

# Planning for success: How integrated energy planning can help the electrification of Europe

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As Europe moves away from using fossil fuels and embraces electrification, governments are under pressure to ensure that the transition is timely and cost-effective. By coordinating investment across the energy system, integrated energy planning can help achieve this.

Integrated energy planning is a coordinated planning process across different energy vectors, such as electricity, gas and heat, and across levels of the energy system, from energy generation to consumption. It can occur at multiple governance levels: locally through municipalities, nationally through governments and regulators, and internationally through EU processes and regional cooperation – as well as through the coordination of these different levels. Integrated energy planning can help minimise the total cost of reaching energy goals, provide a clearer picture of investment needs, and address any unfair impacts of the transition on people.

This briefing offers a definition of integrated energy planning. It provides an overview of recent developments toward it in Europe, and suggests possible next steps for decision-makers looking to make progress on this issue.<sup>1</sup>

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# Why integrated energy planning?

## Definition and objectives

Over the last few years, the EU has been working to increase integration in the planning and operation of the energy system. This goal was formalised in the Commission's 2020 strategy on energy system integration, and the analysis this contains remains largely relevant today.<sup>2</sup> The Commission defines energy system integration as the coordinated planning and operation of the energy system "as a whole," across multiple energy vectors, infrastructures and consumption sectors. The strategy highlights the fact that, in the past, planners largely addressed energy networks separately for each energy vector.

Operationalising energy system integration relies heavily on integrated energy planning. Integrated energy planning refers to a coordinated planning process across different energy vectors (gas, electricity, heat, hydrogen etc.) and across different levels of the energy system (behind the meter, distribution, transmission, generation) with the aim of creating an energy system that meets society's needs.<sup>3</sup> The definition may also encompass efforts to align energy planning with other planning processes, such as non-energy network planning (transport, water etc.), and other policies, such as building renovation, housing, spatial planning, and climate adaptation.

Integrated energy planning can take place at different governance levels, from local municipalities to national governments, and can also involve EU-wide and regional cooperation. Its scope can range from simply taking into account how other infrastructure and networks are expected to evolve, to assigning planning duties previously carried out by different entities to the same organisation. Between these two ends of the spectrum are intermediate coordination approaches, such as shared modelling or joint planning exercises. The appropriate solution will depend on the context.

Integrated energy planning allows decision-makers to consider synergies and trade-offs between different dimensions of their energy work. It can help to:

- **Identify a set of solutions that meet objectives in a cost-effective way.** For example, resources deployed by end users, such as flexibility or more efficient equipment, can reduce the need for expensive new power grids and keep system costs in check.<sup>4</sup>
- **Provide greater certainty about current and future investment needs, thereby avoiding redundant investments in energy infrastructure.** For instance, replacing a gas grid in an area that will soon switch to another heat source would be a waste of money. Integrated energy planning can help prevent this.

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<sup>2</sup> European Commission. (2020, 8 July). *Powering a climate-neutral economy: An EU Strategy for Energy System Integration*. COM(2020)299 final. <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=CELEX:52020DC0299>

<sup>3</sup> The desired energy system is defined by various features, such as security of supply, the share of renewable energy, associated CO<sub>2</sub> emissions, the level of interconnectivity with other countries, level of import dependency, or the electrification of end uses, among others.

<sup>4</sup> Agora Energiewende, Forum Energii, IDDRI, EPG and ECCO. (2025). *Designing energy infrastructure for a climate-neutral Europe. Solutions for cost-effective system development*. <https://www.agora-energiewende.org/publications/designing-energy-infrastructure-for-a-climate-neutral-europe>

- **Provide a better understanding of distributional impacts and address potential unfair consequences for end users.** For example, if some users disconnect from a gas grid, those who stay may face higher costs. Detailed, local-level knowledge of these impacts can help with the design of fair solutions for everyone.

## Importance for the electrification process

The importance of integrated energy planning has increased in recent years. There are three key reasons for this:

**Electricity is set to become the dominant energy vector, covering much of today's demand.** Some of the remaining demand will be covered by other energy vectors, such as heat delivered by clean, modern district heating networks, or hydrogen produced from renewable sources for hard-to-decarbonise sectors. This shift requires large investments, including in power generation, interconnectors and grids. At the same time, fossil gas use will continue to fall, and many gas pipelines will become obsolete. The challenge lies in simultaneously building new infrastructure, phasing out old systems and changing equipment at end-user level, while keeping costs in check. For example, delays in establishing new electricity grid connections can hamper industrial players' efforts to electrify their processes, while the slow deployment of heat pumps and other electrified end-uses can jeopardise overall progress.<sup>5</sup> These issues illustrate the types of coordination challenges that integrated energy planning seeks to address.

**End users now play a more important role.** In the past, planners predicted demand and built enough supply to meet it. Today, the EU recognises that end users help shape the system in a more dynamic way. By adopting efficient equipment and reducing their energy needs, end users can reduce overall energy consumption and electricity peak demand. Furthermore, consumers can shift their electricity consumption patterns, scheduling non-time-critical loads at times when renewable power is available, or storing electricity in batteries for later.<sup>6</sup> These actions at end-user level can reduce the costs of the transition for everyone, and energy planners should take their potential into account.

**The energy transition requires the coordination of multiple actors,** including generators, network operators, third parties like storage providers, and end users. Each group has different incentives, and the tools needed to align them also differ. Network companies operate as regulated entities, so national regulatory authorities can steer them directly. Grid users, by contrast, can be guided through incentives such as grants or tariffs, and through obligations such as restrictions on the equipment they can install. For example, a distribution network operator must obtain regulatory approval for its investment plans, whereas individual users can often install storage units wherever they meet connection and permitting requirements. These differences, combined with the different lead times of these investments, often result in coordination issues such as grid connection queues.

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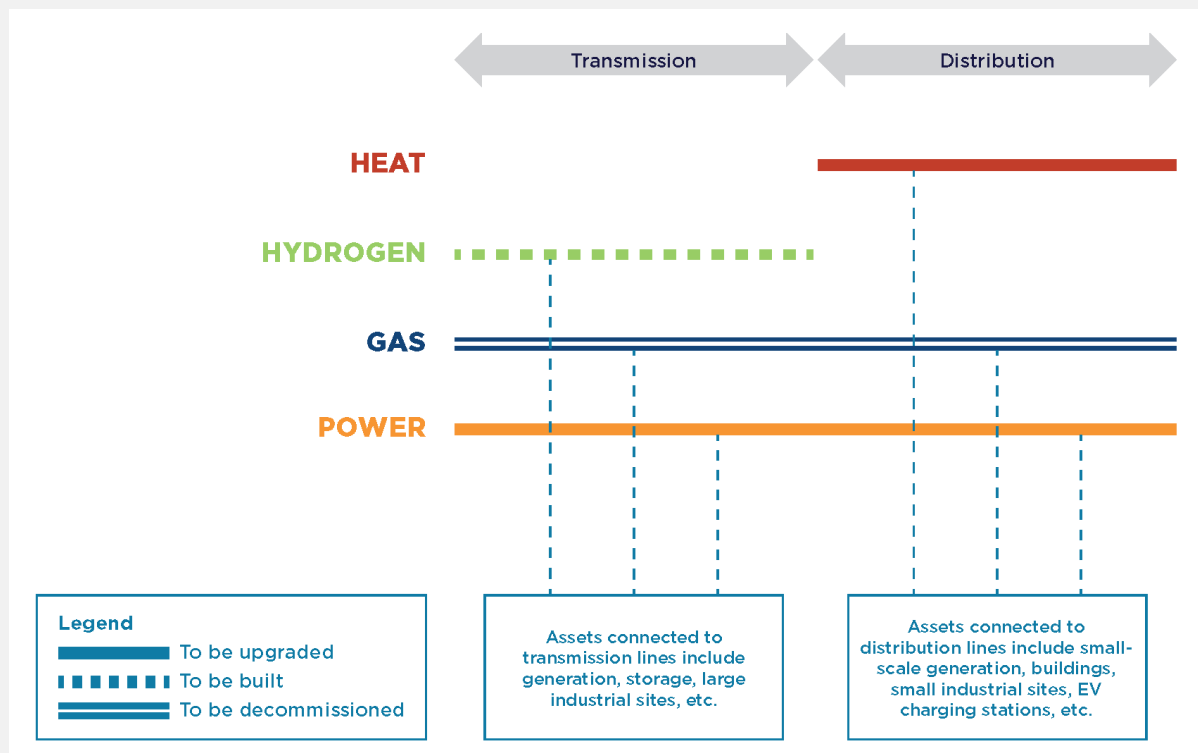
<sup>5</sup> European Commission. (2025, August 27). *Call for evidence: EU Electrification Action Plan – towards a clean, competitive and integrated energy system*. Ares(2025)6932089. [https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=intcom:Ares\(2025\)6932089](https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=intcom:Ares(2025)6932089)

<sup>6</sup> Yule-Bennett, S., & Sunderland, L. (2022, June). *The joy of flex: Embracing household demand-side flexibility as a power system resource for Europe*. Regulatory Assistance Project. <https://www.raonline.org/knowledge-center/joy-flex-embracing-household-demand-side-flexibility-power-system-resource-europe>

## Planning for energy networks in the age of electrification

Energy networks span various energy vectors, from large cables and pipelines at the transmission level to smaller networks that deliver energy to buildings and industrial sites at the distribution level. Electrification means reshaping these networks: closing down some parts, reinforcing others, and building entirely new infrastructure. Figure 1 provides a simplified illustration of the different networks and how they may evolve in the future.

**Figure 1. Planning for energy networks – An illustration**



## The development of integrated energy planning in Europe

The EU faces significant challenges in energy planning:

- First, energy policy largely remains under the control of Member States. Directions and targets are mainly set at EU level, and Member States must then transpose these into their legal systems. This requires coordination between governance levels.
- Second, for energy to flow freely across Member States and for the EU to benefit fully from the development of an integrated European energy market, coordinated investments in networks are required – and this is challenging to organise.

- Finally, some energy planning requires granular, local knowledge about energy systems and related developments such as urban plans. However, the involvement of local and regional authorities in energy planning varies across Member States.

In recent years the EU, its Member States, and local authorities have begun to take steps toward more integrated approaches.

## Governance of the Energy Union: Towards stronger coordination and coherence in national energy policy

Ten years ago, the EU established the Energy Union to better coordinate energy planning among its Member States.<sup>8</sup> With the Governance Regulation adopted in 2018, Member States must prepare National Energy and Climate Plans (NECPs) for ten years, with one mid-term revision.<sup>9</sup> These plans set out how each Member State will contribute to meeting EU targets, and are developed through an iterative process with the European Commission.

Building on this coordination function, NECPs also aim to bring greater coherence across sectoral policies known as the “dimensions” of the Energy Union. These include energy security, energy markets, energy efficiency, climate action, and research policy. How effectively Member States achieve this integration largely depends on how they organise and coordinate their administrative services when developing the plan.

While the Commission has identified significant room for improvement<sup>10</sup> the current process is a first step toward two goals: coordination across 27 national systems, and coherence across sectoral policies within each system. As the EU prepares to amend the Governance Regulation in

### Multi-level governance?

Member States have an obligation to ensure public participation and establish a multi-level climate and energy dialogue in preparing and implementing NECPs, involving, for example, regional and local authorities. NECP preparations could be one step towards multi-level governance, but the experience so far has been mixed, with many shortcomings identified.<sup>7</sup>

<sup>7</sup> European Commission. (2024, September). *Evaluation Accompanying the document Report from the Commission to the European Parliament and the Council on the Review of the Regulation on the Governance of the Energy Union and Climate Action*. <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=CELEX:52024SC0200>; CAN Europe. (2023). *Public participation in National Energy and Climate Plans: Evidence of weak & uneven compliance in Member States*. <https://caneurope.org/public-participation-in-national-energy-and-climate-plans-evidence-of-weak-uneven-compliance-in-member-states>; NECPlatform project. (n.d.). <https://energy-cities.eu/project/life-necplatform>

<sup>8</sup> European Commission. (2015). *A framework strategy for a resilient Energy Union with a forward-looking climate change policy*. COM(2015) 80 final. <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=CELEX:52015DC0080>

<sup>9</sup> European Union. (2018). *Regulation (EU) 2018/1999 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 11 December 2018 on the Governance of the Energy Union and Climate Action and European Commission*. <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/eli/reg/2018/1999/oj/eng>

<sup>10</sup> European Commission. (n.d.). *National energy and climate plans*. [Webpage]. [https://commission.europa.eu/energy-climate-change-environment/implementation-eu-countries/energy-and-climate-governance-and-reporting/national-energy-and-climate-plans\\_en](https://commission.europa.eu/energy-climate-change-environment/implementation-eu-countries/energy-and-climate-governance-and-reporting/national-energy-and-climate-plans_en)

2026,<sup>11</sup> asking Member States to set out their electrification pathways and their approach to integrated energy planning would strengthen the relevance of NECPs for the European energy transition.

## The progressive integration of energy network planning

### EU-level coordination

As the EU aimed (and continues) to further integrate its energy markets, it became necessary to coordinate energy network planning to ensure that infrastructure supported the integration. In 2009, EU legislation established the European Network for Transmission System Operators for Electricity (ENTSO-E) and Gas (ENTSOG).<sup>12</sup> The organisations develop biennial ten-year plans to coordinate electricity and gas infrastructure development across Europe.<sup>13</sup> The European distribution system operator entity (EU DSO), set up in 2021, represents European distribution system operators in their interactions with the electricity transmission operator network in network planning.<sup>14</sup>

Since 2022, the ENTSOs have worked together to develop a joint scenario as the basis for the Union-wide network development plans.<sup>15</sup> With the creation of the European Network of Network Operators for Hydrogen (ENNOH), ENTSO-E, ENTSOG and ENNOH will now prepare joint scenarios for electricity, hydrogen and gas.<sup>16</sup>

Energy network planning at EU level remains mainly driven by national transmission system operators and split across energy vectors.<sup>17</sup> To improve coherence at EU level, in December 2025 the Commission proposed that a single central scenario should be developed by the Commission services themselves to underpin future development plans and aid ENTSO-E

<sup>11</sup> European Commission. (2025, October 21). *2026 Commission work programme and annexes*. [https://commission.europa.eu/publications/2026-commission-work-programme-and-annexes\\_en](https://commission.europa.eu/publications/2026-commission-work-programme-and-annexes_en)

<sup>12</sup> European Union. (2009). *Regulation (EC) No 714/2009 of 13 July 2009 on conditions for access to the network for cross-border exchanges in electricity*. Article 4 [https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/HTML/?uri=CELEX:32009R0714#art\\_4](https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/HTML/?uri=CELEX:32009R0714#art_4); European Union. (2009). *Regulation (EC) No 715/2009 of 13 July 2009 on conditions for access to the natural gas transmission*. Article 4. [https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/HTML/?uri=CELEX:32009R0715#art\\_4](https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/HTML/?uri=CELEX:32009R0715#art_4)

<sup>13</sup> Regulation (EC) No 714/2009, Article 8(3)(b) and Regulation (EC) No 715/2009, Article 8(3)(b). In 2013, a more harmonised process for preparing these plans was introduced: European Union. (2013). *Regulation (EU) No 347/2013 of 17 April 2013 on guidelines for trans-European energy infrastructure*. <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/HTML/?uri=CELEX:32013R0347>

<sup>14</sup> European Union. (2019, June 5). *Regulation (EU) 2019/943 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 5 June 2019 on the internal market for electricity*. <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=CELEX:32019R0943> Article 52.

<sup>15</sup> European Union. (2022). *Regulation (EU) 2022/869 of 30 May 2022 on guidelines for trans-European energy infrastructure*. Article 12. <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/ALL/?uri=CELEX:32022R0869#>

<sup>16</sup> European Union. (2024). *Regulation (EU) 2024/1789 of 11 July 2024 on the internal markets for renewable and natural gases and for hydrogen*. Article 61. <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/eli/reg/2024/1789/oj/eng>

<sup>17</sup> ACER and CEER call for the introduction of a complementary EU planning approach to identify regional electricity infrastructure solutions with an EU dimension and empower energy regulators to request transmission system operators to develop proposals for projects to bridge infrastructure gaps. European Union Agency for the Cooperation of Energy Regulators (ACER) and Council of European Energy Regulators (CEER) (2024). *Challenges of the future electricity system: Recommendations and commitments*. [https://www.ceer.eu/wp-content/uploads/2024/07/Future\\_electricity\\_system\\_challenges\\_2024.pdf](https://www.ceer.eu/wp-content/uploads/2024/07/Future_electricity_system_challenges_2024.pdf). Agora Energiewende and other partners have also outlined several recommendations on how to improve top-down energy planning in Europe, and proposed new governance models that can be implemented to increase top-down modelling at the EU level. Agora Energiewende. (2025). *Designing energy infrastructure for a climate-neutral Europe* <https://www.agora-energiewende.org/publications/designing-energy-infrastructure-for-a-climate-neutral-europe>

and ENNOH with the identification of infrastructure needs.<sup>18</sup> If the co-legislators adopt these provisions, responsibilities would shift from the associations of national transmission system operators to the European Commission.

## Progress at national level

The European legislative framework for network planning has increasingly introduced rules to strengthen integrated planning at national level. EU legislation now requires electricity transmission and distribution companies to consider alternatives to system expansion, such as demand response and energy storage facilities, in their network development plans;<sup>20</sup> and gas distribution system operators must provide comprehensive and detailed information on gas infrastructure that can be or is to be decommissioned.<sup>21</sup> Finally, it calls for stronger coordination between transmission and distribution system operators.<sup>22</sup> It is still too early, however, to assess the full impact of these provisions.

In a number of European countries within and outside the EU, national regulation and planning practices have evolved to ensure better integration across energy vectors. For example:

- In Denmark, the national transmission system operator for gas, electricity and hydrogen has published a long-term development plan for all three networks combined.<sup>23</sup> The first plan was published in 2022, and the 2024 edition also included hydrogen.
- In 2025, the Italian regulator issued guidance on the forthcoming gas network development plan, requiring the inclusion of any planned infrastructure decommissioning, while also aiming for the plan to be broadly aligned with the electricity transmission sector by 2027.<sup>24</sup>

## Efficiency First

The EU adopted the Efficiency First principle to highlight the role of demand-side options in meeting energy needs. In energy planning it means to consider and invest into flexibility and energy efficiency instead of generation and/or networks whenever it is possible and cheaper, in order to reach societal goals.

The concept originates from the United States, where several states require utilities to include such demand-side investment in their integrated resources plans.<sup>19</sup>

<sup>18</sup> European Commission. (2025). *Proposal for a Regulation of the European Parliament and of the Council on guidelines for trans-European energy infrastructure*. COM(2025) 1006 final. <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=COM%3A2025%3A1006%3AFIN>

<sup>19</sup> ENFIRST. (2019). *Defining and contextualizing the E1st principle*. Deliverable D2.1 of the ENFIRST project, funded by the H2020 programme. <http://enefirst.eu>

<sup>20</sup> European Union, (2019). *Directive (EU) 2019/944 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 5 June 2019 on common rules for the internal market for electricity*. Articles 51 and 32. <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/HTML/?uri=CELEX:32019L0944>. See also Pató, Z. & Rosenow, J. & Cowart, R. (2019). Efficiency first in Europe's new electricity market design -how are we doing?. *eceee summer study proceedings 2019*, [https://www.eceee.org/library/conference\\_proceedings/eceee\\_Summer\\_Studies/2019/](https://www.eceee.org/library/conference_proceedings/eceee_Summer_Studies/2019/). Since 2022, the joint scenario developed by the ENTSOs must also comply with the energy efficiency first principle (Regulation (EU) 2022/869 of 30 May 2022, Article 12).

<sup>21</sup> European Union. (2024). *Directive (EU) 2024/1788 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 13 June 2024 on common rules for the internal markets for renewable gas, natural gas and hydrogen*. Article 57. <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/eli/dir/2024/1788/oj/eng>

<sup>22</sup> Regulation (EU) 2019/943 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 5 June 2019 on the internal market for electricity, Article 57

<sup>23</sup> Energinet. (2024). *Long-term development plan 2024*. <https://en.energinet.dk/about-our-reports/reports/longterm-development-plan-2024>

<sup>24</sup> ARERA. (2025). *Annual Report to the International Agency for Cooperation between National Energy Regulators and the European Commission on the Regulatory Activities and Fulfilment of Duties of the Italian Regulatory Authority for Energy Networks and Environment*. <https://www.ceer.eu/national-report/market-monitoring-reports-2025/>

- In 2024, the United Kingdom created an independent system operator and planner, the National Energy System Operator (NESO). NESO was established through the nationalisation of the operator of the national electricity transmission system, while the transmission network assets remain privately owned across several companies. Apart from operating the electricity transmission system, its mandate has been expanded to cover development planning for network infrastructure across electricity, gas and eventually hydrogen. It will use a long-term, strategic, whole-energy-system approach, with tools such as the still-in-development Centralised Strategic Network Plan, Regional Energy Strategic Plans, and the Strategic Spatial Energy Plan.<sup>25</sup>

But progress in integration across energy vectors at the national level remains uneven. It is therefore a good moment for Member States to examine network and broader energy planning processes to better implement the principles of integrated planning. Depending on the national context, possible actions range from opening the process to a wider variety of stakeholders to establishing an independent system planner or operator, be it the network operator or a dedicated energy agency. Reforms should at a minimum address cross-vector coordination of investments, cooperation between distribution and transmission levels, and coherence with local planning processes.

## The empowerment of local authorities in energy planning

Several European countries have assigned regional and local authorities with responsibilities related to integrated energy planning, recognising their unique position and understanding of local contexts.

- The Netherlands has adopted a district (or zoning) approach to heat decarbonisation to improve coordination between heat planning, building renovation plans, and urban planning. Municipalities are tasked with drawing up heat plans, working with occupants, building owners and other local stakeholders to identify the clean energy source most suited for a neighbourhood, and to decide when fossil gas heating will be phased out. Municipalities have a clear legal mandate to perform heat zoning, meaning they can decide on which heat solutions are preferred in a specific geographic area, and set an end date for fossil gas provision in that area accordingly.<sup>26</sup> Legislative proposals currently under discussion would further extend municipal powers, giving local authorities full decision-making power on the supply and transport of heat in their geographic area. In addition, heat networks will need to have majority public ownership, which in practice will often be the municipal and regional governments. This further solidifies local authority control over heat infrastructure planning.<sup>27</sup>

<sup>25</sup> National Energy System Operator. (2025). *Centralised Strategic Network Plan (CSNP)*. <https://www.neso.energy/what-we-do/strategic-planning/centralised-strategic-network-plan-csnp>

<sup>26</sup> See for example: C40 Cities. (2025). *Transforming Heat Systems: what Amsterdam's clean energy transition can teach us*. <https://c40.my.salesforce.com/sfc/p/#36000001Enhz/a/Vo00000W12b/v9SeGIMCJ3.jRFqQiwqzN2577uzzSosHFht.9Vlx6T8>

<sup>27</sup> NPLW. (2025). *Law on Collective Heat Provision*. <https://www.nplw.nl/wet-en-regelgeving/wet-collectieve-warmte-wcw>

- In Denmark, municipalities are responsible for heat planning and zoning, and for ensuring that district heating construction and expansion takes place in accordance with the local heat plan and national legislation. To support this work, the Danish national energy agency maintains a technology catalogue with input parameters to use for planning, ensuring local plans across the country are comparable, based on best practices and the latest technological and economic data.<sup>28</sup>
- In Germany, a law introduced in 2023 which entered into force in January 2024 requires cities with more than 100,000 residents to prepare a heat transition plan, including heat zoning, by mid-2026. Smaller towns must do so by mid-2028.<sup>29</sup> The national energy agency has put in place a centre of expertise, providing tools such as templates and training material to support municipalities ([www.kww-halle.de](http://www.kww-halle.de)). In addition, some federal states have well-developed frameworks for heat planning with clear roles and responsibilities for local authorities.<sup>30</sup> Legal powers for local authorities to control the planning process are however much more limited than in Denmark and the Netherlands, with the possible exception of local authorities that have ownership of the local energy grid and/or district heating company.

Building on these first-movers, EU legislation now requires Member States to ensure that regional and local authorities with more than 45,000 inhabitants produce local heating and cooling plans that focus on increasing energy efficiency and the use of renewable energy.<sup>31</sup> Regional and local authorities are well positioned to understand building-level heating and cooling demand, to involve all relevant stakeholders in local planning, and to identify potential trade-offs among end users. Depending on the local context, they may also be well placed to coordinate with other processes under their direct control, such as spatial planning.

For this to happen, it is crucial for governments to implement effective legal, technical, economic, and organisational governance frameworks to support local authorities in their heat planning mandate and ensure coordination with wider planning processes for electricity and gas infrastructure. It will be important for regulators to ensure that energy companies cooperate in these local transition processes.

## Conclusion

In light of the need to accelerate electrification across the EU, this is an opportune moment to acknowledge progress made in integrated energy planning to date, and to identify areas for improvement. These include:

- Ensuring in the revision of the Governance Regulation that the next round of NECPs further integrates the planning of different vectors and planning levels, with a focus on achieving the EU's electrification goals.

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<sup>28</sup> Oxenaar, S. (2025, January). *Making Europe's homes Hygge*. Regulatory Assistance Project. <https://www.raponline.org/knowledge-center/making-europes-homes-hygge-danish-lessons-district-heating/>

<sup>29</sup> Bundesministerium für Wirtschaft und Energie (DE). (2024). *The Heat Planning Act: momentum for the local heat transition*. <https://energiewende.bundeswirtschaftsministerium.de/EWD/Redaktion/EN/Newsletter/2023/11/Meldung/news1.html>

<sup>30</sup> Energy Cities. (2024). *Local Heating and Cooling Planning in the EU: Germany*. <https://energy-cities.eu/countries/germany>

<sup>31</sup> European Union. (2023). *Energy efficiency directive*. Art 25(6) <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/eli/dir/2023/1791/oj/eng>

- Updating the governance of energy network planning at national and EU levels, recognising that it remains fragmented across energy vectors and across levels of the energy system.
- Ensuring that Member States and regulators appropriately support local authorities in their heat planning and implementation role.



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