Energy Community Secretariat

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Uniting Europe's Energy, Today

Renewable Acceleration Areas

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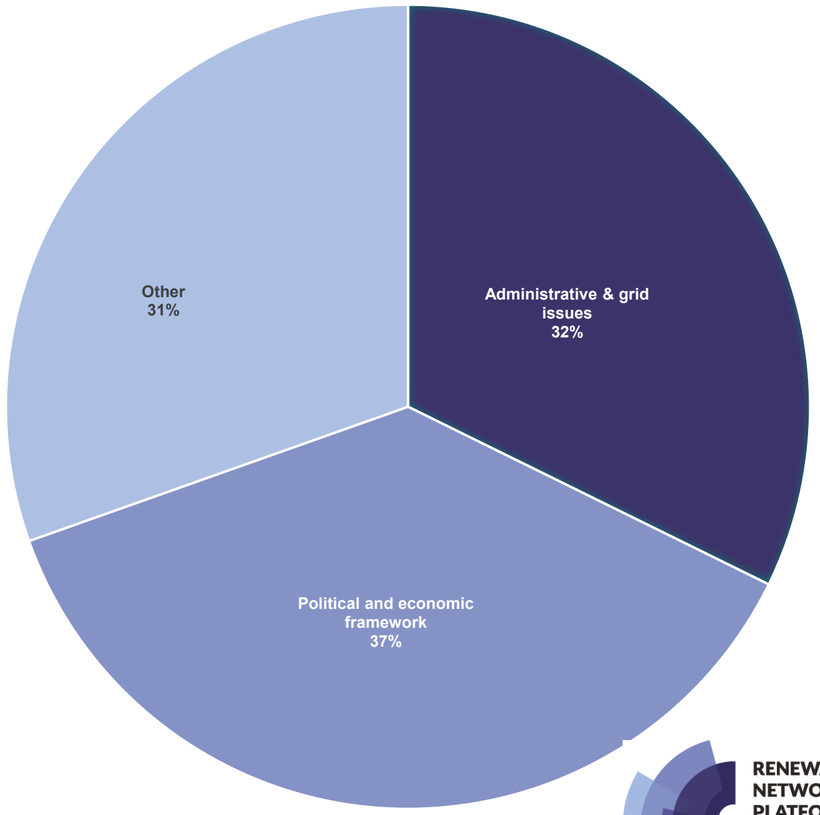
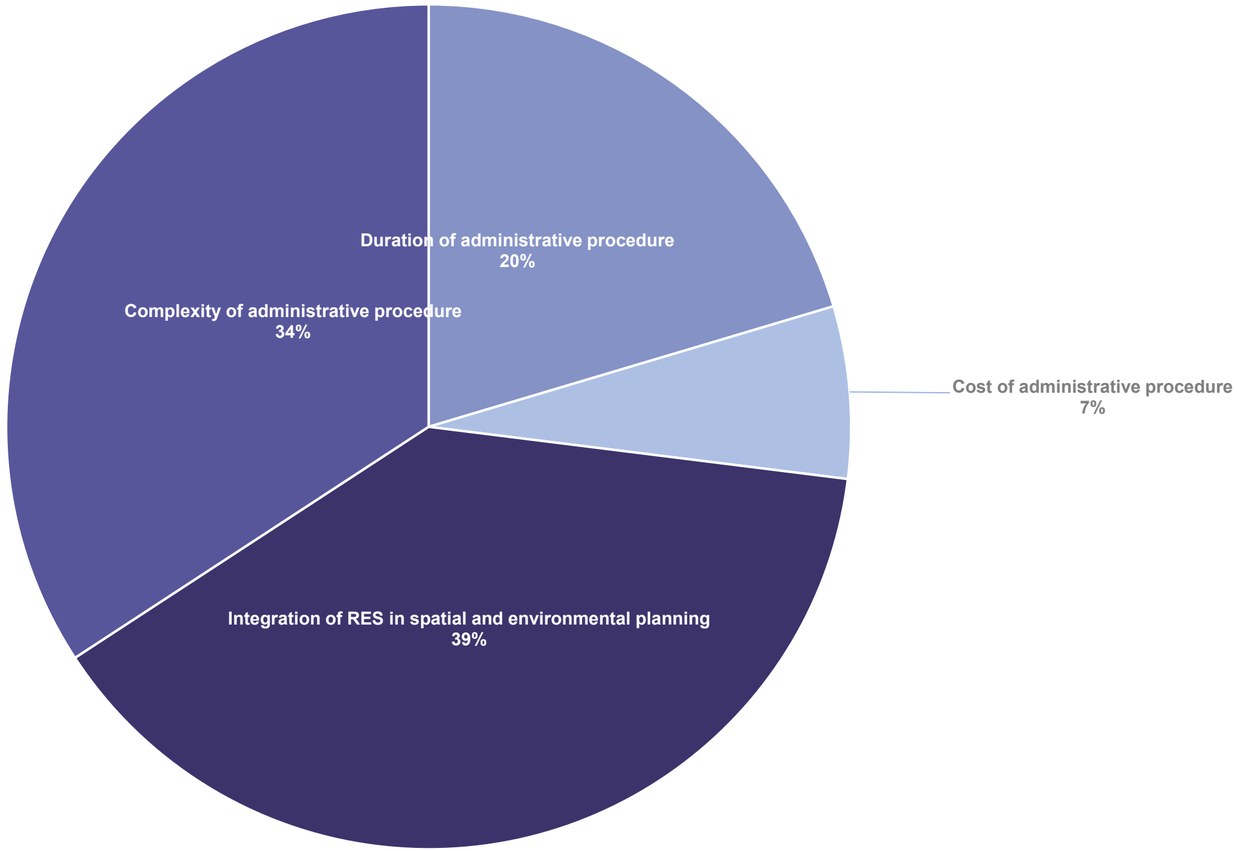
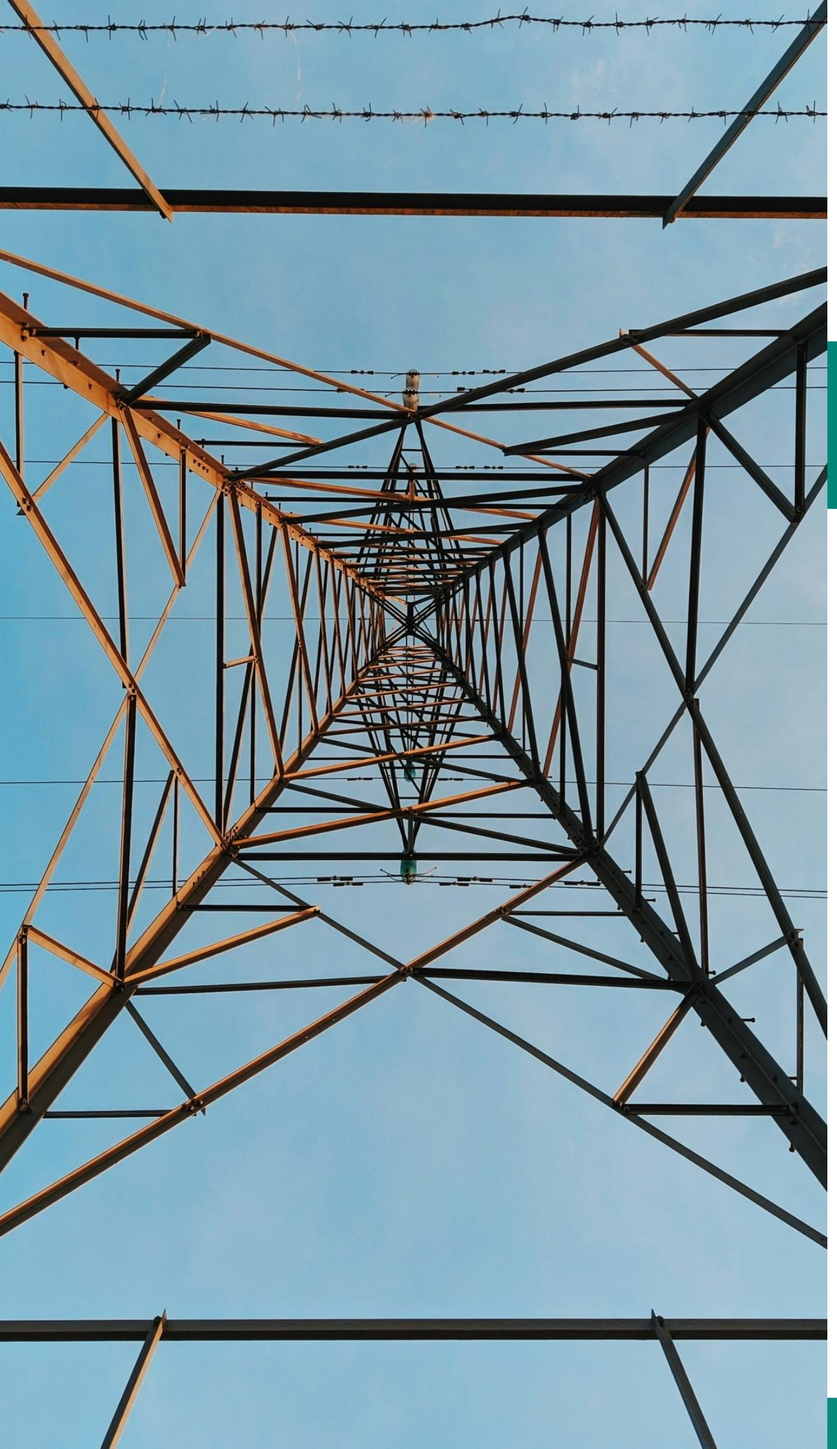
28 April 2026

RES debates today







At the Interface Energy & Environment

Defining the future

- Environmental acquis under the Energy Community Treaty:
  - So far: ancillary or backwards-oriented
  - Now: an enabling instrument
- The way forward

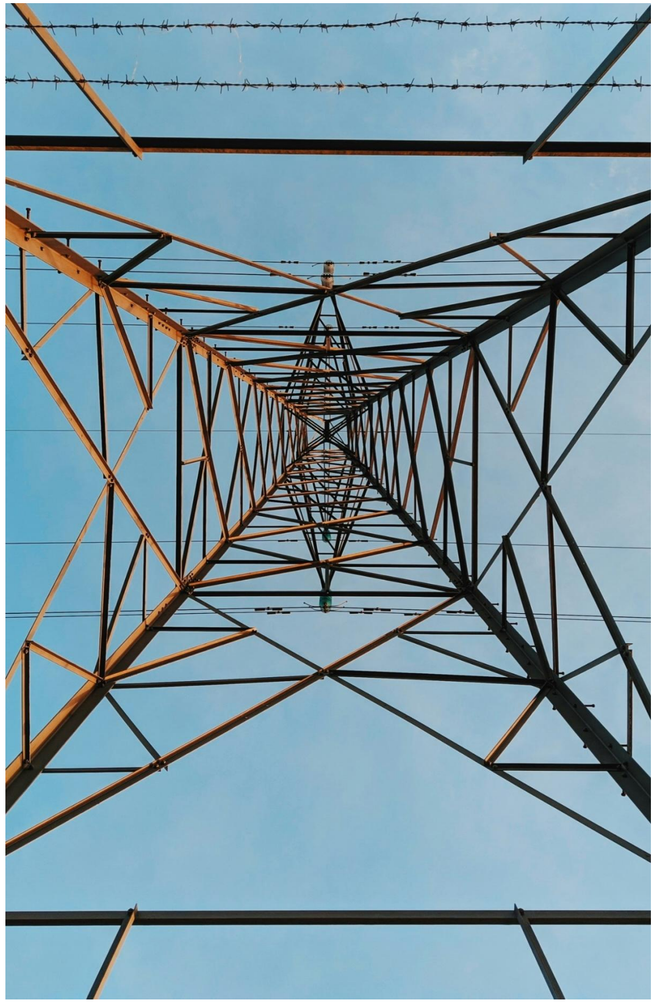
Recommendation 2024/1/MC-EnC on accelerating the deployment of renewable energy projects

RES uptake: Fast and sound

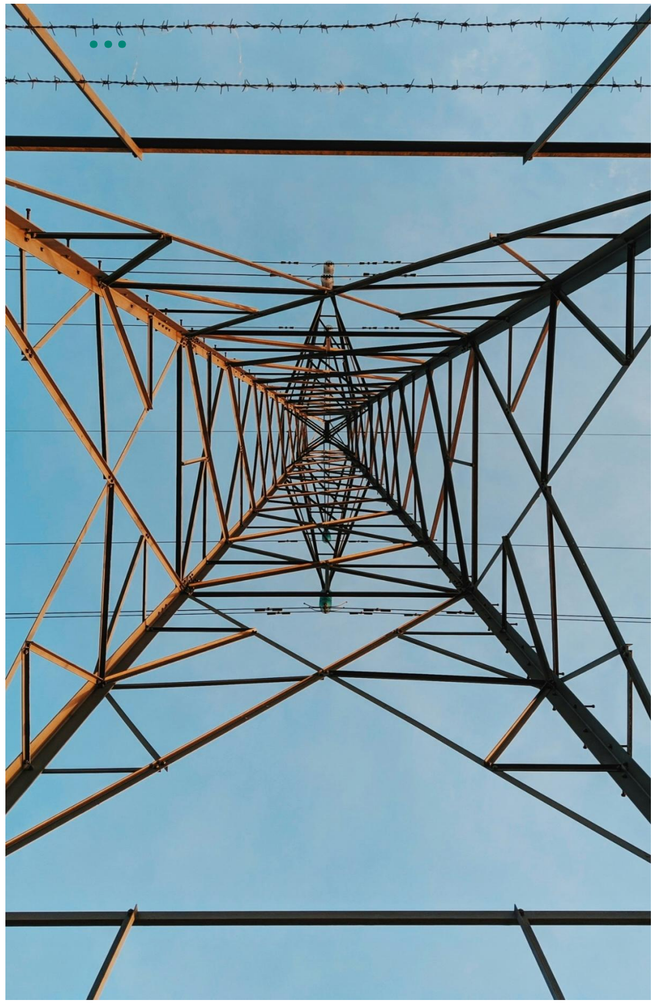
What are RE acceleration areas?

Directive (EU) 2023/2413 (‚RED III‘) in a nutshell

- **mapping RES potential, grid and storage infrastructure & available areas (exclusion of high-value environmental areas)**
- **designating renewable acceleration areas with full public participation**
- introducing fast permit-granting procedure for new and repowering RES projects
- digital single point of contact
- presumption that RES projects are of overriding public interest



Benefits for Contracting Parties



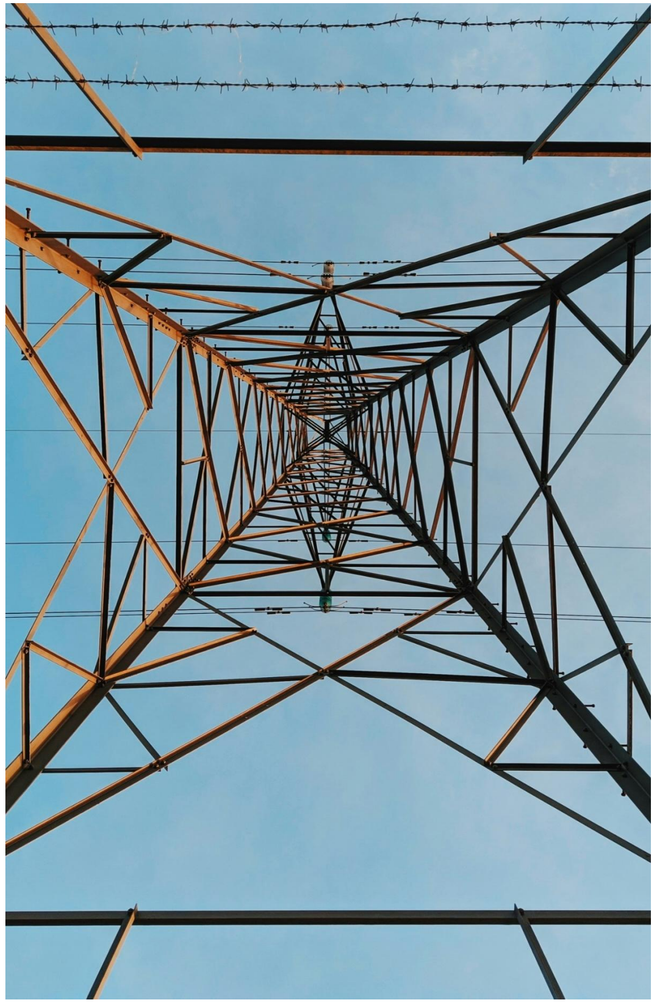
- The formal side: Recommendation 2024/1/MC-EnC
  - ‘prepare the legal and institutional preconditions for the implementation’
  - Commission Guidance SWD(2024) 333 final
- Why it really matters
  - Fast-tracking RES by removing barriers
  - Controlling the development
  - Benefits of early moving in a pan-European dynamic
  - Leap-frogging over problems which have slowed down RES deployment in the EU
  - Conversion of brownfields etc and industrial development

Mapping the 2030 potential

Art. 15b

- **Objective**: CP to identify land and water surface needs for RES deployment and related grids and storage facilities that are needed to meet national contributions towards 2030 RES targets

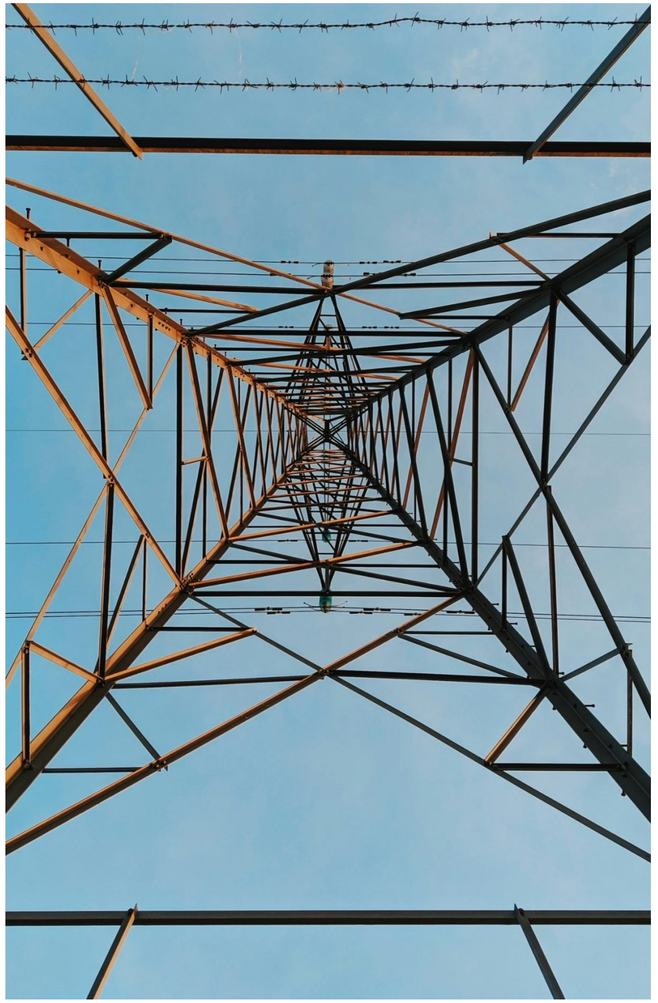
- Starting point substance: RES share for 2030
  - Excursus: what is renewable?
  - Available additional RES energy potential per technology, incl. cooperation mechanisms
  - Demand projection
  - Availability of infrastructure (grid/storage)
  - Availability of land, river or sea surface, priority to multiple use (such as agri-PV, floating PV, transport corridors, buildings etc.)



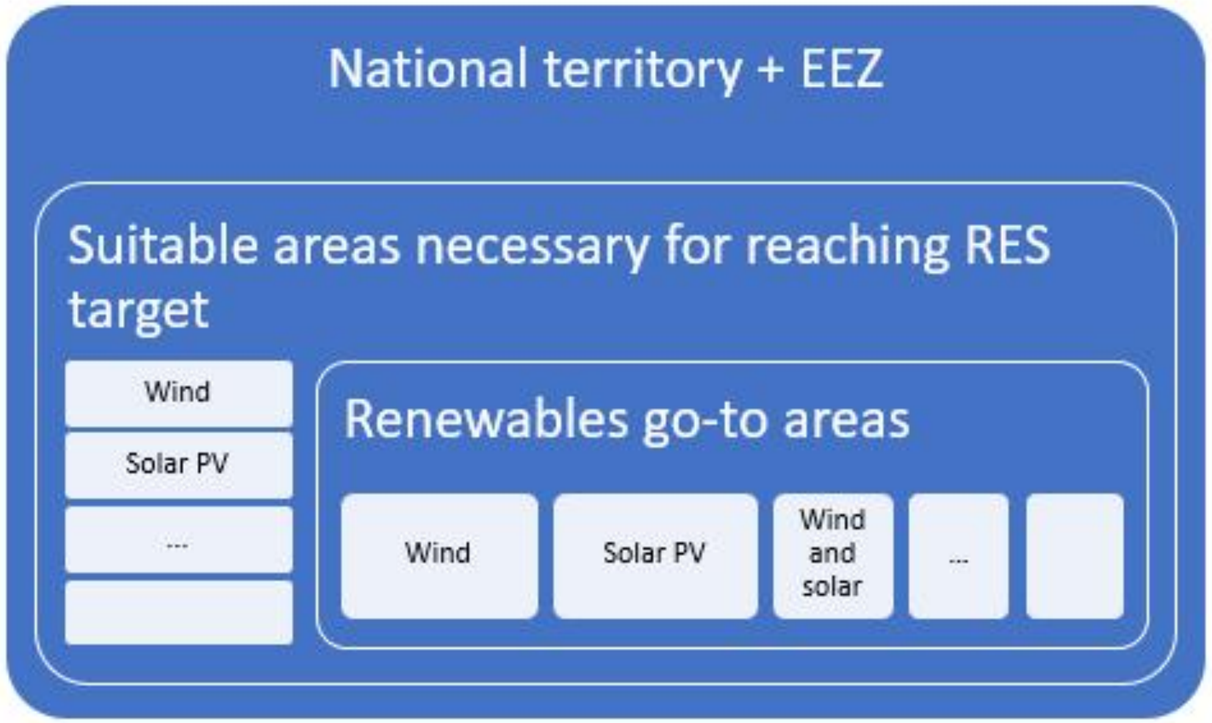
Mapping the 2030 potential

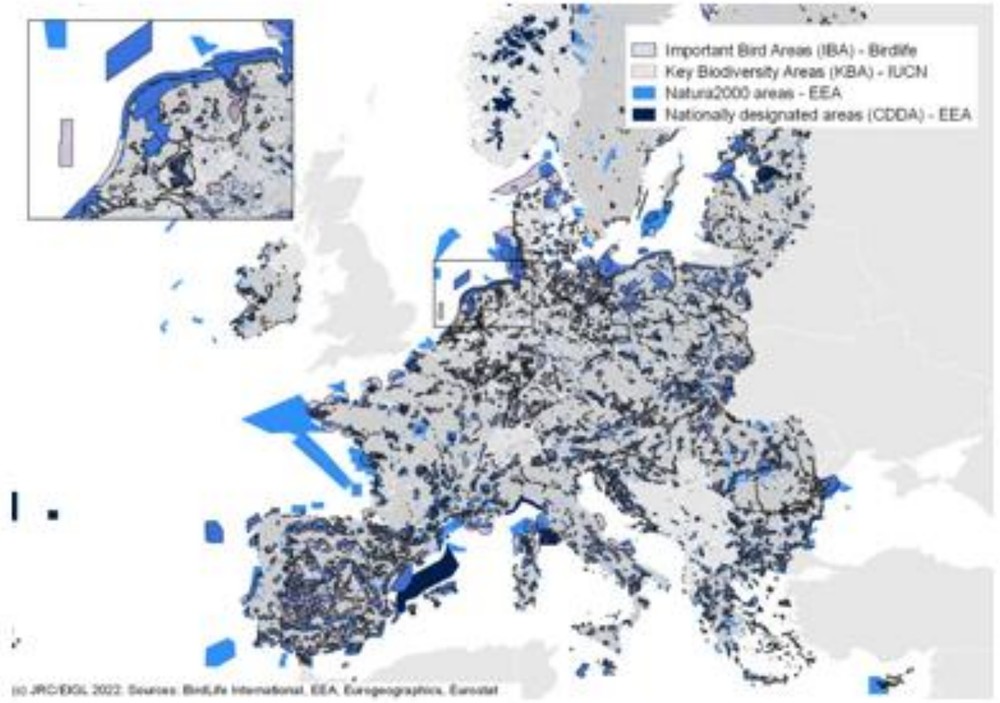
Art. 15b

- Starting point procedure: spatial planning
  - NECP for trajectories and planned installed capacity
  - Periodical update
  - Coordination between national, regional ,local entities + network operators
  - Land use: installation of RES projects shall be compatible with pre-existing uses of mapped areas. Concern that this might be interpret too strictly, leading to reluctance to allow a change in land use

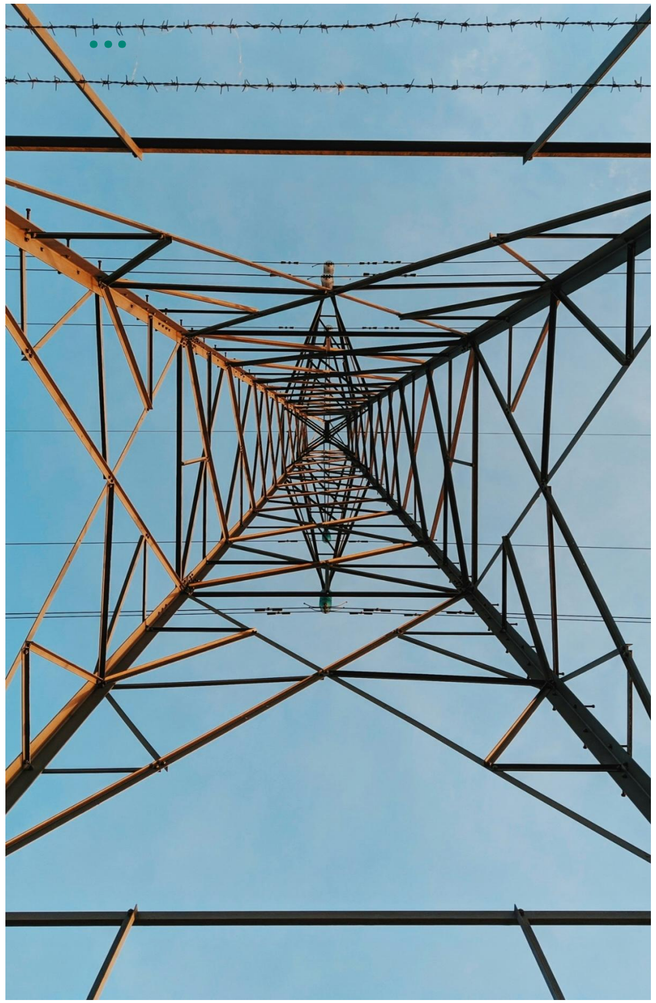


Mapping illustrated





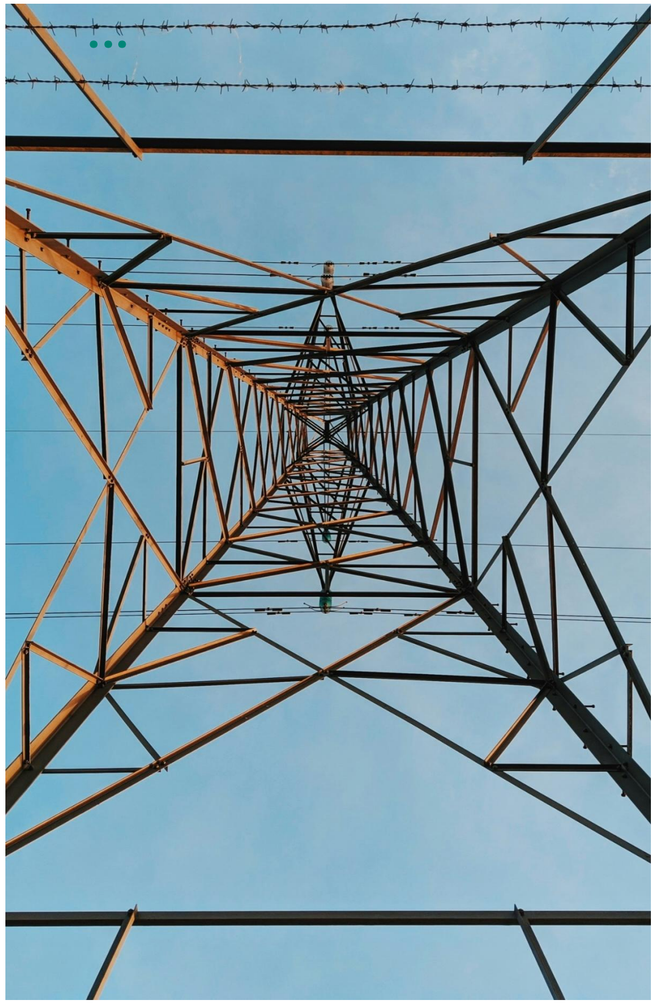
Designating RAAs



Art. 15c

- A subset of 2030 maps
- Legally binding plans, in accordance with national law (amendments needed?)
- Consequence: Fast-track permitting applies
- Technology-specific or technology-mixed
  - hydro and biomass plants may be excluded
  - COM Guidance focuses on ground-mounted solar and onshore and offshore wind projects
- Combined size of all RAAs should be ‘significant’

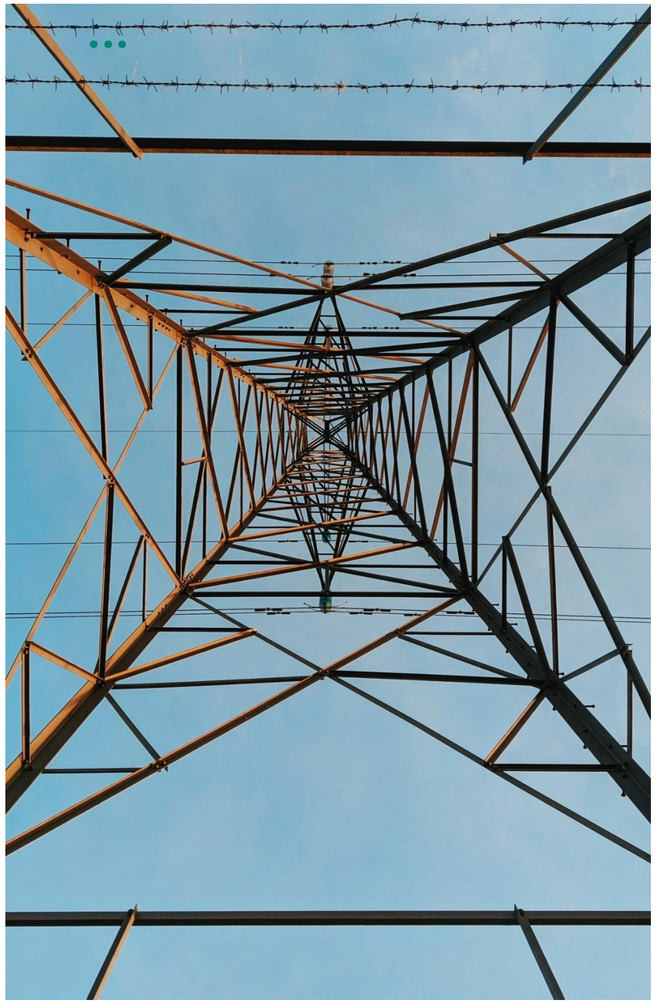
Designating RAAs



Art. 15c

- Step 1: Preparation of the RAA plan
  - **Priority/'go-to' areas**: Areas where the deployment of RES is not expected to have a 'significant environmental impact'
  - Priority to artificial/built surface ('*such as rooftops and facades of buildings, transport infrastructure and their direct surroundings, parking areas, farms, waste sites, industrial sites, mines, artificial inland water bodies, lakes or reservoirs and, where appropriate, urban waste water treatment sites, as well as degraded land not usable for agriculture*')
  - Use of appropriate tools and datasets (wildlife, biodiversity, COM Energy & Industry Geography Lab)
  - Excluding Natura 2000 sites and areas designated '*for nature and biodiversity conservation, major bird and marine mammal migratory routes as well as other areas identified on the basis of sensitivity maps*'
  - Availability of infrastructure (grid/storage)

Designating RAAs



Art. 15c

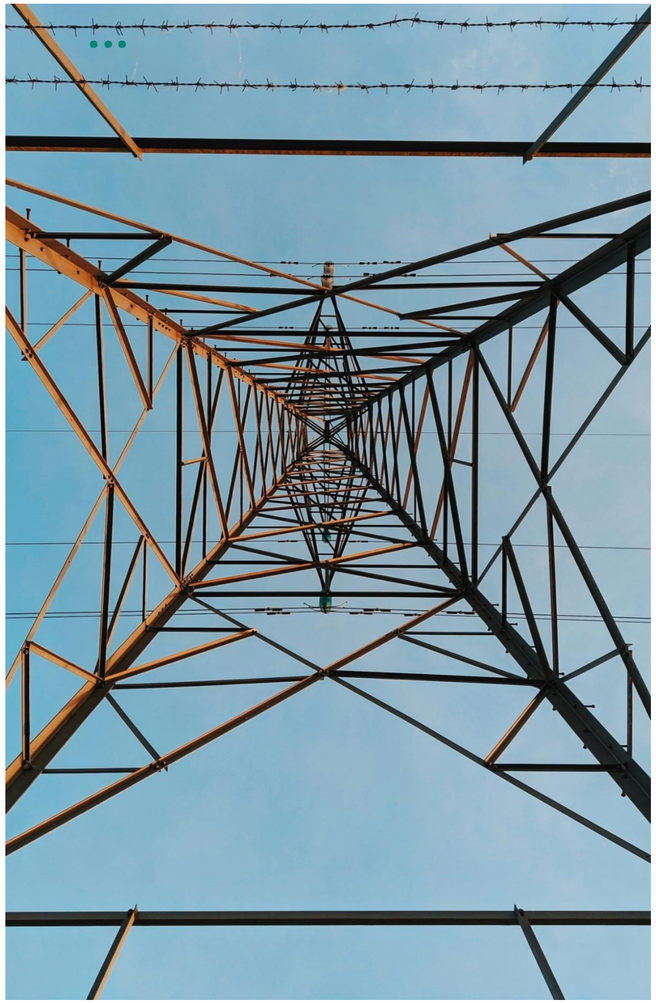
- Step 2: Preparation of Mitigation Rulebook
  - Rules for avoidance/restoration/mitigation measures for the adverse environmental impact of RES + infrastructure deployment in RAA
- Step 3: Stakeholder engagement
  - Public participation in RAA designation process, incl local communities (Art. 15d)
- Step 4: SEA on RAA Plan(s)
  - Arhus Convention applies
  - Main environmental impacts of wind and solar energy technologies:

    Onshore wind: land clearance and potential harm to habitats

    Offshore wind: underwater noise, pollution, animal collisions, seabed habitat loss, barrier effects

    Habitat degradation, microclimate changes, pollution, and wildlife impacts (injury, mortality, displacement, habitat loss)

Designating RAAs



Art. 15c

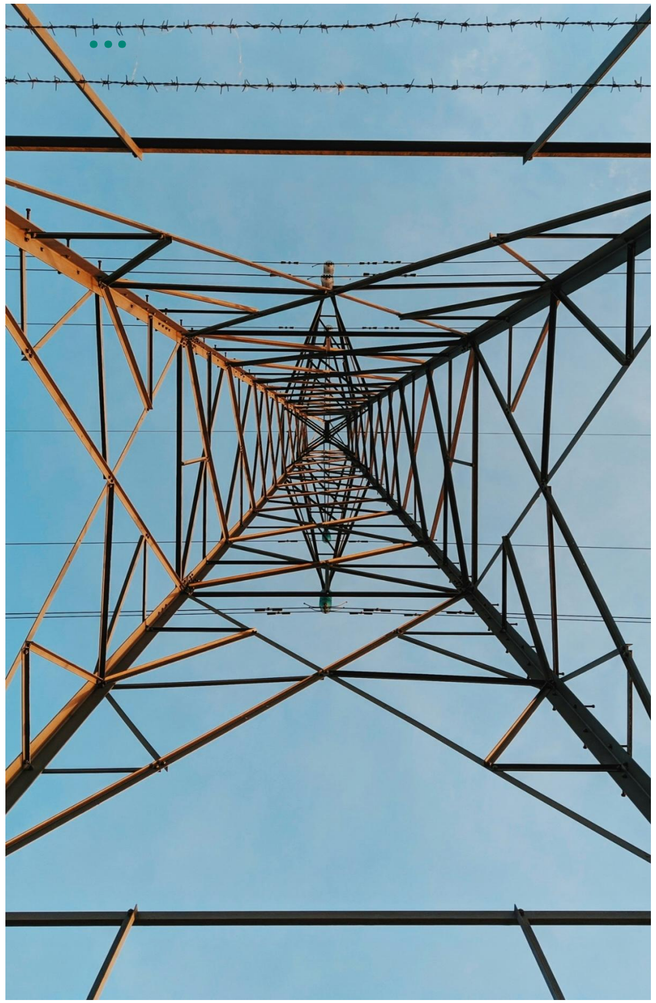
- Existing Acceleration Areas
  - CP may declare as RES Acceleration Areas if:

    - They are outside protected areas (Acceleration areas exclude Natura 2000 areas, protected areas, major migratory routes for bird and marine mammals)

    - Those areas have carried out a SEA

    - There are mitigation measures at project level

The infrastructure component

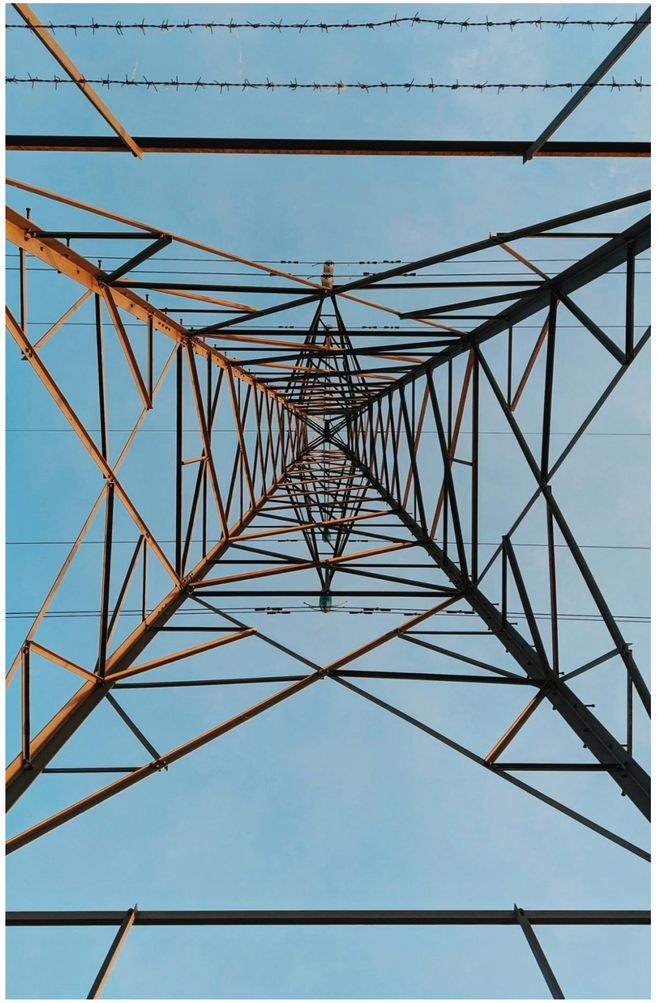


Art. 15e

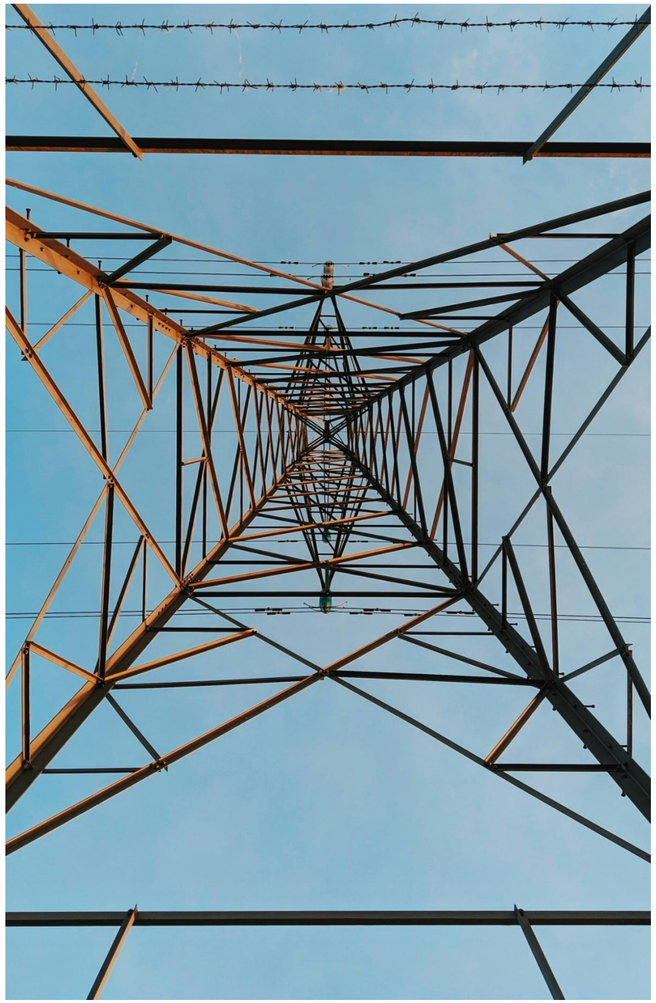
- Complementary Dedicated Infrastructure Areas (grid, batteries), where synergies with RAA exist
- Exemption from EIA etc. of infrastructure necessary to integrate RES, reduction to screening
- Facilitation also for grid infrastructure projects outside Dedicated Infrastructure Areas

Experience in EU Member States

- Transposition (2/2026)
  - Achieved: CZ, DE, ES, IT, LT, RO
  - Ongoing: AT, FR, GR, HR, PL, PT
- In the EnC: TNC Smart Siting Guidelines
- Implementation: Example DE
  - Focus on wind: 2% of national territory designated for onshore wind
  - Retroactively integrated in existing spatial plans (e.g. offshore or onshore wind areas), unless in defined exclusion zones (criticism: too formal), no additional SEA
  - Competences scattered on all governance levels
  - No priority given to brownfields or degraded land
  - Dedicated Infrastructure Areas included in RAA



The final step: Project implementation



- EIA frontloaded by RAA designation

- Environmental permit still relevant
  - Carry out SEA of designated RES acceleration areas, and if needed, to a Natura 2000 Appropriate Assessment
  - This will allow for project-level exemption:

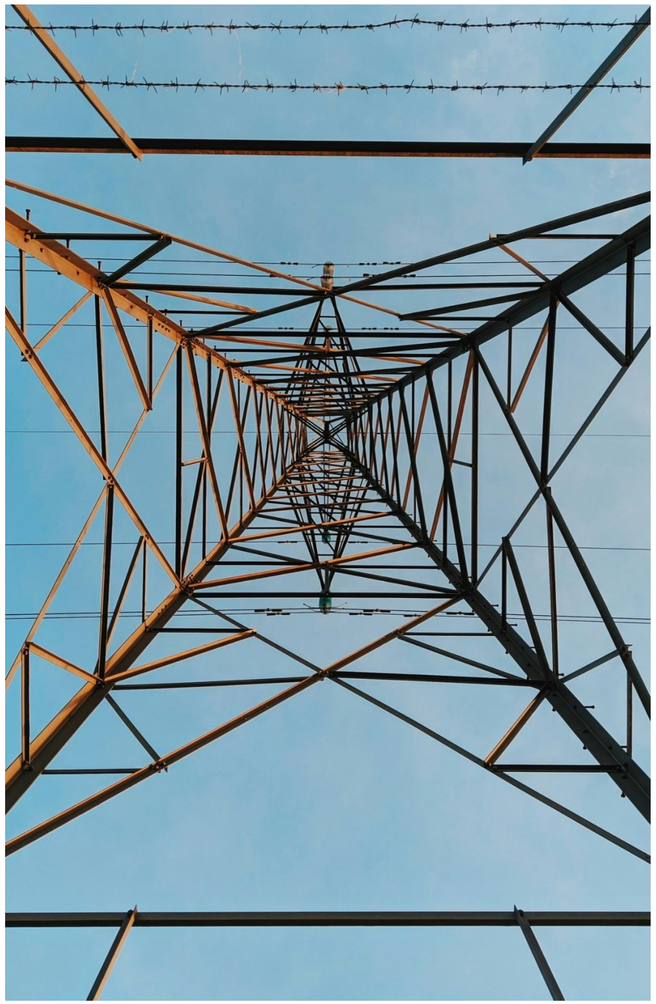
    - Project-level EIA exemptions: projects in renewables acceleration areas are exempted from EIA.

    - Screening phase: intended to identify any significant unforeseen effects not accounted for in SEA, as well as any significant environmental impact on other MS.

    - If significant environmental impact expected, mitigation and compensation measures to be adopted by operators.

Preliminary conclusions

- Clearly structured mapping and designation process
- Building largely on spatial planning
- New areas and stakeholders for EU and EnC
- Recommended way forward
  - Mapping and RAA identification first (data-heavy)
  - Address possible bottlenecks with legal basis for designation and permitting (transposition) later
  - Make a start!



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THANK YOU!

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