Exploitation and maintenance strategy

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Abstract

The SHAREs+ project aims to accelerate the development of citizen-led energy initiatives across five European countries by leveraging frontrunner expertise, validated tools, and functional digital platforms. The project targets the establishment of 13 new energy communities while strengthening the capacity and resilience of 50 existing initiatives. Implementation focuses on Cyprus, Romania, North Macedonia, and Ukraine, where decision-support tools and tailored capacity-building measures foster collective action and community energy growth. Bulgaria contributes both as a frontrunner in developing an energy community framework and as a pilot site for citizen-led thermal renewable projects and vulnerable consumer engagement. Austria acts as the lead partner for capacity-building activities.

The current **Deliverable 5.1 Exploitation and maintenance strategy** presents the preliminary version of the project's Final Exploitation and Sustainability Plan. Developed under Task 5.1 and led by BSERC with contributions from all partners, this document builds upon the initial discussion initiated during the project kick-off meeting and subsequent internal partner consultations within each partner organisation. To ensure a coherent and comparable approach across countries, the consortium used a structured template comprising guiding principles and scenario-building prompts with key questions to help them systematically assess their current available options and clearly articulate their proposed post-project sustainability scenarios. The outcomes were initially gathered for Milestone 10 (Initial Maintenance Strategy) and polished in the current document.

The E&M Strategy aims to ensure the long-term impact, continuity, and sustainability of SHAREs+ results beyond the project lifetime. It defines continuation pathways for the project's key outputs, including the two established networks (NCEF and CEPC), the National Gateways, and the associated tools, databases, and communication materials all of which will be created later in the project. The strategy outlines minimum resource requirements for maintaining these assets, provisions for content updates, IT and hosting needs, and opportunities to further enhance user support services.

Stressing over ensuring the sustainability of the National Gateways (as one of the main major outcomes of the project), the strategy explores three potential post-project scenarios and assesses their associated risks:

1) Maintaining National Gateways within project partner organizations: Under this model, each partner organization would assume responsibility for updating the platform's content and covering the annual operational costs, including hosting and domain maintenance based on its revenue streams. While this approach ensures continuity, it does not include further upgrades to platform functionalities unless additional funding is secured.

2) Upgrading national platforms: This option involves seeking additional funding through grants, membership contributions, or other financial mechanisms to enhance and expand the functionalities of the National Gateways. Some project partners, such as those in Romania, might utilize this approach by leveraging membership fees to finance ongoing platform maintenance and improvements in the benefit of their members.

3) Handover to national public institutions: In this scenario, the National Gateways would be transferred free of charge to public institutions, such as national energy agencies, which have the mandate to provide services related to self-consumption, renewable energy adoption, and energy efficiency for citizens and energy communities. These institutions would take on the responsibility for maintaining and updating the platform's content, ensuring that the information remains relevant and accessible over time.

The contributions consolidated in this deliverable reflect partners' initial assumptions and strategic orientations regarding the exploitation and maintenance of project results. A final joint review and refinement process will be conducted toward the end of the project to integrate more precise projections and commitments. These updated inputs will form Deliverable 5.2 – Final Exploitation and Sustainability Plan, which will serve as the comprehensive and definitive framework for sustaining SHAREs+ outcomes beyond the project duration. This will include not only the long-term maintenance of the National Gateways, which is broadly examined in the present document, but also provisions for the potential continuation of network moderation activities. While partners are not contractually obliged to maintain the networks beyond the project lifetime, they may observe self-motivation to utilize the created framework for further knowledge-exchange.

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1 | Maintenance strategy per country

1.1 Austria

AEA is in close contact with the coordination office for energy communities in Austria to avoid double work and foster synergies. This office is managed by the Austrian Climate and Energy Fund and runs the website energiegemeinschaften.gv.at. To avoid offering the same information on various websites, the focus of the Austrian Gateway lies on the communication campaign. This campaign supports local heroes in better understanding possible members, investors and multipliers and helps them to motivate people to join their energy community. The website offers free:

- White label materials (e.g. flyers, slides and factsheets)
- Descriptions of types of members and 14 target groups
- A variety of key messages to motivate people to join energy communities (assigned to target groups and types of members)
- Communication activity guidelines (on e.g. social media, organising events, coverage in newspapers) and
- A picture database.

The Austrian website fills a gap in the Austrian offer and enjoys a high number of views.

Link to the national Gateway, established in the H2020 project SHAREs: energie-teilen.at.

Scenario 1: Maintaining the National Gateway within your organisation

AEA acts as a fall-back option to keep the Gateway in operation after the project duration.

Scenario 2: Upgrading the Gateway through additional funding sources

AEA could take over the national Gateway in a potential follow-up project, if the acquirement of a suitable funding opportunity were successful. This depends on the specifications and requirements of upcoming EU or national calls and on the proposal's relative performance. AEA can improve a proposal's chances by setting aside sufficient personnel resources. Necessary costs to maintain, update and further develop the Gateway would be funded by the follow-up project.

Scenario 3: Handing over the Gateway to a national public institution (try to identify at least one potential institution)

The Austrian Climate and Energy Fund runs the coordination office for energy communities in Austria. The coordination office established an Austrian one-stop-shop for energy communities, regularly communicates with experts from the regional energy agencies, and organises conferences for energy communities. The national SHAREs+ Gateway complements the one-stop-shop with the "Get members" section, so that local heroes may learn how to communicate with the public, specific target groups and further stakeholders. As the coordination office already owns a well-known one-stop-shop, they would probably not run an additional one but rather integrate the content of the national Gateway into their current website energiegemeinschaften.gv.at. AEA and the coordination office hold short meetings regularly, also touching on the topic of the future of the Gateway. In a later phase of the SHAREs+ project, they will decide if the coordination office shall take over the contents of the Gateway.

The coordination office would probably not take over the entire Gateway as an own website but rather integrate its content into its one-stop-shop, so mostly personnel costs would apply.

Most likely scenario:

The perceived risk of not being able to maintain and update the Gateway as described in options A, B and C is very low. AEA is upholding good relations with all relevant stakeholders, and it is very probable that one of the scenarios described above can be implemented. In the worst-case scenario, AEA can act as a fallback to keep the national Gateway online.

From today's perspective, Scenario 2 appears to be the most probable. Energy communities are currently a high-priority topic in Austria, and it seems feasible to secure the additional resources required for its implementation.

1.2 Bulgaria

The National Gateway for Bulgaria, established under the H2020 SHAREs project, remains the only online platform in the country that brings together all essential information needed for the creation and development of energy communities. It offers regional information, guidelines, good practices, business models, news, useful videos, and references to relevant tools and materials produced by various projects, initiatives, and organisations from the region. The topic of energy communities has gained significant momentum in Bulgaria, leading to an increasing number of organisations such as Greenpeace Bulgaria, Gabrovo Municipality, and multiple energy agencies, all publishing information on their own websites. However, these resources remain scattered across various channels, forums, and platforms. The central mission of the Bulgarian National Gateway is therefore to consolidate this knowledge and make it easily accessible to all interested stakeholders. In SHAREs+, BSERC will continue this mission by expanding the content and integrating new developments that have become relevant in the past year.

Link to the National Gateway: https://sharerenewables.bg.

Scenario 1: Maintaining the National Gateway within your organisation

BSERC has already demonstrated its capacity to maintain the National Gateway beyond a project timeframe, as it successfully did after the conclusion of the previous SHAREs project. The organisation possesses the necessary expertise to update and create content, as well as to manage the technical aspects of the platform. The main challenge relates to covering the hosting and domain costs, as BSERC is a non-profit organisation that does not generate revenue. While the current SHAREs+ budget can cover these expenses for up to three years after the end of the project, additional funding sources will be required to ensure long-term sustainability.

Scenario 2: Upgrading the Gateway through additional funding sources

A second viable option is to further upgrade and expand the National Gateway through future projects or other funding mechanisms. BSERC will actively monitor relevant EU and national funding opportunities and explore options for including Gateway maintenance and enhancement in upcoming proposals. The organisation has a solid track record in successfully participating in EU-funded projects, which increases the realism of this scenario. However, feasibility depends on the nature of upcoming calls and the competitiveness of future proposals.

Scenario 3: Handing over the Gateway to a national public institution

As identified already in the previous SHAREs project, the Sustainable Energy Development Agency (SEDA) remains the most suitable public institution for a potential handover. SEDA is a state-funded

executive agency within the Ministry of Energy and is expected to act as a coordination point for local one-stop shops supporting energy communities. A handover remains possible, but only if SEDA can secure the necessary financial and human resources. At present, this capacity has not been formally confirmed, which was also the main reason they did not take over the platform after the previous project. During the remaining project implementation period, BSERC will continue to monitor and assess alternative institutions that may be suitable for a potential transfer. Such institutions would need to demonstrate relevant technical expertise in the field of energy communities, institutional engagement in the topic, and the capacity to allocate adequate financial and operational resources for the long-term maintenance of the Gateway.

Most likely scenario:

The overall risk of not being able to fulfil at least one of the three scenarios is low. BSERC has already proven that it can maintain the Gateway independently and stands ready to continue doing so. The organisation maintains strong relationships with relevant stakeholders, energy agencies, NGOs, municipalities, and active citizen groups, ensuring continuous content updates and collaboration opportunities. At this early stage of the project, the most probable scenarios are 1 and 2. However, 3 remains a relevant long-term option, depending on future institutional developments within SEDA or other organisations that may express interest in taking over the platform. To support this possibility, BSERC will plan additional communication and engagement with the identified institutions during the SHAREs+ project.

1.3 Cyprus

Scenario 1: Maintaining the National Gateway within your organisation

Description: In this scenario, our organisation would continue to host and maintain the National Gateway after the project ends, ensuring ongoing access to tools, resources, and updates. This would likely involve internal allocation of staff time for technical maintenance and content updates.

Feasibility: Possible - Uncertain

Reasoning: This scenario could align with our organisation's mission of supporting energy communities and citizen engagement. However, it depends on the availability of long-term funding or internal resources to maintain and manage the platform sustainably.

Early feasibility considerations:

- Requires dedicated personnel and some technical capacity for maintenance.
- Potential to integrate Gateway functions into our existing communication and advisory work.
- Could explore partnerships with local authorities or energy agencies for shared responsibility.

Risks:

- Limited staff capacity and uncertain long-term funding.
- Potential challenges in ensuring continuous content updates and platform promotion

Scenario 2: Upgrading the Gateway through additional funding sources

Description: This scenario involves continuing and expanding the Gateway through new project funding.

Feasibility: Uncertain

Reasoning: This option could be realistic if new funding calls align with the project's objectives and if partnerships can be maintained or expanded. It fits well with our experience in proposal writing and international project participation.

Early feasibility considerations:

- Potential to integrate the Gateway into future EU or national projects.
- Opportunities to add new features or connect with other digital platforms.
- Would require strong consortium collaboration to secure future funds.

Risks:

- Dependence on external funding cycles and eligibility criteria.
- Possible gaps in continuity between projects.

Scenario 3: Handing over the Gateway to a national public institution

Description: Under this scenario, the National Gateway would be transferred to a relevant public body (e.g., Ministry of Energy, regulatory authority) that could ensure its maintenance and visibility.

Feasibility: Uncertain - Unlikely

Reasoning: This could be effective for long-term institutionalisation, as public institutions have stable mandates and visibility. However, it would require early discussions and interest from such an institution.

Early feasibility considerations:

- Potential institutions: [e.g. Ministry of Energy / Office of the Commissioner for the Environment].
- Could ensure long-term credibility and integration with national energy transition policies.
- Would require formal agreements or memoranda of understanding.

Risks:

- Bureaucratic processes or lack of flexibility in public institutions.
- Limited capacity or willingness to take on digital platforms.

Most likely scenario:

At this stage, the most likely scenario will be to maintain within the organisation the nation Gateway since it aligns with our missions and goals. During the project, we can explore the idea of external funding opportunities and maybe develop a sustainable plan to ensure the National Gateway will be visible after the project ends.

1.4 North Macedonia

Scenario 1: Maintaining the National Gateway within SDEWES organisation

SDEWES will maintain the National Gateway, supported through institutional infrastructure or local hosting for an initial transition period. This approach is possible given SDEWES's research mission and project involvement, but realistic only for 6–12 months without additional resources. To ensure long-term sustainability, SDEWES will actively explore transfer opportunities with sister projects and public

institutions (ZELS, government bodies) at every stakeholder event and meeting. This proactive engagement during the project will enable a smooth handover and keep the Gateway accessible beyond the interim period.

Risk: Limited institutional capacity and uncertain funding may constrain maintenance to a short timeframe without a clear long-term host.

Scenario 2: Upgrading the Gateway through additional funding sources

Additional funding could be sought through EU mechanisms (Horizon Europe, LIFE, IPA), regional initiatives, or private sector partnerships interested in energy communities. This scenario is uncertain but potentially viable given North Macedonia's EU integration focus and international support (EBRD GEFF, REEP Plus). Collaboration with complementary initiatives such as the EU LIFE-funded OSS Habitat project (focused on energy-efficient renovations and municipal partnerships) and partnerships with entities like Macedonian Association of Renewable Energy Sources (MARES) or private energy companies could strengthen funding applications, though limited track record with standalone platform operations creates challenges.

Risk: Dependency on competitive EU funding cycles and external financing creates sustainability uncertainties. Limited track record with standalone platform operations creates challenges, and coordination with multiple partner projects may face logistical difficulties affecting implementation.

Scenario 3: Handing over the Gateway to a national public institution

We propose transferring the Gateway to the Association of the Units of Local Self-Government (ZELS), representing all 84 municipalities, and the City of Skopje, which is naturally aligned with energy community promotion at the local level. Alternatively, coordination with the Ministry of Energy, Mining and Mineral Resources could provide institutional backing and regulatory support. This scenario is potentially viable as ZELS has established organizational infrastructure, international partnerships, and direct connections to municipalities increasingly engaged in energy transition initiatives and renewable energy projects.

Risk: ZELS operates on membership contributions and project funding rather than guaranteed budgets, creating uncertainty about long-term financial sustainability. Additional risks include potential limitations in IT infrastructure capacity and the need for formal agreements between project partners, ZELS, and the Ministry to ensure platform continuity, technical support, and alignment with national energy community policy.

Expected most likely scenario and approach

We expect Scenario 1 (initial maintenance within SDEWES) to transition to Scenario 3 (handover to ZELS) as the most likely pathway. Our approach will prioritize: (1) documenting all operational procedures for transferability; (2) initiating formal discussions with ZELS and the Ministry during the project; (3) building stakeholder engagement to demonstrate Gateway value; and (4) developing transition agreements to ensure continuity and local anchoring of the platform.

1.5 Romania

Scenario 1: Transfer the National Gateway to Community Energy Coalition

Description: CdE transfers the SHAREs National Gateway to the Coaliția Energie Comunitară (Community Energy Coalition), Romania's first coalition dedicated to energy communities, launched in February 2025 by CdE with WWF Romania and energy experts. The Coalition assumes platform

maintenance, content updates and user support as its flagship digital tool, with CdE maintaining active governance role.

Assessment: Highly probable;

Rationale: Perfect mission alignment with Coalition's mandate; distributes responsibilities across members; leverages CdE's founding role;

Feasibility: Coalition membership fees + EU/national grants; CdE provides technical transition support;

Risks: Low to medium - requires Coalition institutionalization during project timeframe;

Scenario 2: Upgrading the Gateway through additional funding sources

Description: CdE partners with national institutions and European Funds (ANRE, Ministry of Energy, EU Funds) to secure grants for platform upgrades while CdE handles operations.

Assessment: Possible

Rationale: Romania's OUG 59/2025 creates funding opportunities for energy community tools;

Feasibility: Horizon Europe/LIFE grants + Coalition membership contributions;

Risks: Medium to high - lengthy public procurement processes;

Scenario 3: Handing over the Gateway to a national public institution

Description: Transfer to ANRE (Romanian Energy Regulatory Authority) for official energy community support services.

Assessment: Uncertain (short-term)

Rationale: Public institutions lack technical capacity currently

Feasibility: Free handover with training support

Risks: High - budget constraints, risk of static platform

Most likely scenario & project approach

The most likely scenario is Scenario 1 (Handover to Coaliția Energie Comunitară). The Coalition's dedicated mission, multi-stakeholder structure, and CdE's founding leadership make this optimal for sustainability. During project: (1) Strengthen Coalition governance and funding model; (2) Establish Gateway as Coalition's core platform; (3) Gradual transition of operations while CdE retains governance role; (4) Demonstrate value to Coalition members for long-term commitment.

1.6 Ukraine

Scenario 1: Maintaining the National Gateway within Ecoaction

Description: In this scenario, Ecoaction would continue to host, manage, and update the National Gateway after the project ends. This would include maintaining the platform’s technical functionality, regularly updating materials, and keeping it relevant for municipalities, CSOs, and energy community actors.

Feasibility: Possible – Uncertain

Reasoning: This option aligns well with Ecoaction’s mission, expertise, and ongoing work on renewable energy, green recovery, and community engagement. However, sustainable long-term maintenance

would require stable funding or the ability to integrate the Gateway into our existing programme activities, which is not guaranteed.

Early feasibility considerations:

- Would require allocating staff time for content updates, coordination, and minor technical maintenance.
- Could be integrated into Ecoaction's communication, advocacy, or municipal support workstreams.
- Some potential to involve partner NGOs or communities to keep content relevant.
- Risks:
- Limited staff capacity and the need to prioritise core organisational activities.
- Uncertainty of long-term donor funding for digital tools.
- Potential technical challenges if the platform requires upgrades beyond current in-house capacity.

Scenario 2: Upgrading the Gateway through additional funding sources

Description: Under this scenario, Ecoaction would seek new funding streams (e.g., EU LIFE, Horizon Europe, GIZ or bilateral donors) to expand, improve, and maintain the National Gateway beyond the initial project. The platform could evolve with new functionalities, updated tools, and broader national outreach.

Feasibility: Possible – Promising

Reasoning: Ecoaction has strong experience securing multi-donor funding and managing long-term projects. If the Gateway demonstrates clear value to communities and policymakers, attracting additional funding appears feasible. This scenario supports both sustainability and further development.

Early feasibility considerations:

- Inclusion of Gateway support into future project proposals.
- Donor interest in digital resilience, municipal capacity-building, and energy communities is rising in Ukraine's recovery context.
- Opportunity to expand the platform's features or regional outreach with external funding.

Risks:

- Dependence on donor priorities and funding cycles.
- Competition for funding among Ukrainian CSOs.
- Potential need for more advanced IT development than Ecoaction can currently provide.

Scenario 3: Handing over the Gateway to a national public institution

Description: This scenario would involve transferring ownership and management of the National Gateway to a national public institution capable of long-term hosting. Potential institutions in Ukraine could include the State Agency on Energy Efficiency and Energy Savings (SAEE), the Ministry of Energy, or potentially the Ministry of Infrastructure Development (MinInfra).

Feasibility: Uncertain – Unlikely at this stage

Reasoning: Although public institutions have the mandate to manage national-level tools, current capacity limitations, bureaucratic procedures, and wartime constraints make such transfers challenging.

Early feasibility considerations:

- SAEE is the most relevant potential host due to its role in energy efficiency, municipal support, renewable energy and EU alignment.
- Would require formal agreements, technical compatibility, and ministerial interest.
- Realistic only if the Gateway becomes widely recognised and demanded by national stakeholders.

Risks:

- Bureaucratic delays, institutional turnover, or shifting priorities.
- Risk of the platform becoming outdated or under-managed.
- Technical and financial resource limitations within ministries.

Most likely scenario:

This is Scenario 2 – Upgrading the Gateway through additional funding sources. This option provides the strongest balance between feasibility, alignment with Ecoaction's mission, and long-term sustainability.

Planned approach during the project:

- Build evidence of user demand and clear added value to support future funding proposals.
- Engage early with SAEE and other institutions to assess long-term interest without relying on it.
- Explore funding integration into broader green recovery, municipal resilience, or energy community projects.
- Ensure that documentation, backend structure, and workflows support possible handover or expansion.
- Strengthen partnerships with municipalities, CSOs, and national actors to increase the platform's relevance and visibility.

1.7 Blueprint

The blueprint serves as a template (implemented in WordPress) for national one-stop-shops for energy communities and collective actions. It provides a well-thought structure and ideas to support citizens to set up their citizen driven energy project. The blueprint can be cloned to enable a quick replication of national Gateways, as was successfully done for the SHAREs partner countries.

Link to the blueprint: sharerenewables.eu.

Scenario 1: Maintaining the National Gateway within your organisation

In case no follow-up project or external take-over were to take place, AEA will keep the Gateway blueprint in operation beyond the project lifetime.

Scenario 2: Upgrading the Gateway through additional funding sources

AEA could take over, further develop and expand the blueprint in a potential follow-up project, if the acquirement of a suitable funding opportunity were successful. This depends on the specifications and requirements of upcoming EU or national calls and on the proposal's relative performance. AEA can improve a proposal's chances by setting aside sufficient personal resources.

Scenario 3: Handing over the Gateway to an international institution (try to identify at least one potential institution)

An international organisation could take over the blueprint. Suitable candidates are organisations such as RESCOOP.eu, FEDARENE or Energy Cities.

Most likely scenario:

Both options 2 and 3 are promising and guarantee that the work done will be continued. AEA will screen upcoming calls to guarantee no possibility for a follow-up project is overlooked. Regular contact with international organisations is maintained and a possible takeover discussed if it turns out to be the best option. Fall-back option 1 guarantees that the work done is not lost in any case and will be available for at least three years beyond project lifetime. The perceived risk of not being able to maintain and update the blueprint is low.

From today's perspective, Scenario 2 appears to be the most likely pathway, particularly as energy communities are gaining strategic importance across Europe for advancing the energy transition, and effective capacity building and knowledge transfer are becoming increasingly critical to ensure their successful and widespread implementation.

shares-project.eu