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THE TOP TEN BARRIERS TO FASTER RENEWABLES DEPLOYMENT

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Top Ten Barriers to Faster Renewables Deployment

Introduction

Achieving the European Union's (EU) strategic energy policy goals – climate neutrality, energy affordability and security, and increased competitiveness – depends on a substantial and rapid rollout of renewable energy. To achieve this, **permitting procedures for renewables must become faster and more predictable**. This is the basis for the revisited Renewable Energy Directive (REDIII)[1].

Where they have been implemented, the new EU rules have started to produce encouraging results: Permitting for large solar and wind projects has already become faster[2]. However, several EU countries have not implemented the new rules comprehensively enough to kickstart a tangible acceleration of renewables deployment[3].

Rather than await full implementation of existing EU law, the European Commission's Affordable Energy Action Plan recommends further 'targeted updates to the legislative framework on environmental assessments'. In addition, the EU executive has recently suggested relaxing EU nature protection rules even further. In either case, **simplifying environmental assessments beyond the current REDIII remit would be a poor solution** to a problem that does not exist[4].

Both industry leaders and civil society organisations are warning: we do not need more legislative changes. What we need is better implementation of existing rules[5], because the real obstacles do not lie with environmental assessments but elsewhere. Here are ten big barriers to fast renewables deployment – and what can be done to overcome them.

Top ten barriers

1. Lack of staff in public authorities

Planning and permitting authorities across the EU are critically understaffed, especially at local and regional levels. The Commission's assessment of Bulgaria's National Energy and Climate Plan (NECP) flagged grid and permitting delays due to staffing shortages, with authorities unable to keep pace with renewables demand. NGO analysis of spatial planning and the designation of Renewable Acceleration Areas (RAAs) has also pointed to a widespread shortage of qualified assessors and planners. This is a relevant factor reducing the speed and quality of processes.

> **What's needed:** Boost recruitment to meet the time requirements of the Renewable Energy Directive (REDIII); Establish staff pooling instruments to enable smaller administrations to share human resources and receive legal and technical assistance; Allow authorities flexibility to offer highly qualified staff competitive salaries.

2. Incomplete implementation of EU law

No EU country has, to date, met its obligations to transpose the REDIII (triggering infringement procedures by the European Commission). This is resulting in an implementation that is disjointed, insufficient and/or incoherent. Outdated national and local spatial planning frameworks still often hinder the environmental mapping and the spatial planning efforts for renewables, causing legal uncertainty and delays for developers and authorities alike. The unclear division of responsibilities between regions and municipalities hinders implementation efforts further, with smaller local entities often being less able to mobilise quickly in response to new legislation.

> **What's needed:** EU governments must (A) coherently transpose the REDIII's permitting articles into national law as soon as possible, allowing public scrutiny and in compliance with existing EU nature protection and restoration rules[6]; (B) meet the February 2026 deadline to establish Renewables Acceleration Areas (RAAs) and for this (C) begin very swiftly with the participation of civil society in the Strategic Environmental Assessment process; Continued assistance by the European Commission to national and regional governments, including by fostering the exchange of good practices and increasing the resources available under the Technical Support Instrument.

3. Political uncertainty

Some EU countries and regions have been adopting or discussing unreasonable bans on renewables. The Italian regions of Sardegna and Lazio effectively put in place moratoria on solar and wind projects. While these measures have been deemed unlawful by the competent judicial courts, they still discouraged developers and authorities from pursuing accelerated renewables deployment. A nationwide ban on new wind and solar projects was recently proposed in the French National Assembly. Although French lawmakers rejected the proposal, campaigning efforts to lobby for these bans are ongoing across the EU, adding to the uncertainty of an already tense political landscape.

> **What's needed**: the EU Commission must continue to provide political guidance to national and regional governments to foster compliance with REDIII, which prohibits undifferentiated restrictions without proper justification; EU governments must seek and heed public advice on the siting of renewable energy projects and ensure fair benefit-sharing to defuse and delegitimise political calls for moratoria.

4. Excessively restrictive spatial planning rules

Poland continues to enforce excessive distance rules for onshore wind, drastically reducing the space available for renewables development beyond what is reasonable in terms of environmental protection and impact on local communities. In Czechia, the Ministry of Defence has excluded many areas surrounding military installations during the REDIII mapping phase, resulting in exclusion zones

much larger than nature protection areas. In Sweden, over 30GW of planned offshore capacity was blocked by the government for military reasons. No technical criteria are provided for these decisions due to military secrecy.

> **What's needed**: EU countries should remove all unreasonable distance limits and other unjustified spatial planning barriers; EU countries should reach an agreement on harmonised rules for exclusion of areas surrounding military sites.

5. Insufficient grid capacity

In many EU countries, the grid is struggling to keep up with the rapid rollout of renewables. As of May 2025, 1,700 GW of renewable projects are stuck in grid connection queues across 16 European countries – over three times the capacity needed to meet the EU 2030 targets. Planning and financing are key issues here, with national infrastructure plans often underestimating the pace of wind and solar deployment, and EU-level funding falling short of what is needed.

> **What's needed:** Support Transmission System Operators (TSOs) in developing long-term plans that are fit for 100% renewables and in deploying anticipatory investments; Optimise existing high-voltage lines, including by co-locating solar and wind projects, taking advantage of the increased stability that comes with different generation profiles; Streamline approvals for the needed expansion of grid capacity without recurring to environmental derogation and by fully involving civil society in planning and permitting processes.

6. Limited public participation

Meaningful public participation is more than a box-ticking exercise. Bypassing it in the name of speed can be counterproductive, as a lack of participation can fuel existing local opposition, resulting in lengthy legal challenges and delaying plans and projects. In Romania and Slovakia, civil society has raised concerns about restricted access to environmental information and inadequate consultation timelines. In Portugal, the national government's consultation on some elements of REDIII transposition in September 2024 has been criticised by environmental NGOs for its extremely short ten-day.

> **What's needed:** Ensure early, meaningful, and transparent public participation throughout the RAA designation and permitting processes, both in mandatory consultations and through additional information and dialogue campaigns; Foster the adoption of appropriate benefit-sharing mechanisms, such as community-benefit funds; Establish auction criteria that reward public participation in the form of community ownership.

7. Slow digitalisation

Despite RED III requirements to digitalise processes, many EU countries still rely on paper-based documentation or fragmented digital systems. Developers have reported a lack of digital permitting platforms in countries such as Greece, Bulgaria, and Hungary. Although there has been some improvement in the digitalisation of administrative procedures in countries such as Spain, Portugal and Germany, they still fall short of providing developers with transparent, fully digital permitting workflows.

> **What's needed:** Build and expand fully digital portals that bring together all phases of the permitting process; Ensure that digital platforms provide the relevant authorities, project developers and the public with easy access to key environmental and technical information.

8. Overlaps between authorities

Permits for renewable energy installations and grids invariably require approval from multiple authorities across different administrative levels, often operating with limited coordination. In Spain jurisdictional conflicts between central and regional governments on renewables siting have led to delays in spatial planning processes. In Italy, permitting powers are fragmented across regions, provinces, and municipalities, resulting siloed procedures and delays.

> **What's needed:** EU governments must swiftly establish single contact points and promote coordinated decision-making to overcome fragmented governance.

9. Shortage of skilled professionals

There is a shortage of skilled workers beyond planning and permitting, including engineers, installers, project managers and mediation experts. The gender imbalance in the renewables sector is also high with women accounting only for 32 % of the workforce. As mandated under the REDIII, Member States must identify gaps in their workforce and skill sets. For example, Austria has officially listed power engineers among its 2025 shortage occupations programme[7] due to unfilled roles needed for grid and renewables support.

> **What's needed:** Scale up EU financial support for training and apprenticeships via initiatives like the Pact for Skills' Renewable Energy Skills Partnership; EU countries should fast-track visa procedures for renewable energy specialists from non-EU countries.

10. Lack of publicly available data

Project developers and permitting authorities often lack access to reliable spatial, biodiversity, and grid capacity data, significantly slowing planning and permitting. Insufficient environmental sensitivity data can result in poorly planned renewable energy projects that have a significant adverse impact on

ecosystems. Furthermore, grid capacity data is critical to guide renewable siting effectively, as recently emphasised by the International Energy Agency (IEA). In Italy, a backlog of over 300 GW of grid connection requests has led to "virtual saturation" as developers struggle to identify viable points of connection.

> **What's needed:** EU countries must ensure open access to up-to-date spatial, biodiversity, and grid data; The European Commission should improve centralised, interoperable data platforms such as the Joint Research Centre (JRC)'s Energy and Industry Geography Lab (EIGL) tool to facilitate informed decision-making and project planning; National and regional authorities must strengthen data collection practices, by collecting up-to-date regional-specific data existing data for sensitivity mapping.

Conclusions

There is no need for additional legislative changes to accelerate the deployment of renewables in the EU. The ten key barriers we identified in this paper demonstrate that bottlenecks stem from governance and implementation failures, not from environmental protections. The Renewable Energy Directive (REDIII) already provides a solid framework, and solutions lie in its proper and timely implementation.

Furthermore, existing EU energy and nature legislation already allows for the streamlining of environmental assessments where appropriate. By supporting EU countries with **technical guidance, adequate funding, and targeted training** to overcome these barriers, the European Commission can unlock a swift renewables revolution, while safeguarding protecting nature and empowering communities.

Background notes

[1] The REDIII envisages the possibility for renewable projects located in certain particularly suitable areas to be exempted from the requirement of conducting a full-fledged Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) and, where these apply, Appropriate Assessments (AAs) mandated by EU environmental law, i.e. the Nature Directives. The rationale of REDIII adheres to a fairly simple logic: frontloading spatial planning as far as possible through Strategic Environmental Assessments and plans designating Renewables Acceleration Areas (RAAs) will make it possible for authorities to decide, based on quick screening procedures, whether a project applicant can forego its general obligation to carry out an EIA, provided that the project is located in an RAA.

[2] For example, Germany has already authorised 15 GW of new onshore wind capacity in 2025, seven times more than in 2020. This has been mainly attributed to the new federal rules on spatial planning and the uniform application of the Overriding Public Interest (OPI) principle based on the revised REDIII.

[3] For instance, Poland is still very far from meeting the maximum timeframe of 2 years for permitting new onshore wind projects, with 5 to 7 years still needed on average to obtain the necessary permits. This is despite Poland making substantial progress on the implementation of REDIII in terms of mapping and spatial planning to designate RAAs, including public consultations. [Source: ClientEarth Poland at the Implementation Dialogue on 11 June 2025.]

[4] Even when environmental assessments take up long time, perhaps even the majority of the overall permitting procedure's length, the reasons for that are not specific to environmental assessments per se. Instead, they are of a broader, systemic nature and impact every stage of project permitting. It should be noted that the European Commission has already provided extensive guidance on how to simplify EIAs effectively, and has recognised examples of good practice in Denmark and the Netherlands for improving the efficiency and timescales of AAs.

[5] This was also evident during the Implementation Dialogue on Permitting with EU Energy Commissioner Dan Jørgensen, held in the framework of the EU Sustainable Energy Week on 11 June 2025.

[6] I.e. the long-standing Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) Directive, the Birds and Habitats Directives, and the Water Framework Directive, as well as the recently adopted Nature Restoration Regulation.

[7] Austria has a shortage occupation list that identifies professions where there is a high demand for workers. This list helps facilitate the immigration of skilled workers to fill these gaps in the Austrian labour market.