



European
Commission

Projects of Common Interest (PCIs)

How to engage with local communities

Purpose

This document is intended to support project promoters' engagement and consultations with stakeholders and the general public during the implementation of Projects of Common Interest (PCIs). It analyses the main target audiences and influencers, presents key insights into public acceptance and opposition for PCIs in general. It also outlines how these audiences can be better approached and which channels and communication materials are best to use. These insights result from a study that identified the main drivers of and barriers to the public acceptance of PCIs. More information can be found [here](#).

Public acceptance of PCIs

PCIs are major infrastructure projects that modernise and link energy networks and systems across Europe. Each PCI helps at least two EU countries work together to develop state-of-the-art energy networks that are better interconnected by land or sea with new infrastructure such as overhead lines, underground and undersea cables.

PCIs can be complex due to their cross-border nature. They cross several jurisdictions in the territory of potentially more than one Member State, impacting several regions, locations and local communities that often speak different languages. The public may be more reluctant or opposed to such PCIs at the very beginning due to misconceptions and concerns that may relate to lack of information about the needs of the project, lack of involvement in the decision-making process or fear of potential impact on the local environment, landscape or land.

The study has also shown that the more citizens and local communities are informed about a project being developed in their vicinity, the higher their level of acceptance is towards that infrastructure. Results also indicated a strong correlation between peer approval and public acceptance. The higher the approval of a PCI by family, friends and neighbours, the higher the person's likelihood to accept it.

TOP FOUR drivers to boost public awareness, trust and acceptance

1. Awareness of environmental benefits
2. Transparency and fairness of process
3. Security of energy supply
4. Positive impact on local economy

Energy



Concerns of citizens regarding PCIs

Opposition in local communities and regions could result in a PCI being delayed or not built. This holds back the potential benefits for society and the economy, delays the energy transition and consumers are ultimately negatively affected by the higher costs, the congested grid and expensive dispatch measures. The main reasons citizens may oppose PCIs include the following:

- health concerns (electromagnetic field of overhead/underground transmission lines, noise);
- negative environmental impact (nature, landscape, flora and fauna, deforestation);
- questionable future of tourism along route;
- drop in property values;
- low potential of housing development along route;
- disruption of agricultural practices.

How to successfully communicate the benefits of PCIs

Informing citizens about the benefits and the different technical features (e.g. technology) of a PCI and engaging them early in the process is key to building support. Early engagement creates opportunities for citizens' involvement allowing for potential collaborative solutions in the design and construction of PCIs. It is also important to communicate about the needs for such infrastructure (e.g. integration of renewables from a nearby source, reinforcement of the grid) and the different non-infrastructure alternatives considered. Early and frequent communication is the best tool to convey transparency and fairness during implementation practices and procedures, and inform about the benefits brought to the local community by the project. Tackle concerns and/or misunderstandings by organising an informative communication campaign when the PCI is being designed.

People who have lived or are currently living close to a PCI are much more likely to be open to receiving more information. Local and tailored communication strategies that emphasise regional specificities, PCI benefits, local experiences and best practices are more impactful.

Leverage peer approval by working closely with stakeholder communities. Build trust through partnerships or collaborations with strategic stakeholders.

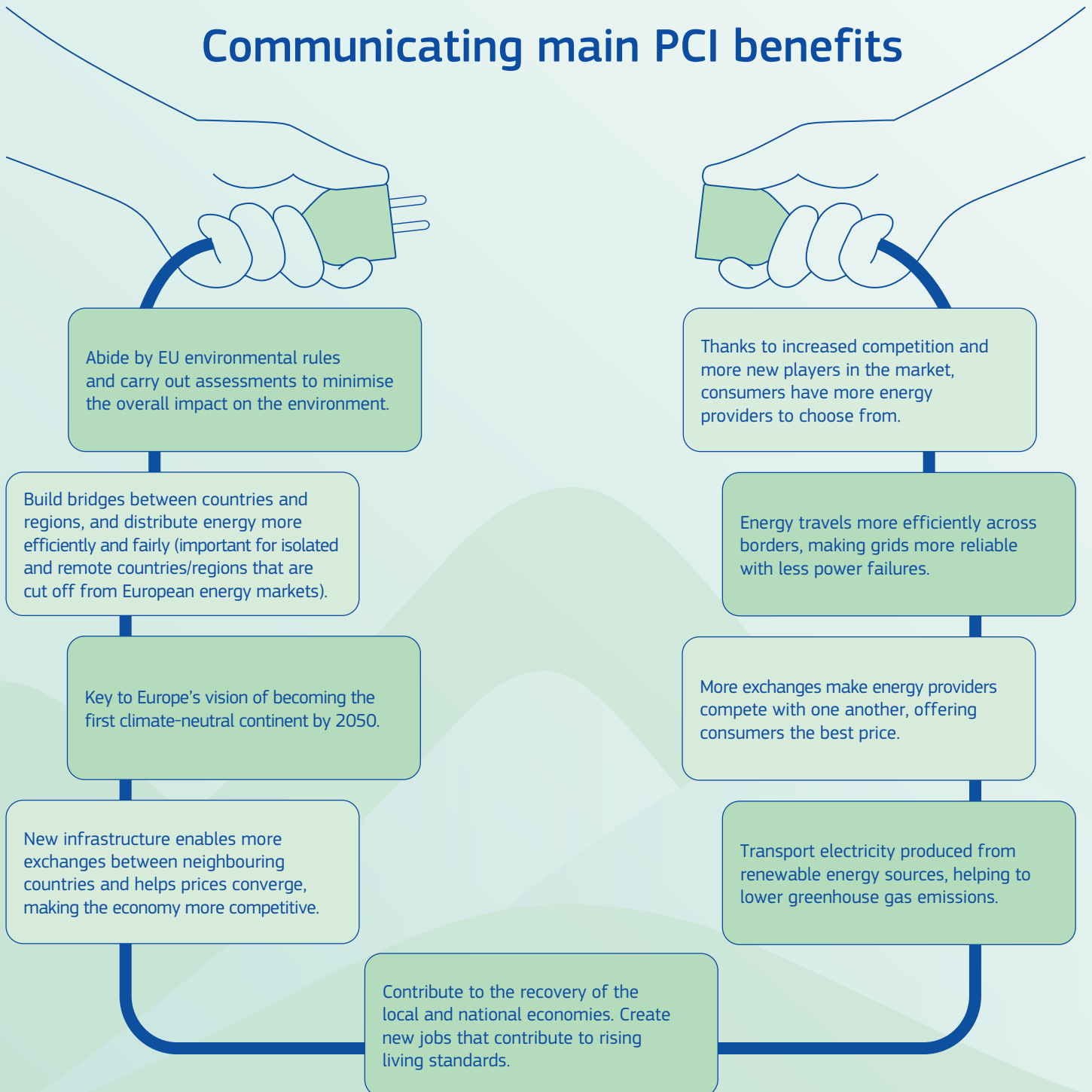
Remember

- Demonstrate transparency and fairness of the decision-making process.
- Foster open dialogue in communicating about PCI needs, its benefits and costs and promote feedback and participation.
- Disseminate information on actions undertaken to minimise inconvenience before, during and after construction.



CHECKLIST

Communicating main PCI benefits



Main audiences

The actors most affected by PCIs are members of the public, tourism businesses, landowners, NGOs and local government (municipalities).

Multipliers serve as ‘message transmitters’ and help to transmit messages and materials more effectively at European and national levels.

Key target groups:

- general public;
- business intermediaries;
- national & local organisations.

Key multipliers:

- key stakeholders;
- public authorities;
- industry representatives;
- educational institutions;
- media.

Audience class	Specific audience	Sample breakdown
Target audiences	General public	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Residents of the region/community • Landowners (within the vicinity of the line route) • Entrepreneurs (e.g. tourism, handicraft, agriculture) • Citizens interested in the environmental, health, landscape, touristic and socio-economic impact of the PCI
	National & local organisations	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Municipalities • Communes • Counties • Representatives of locals/schools/landscape groups • National park and wildlife services • Heritage councils • Sports unions
	Business intermediaries	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Tourism organisations • Farmers’ associations • Fishery boards • Landowners’ associations • SME associations
Multipliers	Key stakeholders	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • State-owned or private electricity/energy companies • European Commission Representations • Europe Direct Information Centres
	Public authorities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ministries and departments (e.g. economic development, environment, health, culture) • Regional/municipal government
	Industry representatives	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Electric/utility cooperatives • Energy service company associations
	Educational institutions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Research centres • Universities • Primary/secondary schools
	Media	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • National/regional/local newspapers (general and trade/industry) • Websites, portals and platforms related to energy, environment and economy • Regional/local radio and TV stations



Key messages



Target audience	Points	Message
General public	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • PCIs are key cross-border energy infrastructure projects for the transition towards a secure, clean and affordable energy future. • Secure and clean energy has a direct positive effect on climate, good health and well-being. • A clean and fair energy transition creates growth and jobs, and works towards the recovery of our economies and lives. 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. PCIs integrate renewable energies, creating a better climate for all of us. Working together to build tomorrow's energy grids for all. 2. PCIs better interconnect our energy networks, making grids more reliable with less power shortages and outages. Working together to build tomorrow's energy grids for all. 3. PCIs create jobs and support the economic recovery of our region/local community. Working together to build tomorrow's energy grids for all.
National & local organisations	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • PCIs build bridges between countries/regions and distribute energy more efficiently and fairly. • The EU is leading the energy transition for a more secure, competitive and sustainable energy system that fights climate change. • An interconnected European grid will increase energy independence and ensure affordable, secure and sustainable energy for all. 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. PCIs make our grid resilient whilst helping us use more renewable energy sources. Working together to build tomorrow's energy grids for all. 2. PCIs will increase energy exchanges across countries/regions and secure energy supply for all of us. Working together to build tomorrow's energy grids for all. 3. PCIs contribute to the economic recovery of the region and help modernise and better connect Europe's energy infrastructure. Working together to build tomorrow's energy grids for all.
Business intermediaries	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Upgrading the grid is crucial for the decarbonisation of the power sector and the switch to renewable energy sources. • The EU is committed to an energy transition that works for everyone. Get involved today and become a part of the energy transition. 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. PCIs contribute to the integration of renewables into our grids. Working together to build tomorrow's energy grids for all. 2. PCIs speed up the development of an interconnected electricity market in Europe. Working together to build tomorrow's energy grids for all.



Available communication tools

The following materials can serve as a basis for communicating and reinforcing key messages, as well as boosting public awareness, trust and acceptance amongst local communities and stakeholders before and during the PCI implementation. They are ready to use, or can be adapted to accommodate regional and local needs. In all communication tools, highlight the benefits the PCI will bring.

PCI support toolkit:

- **key visual** for online and offline use;
- **poster template** (adaptable) for online and offline use;
- **PPT template** (open for editing) highlighting relevant elements of PCIs for use during project presentations;
- **factsheet for citizens** with ready-to-use arguments/answers to most common questions about PCIs;
- **brochure** directly linking several electronic resources;
- **video** highlighting importance and benefits of PCIs.

The toolkit can be used in whole or in part during presentations/events involving local stakeholders. Disseminate the material to local media contacts (e.g. journalists and bloggers).

Download the toolkit [here](#).

European Commission Directorate-General for Energy (DG ENER) website

Use DG ENER resources to reach a wide audience (regional, national and European). The [dedicated portal](#) serves as a one-stop shop for all issues related to PCIs:

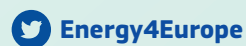
- **introduction** to the trans-European energy networks policy and PCIs;
- **examples** of PCIs and their benefits to the community;
- **public acceptance** of PCIs;
- **funding** for PCIs;
- **interactive map** showing ongoing PCIs where you can access more detailed technical information;
- **videos** introducing PCIs, how they improve and modernise Europe's energy grid, and how connecting Europe's energy grid provides various benefits.





What to keep in mind

- **Ensure support** for the PCI from nearby regions other than the implementation area to facilitate public acceptance locally. Then consult with the local community that is directly affected. Emphasise the need for the PCI and its positive impact at national level while focusing on specific target groups (e.g. residents, tourism entrepreneurs, NGOs) and issues that concern the local community.
- The closer to the start date of the PCI, the more the affected target audiences begin to consider it more carefully. In contrast, less affected groups tend to disengage.
- Stakeholders prefer **personalised and one-to-one meetings**, as well as open offices to the public, information centres and open days. This type of direct contact with municipalities will lead to better dissemination of all the necessary information and help mitigate their concerns.
- Consultation and communication activities should continue at a **local level** during the construction phase to mitigate objections of municipalities and accommodate any new concerns.
- **Increase support** among those in favour of the PCI and involve them further in consultations.
- **Engage target groups early.** Early engagement can lead to less adversarial interactions and alienation, and to better results.
- **Set up permanent online communication tools** (e.g. dedicated PCI website) that are accessible to all stakeholders. They should tailor to the specific needs (e.g. language) of multiple regions/countries.



#WorkingTogether #PCIs

