who are not experienced in participatory processes and/or hard-to-reach (e.g., youth, young families, digitally underserved groups).
- Critical voices against a grid project and planned community and local benefits schemes should be heard and discussed openly. This may reduce negative attitudes and increase acceptability of the local benefit sharing process.
- Depending on the local needs, capacities, resources, experience and existing legal frameworks, it is highly beneficial if local stakeholders have a certain degree of autonomy over the decision-making processes for CLB schemes.

Lasting community value

- Affected communities should be approached as early as possible in the benefits scheme development process (and, ideally, in the grid project's planning process) to identify what their local needs are and how they may be fulfilled. A tailored CLB scheme will be more beneficial to both communities and project promoters.
- The legitimacy of CLB schemes in the eyes of communities will likely increase if they are designed to provide the latter with revenues and/or other gains in the long run compared to a one-time payment or activity.
- To ensure longevity of implemented benefits, local institutions need to be ready and capable to take over parts of management of the CLB schemes after the grid operator is no longer continuously present in the area. In case local capacities are lacking, capacity building is required, preferably as part of the CLB scheme itself.

Clear and transparent procedures

- CLB schemes should not be a supplementary element added at the final phase of project planning or public engagement activities but rather considered from the outset to ensure the best possible design.
- Ideally, the objectives, processes and resources dedicated to community and local benefits schemes should be complementary to but distinct from the grid operator's public engagement or public relations activities, so as not to create a confusion between engagement practices and benefit sharing practices.
- Legitimacy is likely to increase if CLB schemes include clear, pre-determined criteria for selecting beneficiaries, as well as monitoring and mediation mechanisms (ideally by a trusted third-party).
- The mandate of CLB schemes can be strengthened if they are anchored in formal or legal agreements that ensure fulfilment of terms by all sides involved. The development of agreements and benefit schemes should be done alongside representatives empowered by the community to communicate their views.
- Clear, well-documented and accessible two-way communication and information-sharing through simplified tools and platforms allow for all parties to be heard.
- Legitimacy and acceptance are likely to increase even more if communication between the project promoters and local stakeholders is done in person and on-site, as this allows both parties to quickly clarify possible uncertainties and builds trust between involved parties.



DELIVERING MEANINGFUL COMMUNITY & LOCAL BENEFITS

There are already many existing practices that can provide inspiration for meaningful and holistic community and local benefits. This section dives deeper into different approaches to community and local benefits and provides examples of best practices that have been implemented by European grid operators.

To highlight different focus areas, the approaches shared below are divided into addressing communities' economic, social and environmental needs. However, it is important to note that CLB approaches can – and ideally should – combine and cover several different aspects to create a holistic approach that serves many facets and groups of the community.

Addressing communities' **economic needs** can be achieved via one or several of the below approaches:

Developing financial mechanisms or instruments with local stakeholders to invest dedicated resources in the community. These mechanisms allocate funds for local benefits from the grid project and distribute or spend them according to pre-determined local needs and criteria. Management of these mechanisms can be taken over by the municipality and elected community. To maximise its impact, the mechanism and/or revenues it generates should serve the community for years to come, for example through sustainable monetary value creation.

Developing/re-developing local infrastructure. Resources from benefits schemes can be directed to address local needs that would otherwise have been postponed or unachievable for financial reasons. For example, investments in renewables and/or energy efficiency measures in local public buildings will lead to savings on electricity and heating, which can be directed into other local needs. Other long-term beneficial infrastructure could be pathways for pedestrians and bicycles, or community recreational areas.

Supporting local businesses and supply chains and/or integrating them into the grid project, ensuring that the community profit from grid development in their area. For example, local communities can be contracted to provide food, transportation and accommodation for grid workers and, when applicable, equipment and technical services for the grid project. Another path could be hiring local workers to directly contribute to necessary works on or related to the grid project, like constructing access roads.

In areas relying heavily on agriculture, CLB schemes can be tailored around local farming, **such as enabling/supporting sustainable agriculture schemes along the grid route and its surroundings.** These initiatives can be combined with other programmes or goals such as agritourism and supporting local supply chains.

Supporting professional training programmes related to energy and electricity grids, ranging from ecologists to mechanics and from engineers to accountants, as well as related to other professions depending on community needs. This kind of support ensures long-term investment in the community's future and its capacity to provide highly skilled workers needed for future energy projects

Addressing communities' **social needs** can be achieved via one or several of the below approaches:

Developing and/or financing educational programmes focussed on renewable energy, electricity grids and the energy transition in local schools and community centres, as well as courses in higher-education institutions. Ideally, programmes and courses include social and ecological dimensions. In parallel to professional training (see above), educational programmes of these kinds aim to develop a more informed and knowledgeable community in the long run, potentially contributing to its resiliency and adaptability to changing situations that may affect it.

Support recreational or cultural activities, ranging from sport events, ranging from sport events and neighbourhood clubs to community gardening and afterschool activities. Activities related to the energy transition can be considered. Understanding needs and characteristics of the community would enable a better, more tailored support for the community.

CLB schemes can be dedicated to support the preservation and/or commemoration of local heritage (cultural and historical assets) in the surroundings of a grid route, and/or affected communities. Here as well, support should be designed to involve local stakeholders as much as possible and sustainable for the long run, e.g., future maintenance.

Improving local well-being by contributing to large-scale community infrastructure needs, for example reducing energy poverty by supporting retrofitting and/or (social) housing programmes and preparedness of local infrastructure for impacts of climate hazards. Importantly, selection criteria of what will be improved and how should be transparent and inclusive as much as possible, to avoid bias selection and, on the other hand, resentment from parts of the community that might feel excluded from suggested improvements.

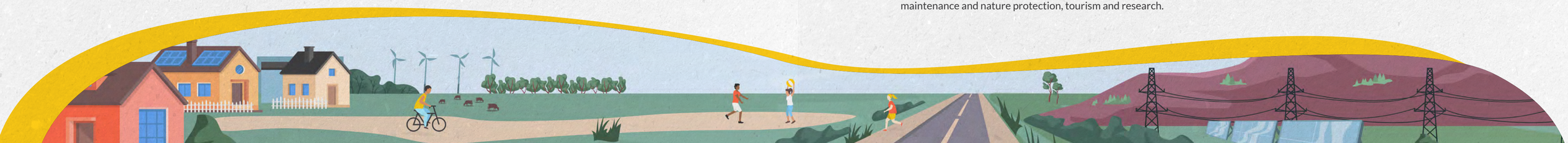
Addressing communities' **environmental needs** can be achieved via one or several of the below approaches:

Nature-based solutions (NBS) provide multiple options and opportunities in the context of benefit creation. CLB schemes can take advantage of the grid route and surrounding areas for flora and fauna preservation and restoration, for example preserving/creating ponds and small water reservoirs and animal habitats. Practices such as these are already commonly used by grid operators as part of Integrated Vegetation Management (IVM) but can be leveraged in the context of local benefit creation. Often NBS/IVM practices can even address communities' economic, social and environmental needs simultaneously. For example, IVM practices along a grid route in proximity to residential areas can provide economic opportunities for local populations (e.g., jobs, agriculture) and create recreational areas (e.g., open green spaces) while restoring/preserving the local natural environment.

With the support of CLB schemes' resources, **protected and preserved areas along the grid route can be utilised and further developed** to boost local tourism or to serve environmental education purposes for locals and visitors.

In case the grid route runs through agricultural areas, **CLB can be utilised to preserve and support sustainable/ecological agriculture together with local farmers and businesses.** This solution would benefit from broad community agreement, preventing contestation over benefit sharing within the community.

Implementing climate adaptation and resilience measures along the grid route or its surrounding is an overarching approach to addressing community needs. While these measures are linked to environmental challenges and solutions, they can be used to address many needs of a locality (economic, social, and environmental), combining resources and providing long-term benefits for both the community and the grid operator. For example, preserving natural ponds in or near grid routes can provide natural protection against wildfires instead of engineered solutions, while addressing social and environmental needs (recreation, nature protection), as well as providing economic opportunities, e.g., maintenance and nature protection, tourism and research.



GOOD PRACTICES

COMMUNITY BENEFIT FUND AND THE GROWSPACE NETWORK

by SSEN Transmission

To support the development of the transmission network in the North of Scotland and redistribute benefit shares to the communities hosting this infrastructure, Scottish transmission operator SSEN Transmission introduced Community Benefit Funds associated with their proposed infrastructure projects. A regional fund is dedicated to strategic regional scale projects, while local funds finance local projects for communities living close to the infrastructure. Funding decisions are made by an independent panel, made up of community members in the case of local funds. For example, the East Coast Fund awarded £5,000 to the Growspace Network, a community growing space, aimed at supporting the community to connect with nature and learn new skills. The award has enabled to fund the purchase of a polytunnel, a compost toilet for visitors and volunteers, and the compost required for the initial planting at the site.

Highlights

- SSEN Transmission created both regional and local funds to ensure a fair distribution among communities.
- The approach is built on a set of principles including transparency, value sharing and co-creation with communities.
- By funding local initiatives, the Community Benefit Funds deliver tangible results for communities, like providing a community gardening space.

Find more information about this practice here

REGIONAL INVESTMENTS FOR ONSHORE HIGH VOLTAGE ENERGY INFRASTRUCTURE

by MINEZK

To support the expansion of the national extra high voltage grid in the upcoming years, the Dutch Ministry of Climate Policy and Green Growth (MINEZK) is actively investing to improving the quality of life in the communities affected by grid projects (220 / 380 kV). These funds will be used by the local governments to invest in these communities, requiring the involvement of residents in decisions on how the resources are allocated. An expenditure plan, established jointly, will then specify the use of the funding. Projects, that can range from examples such as a playground to bike lanes and a public park, will have to reflect local needs and contribute to the community's well-being, ensuring that the scheme provides meaningful benefits for affected communities, while making sure critical grid projects are delivered in a timely way.

Highlights

- The amount of funding received by communities will depend on the project's characteristics.
- The local government, together with the residents, will be involved to decide where to invest the funding attributed to the municipality.
- The aim of the scheme and condition for projects to receive funding for is to focus on responding to the community's needs.

Find more information about this practice here

EIRGRID'S COMMUNITY BENEFIT FUND

by EirGrid

For each new grid infrastructure project, Irish TSO EirGrid creates a **Community Benefit Fund** to provide direct benefits to the communities impacted by a transmission line or substation. These funds are proportional to the scale of the project and aimed at supporting local good causes, helping communities transform their area and providing the opportunity for each community to become or remain a 'sustainable energy community'. The distribution of the funding is outlined by a **community benefit strategy**, elaborated by an independent funding administrator and the Community Forum. This Forum is a democratically elected entity representing local stakeholders and citizens and is also part of EirGrid's engagement strategy. In 2024, EirGrid awarded almost €1,000,000 through this Community Benefit Fund, supporting initiatives ranging from biodiversity enhancement and renewable energy projects to community and sporting organisations, transport and education programmes. EirGrid reports that this strategy has delivered overwhelmingly positive outcomes. Projects that allocate dedicated community funds consistently experience higher levels of public support, with measurable improvements in social acceptance across host communities.

Highlights

- Commitment to deliver Community Benefit Funds that are designed for the local community by the local community.
- In 2024, almost €1,000,000 awarded through the Community Benefit Fund to local groups on the Laois Kilkenny Reinforcement and Celtic interconnector projects.
- Last fund launched in North Connacht in January 2026, with more to come around the country in the next two years.

Find more information about this practice here

COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT PROGRAMME FOR EDUCATION

by Amprion

To support communities in its areas of activity, Amprion has established a Community Development Programme focused on equal opportunity and educational equity, with a funding pot of €150,000. In order to generate lasting and genuine impact, all collaborations are designed to be long-term and involve the active engagement of Amprion staff. A particular highlight of this programme was a holiday activity day organised by Amprion for a learning support initiative for children from disadvantaged neighbourhoods. Amprion set up several hands-on stations that focused on physics, energy generation and transmission, leading to moments of understanding and excitement among the children.

Highlights

- Collaborations are long-term to deliver lasting impact.
- Amprion employees dedicate time to the programme's projects, helping to ensure that the company's engagement is meaningful for everyone involved.
- The company organised an activity on physics and energy for children involved in one of the funded projects.

Find more information about this practice here

T-LAB
MASTER'S PROGRAMME

by Terna

Through the Tyrrhenian Lab (T-Lab) Master's Programme, Italian TSO Terna illustrates how electricity infrastructure development can deliver long-term benefits to local communities through targeted investment in education. Launched in 2022 in the context of Terna's Tyrrhenian Link project and in collaboration with the Universities of Cagliari, Palermo and Salerno, the programme aims to establish a centre of excellence for training supporting the energy transition and the digitalisation of the electricity system. By embedding the programme in the affected territories, the initiative strengthens local skills and institutional capacity. Across the first three editions, approximately 160 participants were subsequently hired by Terna in local offices and interest has increased steadily, with up to approximately 400 applications for 57 places in the most recent edition.

Highlights

- The co-design approach allows for academic standards to be aligned with industrial needs.
- The initiative aims to contribute to local education and employability.
- In the most recent edition, female participation has seen a 27% increase.

Find more information about this practice here

COMMUNITY
LIAISON COORDINATORS

by Red Eléctrica

In the context of the Salto de Chira infrastructure project in the Canary Islands, that included a 220 kV overhead transmission line of 15km, Spanish TSO Red Eléctrica provided local benefits to the impacted community that were identified with the help of Community Liaison Coordinators on site. While these two full-time professionals engaged with the residents about the project, specific community needs emerged. Based on these, Red Eléctrica co-created solutions with the residents, including, for example, maintaining a construction detour as a permanent route for heavy traffic to relieve residential roads and redirecting excess tunnel water to irrigate local farmland. Overall, 380 issues were received and 70% resolved, allowing Red Eléctrica to provide substantial environmental, social and economic benefits to the Salto de Chira community.

Highlights

- Community Liaison Coordinators were responsible for communicating with local communities on a personal level.
- The community expressed needs that were addressed by Red Eléctrica, creating tangible benefits for residents.
- The solutions were co-created with residents to ensure maximum impact.

Find more information about this practice here

INVESTING IN TRUST

by Elia

Due to an extreme storm on 9 July 2024 in Mechelen, Belgium, nine high-voltage pylons toppled over, and residents of 15 households couldn't return to their homes for a week. In this context, Belgian TSO Elia invested in communities during and after the restoration to build trust and demonstrated the power of solidarity in crisis. Residents supported grid restoration by reducing electricity consumption during the necessary works. In parallel, beyond restoring the line, Elia was present to provide continuous information. The TSO also supported residents with insurance issues and by maintaining communication. Overall, this serious incident showed how investing in trust-building can create stronger connections with communities and benefit residents affected by a transmission line.

Highlights

- Residents reduced their electricity consumption to support grid restoration works.
- Elia's team was present on site to provide information and assisted residents with insurance issues.
- The connection with the community was strengthened and the incident was tackled through trust-building efforts with positive results for those affected.

Find more information about this practice here

UNDERGROUNDING FOR COMMUNITIES

by Iberdola

After initially planning a new 20kV overhead medium-voltage line in Osa de la Vega (Spain), Spanish electricity distributor i-DE decided to opt for undergrounding the line along an existing path. The objective behind this undergrounding was to simplify the process but also to provide social and environmental benefits to the area by preventing expropriations and avoiding bird electrocutions and forest fires caused by overhead lines. Several administrations were included in the process and meetings were held with impacted residents. Through this dialogue, improvements were made during the execution of the project, such as carrying out part of the trenching work along a paved road. Overall, this allowed for minimisation of road closures and impacts on residents, as well as taking full advantage of the environmental benefits of undergrounding.

Highlights

- Undergrounding allowed to reduce disruptions for residents.
- Bird electrocutions and forest fires caused by overhead lines were avoided.
- After the works,the construction area was minimally impacted with no visible negative changes.

Find more information about this practice here

ENVIRONMENTAL

EDUCATIONAL FORMATS FOR COMMUNITIES

by 50Hertz

Through its collaboration with the Berlin NGO Independent Institute for Environmental Issues (UfU), 50Hertz designed two educational formats made for pupils in areas affected by grid projects, allowing the TSO to contribute to local education networks and share social benefits with communities. The hands-on exhibition "Transitioning Energy Together" illustrates the energy transition process to pupils in grades five and six via different learning stations, conveying the possibility for everyone to contribute to the energy transition and stressing the importance of electricity grids for this process. The second format is an online simulation game called "Wind over Wintow", an interactive role-playing game, in which students from grade seven onwards gain insights into the multi-layered planning of a fictional wind farm and the associated power grid expansion.

Highlights

- 50Hertz directly contributes to local education efforts on the energy transition.
- The interactive activities allow students to personally engage with the topic and realise the value of participation.
- Students are introduced to the complex and competing interests that arise during grid development.

Find more information about this practice here

GRID ORCHADS

PROMOTING HERITAGE 'ERMELO' ORANGES IN GRID CORRIDORS

by REN

Portuguese TSO REN, in collaboration with local communities, developed 3 hectares under powerlines to preserve the endangered and culturally important Ermelo orange trees. Local stakeholders worked to identify the best trees for propagation in nursery and prepared the soil with different techniques like manure spreading and the sowing of biodiverse pastures to promote carbon and nitrogen fixation and support pollinators. Local authorities contributed by installing an irrigation system and local schoolchildren symbolically planted the last trees. To date, the overall population of Ermelo orange trees increased from 500 to over 1,800 and, beyond preserving a historically important local variety of oranges, this initiative reduces REN's vegetation management costs as well as prepares the ground for other long-term benefits such as bee keeping other cattle growing.

Highlights

- Successfully increased the overall population of Ermelo orange trees from 500 to over 1,800, contributing to the preservation of a unique local variety.
- Collaborated with local stakeholders, including schools and beekeepers, for long-term involvement and educational initiatives.
- Developed 3 hectares of orange groves under powerlines, showcasing a sustainable use of the transmission corridors while reducing vegetation management costs.

Find more information about this practice here

DATA SOURCES

Interviews, written and oral feedback (September – December 2025)

- Interviews and written feedback: 1 electricity authority (Europe), 1 TSO (Europe), 1 Ministry of Economic Affairs (Europe), 1 NGO (Canada), 2 researchers (Ireland, Germany)
- Workshops' feedback: interactive session during the Power of Participation workshop (<30 participants), interactive session during the RIFS 2025 Conference (8 participants)

Selected studies and publications

- CAN Europe 2025, Community Engagement and Fair Benefit Sharing of Renewable Energy Projects - Presenting policies and practices across Europe and guidelines for developers (Link)
- Devine-Wright, P. and Sherry-Brennan, F. (2019). Where do you draw the line? Legitimacy and fairness in constructing community benefit fund boundaries for energy infrastructure projects. Energy Research & Social Science, 54, 166-175, https://doi.org/10.1016/j.erss.2019.04.002
- Eurelectric 2025, The electricity industry-a socially performing sector (Link)
- Gabe Chan and Kristine Chan-Lizardo 2025, Community Benefits in Energy Projects: Understanding the Building Blocks that Utilities, Cooperatives, and Clean Energy Developers Have Used to Engage Communities. RMI (Link)
- Re.Climate 2026, Getting to "Yes" on Renewable Energy Takes Fairness, Trust and Tangible Benefits (Link)
- Regen 2022, Delivering local benefit from offshore renewables - Working towards a new model for community benefit and local ownership (Link)
- VicGrid 2025, Community Engagement and Social Value Guidelines for Renewable Energy and Transmission Projects (Link)
- World Resources Institute 2025, Community Benefits Frameworks: Shortcomings and Opportunities for Greater Impact (Link)

IMPRINT

2026 Community & local benefits in electricity grid development

Manfred-von-Richthofen Strasse 4
12101 Berlin, Germany
CEO: Antonella Battaglini
Jurisdiction: AG Charlottenburg / VR 32907 B

Contact

communication@renewables-grid.eu

Team:
Stephanie Bätjer, *Director – Communication*
Dr. Andrzej Ceglarz, *Director – Energy Systems*
Dr. Ira Shefer, *Manager – Energy Systems*
Anaïs Picart, *Junior Manager – Socio-Energy Systems*

Design by Iryna Kukuruza & Nathália Pimentel

Co-funded by the European Union

Funded by the European Union. Views and opinions expressed are however those of the author(s) only and do not necessarily reflect those of the European Union or CINEA. Neither the European Union nor CINEA can be held responsible for them.

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