The Role and Future of Energy Communities in the EU

The European Union (EU) is pushing for a transformation in energy systems to achieve climate neutrality by 2050. A pivotal part of this transition involves energy communities, which enable citizens to collectively own, control, and consume local renewable energy. These communities are recognized by EU legislation as key players in promoting social cohesion and reducing energy poverty.

Since 2018, the EU has introduced the concepts of Renewable Energy Communities (RECs) and Citizen Energy Communities (CECs) through the Clean Energy for All Europeans package. These frameworks aim to support localized, decentralized energy production while ensuring that communities benefit from environmental and social gains rather than focusing purely on profit.

Despite the EU's strong political backing, the implementation of these energy communities at the national level remains inconsistent. Member states are required to establish supportive frameworks that include financial access, information dissemination, and the removal of regulatory barriers. However, many countries have yet to fully align their national legislation with EU directives, resulting in uncertainty and slow progress for energy communities.

Recent legislative developments, such as the Fit for 55 package and the RePowerEU plan, are designed to accelerate the integration of renewable energy. These initiatives emphasize the need for swift permitting processes for renewable projects and aim to set up energy communities in municipalities with populations over 10,000.

Financial and technical support is crucial for the growth of energy communities. While several EU funds are available, accessing these resources remains a challenge for many communities due to competing priorities and limited expertise. The EU has established several support initiatives, including the Energy Community Repository and the Rural Energy Community Advisory Hub, to address these needs.

To further bolster the development of energy communities, the EU recommends several actions:

Legislation: Continue integrating community-specific provisions into EU laws and ensure clear definitions and frameworks for RECs and CECs.
Implementation: Ensure member states provide comprehensive enabling frameworks and report on their support for the social roles of energy communities.
Financing: Establish dedicated funding programs and provide detailed guidelines for accessing these funds.
Technical Assistance: Offer ongoing support and create one-stop-shops to help communities navigate funding opportunities.
In conclusion, while the EU has laid the groundwork for energy communities, the success of these initiatives largely depends on the commitment and action of member states.
Enhanced legislation, financial incentives, and technical support are essential to fully realize

the potential of energy communities in creating a fairer, more sustainable energy system in Europe.

For more details on this transformative movement, refer to the full policy brief from the Sun4All project, funded by the EU's Horizon 2020 program