



ENERGY TRANSITION IN BRIEF

DIALOGUE AND PARTICIPATION: RAISING PUBLIC ACCEPTANCE OF THE ENERGY TRANSITION



A majority of the German population supports the energy transition. This is not least because many German citizens are involved in energy projects, can provide input for political decisions and can engage in dialogue with decision-makers.

There is a long tradition of environmental awareness in Germany, with the first nature conservation association being founded more than 100 years ago. The oil crisis and the anti-nuclear movement helped environmental activism gain political momentum in the 1970s and prepared the ground for the on-going energy transition – a massive project involving all groups of society. The energy transition has very high acceptance rates among the German population. Surveys show that more than 90 per cent endorse a transformation towards a sustainable, climate-friendly and environmentally acceptable energy supply (see figure 1).



The plans for grid expansion are made in close coordination with the public

(Source: 50Hertz, Amprion, TenneT, TransnetBW)

Most Germans support the energy transition

A number of different studies and practical tests have found that by actively involving the public, the level of acceptance of energy transition projects can be considerably improved. For example, people who own a renewable energy installation or are a member of an energy cooperative not only help move forward the energy transition, but also see some financial benefit. The Renewable Energy Sources Act provides the legal basis for the priority feed-in of green electricity into the grid and feed-in tariffs. And since the adoption of the Landlord-to-Tenant Electricity Act in 2017, tenants can get cheaper electricity directly from solar installations on the rooftops of their apartment blocks.

Conflicting interests weaken public acceptance of energy transition projects

However, even citizens who support the concept of the energy transition frequently reject specific action if it takes place in their own backyard. This particularly includes the building of new wind farms and grid expansion projects (including the establishment of converter stations and substations). Some 78 per cent of the German population support grid expansion. However, only 32 per cent want power lines to be laid across their neighbourhood. In addition, acceptance for renewable energy and grid expansion projects can be further reduced by potential conflicts between the energy transition and nature conservation, such as protecting migrating birds against wind turbines.

Germany has several formal and informal mechanisms to involve the public and raise the level of acceptance of specific energy transition projects among stakeholders. Formal mechanisms to involve the public include for example land use and building approval procedures.

These can be effectively supplemented by voluntary mechanisms that actively involve the relevant stakeholders early on. This is exactly what many project developers opt to do. They inform residents about the projects they undertake in order to try to raise acceptance. The government also offers different energy transition-related information, dialogue and consultation formats. These include the 'Public Dialogue on Grids', advisory centres such as the centre of excellence for 'Protection of Nature and the Energy Transition', dedicated offices at Länder level and the SMARD electricity market data website (see IN BRIEF). These government initiatives foster open and transparent dialogue with the municipalities and the public.

Figure 1 Population supports renewables expansion
(Source: own representation based on data from the Federal Ministry for Economic Affairs and Energy)

93 per cent of Germans think that making greater use of and expanding renewable energy is important, very important or extremely important.

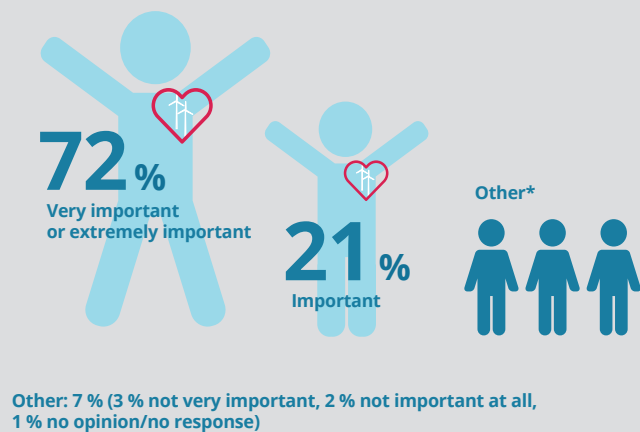
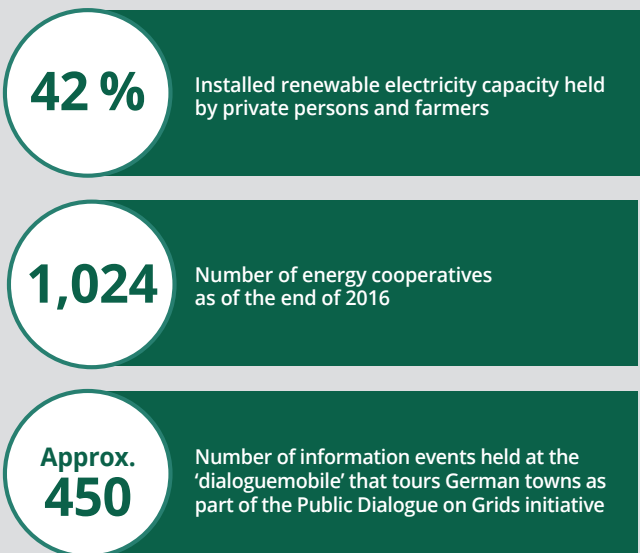
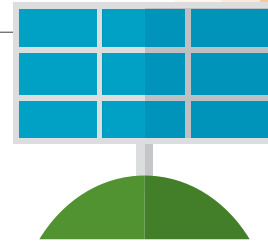


Figure 2: Public participation and the energy transition in figures
(Source: own representation based on data from AEE, Kahla et al. and the Public Dialogue on Grids)



IN BRIEF



Grid expansion: How can the public participate in the planning of new corridors?

As part of grid expansion, a transparent procedure for planning high voltage power lines has been developed. It involves several steps. First of all, the grid operators and the Bundesnetzagentur assess how much electricity and electricity generation capacities will be needed in the future. This is used as a basis for determining the need for grid expansion. The Bundesnetzagentur – which is the authority responsible for approving grid expansion projects – and the transmission system operators then involve the relevant stakeholders and the public by organising consultation procedures and dialogue sessions. It is only after all of these steps are completed that the search for a suitable corridor and route will start. Under the Public Dialogue on Grids initiative, the Federal Ministry for Economic Affairs and Energy informs the people living in the regions concerned about the planned projects and ways in which they can get involved. For this purpose, ten citizens' offices have been established in the regions (www.netzausbau.de, www.netzentwicklungsplan.de, www.buergerdialog-stromnetz.de).

Wind energy: What rules do wind energy developers need to meet?

Wind turbines and particularly large wind farms often provoke mixed feelings among residents. They feel that wind turbines are a blight on the landscape and a threat to biodiversity and natural habitats. Wind energy developers therefore need to adhere to the rules laid down in the Federal Immission Control Act and the Federal Nature Conservation Act designed to minimise the negative impact on residents and the environment. There are also rules for the distance between wind turbines and the nearest house. In order to pre-empt concerns about wind turbines, many wind farm developers approach residents on their own initiative and early on in the planning process. They provide information, organise round tables and offer residents the chance to buy a stake in the project. For example, the WISE Power 'WE Engage' toolkit for stakeholders – a guideline for public engagement – has been developed (www.we-engage.eu).

Electricity market: What is SMARD?

SMARD is a website that provides electricity market data in a way that is easy to understand. It is run by the Bundesnetzagentur and seeks to provide consumers with information about the electricity market and the energy transition. Users receive data in close to real time – and also in English – about conventional and renewable energy generation and electricity consumption in Germany (www.smard.de).