# IEA Support to Accelerating Renewable Energy Permitting (ARPE)

# Final workshop

## Hybrid workshop

**14 March 2025**
**Paris, France**

## Main findings

International Energy Agency

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# Introduction

This **final workshop** was the last in a series of events organised within the IEA Support to Accelerating Renewable Energy Permitting (ARPE) action. This is a project funded by the European Union (EU) via the Technical Support Instrument, which is managed by the Reform and Investment Task Force (SG REFORM) of the European Commission. The project is implemented by the International Energy Agency (IEA), in cooperation with the European Commission.

The overarching objective of the action is to assist five focus countries – Finland, Ireland, Lithuania, the Netherlands and Slovakia – in developing and implementing policy and regulatory measures aimed at **reaching their renewable energy targets**, notably through **accelerating permitting**.

In support of this objective, the IEA organised and facilitated five workshops focused on the following topics: (1) streamlining administrative procedures; (2) accelerating offshore wind deployment; (3) facilitating spatial planning for renewable energy deployment; (4) ensuring public engagement and acceptance and a (5) final workshop summarising the project's findings. The objective of these workshops was **to understand the challenges and priorities of the focus countries**, share international best practices, and offer a platform for discussion.

On 14 March 2025, the IEA Secretariat brought together experts from across governments, regulators, civil society and industry in the final workshop, summarising findings of the previous workshops and expanding the discussion on selected topics. Focus topics included **streamlining permitting procedures**, especially through implementation of overriding public interest principle; **coordinating grid investments and spatial planning**; and **enhancing cooperation and sharing renewables benefits** with local communities. Invited speakers and discussants shared their experiences and lessons learned, providing multiple applicable insights for policy makers in focus countries and beyond.

This document is a summary of the main outcomes of the workshop. It provides examples of solutions and can inform policy making.

# Main findings

## Overriding public interest principle

**Implementing the overriding public interest principle can be an effective solution, reducing the risk of project delays due to litigation.** In Germany, applying this principle, among other measures, has been an important factor in achieving a significant increase and acceleration of renewable energy projects permitting. In 2024, almost 15 GW of new onshore wind projects have been permitted in Germany, up from around 7.5 GW in 2023 and around 4.2 GW in 2022 and 2021. Consistent application of the principle by courts led to significant acceleration of projects' lead times.

However, the interpretation of "overriding public interest" varies between stakeholders, especially among local communities. Speakers expressed they would welcome further guidance from the European Commission on the application of the principle. In addition, more effort is needed to raise public awareness of how the application of the overriding public interest principle can affect local administrations and communities. Governments should also enhance the participation of local communities from the beginning of planning processes (see section on benefits sharing and local communities' engagement). This could increase and maintain support and avoid litigation, minimising the risk of the principle being used in court rulings.

Effective implementation of the principle may require changes in other parts of a country's legal framework. Examples of court ruling in Ireland show that the principle cannot be automatically applied as it can create conflicts with other legal principles, especially related with environmental protection. Addressing this challenge will require a tailored approach by each Member state, and a comprehensive assessment of all legal implications.

**Policy priority**: The overriding public interest principle can be a powerful instrument. The German case serves as a good example for other countries, which can tailor the application of this principle to specific local needs and circumstances to accelerate renewable energy projects permitting. Creating a EU database containing implementation cases and lessons learnt would also be highly beneficial.

## Risk-based approach

**Adopting a national risk-based approach in policy and administrative procedures design can be a useful tool for streamlining the permitting process.** Permitting procedures, including for renewable energy projects, are often designed based on inefficient principles due to a lack of consistent risk-addressing policy. This can result in very detailed procedures, aimed at eliminating any risks related with the project but leading to an excessively

large number of steps and stringency of requirements. Moreover, another possible outcome is transferring too much of the responsibility of assessing these risks to local authorities. The latter often lack tools, resources, and knowledge to properly execute this task. As a result, risk-averse authorities often opt for a negative decision to limit their own risk exposure.

Adopting a risk-based approach can set a proper framework for assessing risks related to renewable projects and inform how detailed and complex the permitting procedure should be to strike a balance between all societal interests. If successfully implemented, it can allow well understood technologies with limited or easy to mitigate environmental impacts to follow a fast-permitting process. Still, local authorities and all administrative offices need to have properly trained staff and be equipped with digital tools necessary to efficiently execute tasks related to such risk-based systems.

**Policy priority**: Adopting a national risk-based approach in policy and administrative procedure design can help streamline the permitting process. Local authorities and all administrative offices need to have properly trained staff and be equipped with digital tools to execute tasks related to such risk-based systems.

## One-stop shops and digitalisation

**Implementing one-stop shops and digital infrastructure and tools is a necessary step to accelerate permit applications processing.** On multiple occasions during the project, the importance of digitalisation of the permitting process has been raised. One-stop shops can significantly streamline the interaction between the developer and administration. However, to work properly, a digital system should encompass all engaged administration levels.

Sharing documents, avoiding duplication of work, ensuring proper cooperation between different authorities can be significantly streamlined through a digital system. Such system needs to be developed on a national level and be overseen by national authorities to ensure the coverage of all administration levels and data security.

While the system design can be different for each Member state, creating a database of good examples and proven solutions to support countries introducing digital solutions would be useful.

**Policy priority**: Implementing one-stop shops, preferably coupled with digital infrastructure and tools, is a critical step to accelerate permit applications processing.

## Renewables spatial planning and grids

**Ensuring a close coordination between grid development plans and spatial planning for renewables is crucial for faster deployment.** Grid operators, policy makers and local governments need to cooperate closely to ensure effective designation of areas for streamlined renewables permitting. Examples from several countries, including France, Italy, and Portugal, show that the current process often results in regions outside of renewables acceleration areas (RAAs) being interpreted as no-go areas. Additionally, RAAs are often not the most economically attractive in terms of resources for project developers.

Speakers expressed that they would welcome more guidance from the European Commission in implementation of renewable acceleration areas. The process for the designation of these zones needs to be thoroughly planned to avoid unintended adverse consequences. In particular, grid availability, renewable energy resources and risk-based environmental impact assessments should be taken into account to create an effective process. In the case of grid availability considerations, it is important to consider all solutions, including storage, demand management and connection of demand with supply (e.g. data centres).

**Policy priority**: In principle, renewable acceleration areas can be an effective instrument to reduce project lead times, however, their actual implementation can be challenging in some cases. Further discussions and exchanges on best practices are needed to avoid unintended consequences.

**Policy priority**: Ensuring close coordination between (anticipatory) grid development plans and spatial planning for renewables is crucial for faster deployment. Short- and medium-term solutions taking into account long lead times for grid expansion and addressing grid congestion concerns should also include storage and flexible demand-side management. In addition, these solutions should also include designating areas for new renewable assets close to industrial clusters.

## Benefits sharing and local communities' engagement

**Programmes for sharing the benefits of renewable energy investments with local communities can be an important tool to create the support of local communities.** The example of Ireland's Community Benefit Fund shows the effectiveness of the tool in creating a positive attitude among local populations towards investments in renewable projects as well as in fostering relationship building between developers and communities.

It is important however, to continue the efforts to encourage the communities to further engage in renewable projects deployment, e.g. by creating legal frameworks empowering local stakeholders in taking ownership of projects. Increased efforts from national policy makers, local governments, communities and NGOs are necessary to create and maintain public

support for the energy transition, which translates to how easily and fast renewable projects can be permitted and deployed.

**Policy priority:** Schemes for sharing the benefits of renewable energy investments with local communities over the project lifetime can be a very effective tool to create trust and local support. In addition, community ownership of projects should also be enabled and supported. Both actions can increase (perceived) fairness, lead to a more positive narrative and consequently higher public acceptance of renewable energy projects.

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**International Energy Agency (IEA)**

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