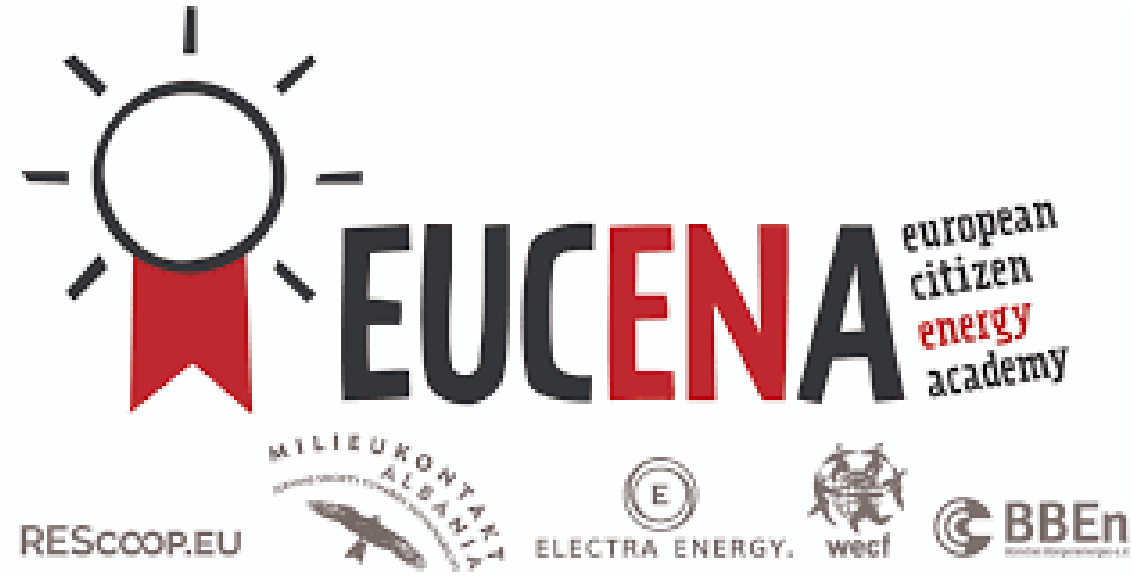
Gender Survey of Energy Cooperatives – A Summary with Recommendations



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Author: Sukhveen Kaur

Co-authors: Kiara Groneweg, Katharina Habersbrunner

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Gender Survey of Energy Cooperatives – A Summary with Recommendations

Abstract:

Energy Communities (ECs) have immense potential in becoming a beckoning force to bring a just transition in the energy sector. But the inequalities within the energy sector and energy communities have led us to believe that the journey of just transition will take longer (as women and other gender are not equally represented). Since each energy community is unique, it is important to understand the specific needs of communities. This report is based on the results of the survey on gender in energy communities. The survey was designed with the aim to understand the perspective of its members, boards, and employees with respect to their gender, their role, and their position in their organisations. It also helped to understand the existing structure of ECs and their stand on women and gender in their organisation. This publication shares the findings of the survey and deduces the required resources, gendered roles, gendered needs, and gaps within communities and recommends strategies to mainstream gender at macro-, meso- and micro levels. These recommendations for ECs are developed to integrate gender across policies and practices for achieving the goal of gender-just energy communities and accelerating a just energy transition.

Introduction:

Energy efficiency and renewable energy projects play a pivotal role in achieving the global goal of reducing greenhouse gas emissions.[1] (Renewable) Energy Communities can play an equally significant role in the energy sector by bringing citizens' participation into the focus and bringing the much-needed transformation towards a decentralized energy system. At the policy level, the European Renewable Energy Directive (RED II) promotes the formation of 'renewable energy communities' (WECF, 2022). The European Commission's Clean Energy for All Europeans Package acknowledges and categorises some specific types of community energy initiatives as Energy Communities. There are two formal categories of communities defined by RED II and the Internal Electricity Market Directive. RED II defined these communities as 'Renewable Energy Communities (RECCs)' while Internal Electricity Market Directive defined them as 'Citizen Energy Communities (CECs)'.[2] In this publication, we are referring to RECs and CECs together as Energy Communities (ECs) as they both are citizen-led initiatives that aim to generate social and environmental benefits (Caramizaru and Uihlein, 2020). Energy Community (EC) refers to organising a wide range of collective energy actions through citizens' participation via open, voluntary and democratic participation and governance that aims to provide benefits to their members or/ and the local community (ibid).

Energy Communities (ECs) have become a popular and viable solution against an only profit-oriented, male-dominated and centralised fossil fuel based energy system. The extractive energy model has been constantly male-dominated and driven, neglecting women's energy needs and skills. Hence, creating systematic gender inequalities in access to and control of energy.[3] The perceptions of gender

[1] Nelson, S and Kuriakose, A. (2017). Gender And Renewable Energy: Entry Points for Women's Livelihoods and Employment. Climate Investment Funds.

[2] Caramizaru, A and Uihlein, A (2020). Energy communities: an overview of energy and social innovation. JRC Science for Policy Report. https://publications.jrc.ec.europa.eu/repository/handle/JRC119433

[3] WECF. (2020). Gender just energy communities – a catalyst for sustainable and just development. Under publication.

roles, which are driven by sociocultural norms, are one of the main barriers which lead to unequal representation of all genders in the energy sector.[4] There have been some studies on energy and gender nexus with a focus on the traditional gendered roles which provide only a binary glance at the sector. Therefore, women and diverse gender become part of the downside system. Thus, this contribution tries to dwell a bit into gender topics using gender analysis of energy communities/cooperatives (under the EUCENA project). This paper aims to understand the status quo of gender, structure, perceptions, needs and integration of gender and women in ECs. The strategies are proposed with an aim to mainstream gender in policies and practices which can be applied at the macro-, meso- and micro levels.

Methodology:

As a part of the EUCENA project, REScoop.eu[5] and WECF[6] prepared a gender survey for the people who are either directly or indirectly involved with energy communities. The survey focuses on the energy communities of Europe and was disseminated among the members of REScoop.eu and WECF network. This survey collected information on participants' gender, position, and perception, and then collected further responses on existing gender practices and policies, women in ECs, gender and resources and thereof lack of resources to identify their needs through these gaps. There were 42 respondents to this survey which laid the foundation of the analysis.

Findings and Discussion:

The collected responses helped to create a visual to understand gender roles and gaps. Hence, the findings from the survey are categorised into five parts: a) Overview of the Survey b) Resources in Energy Communities c) Gender in Energy Communities d) Women in Energy Communities e) Perception, Needs and Interests of Energy Communities.

a) Overview of the Survey

This section gives a generalised summary of the survey results to understand the structure and regional background of ECs. The survey questionnaire had 29 questions targeting members and employees of European ECs. The survey received a response from 42 participants from 10 **European countries**, namely: Albania, Austria, Belgium, Georgia, Germany, Greece, Ireland, Italy, Netherlands, and Sweden. It did receive additional responses from other countries, but those were excluded from the analysis because this contribution focuses on European countries only. 50% of the participation was from Germany, followed by 29% of participation from the Netherlands, 7% from Greece, and 5% from Austria and Italy, respectively. The other countries like Albania, Belgium, Georgia, Ireland, and Sweden had low participation of just 2% each.

The responses came from across all the **working positions**. 42% of the participants work for the management board while 3% of the participants work for the supervisory board (refer to figure 1). The remaining participants were either staff (21%), members of ECs (23%) or participants represented other categories depicting the people who are associated with ECs (9%). Hence it can be considered

[4] IRENA. (2019). Renewable Energy: A gender perspective Summary. https://cms.irena.org//-/media/Files/IRENA/Agency/Publication/2019/Jan/IRENA_Gender_perspective_2019_EN_Summary.pdf
[5] More information on REScoop.eu is available on the homepage: https://www.rescoop.eu/
[6] More information on WECF is available on the homepage: http://www.wecf.org

that the survey was able to reach out to people working at diverse levels allowing us to get a perspective from each side.

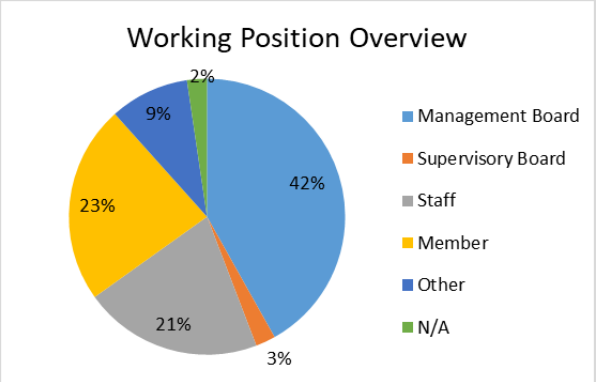

Figure 1: Working Position of Participants Overview

It was interesting to find that ECs have a different **business model** which shows their involvement in a wide range of activities. It was evident that the production of renewable energy (RE) was the major business activity (57.14%) followed by 35.7% working in consultation and 23.81% in electricity supply. Whilst 21% of the participants were involved in other activities related to energy communities, followed by 16% in the storage of energy, 14% working in e-mobility, 7% in energy renovation and 5% in both, contracting and grid operation facilities. It was observed that the overall share of activities shows that the production of renewable energy is the most common activity followed by consulting and electricity supply. Most of the participants are involved in working in only one activity, but a small share of participants was involved in four or six activities.

After understanding the origin, structure, and business models of ECs, it is important to study the size and engagement of ECs which means engagement of members and employees with and in ECs. The EC **employees overview** showed that 76% of participants were from communities with 0-50 employees, while 7% of the participants were from ECs with 100-500 employees, 14% participants were from communities with more than 500 employees and only 3% of the participants were from communities with 50-100 employees.

On the other hand, the EC **members' overview** showed that 31% of the participants were from ECs that have 100-500 members, followed by 28% from ECs with 0-50 members then, 24% from ECs with more than 500 members and 17% from ECs with 50-100 members. It can be observed that the number of employees in the EC does not influence the number of members it can engage with and vice a versa.

b) Resources in Energy Communities

This section elaborates on the results regarding human and financial resources. Figure 2 shows that 33% of the participants agreed that there is a lack of human resources and financial **resources** in their ECs, followed by 14% who have sufficient human and financial resources and 17% with insufficient resources whereas 19% of the participants did not know the status of resources because they never had a chance to engage in human and financial aspects of EC development. Whilst 17% of participants don't know about them because it is not on their

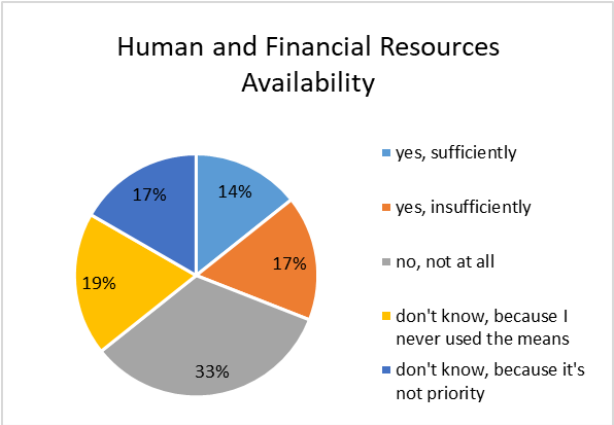

Figure 2: Status quo of Financial and Human Resources in ECs

priority list. It can be considered that there can be lack of resources despite the size of ECs.

Consecutively, it is important to know if the actors have any **expertise** on gender mainstreaming or integrating gender on daily basis. Hence, the result shows that 24% of participants agree on being sufficiently equipped with gender expertise while 38% have insufficient expertise on gender. 21% of the participants don't know whether the employees/members of their ECs have any gender expertise but on the contrary, 17% of the participants don't think it is necessary to have gender expertise. Furthermore, some of the participants shared some insights on their insufficient resources e.g., the gap between the target groups, reaching out to women to increase their engagement, and the difference in the willingness of men and women to invest in uncertain or risky areas.

In many cases, gender has never been a priority or goal which means there is a significant difference when it comes to priorities and opinions, etc. It was an interesting observation that despite insufficient resources, some of the ECs wanted to engage more women. On the contrary, gender does not seem to be a priority, especially not for male actors in ECs. There is a remarkable difference between male and female participants regarding priorities and opinions on gender measures for ECs. Thus, this scenario showed that there is a need to create awareness amongst people on gender topics and ways to integrate it as a cross cutting topic.

c) Gender in Energy Communities

In this section, the survey findings are related to the gendered representation of gender integration at the policy level, different methods to integrate gender, and gender tools and skills. In the overview of **gender** in the participation, the gender-disaggregated information showed that 60% of the participants were women while 38% were men. This survey got a gender-balanced response from the management board and members of ECs.

To identify the gendered gaps and needs in ECs, it is important to understand the status quo of the gender integration in the ECs. The first step is to look for gender integration or mainstreaming aims and targets in **policies** for EC **members**. It was observed that 43% of the participants aim to integrate gender equality and social justice target in their policies but have not implemented them yet and 7% have formally agreed on targets in their policies. While 29% of the ECs don't have integrated policies for members. 9% of participants don't know about the policy targets for members of their ECs and 5% of the participants don't care which shows a lack of awareness amongst participants.

Figure 3 shows the status quo of the gender integration in **policies** for **employees** that is 9% have formally agreed while 5% have informally agreed on targets. While 43% aimed to have it but nothing has been implemented, On the other hand, 29% of ECs don't have gender equality and social justice targets integrated policies for employees (refer to figure 3). Whereas 7% of the participants don't know if their ECs

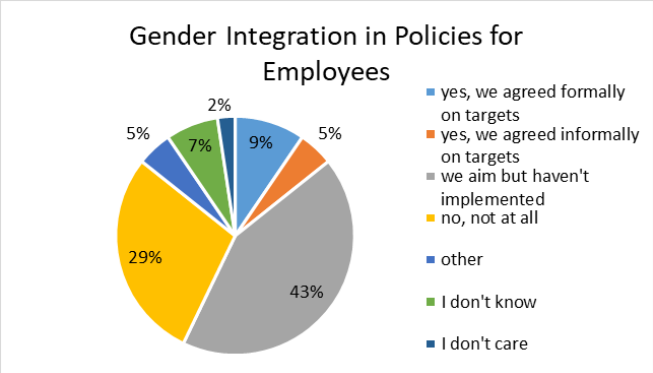

Figure 3: Status of Gender Integration in Employee Policies

have such policies for employees or not and 2% were not interested in adopting such policies.

Based on the existing practices, the **existing gender tools** and skills that the ECs follow were compared with the new skills and **new gender tools** that they wanted to adopt or/ -and strengthen. It helps to analytically see the difference in the existing practices and the willingness, acceptance and need of the gender tools and expertise in the future. Figure 4 (given below) shows a visual representation of the existing practices versus future capacity building/strengthening of gender tools. The first column 'don't know- no interest/priority' in figure 4 showed that there is a dynamic shift from 35to 0 (existing vs future interest) which means the willingness and demand of to develop gender skills and tools will increase in the future. The top 5 existing tools and skills in ECs are policies against sexual harassment (23.8%), special offers to understand the target audience e.g. women, vulnerable groups, etc. (23.8%), training (16.7%), gender quotas (14.3%), and indicators for monitoring (14.3%). The future interest in developing a skill to understand the target groups and women in special offers is 47.6% which is double the existing interest. The top 5 skills that the participants wanted to develop in the future are special offers (47.6%), network exchange (45.2%), trainings (42.9%), financial mechanisms (40.5%) and indicators and monitoring (38.1%). Most participants indicated that they want to adopt network exchange tools. Figure 4 shows that there are no existing tools currently, while 45.2% indicated wanting to adopt them in the future.

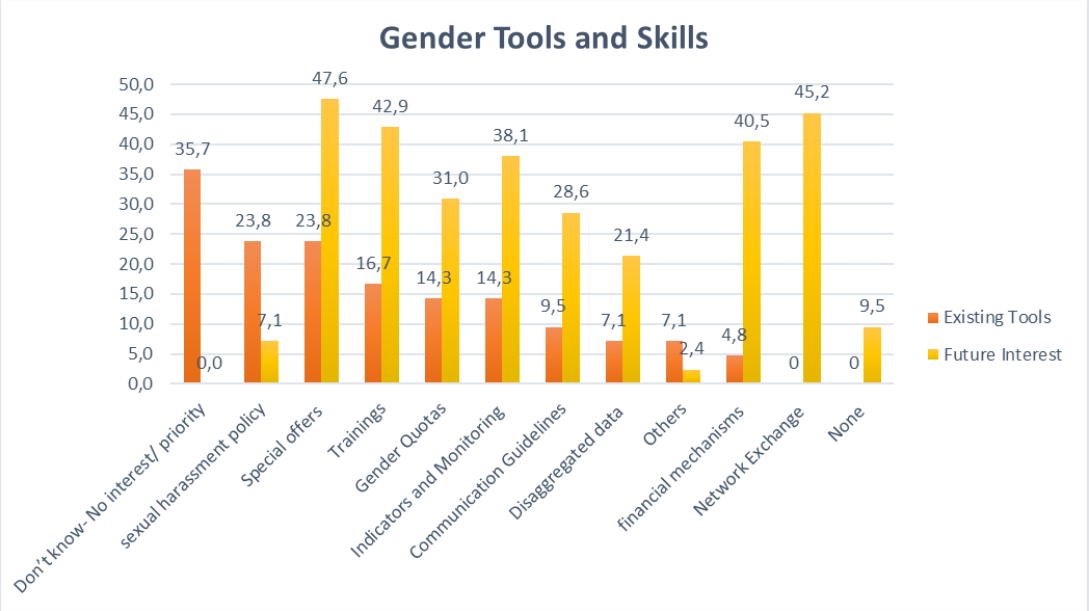

Figure 4: Existing Gender Tools vs Future Interests in Gender Tools

Hence, the above-mentioned tools help in better integration of gender in ECs for instance, increase all gendered workforce, members, and investors, or increase the share of women or/ and diverse gendered representation in boards, or promote gender equality, or create Gender Equality Plan, Gender Action Plan, or conduct gender analysis, or promote equal pay etc.

d) Women in Energy Communities

In order to bring the transition in the energy sector, it is essential to understand the status quo of women in the energy communities. The size of the energy community doesn't have any relation to the fair share of women's representation in ECs. It is not only about women's passive participation but also about fair representation in members, employees, and boards.

The results showed that 24% of the participants have 40%-60% **women employees**, followed by 21% with 10%-25% women employees, 21% with 0%-10% women employees and then 19% with 25%-40% women employees. It was observed that only 10% of the participants had 60%-100% women employees.

On the other hand, **women member** results showed that 31% of participants have women members between 10%-25% followed by 26% with women members between 25%-40% then, and 17% women members between 40%-60%. The result also shows no EC was engaged with over 60% of women members. It is to be noted that a small share of the participants was not aware of women's engagement which showed a lack of interest and priority to develop or use sex or/ and gender-disaggregated data.

Figure 5 shows the share of **women's** representation in **management** which implies that 36% of the participants have 25%-50% women in their management board followed by 12% with a 0%-25% share of women in the management board. The result also showed that 21% of ECs have 0 women on the management board which implies that 21% of ECs are 100% male-driven. It was observed that 14% of energy communities don't have a management board.

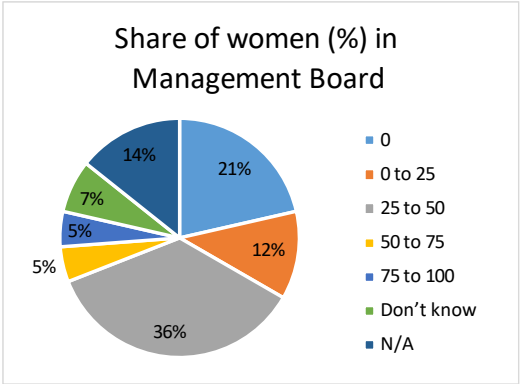

Figure 5: Women Representation in Management

Figure 6 shows the result of the share of **women** in the **advisory board** which implies that 22% of the participants have 0 women in the advisory board followed by 21% with 25%-50% women in the advisory and 12% of participants have 0%- 25% women. Hence, it can be said that 22% of them lack female experts and are male-driven. It was also observed that 33% of them don't have an advisory board.

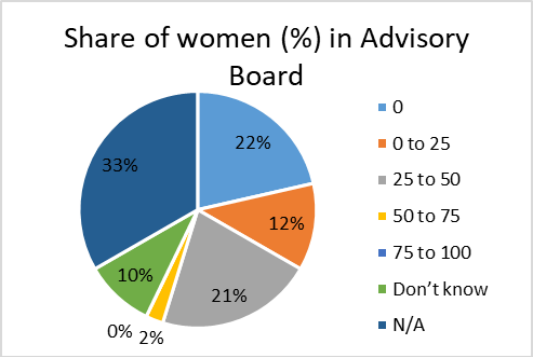

Figure 6: Women Representation in Advisory

All the results in this section showed the share of women and thereof lack of women representation in the advisory boards, management boards, members, and employees which is due to lack of interest, differences in priorities and targets, lack of financial mechanisms, lack of gender-sensitive approach, unknowingly focusing on androcentric communication methods, lack of knowledge to understand the requirement of women and ways to engage people of other genders than men and so on. Hence it can be said that there is still a section of the energy sector which is male-driven, and women are still not given major roles, especially decision-making roles. Therefore, creating the need and demand of fresh skills, new perspective, and new ventures to have a just-transition and become sustainable.

e) Perception, Needs and Interests of Energy Communities

There has always been a debate on different gendered approaches and how they benefit differently for instance grants for women-led initiatives, capacity building for specific communities or areas like island energy, small communities becoming self-sufficient, investment opportunities, etc, so the

survey also asked the same, to understand the perspective of ECs. Therefore, the survey showed that 36% of the participants denied that men and women **benefit** differently whereas 31% of the participants agrees that there some differences but for some cases only whereas 14% of the participants clearly agree that men and women are benefitted differently in all the cases. Apparently, 19% of the participants never thought about these differences.

Most of the participants think that gender topics are important and need to be considered in ECs. It was observed that 61% of the participants were interested in **gender training** (refer to figure 7) while the rest were not interested or had different priorities. Training on gender can help to change the perception of people in ECs and make them aware of the existing inequalities which can act as the first to acknowledge the differences between various gender roles, needs and barriers.

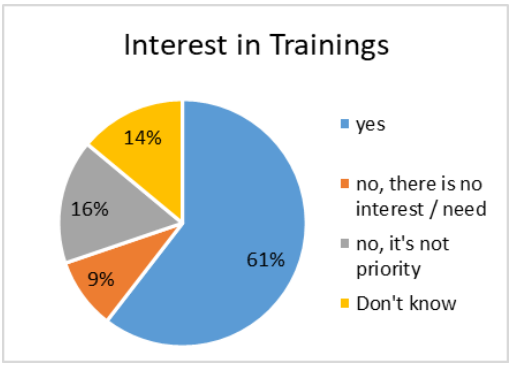

Figure 7: Overview of Interest in Gender Training

The survey helped to understand the factors that could influence **gender perceptions** within ECs. It showed differences between men's and women's interests, knowledge, financial support, time, and other factors that influence their involvement in ECs. Figure 8 shows an enormous difference between men's and women's perceived influenced factors for instance 45.2% of the participants agreed that men have more knowledge while only 4.8% considered that women have more knowledge, while 47.6% of the participants consider men have higher interest and only 4.8% considered women have higher interests. A similar pattern was observed for other resources, money and spare time, where participants agreed that men have more spare time and money to invest in ECs. Overall, participants considered men to have more resources and availability than women to engage themselves with ECs (refer to figure 8).

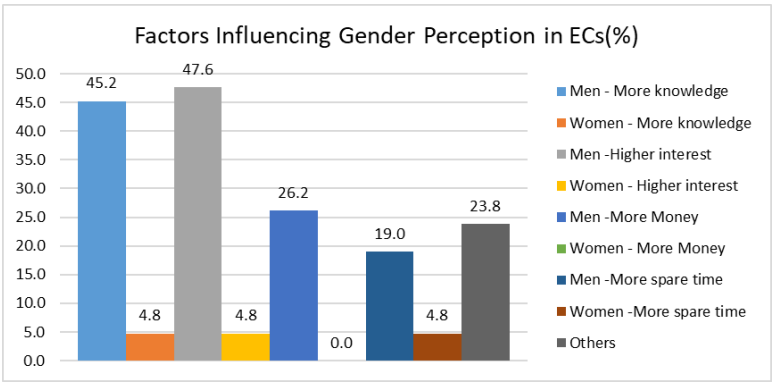

Figure 8: Gender Perception

Since the energy sector is male-dominated and shows structures of inequality, it was important to ask the participants if there are any **barriers** that members or employees face. Hence, the result shows (refer to figure 9) that 66.7% of the participants consider that having a different priority over gender can act as a barrier for members while 42.9% of the participants consider a lack of awareness

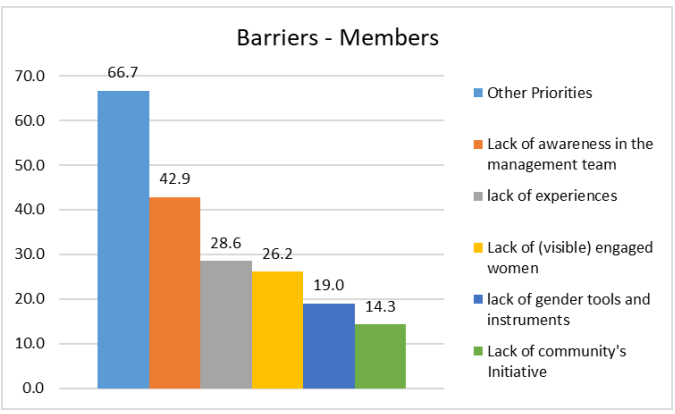

Figure 9: Barriers for Members in ECs

in the management board/team which implies that ECs will not have a fair share of measures that help to integrate gender in ECs. Furthermore, 28.6% of the participants consider lack of experience as a barrier to getting all genders involved in communities which can lead to restricted growth within the EC and can lead to empty spots in leadership positions that become visible and inspiring for other people. This is supported by the percentage of participants (26.2%) that consider the lack of visible engaged women in ECs as a barrier (refer to figure 9). Since there is a lack of knowledge and awareness in the management and if ECs have different priorities over gender integration, it will lead to overlooking gender tools or skills that can engage more women and diverse gendered people in ECs and make it inclusive. Lack of awareness will further lead to ignorant communities who could lead initiatives and use local knowledge to build region-based communities that become sustainable and self-dependent prosumers.

Recommendations

Energy communities have a high potential to accelerate gender and socially just energy transition. Considering the long operational life of energy infrastructure (e.g. energy efficiency, PV and wind plants, mobility, etc.) and the possibility of not being able to mainstream gender will reinforce gender inequalities for decades and waste the limited financial, social, and human resources and miss the ecological chances to become sustainable with optimum utilisation of resources. The gender analysis also indicated the same. Therefore, it becomes to escalate gendered needs, gender integration, expertise, rights and skills and empower all not only as individuals but also as users and providers of energy services. Integrating gender targets and tools into energy value chains, knowledge development, technical assistance and policy and advocacy work is the key to a just-transition and building a sustainable system. The recommended strategies can be categorised into three levels: macro-level, meso-level, and micro-level so that these strategies can reach out to individuals, organisations, policymakers, decision-makers etc and can be implemented at multiple levels.

a) Macro-level

The strategies that can be proposed at a larger scale are the macro level strategies. These may include national or international policies, projects, policy interventions etc. Given below are the proposed strategies:

- Follow legislative framework and guidelines on gender equality, gender mainstreaming, gender integration, gender language etc.
- Revise, submit and publish policies and guidelines with gender as cross-cutting aspect.
- Use or refer to good practices from international pilot projects and women-led initiatives for setting up energy communities and mainstream gender.
- Follow and apply gender-sensitive communication at all levels of communication activities.
- Push and implement gender mentoring programs, coaching, and network building and strengthening.
- Establish a gender award for best practice-examples and promote role models and their work to inspire others.
- Provide and exchange data, examples, and experience for coherent and gender-just policies on national and EU-level.

b) Meso-level

The strategies that can be proposed for the community level are meso-level strategies. These strategies are built to connect macro- and micro-level implementation of policies and projects. Given below are the proposed strategies:

- Develop and improve participation schemes with ECs to bring citizens to the centre of decentralised energy markets. More engaged and involved people brings more power and increases the acceptance of the energy transition.
- Learn about gender tools and implement to improve ECs like:
    - Gender Analysis: to understand the sex or gendered information on available resources, its access and impact.
    - Gender Self-Assessment (GSA): to evaluate your organisation with regular self-evaluating questions.
    - Gender Action Plan (GAP): to propose strategies that will help to mainstream gender or put gender as a cross-cutting aspect with other goals
    - Gender targets: to monitor the progress and evaluate your procedures.
    - Gender trainings: to share data and arguments about the relevance
    - Women's empowerment: to encourage women and strengthen their capacities via training, mentoring and networking programs.
    - Gender-responsive communication: to build stronger communities by engaging diverse people in various roles in communities.
- Promote prosumer model for energy just transition and benefit all genders equally.
- Find and collaborate with feminist organizations to spread the idea and participate in feminist events and programs to recruit more FLINTA and LGBTQIA+ in ECs
- Create safe spaces for all to openly voice their concerns about everything without putting them at a difficult spot.
- Aim for remuneration for women or/ and diverse genders who do not have enough financial/economic resources to become a member of an energy community.

c) **Micro-level**

The Micro-level refers to individual based strategies to integrate gender in their daily lives and engage themselves in ECs. Given below are the proposed strategies:

- Acknowledge the difference in various genders, gendered roles, priorities, needs and capabilities, etc.
- Training and workshop: A lot of women and non-binary people tend to undetermined themselves even if they have the required capabilities. Hence, it is important that women and diverse gender take challenging tasks or participate in trainings or workshops to develop and strengthen their technical skills, leadership skills, management skills and most importantly confidence. It is one of the methods to empower women and diverse gender.
- Break gender stereotypes and unlearn patriarchy: Gendered stereotypes are institutionalised in the early stages of life due to a patriarchal system. These vary from country to country and community to community the difference between the children who grew up in a gender-aware environment versus the children who grew up in a gender non-responsive

environment. Hence, it is important that as an individual, you make sure that your surroundings are taught to be gender aware, and inclusive and the sky is the limit sort of learning.

- Involving men in gender talks and making them allies: Whenever we talk about women's empowerment, we try to bring men on the same page as women or diverse gender. It is because there is a section of society that does not acknowledge that women and diverse gendered people face inequalities. Hence, it is important that men join as allies to change perspectives on gender topics e.g. HeForShe movement initiated by UNWomen to bring men and people of all genders to stand in solidarity with women to create a bold, visible and united force for gender equality. The initiative also aims to work with women and help them to build their businesses, raise families and give back to their communities.
- Advocate and raise awareness for safe space and encourage people to voice their thoughts and opinions.

Conclusion

To conclude, Energy Communities show a rising awareness on gender and inclusivity. Some ECs have gender tools already in place. A regular exchange between the EUCENA partners and beyond targeted trainings on gender tools and going ahead with the REScoop.eu Gender Power Group will accelerate the development of gender just energy communities.