



Technical support for RES policy development and implementation – Simplification of permission and administrative procedures for RES installations (RES Simplify)



Slovenia

Written by: Dipl.-Jur. Saša Rajković, Jurga Tallat-Kelpšaitė, eclareon GmbH

4 March 2021, Berlin

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Executive summary

This report covers four RES-E technologies: rooftop and ground-mounted PV as well as onshore wind and hydropower.

The most severe problem for the development of hydropower, onshore wind and to a lesser extent for ground-mounted PV is that large parts of the territory of Slovenia are protected areas and thus it is difficult to find suitable locations in the site selection process. For rooftop PV, no barriers have been detected in this regard.

The electricity production license can be acquired without any problems.

The administrative authorisation entails the most serious barriers to the development of renewable energy sources in Slovenia. The procedures are deemed too lengthy because of public opposition and slow case processing. Furthermore, the procedures are not well harmonised with each other, which, leads to planning uncertainty and higher costs. Procedures for rooftop PV are in contrast eased and deemed to be fairly efficient.

The grid connection procedure takes also more time than legally guaranteed due to capacity limitations and inefficient administrative action by the competent authorities.

Obtaining the use permit is deemed to be unproblematic, if the steps before have been carried out carefully.

Slovenia has not yet implemented provisions from the RED II directive into its national legislation, but the government intends to develop implementation proposals in 2021.

Table 1 contains a traffic light assessment of the relevant process steps for the installation of onshore wind, solar PV (rooftop and ground-mounted) and hydropower.

Table 1: Traffic light assessment of the relevant process steps

Process step	Site selection	Electricity production license	Application preparation process	Administrative authorisation	Grid connection permit	Corporate legal-fiscal	Other
PV ground-mounted	Minor barriers identified	No barriers identified	Not relevant for target country	Moderate barriers identified	Minor barriers identified	Not relevant for target country	No barriers identified
PV rooftop	No barriers identified	No barriers identified	Not relevant for target country	No barriers identified	Minor barriers identified	Not relevant for target country	No barriers identified
Onshore wind	Moderate barriers identified	No barriers identified	Not relevant for target country	Severe barriers identified	Minor barriers identified	Not relevant for target country	No barriers identified
Hydro power	Moderate barriers identified	No barriers identified	Not relevant for target country	Moderate barriers identified	Minor barriers identified	Not relevant for target country	No barriers identified

■ No barriers identified	■ Moderate barriers identified
■ Minor barriers identified	■ Not relevant for target country
■ Severe barriers identified	■ No projects implemented

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1. National RES targets and relevant RES technologies

In 2019, Slovenia had a share of 21.97% of energy from renewable energy sources (RES) in the gross final energy consumption and thus has not reached its 2020 target of 25% so far (Eurostat, 2020). For 2030, Slovenia envisages a RES share of at least 27% in energy end-use (Government of the Republic of Slovenia, 2020). Looking at the specific sectors, the gross direct consumption of RES in the electricity sector should increase from an estimated 35.0% in 2020 to 43.3% in 2030, whereas the RES consumption for heating and cooling should rise from 33.5% in 2020 to 43.3% in 2030 (ibid.).

In the estimated contribution of RES technologies to gross final consumption wood biomass accounts for the largest share, but with a view to 2030, a decrease in use of almost a fifth is predicted (ibid.). Hydropower is the second most important RES technology and shows relatively moderate growth until 2030 due to its already extensive establishment, but is expected to grow significantly in the decade up to 2040 (ibid.; aquarius 2015b). Because of its wide use and the experiences made in permission and administrative procedures it is considered to be relevant for the purposes of this study. The geothermal market will be growing in the upcoming years, but since this technology is still not quite established and the fulfilment of the target will be achieved by only a small number of geothermal projects, this technology is not considered to be relevant for this report.

The small onshore wind sector is stagnating since many years, although significant potentials are still unused, and can thus be revealing in terms of the barriers for the procedures in questions (aquarius, 2015a). For the achievement of the 2030 targets wind onshore power together with rooftop and ground-mounted PV show dynamic development with promising growth rates in the coming years (ibid.; ELES, 2020).

Thus, hydropower and onshore wind as well as ground-mounted and rooftop PV are considered to be relevant technologies for the achievement of the 2030 targets and for the analysis of barriers to administrative and grid connection procedures. Also according to energy industry experts these technologies will play an undisputedly important role in the RES expansion in the years to come (Grmek, 2021; Petek, 2021; Tručl, 2021; Rajer, 2021).

Figure 1 displays the annual deployment of solar PV and onshore wind between 2010 and 2019. It can be observed that the deployment of solar PV took constantly place since 2010, however with a downward trend since 2012 and with interruptions in 2016 and 2019. Modest onshore wind capacity was added in 2013 and 2015 only.

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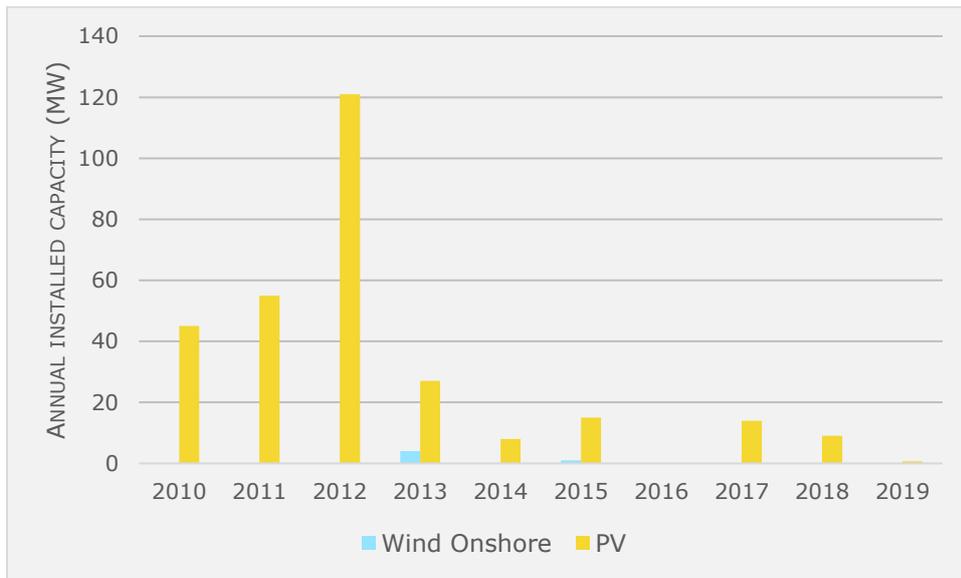


Figure 1: Annual installed capacity of PV and Wind onshore 2010-2019 (source: EurObserv'ER)

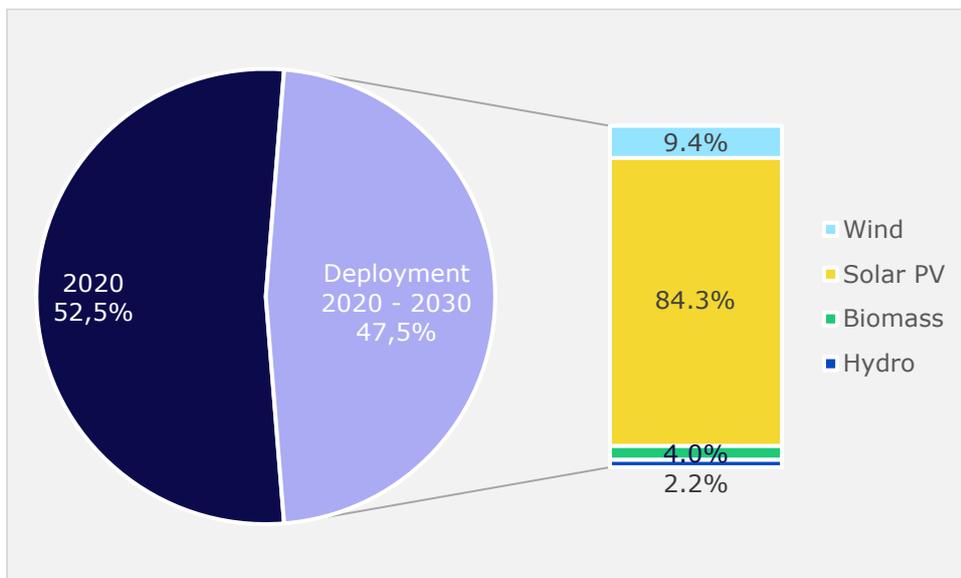


Figure 2: Planned deployment of RES-E 2020-2030 in relation to past deployment (source: NECP)

2. Administrative and grid connection procedure

2.1. Relevant process steps

When implementing a renewable energy project, the project developer will in the first step look for a suitable location for the project. If necessary, an electricity production licence (*energetska odobrenje*) needs to be acquired.

The administrative authorisation starts with assessing whether the spatial plan is suitable for the project or whether it needs to be adapted. Then the developer will request a building permit or, if necessary, an environmental impact assessment will be carried out in an integral procedure with the building permit procedure. For onshore wind projects,

an air permit might be needed and for hydropower plants a water permit and water concession are necessary.

The grid connection procedure consists of the issuance of the grid connection approval and the conclusion of the grid connection agreement.

Finally, the use permit needs to be granted.

The State Administration Act (2002) and the General Administrative Procedure Act (1999) regulate the basic structure of administrative procedures in the Republic of Slovenia. In specific administrative procedures, such as in the field of building or environmental protection law, additional provisions may apply and supersede general rules.

2.1.1. Site selection

Process flow

Suitable Site

First of all, the choice of a suitable location for the power plant must be made, which, firstly, depends on the local potential for the respective technology. The developer will consult wind potential maps or studies on the suitability of rivers for the use of hydro energy. It can also be necessary to carry out own studies at one's own expense, for example of the wind flow, in order to assess whether it is indeed a suitable site for construction and what size, type and number of wind turbines is optimal (RES developer, 2021; Petek, 2021).

Natura 2000

Moreover, maps of habitats and protected areas as well as spatial plans should be consulted in order to determine the possible purpose, the conditions of land use and possible conflicting interests with the project. Especially for wind and hydropower it should be well ascertained beforehand whether the project falls within an area that is subject to the Natura 2000 regulations (Grmek, 2021).

Obstacle Permit

Wind power developers should take into account that a site near an airport or low flight routes can make an obstacle permit pursuant to the Aviation Act necessary.

Ownership or renting

Depending on the ownership of the building site, it may be necessary to rent or lease the location. When building rooftop PV systems, the investor often already owns the construction site (Tručl, 2021; RES developer, 2021).

Dialogue with the Municipality and population

It is advisable to find out at the earliest possible stage the acceptance in principle of the local authorities and the local population concerned. This will gain time to initiate the sometimes lengthy processes of amending spatial plans at the earliest possible stage and it builds trust for the future interactions (RES developer, 2021).

Contacting transmission system operator/ distribution system operator

Furthermore, the transmission system operator (TSO) or the distribution system operator (DSO) should be contacted at an early stage in order to determine the available grid capacity at the envisaged site. This is done by filling in forms of the respective system operators on basic information of the project such as the planned capacity and the location of the plant (RES developer, 2021).

Deadlines

Since the processes in the early stage of site selection are not administrative procedures in a formal sense, no specific deadlines apply.

Detected barriers

To find a suitable location for the installation can be a severe problem for investors of hydropower, wind and ground-mounted PV installations (Rajer, 2021; Seršen, 2021; Miklavčič, 2021). Under the aspect of environment protection, construction in certain areas such as under Natura 2000 (more than 37% of the territory of the Republic of Slovenia) or regions with a special environmental status is prohibited (RNP, 2020).

Nature protection considerations limit further development of hydropower.

Small hydro-electric power plants are traditionally used for electricity production in Slovenia. However, here too for nature protection considerations (aquatic and riparian organisms and Natura 2000 habitats, natural assets associated with water and protected watercourse areas) there are restrictions on the locations where hydropower plants may be sited. The government plans to minimise negative impacts on nature by prioritising the upgrading and modernising of existing, already functioning small hydro-electric power plants and the revitalisation of existing, non-functioning installations in preference to the construction of new power plants (Government of the Republic of Slovenia, 2020).

Limitation of onshore wind development for nature conservation reasons. With regard to wind power plants, the problem of siting wind turbines spatially is encountered with similar problems such as areas classified as secured, protected and habitats of endangered species (ibid.; Petek, 2021).

To tackle these barriers, it would be necessary to implement legislation, which would give higher priority to the public interest of the expansion of these technologies, and to carry out studies, which would clearly pre-identify acceptable sites for construction (RNP, 2020; Rajer, 2021).

Identified good practice

No good practice related to this process step was identified.

2.1.2. Electricity production licence

Process flow

For the construction and reconstruction of facilities for the production of electricity of a rated electrical power greater than 1 MW, which are connected to the public network, the investor must have obtained an energy permit (*energetska dovoljenje*) issued by the Minister responsible for energy (at the moment the Ministry for Infrastructure) before the start of construction (art. 52 Energy Act).

The procedure is governed by the Energy Act (2014) and, in more detail, by the Energy Permit Rules (2016). The applicant shall submit his application on the form set out in the annex of the Energy Permit Rules (2016). The Ministry then verifies, whether the production facility meets special conditions and criteria set out in article 2 of the Energy Permit Rules (2016) such as safe operation and technical design standards and whether the applicant is technically, economically and financially qualified. Moreover, the Ministry keeps a public energy permit register on its website.

Deadlines

No special deadlines apply to this process step.

Detected barriers

No barrier related to this process step was identified.

Identified good practice

No good practice related to this process step was identified.

2.1.3. Administrative authorisation

Process flow

Spatial planning (art. 78 et seq. and 106 et seq. Spatial Planning Act 2017)

In Slovenia, spatial planning is governed by the Spatial Planning Act (2017). It states that the Spatial Development Strategy of the Republic of Slovenia is the basic document for the general direction of spatial development in Slovenia.

The spatial planning takes place in form of national spatial plans (art. 78 et seq. Spatial Planning Act 2017) and municipal spatial plans (art. 106 et seq. Spatial Planning Act 2017), which hierarchically have to be in accordance with each other. They define orientations on the spatial development, such as construction areas and protected areas (water protection areas, special habitats). The municipal spatial plan is later also the basis for obtaining a building permit.

The development of the national spatial plan (prepared by the Ministry for Environment and Spatial Planning under the council of the Commission on Spatial Planning) foresees an involvement of the interested public from an early phase. Firstly, in regional consultations in the initiative phase (in line with the principles of the Aarhus Convention). Secondly, through local workshops. Then the public is acquainted with a study of different variants of the plan. Finally, the draft national spatial plan is announced to the public for further discussion.

This early public involvement and involvement throughout the process underlines the importance of early communication between the investor and the relevant groups. If the Ministry expects at the beginning of the preparation of the process a lot of opposition from the public to the envisaged spatial plan, the investor chooses a coordinator of the public involvement process who will organise individual activities in the field such as to inform the public, lead public debates and prepare minutes (RES Developer, 2021). The coordinator of the public involvement process can be an organisation that deals with such matters professionally but takes over only the organisational part of the process and the professional part is still led by the preparation coordinator.

The preparation or modification of the municipal spatial plan is the responsibility of the respective municipality and foresees in a similar way an early involvement of the interested public. In order to ensure the professionalism and legality of performing spatial planning tasks a municipality must employ at least one municipal urban planner, who must be an authorised architect or spatial planner.

The procedure of drafting a municipal spatial plan can be initiated by the investor and it begins with a decision of the mayor, which is submitted to the Ministry. The Ministry assigns it an identification number, publishes it and informs the municipality. The

municipality then invites state spatial planning bodies involved in the EIA process to give an opinion on the requirement of carrying out an environmental impact assessment, on which the ministry subsequently decides. The municipality prepares a draft plan, publishes it on its website and invites spatial planning authorities to give an opinion within 30 calendar days.

Within 30 calendar days of receiving the opinions of the state spatial planning authorities participating in the EIA process, the Ministry for Environment and Spatial Planning decides, whether the EIA report is appropriate or requests its amendment in accordance with the regulations in the field of environmental protection.

After obtaining the opinions and receiving a decision on the adequacy of the EIA report, the municipality amends and publishes the draft plan. The public disclosure also informs of any conflict of interest as foreseen by article 113 of the Spatial Planning Act (2017). The public is then allowed to make suggestions and comments on the published and disseminated material within a period of not less than 30 calendar days, which in complex matters can be prolonged for another 30 calendar days. The municipality examines the comments and proposals of the public on the draft and takes a position on them, which it then publishes. Thereupon spatial planning authorities can give their opinion within 30 calendar days. The Ministry for Environment and Spatial Planning thereafter decides whether the effects of the proposal are acceptable for the environment pursuant to article 46 of the Environmental Protection Act.

Thereupon the municipality adopts the decision on the municipal spatial plan and forwards it to the Ministry. Finally, the Ministry publishes it as a valid spatial planning act and informs the municipality thereof.

Environmental impact assessment and environmental approval

Prior to the construction that may have a significant impact on the environment, it is necessary to carry out an environmental impact assessment (*presoja vpliva na okolje*; EIA) and to obtain an environmental approval (*okoljevarstveno soglasje*). Typically, for hydropower, onshore wind or also larger ground-mounted PV, especially in regions with larger numbers of protected birds or other animals such as eagles and bats, an environmental impact assessment needs to be carried out.

The environmental impact assessment and the issuance of the environmental approval are governed by article 50 et seq. of the Environmental Protection Act (2004), the Environmental Impact Assessment Decree (2014) and the Building Act (2017). The EIA entails a process of assessing the acceptability of the intended project with regard to the environment and it determines the necessary environmental protection measures in order to minimise the impacts and achieve the greatest possible preservation of environmental quality. Possible parties to the proceeding are the investor, neighbours and NGOs.

Annex II of the EIA Decree (2014) entails the groups of criteria for determining whether an EIA is necessary or not, e.g. the characteristics and the location of the intervention into the environment as well as the characteristics of possible effects. The construction of hydropower plants, onshore wind power plants and larger ground-mounted PV installations regularly falls under this category (Petek, 2021; RES developer, 2021). Annex I of the EIA Decree (2014) states that for wind power plants with a capacity of altogether 30 MW and hydro power plants with a capacity of at least 2 MW an EIA is mandatory. For other wind power plants with a capacity of altogether 15 MW the EIA is mandatory, if the location is in a nature protection area or within the distance of 1 km or less from specially protected buildings. For other hydro power plants with a capacity of at

least 0.5 MW and for ground-mounted PV installations with a capacity of at least 250 kW and an area size of at least 0.5 ha an EIA is mandatory, if it is established that they could have significant effects on the environment.

The competent authority is the Ministry of the Environment and Spatial Planning, its special body being the Slovenian Environmental Agency. However, in case of constructions (such as power plants) with possible environmental impacts, the EIA is merged with the building permit procedure and is issued by the Ministry of Environment and Spatial Planning. The agency then functions only as consulting body in the process. The merged procedures are then called 'integral procedure on the issuance of a building permit for objects with environmental impacts' and it is described hereafter.

Building permit (normal procedure, art. 35 et seq. Building Act)

For a new construction or a reconstruction of a building it is necessary to obtain a building permit (*gradbeno dovoljenje*).

If rooftop PV and smaller ground-mounted PV installations do not need to carry out an EIA, the normal building permit procedure pursuant to article 35 et seq. of the Building Act (2017) applies.

Pursuant to article 7 of the Building Act (2017) the competent authority is the local administrative unit (*upravna enota*) in the sense of article 14 of the State Administration Act (2002).

The procedure begins with the application and other necessary documents submitted by the investor. Other parties such as neighbours, NGOs and other persons, who can prove to be influenced by the building (e.g., noise) can acquire the position of a secondary participant in the process by notifying. The competent authority shall invite these persons for participation according to article 37 of the Building Act (2017), if known from official records. They then have the opportunity to contribute their views during the process. If not all the participants agree with the construction plans, the administrative unit holds an oral hearing.

If all the requirements pursuant to article 43 of the Building Act (2017) such as the accordance with building law and a complete documentation are met, the building permit is issued in form of a decision. The construction must be commenced within 5 years after the adoption of the decision (article 47 of the Building Act 2017).

Building permit (integral procedure, art. 50 et seq. Building Act)

In an integral procedure, a building permit is issued, which combines a decision on meeting the conditions for issuing a building permit and an environmental permit. Unlike in the normal procedure the Ministry for Environment and Spatial Planning is the competent authority for issuing a building permit for facilities with environmental impacts (art. 7 Building Act 2017).

The provisions on the EIA in the Environmental Protection Act (2004) principally apply, if the Building Act does not say otherwise (art. 50 Building Act 2017).

The EIA is carried out on the basis of an EIA report according to the Environmental Report Decree (2005) drafted by the investor under the quality overview of the Ministry. The investor then applies for the building permit and the environmental approval with the project plan and the environmental report.

If there are no obvious legal conflicts, the Ministry will provide the public with the possibility of taking insight into the application and enable the expression of opinions and comments by means of local announcements and via the internet. The period within

which the public has the right to give opinions is 30 calendar days from the day of publication (art. 58 Environmental Protection Act 2004 and art. 52 and 55 Building Act 2017). If cross-border impacts are possible, the Ministry will notify the competent authorities of the neighbouring EU-member states Italy, Austria, Hungary and Croatia, which then can also participate in the process.

According to article 54 of the Building Act a civil initiative may also be a participant, if 200 signatures of adult natural persons are collected in the area of the municipality, where the construction is intended.

Afterwards the expected impact of the project on the environment are determined and the consequences are evaluated according to the process outlined in article 7 et seq. of the Environmental Report Decree (2005).

The building permit is issued in an integrated procedure, if the conditions for a normal building permit referred to in art. 43 Building Act (2017) are met and if there are no significant harmful effects on the environment (art. 57 Building Act 2017).

Smaller installations

The Smaller RES and CHP Installations Decree (2020) determines the types, size and conditions for installations, for which a building permit is not required. These are solar power installations with a capacity not exceeding 1 MW and wind power installations with a capacity of up to and including 50 kW (art. 3 Smaller RES and CHP Installations Decree 2020). However, the investor needs to meet several conditions under article 4 of the decree such as static assessments, fire safety assessments or lightning protection precautions.

Obstacle approval for wind power plants

Wind power plants can represent obstacles to the air traffic nearby an airport, in particular in the take-off zone or also outside it. Article 112 of the Aviation Act states that whoever intends to erect a new or to increase an existing obstacle must obtain a prior approval. The competent authorities are the Civil Aviation Agency of the Republic of Slovenia and regarding obstacles in the military airport zone the Ministry for Defence.

Stricter construction and maintenance requirements for larger hydropower plants

Pursuant to article 3 of the Energy Infrastructure Decree (2016), hydro power plants with a capacity over 10 MW are also part of the energy infrastructure of Slovenia and according to article 462 et seq. of the Energy Act have to fulfil stricter construction and maintenance requirements such as optimal technical and economically efficient operation and a latest state of the art design.

Water permit and water concession

For hydropower plants a water permit (*vodno dovoljenje*) according to article 125 et seq. of the Water Act (2002) and a water concession pursuant to article 136 et seq. Water Act (2002) needs to be acquired from the Ministry for Environment and Spatial Planning. These administrative acts determine the manner of water use for the specific installation, which has to be in line with water protection provisions.

Deadlines

There are no universal deadlines for the aforementioned procedures, because each individual process depending on the project specifics is treated differently and can take correspondingly more or less time. According to article 14 of the General Administrative Procedure Act (1999), the procedure must be conducted expeditiously and at the least

possible delay for the parties and the participants. Certain different deadlines, however, are foreseen in the special legislation governing the abovementioned procedures.

Spatial Planning

Before publishing the decision on the preparation of the municipal spatial plan, its draft and proposal, the ministry shall check within 7 calendar days whether it has been prepared in the prescribed form and shall inform the municipality thereof (art. 53 Spatial Planning Act 2017).

Furthermore, the municipality shall publish the decision on the preparation in the spatial information system, inform the state spatial planning bodies participating in the EIA and invite them to give an opinion within 30 calendar days on the likelihood of the requirement to carry out an EIA in the specific case (art. 110 Spatial Planning Act 2017). The ministry responsible for the environment shall on the basis of these opinions decide within 21 calendar days whether an EIA is required for the changes of the municipal spatial plan (art. 110 par. 4 Spatial Planning Act 2017). At the request of the municipality the state spatial planning authorities shall also provide it with concrete guidelines within 30 calendar days (art. 110 par. 5 Spatial Planning Act 2017).

Environmental Approval

The Ministry shall notify the public of the issued environmental approval within 30 calendar days (art. 65 Environmental Protection Act).

Building permit (normal procedure)

If the application is not complete, the competent authority has to request the completion within 15 calendar days from its receipt (art. 35 Building Act 2017).

Building permit (integral procedure)

The deadline for issuing a building permit in case of an integral building permit procedure is 5 months from the submission of a complete application for issuing a building permit, but the deadline does not run during periods of obtaining opinions from other bodies and public debate (art. 57 Building Act). Moreover, the decision shall be published within 15 calendar days after issuance to the investor (ibid.).

Detected barriers

Lack of appropriate cooperation in larger projects. During the spatial planning process there are sometimes problems with regard to the right cooperation on the part of the investors (Grmek, 2021). It happens that working materials and documentation of the spatial planning process are presented in other procedures such as the building permit procedure even before they are approved by the competent authority. This aims at speeding up the procedures, but eventually leads to even more confusion, delay and a loss of trust. It is therefore essential that all processes are carried out according to the law by all participants. This barrier negatively affects larger RES projects in general, including wind power, hydropower and ground-mounted PV projects.

NIMBY attitude. Future investors of larger RES projects (wind power, hydropower and ground-mounted PV) may face a negative public opinion. Many communities express a strong 'not in my backyard' (NIMBY) opposition against e.g., wind energy plants (especially because of noise and animal protection) built in their vicinity, although, generally, most Slovenians recognise the benefits of wind power and larger RES installations and the fact that their deployment is necessary fulfil the climate protection goals. There are lots of civic initiatives such as ecological associations or also groups for the protection of sites of historic interest or monuments (RNP, 2020). It would be helpful, if all Slovenian municipalities would adopt a Municipal Environmental Protection

Programme (as outlined in the Agenda 21 action plan), which would change the attitude of many citizens by sensitising many to environmental problems and the need for the expansion of renewable energies (Lipič, 2020).

Public opposition. In Slovenia, the local population has prevented the construction of wind and hydropower plants during the spatial planning process (e.g., by means of a referendum or petitions) for a variety of reasons (Tručl, 2021; RES developer, 2021; Petek, 2021; Grmek, 2021). The main reason for the local oppositions is the protection of endangered species such as birds, bats and rare fish species, some of which are only found in the Slovenian environment. Due to a dispersed settlement of the population over the countryside only a limited number of locations with appropriate wind conditions can be found where in the vicinity there is no local population and where therefore no noise issues can arise (Government of the Republic of Slovenia, 2020; RNP 2020). A part of the public opposes renewables also because it pursues other goals and interests, such as the continued use of thermal and nuclear power plants (Grmek, 2021).

Lengthy procedures. In particular for larger RES projects such as wind onshore, hydropower or ground-mounted PV installations the overall length of administrative procedures can amount to several years, which makes the development of larger projects less predictable and plannable and ultimately leads to higher investment costs or even the refraining from investing in this regard (RES developer, 2021; RNP, 2020; Petek, 2021; Grmek, 2021). Due to reduced office hours of the competent authorities this problem has increased since the COVID19-pandemic in 2020. In case a favourable decision has been reached, it may be revoked or contested by an appeal, further delaying the entire process.

Therefore, there have been cases, where e.g., wind turbine components from foreign countries were imported at high costs, but instead of starting the construction, due to lengthy administrative procedures the same turbine parts had to be sent back thus generating more costs and overall investment uncertainty, especially in the wind sector (RNP, 2020).

If an environmental impact assessment (EIA) needs to be carried out, this can lead to considerable waiting times due to elaborate discussions and evaluation or monitoring, which are undergone in too great detail from the viewpoint of some investors. Furthermore, if the investor needs to wait for the change of a spatial plan, this can also take a long period of time depending on the municipality and the local opposition to the project. The behaviour and time delays can vary significantly depending on the authorities concerned and the interaction between authorities on various levels (RES developer, 2021; RNP, 2020). In consequence, the delays also lead to a situation, where the investor has obtained public incentives from the support scheme but will probably not be able to call up the funding, because the installations will not be built within the time limit of five years (Rajer, 2021). Sometimes the project design even becomes obsolete and needs an update such as more modern wind turbines (Grmek, 2021).

Similar problems for the installation of ground-mounted PV can be observed. However, it should be noted that the administrative barriers do not have such a severe impact on ground-mounted PV overall. The main reason that in the solar sector almost only rooftop PV installations have been built since 2017 is that there has been a very one-sided support policy in favour of rooftop PV, thus neglecting ground-mounted PV (Tručl, 2021).

Worsened public participation due to COVID-19 measures. Due to COVID-19 measures prohibiting the gathering of citizens indoors, most oral hearings and meetings on substantive submitted documentation (e.g., EIA reports) between citizens, the

competent authorities and the investor were cancelled. The communication via zoom and e-mail did not provide an appropriate alternative and did sometimes not produce clear answers. Some NGOs therefore have the impression that the implementation of the new COVID-19 policy is more in line with the government, ministries and investors than with the interests of citizens such as to maintain the quality of life, living and human health. It is demanded that the procedural rights in question have to be guaranteed also in times of the pandemic, which is mostly dependent on the will of the political parties, the government and the respective ministries (Lipič, 2021).

Lack of coordination and consistency. The Ministry of Infrastructure responsible for energy policy has repeatedly sent initiatives to improve administrative procedures to the Ministry of the Environment and Spatial Planning, where they seem to adhere strictly to European directives on environmental protection, apparently ignoring the exceptions for the use of RES such as in view of the principle of sustainable development. Thus, environmental interests (sometimes paradoxically) completely prevail. In other cases, however, the same ministry opposes the local (municipal) protection of wetland and wants to install a gas pipeline across it, which seems contradictory to investors. These inconsistencies also apply to obtaining building permits, water permits or the adoption of national and municipal spatial plans (Grmek, 2021).

Improper/unlawful decision-making practice. Experience shows that, allegedly, in some parts of the administration, processes are also deliberately slowed down because improper services of a financial nature that do not result from the law are demanded in return for the normal progress in proceedings. If these services are not provided, the process is prolonged, unlawful, i.e., superfluous, procedural actions are demanded (unnecessary documents, proof, etc.) or the official discretion of the final decision is based on irrelevant considerations and is therefore unlawful. The actual proof of these practices is difficult to provide and accordingly it is difficult to quantify the resulting damage in time and money. Although these are only individual cases, this circumstance nevertheless represents an obstacle to the expansion of larger projects and leads to more uncertainty (RES Developer, 2021).

Fake establishments of NGOs. Allegedly, there have been smaller NGOs set up by just a few persons in order to become a party in administrative procedures such as the EIA, to then frustrate or block the process and, finally, to offer the investor to withdraw from the process for a financial reward. However, this practice has been revealed and diminished by changes in the legislature, which foresee higher requirements to be met in demonstrating the public interest of a group (RES Developer, 2021).

Public authorities understaffed. The expertise of public sector employees regarding the development of renewable energies has increased in recent years and is satisfactory. However, it is generally noted that the responsible authorities have too few staff, which ultimately leads to even unproblematic processes taking significantly longer (Tručl, 2021; Petek, 2021; RES Developer, 2021).

Refrain from taking legal action. Because the Slovenian RES market is of a comparatively modest size, the individual investors and decision-makers in the authorities have become familiar with each other over the years. If there are delays in the procedures on the part of the authorities and legal deadlines are exceeded, it is relatively rare for the applicants to take legal action because they believe that a lawsuit before the administrative court would worsen their relationship with the decision-makers for the future. For this reason, even unlawful failure to meet deadlines by the authorities is often not objected to in front of a court, but an attempt is made in an informal way to persuade the decision-maker to do their duty. Furthermore, legal action sometimes

appears to be an unnecessary complication of the matter, as additional costs are incurred, and the outcome of the proceedings still can be uncertain. Ultimately, this damages the enforcement of legal guarantees already given to speed up administrative procedures (RES developer, 2021).

Identified good practice

Good atmosphere for rooftop PV. The regulative framework for smaller installations is deemed to be sufficiently good to increase the development of rooftop PV, since procedures are either not needed or proceed quickly (Tručl, 2021; Petek, 2021).

Increased use of e-communication. The general willingness of the competent authorities to use IT systems and make communication more digital (e.g., with regard to the project preparation in the building permit process) has increased in recent years also thanks to the proper functioning of online platforms e.g., in the field of construction matters and not least because of the new circumstances due to the COVID-19 pandemic (Petek, 2021).

Good cooperation with NGOs. With regard to the abovementioned possibilities of public involvement, the cooperation between NGOs and the competent authorities functions fairly well and the procedural rights (e.g., participation in the EIA process) are deemed to be effective in order to realise an appropriate consideration of public interests such as nature protection, although more participation rights would be welcomed also. Cooperation and mutual understanding between government, investors and NGOs has become more routine over the years and numerous positive experiences with compromise solutions have created a basis of trust (Lipič, 2021).

2.1.4. Grid connection permit

Process flow

The grid connection process is governed by article 147 et seq. of the Energy Act (2014), the Transmission System Operating Instructions (2016), the Distribution System Operating Instructions (2021), Distribution Grid Operating Instructions (2011) and the General Distribution Grid Conditions (2007).

According to article 370 of the Energy Act (2014) the electricity operator must in its activities of regulating the operation of the network on the basis of transparent and non-discriminatory rules, give priority to RES and combined heat and power (CHP) plants, if the safe operation of the electricity system is ensured.

Connection Approval

In order to connect to the system, the potential user firstly must obtain a connection approval (*soglasje za priključitev*) by the system operator (art. 147 Energy Act 2014). For this, a formal request together with a conceptual design needs to be submitted to the electricity operator.

In the connection approval the operator determines the connection point and conditions for connection. The approval is valid for two years; however, the period can be extended twice for one year respectively.

According to article 369 of the Energy Act (2014), the electricity operator cannot refuse the connection approval to the investor of a RES power plant on the grounds of article

147 par. 8 of the Energy Act (2014), which provides that potential grid users have no right to connect, if the connection would lead to disproportionate costs for the operator.

Connection Agreement

After the connection approval was issued, the grid operator and the holder of the approval shall conclude a connection agreement, in which the parties outline a detailed implementation of the grid connection and stipulate the maintenance of the connection (art. 147 Energy Act 2014).

Self-supply

If the construction of power installations intended for self-supply also entail new measuring points, the investor needs a connection approval (art. 315 par. 11 Energy Act 2014). When for example rooftop PV installations fall under the RES-E Self-supply Decree (2019), the system operator can only request the (technical) conditions set out therein without making further prerequisites necessary (art. 10 RES-E Self-supply Decree 2019).

Smaller installations

Smaller RES installations such as Solar power installations with a capacity not exceeding 1 MW and wind power installations with a capacity of up to and including 50 kW only need to fulfil the modified prerequisites of the Smaller RES and CHP Installations Decree (2020) such as the dispensation of the building permit if the building and safety provisions of article 4 are met (art. 5 Smaller RES and CHP Installations Decree 2020).

Deadlines

The connection to the grid is determined by the bilateral grid connection agreement.

At the request of an investor whose RES power plant exceeds 10 MW and for which a national spatial plan was adopted, the system operator shall within 60 calendar days of receiving the application prepare a comprehensive and detailed estimate of the connection costs and a schedule for the implementation of the connection to the network (art. 371 par. 4 Energy Act).

Detected barriers

Lengthy procedures. Lengthy procedures negatively affect all renewable energy technologies, but the waiting time for rooftop PV is significantly less. The connection approval is issued too late and thus the connection to the grid is delayed (RNP, 2020; Tručl 2021). Basically, the same observations as made for the administrative procedures apply.

It would be a sensible approach, if the system operator would have to pay a penalty fee, when procedures take too much time; Otherwise, the legal guarantees are considered by developers as nothing but mere lip service (Tručl, 2021).

Reluctant grid connection procedure. A reluctance to connect self-supply power plants such as rooftop PV installations can be noted among the distribution grid operators (Seršen, 2021).

With regard to rooftop PV, the late permit issuance and grid connection allegedly is in part due to unfair competition and a conflict of interest of some system operators, who prioritise their own installations or in favour of certain other investors and therefore connect them illegitimately before (RNP, 2020).

This barrier has similar consequences (prolonging project timelines, higher costs, uncertainty for the investors, etc.) as outlined for the administrative authorisation procedures and a similar hesitance to take legal action can be observed.

From the perspective of the distribution grid operator this description is not accurate, however, and delays are caused by capacity problems at the low-voltage grid level (Miklavčič, 2021).

Grid integration of rooftop PV. In terms of sustainable use of space, rooftop PV is seen to have the greatest development and environmental acceptability potential in increasing renewable electricity generation in Slovenia. However, the key limitation is the capacity to integrate solar power into the electricity grid, because, from the network perspective, it is cheaper and less complicated to incorporate ground-mounted PV installations at locations with higher electricity consumption (all consumed on-site) or by connecting to the medium-voltage network (Government of the Republic of Slovenia, 2020).

Identified good practice

Eased procedures for RES-E Self-supply. Slovenia has implemented the RES-E Self-supply Decree (2019), with which individual self-supply, self-supply in buildings with several apartments and communities that jointly install facilities for the production of energy from renewable sources are promoted. The decree was adopted and changed to remove administrative barriers in the formation of community self-sufficiency and to simplify the process of connecting devices to the power grid, e.g., by lifting the capacity limit of community devices (Balkanenergy, 2020). So far, the implementation of the new regulation has worked well and brought a significant acceleration of administrative procedures (Rajer, 2021).

2.1.5. Other

Process flow

Use permit

In order to start using a building, for which a building permit is prescribed, a use permit (*uporabno dovoljenje*) is necessary (art. 6 Building Act 2017).

After the completion of construction, the investor must submit an application for the issuance of a use permit pursuant to the procedure described in article 68 et seq. of the Building Act (2017).

The competent authority is the same as for the building permit, but only the investor can be a party in this process (art. 68 Building Act 2017).

Finally, a technical inspection and a trial operation in line with the conditions of the Power Plant Operation Rules (2016) are performed in order to determine whether the installation is in accordance with the building permit (art. 71 Building Act).

Deadlines

The competent authority has to issue the use permit within 15 calendar days from the submission of the complete application (art. 69 Building Act 2017).

Detected barriers

No barriers related to this process step were identified.

Identified good practice

No good practice related to this process step was identified.

3. Use of IT systems

Article 83 of the General Administrative Procedure Act (1999) states that, in general, the public authority has the choice of communicating documents either by post or electronically. However, article 86 of the General Administrative Procedure Act (1999) also encourages an increased use of electronic means for public services.

Environmental atlas

The Environmental Agency offers an interactive Environmental Atlas (atlas okolja¹) of the territory of the Republic of Slovenia, which contains detailed topographical information on the environment, which can be useful in the process of finding a suitable location.

e-uprava

The website e-uprava.gov.si² (e-administration) represents an online tool for the central collection for application forms and the description of various administrative procedures such as the building permit procedure. The user needs a qualified digital certificate to create an account in which all submitted applications and essential documents are displayed.

e-prostor

The project e-prostor³ (e-space), which is co-financed by the Ministry for Environment and Spatial Planning and the European Regional Development Fund, by 2021 aims at establishing the possibility of centrally carrying out procedures in the field of construction (e-building) and the preparation of spatial plans (e-plan) as well as developing a register of building land.

PIS

The website PIS⁴ (*Prostorski informacijski sistem*), which stands for spatial information system and is a part of the aforementioned e-prostor project, is a public service intended for the insight into spatial data on state and municipal spatial planning acts or those in preparation, administrative acts in the field of construction such as building permits and use permits since 2015, spatial restrictions (e.g., Natura 2000, protected areas, ecologically important areas, water protection areas, forest reserves, protective forests, protection of cultural heritage) and real estate records on municipal borders, land cadastre, building cadastre. The data is also organised in an interactive map.⁵

Spatial planning

Article 53 of the Spatial Planning Act (2017) foresees that the procedures for the preparation of spatial planning documents and the publication of materials shall be carried out through the spatial information system.

¹ http://gis.arso.gov.si/atlasokolja/profile.aspx?id=Atlas_Okolja_AXL@Arso

² <https://e-uprava.gov.si/>

³ <https://www.projekt.e-prostor.gov.si/program-projektov/>

⁴ <http://www.pis.gov.si/>

⁵ http://storitve.pis.gov.si/pis-jv/informativni_vpogled.html

EIA and Building permit

The public participation takes place over the spatial information system and by publication of the announcements via the e-government websites (art. 55 Building Act).

Building Permit

Article 9 of the Building Act (2017) provides that requests and applications under the Building Act shall be sent electronically via the spatial information system (*prostorski informacijski sistem*). If they cannot be sent electronically, the application shall be submitted in writing together with the prescribed documentation to the competent administrative body for construction matters, which then shall include it in the information system.

Article 41 of the Building Act (2017) provides that the competent administrative body may conduct an oral hearing by videoconference, if it deems that this contributes to a faster and more efficient procedure, if the body has the appropriate technical possibilities and if this is possible depending on the subject of the hearing.

4. Complaint procedure

Administrative Procedure

According to article 13 of the General Administrative Procedure Act (1999), a party has the right to appeal against a decision issued at first instance, if not regulated otherwise by law. Only if the government decides at first instance, an appeal is not allowed, if not regulated otherwise by law. Under the General Administrative Procedure Act (1999) the party also has the right to appeal, if the competent body of first instance has not issued a decision within a specified time.

Administrative Court proceeding

The administrative court proceedings are governed by the Courts Act (1996) and the Administrative Dispute Act (2006). The plaintiff may be any natural or legal person, who was a party in the procedure of issuing an administrative act. The lawsuit cannot be filed by e-mail, but only be written down in the court office or sent by post. In general, an action in an administrative dispute must be lodged within 30 calendar days of the issuance of the administrative act or the issuance of the decision on the appeal.

Spatial planning

Article 58 of the Spatial Planning Act (2017) provides that an administrative dispute may be initiated against spatial planning acts for which, principally, the provisions of the law governing the administrative dispute shall apply *mutatis mutandis*. The deadline for filing a lawsuit in an administrative dispute shall be 3 months from the entry into force of the spatial planning act. If harmful consequences of the illegality cannot be remedied by the administrative court's decision, the entitled person may claim compensation in accordance with the general rules of civil law.

Environmental permit

Article 64 of the Environmental Protection Act provides that the administrative court must decide on the action within 3 months of the filing of the action, and on the appeal or revision within one month of the filing of the appeal or revision.

Building permit

Article 47 of the Building Act (2017) states that an appeal against a decision issued by an administrative unit in the procedure of issuing a building permit is permitted within 8 calendar days. No appeal is allowed against a decision issued by the ministry, but an administrative dispute is allowed.

NGOs have the right to file an administrative lawsuit within 30 calendar days of the publication of the building permit as a representative of the public interest, even if they were not involved in the building permit challenged in an administrative dispute (art. 58 Building Act).

Article 52 of the State Administration Act (2002) states that the ministry responsible for a certain administrative area decides on an appeal against a decision or other individual act issued by the administrative unit (*upravna enota*) in the first instance in administrative matters, which consequently is the Ministry for Environment and Spatial Planning in construction matters.

Connection Approval

Pursuant to article 147 of the Energy Act 2014, the issuance or refusal of the connection approval is a decision in an administrative procedure and can thus be appealed to according to the general provisions mentioned below. The Slovenian Energy Agency (*Agencija za energijo*) shall decide on an appeal against such a decision. The rejected user also has the right to take insight in all technical documentation of the electricity operator regarding the refusal of connection approval.

5. Specific features to ease administrative procedure

Table 2 below provides information on the existing specific features to ease administrative procedures in Slovenia.

Table 2: Specific features to ease administrative procedures

Specific feature	Existing	
Simultaneous procedures	yes	If the project for which a building permit is prescribed is a facility with possible environmental impacts, the procedures for obtaining a building permit and an environmental approval are merged (integral procedure) and together governed by the Ministry of Environment and Spatial Planning (art. 50 et seq. Building Act).
National contact points and one-stop-shops	no	
Application of 2+1 and 1+1 rules	no	
Simple notification procedure	no	
Pre-planning	no	
Pre-application consultation	no	
Project acceptance measures	no	
Measures to streamline litigation by third parties	no	
Other	no	The transposition of Directive 2018/2001 into national law has not yet been implemented. The bill is currently interdepartmentally discussed. It is expected to be adopted by the Government and sent to the National Assembly no later than April 2021. Currently, it is unclear in what period of time it will be considered in the National Assembly (Seršen, 2021).

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	Furthermore, the government is currently working on legal amendments to ease the site selection process (Rajer, 2021).
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6. Indicators to measure the performance of the overall process

Table 3 below provides information on the indicators to measure the performance of the overall administrative and grid connection process in Slovenia.

Table 3: Performance indicators to assess administrative and grid connection processes

Performance indicator	
Average response time by the competent authorities and TSO/DSO for grid connection procedures	The response time varies among the TSO and the five DSOs Elektro Celje, Elektro Gorenjska, Elektro Ljubljana, Elektro Maribor and Elektro Primorska. The Energy Act (art. 369 par. 9) foresees that every two years the electricity operator must submit a report to the Ministry of Infrastructure, where specific cases of RES plants, which were not connected to the grid within two years, are explained and concrete measures for the completion of the grid connection process are outlined.
Process duration	<p>Building permit</p> <p>For less complex cases such as rooftop PV the waiting time for a building permit can amount from less than a month to over 6 months depending on the administrative unit and municipality. For bigger projects such as the building for hydropower or wind onshore power plants the process duration can amount to several years depending on the municipality (Grmek, 2021; novice.svet24, 2020; Miklavčič, 2021).</p> <p>Grid connection</p> <p>The grid connection process duration can vary significantly between the different regions, although the regulation needs to be applied uniformly nationwide (Miklavčič, 2021). Even for smaller installations such as rooftop PV this can lead to a waiting time of 6 weeks in the region of Kranj and up to 4 months in the region of Maribor, allegedly because the availability of the grid capacity needs to be determined (Tručl, 2021).</p> <p>This is among others due to different personnel and different (more or less productive) organisational structures of the local responsible DSOs (Miklavčič, 2021).</p>
Project approval rates	N.A.
Costs of administrative processes	<p>In general, the costs of administrative processes are governed by the Administrative Fees Act (2000).</p> <p>Spatial Planning</p> <p>Generally, the costs for spatial planning are borne by the state, but if the municipality needs to carry out a location check, it charges the investor with a compensation for the costs incurred in this procedure (art. 132 Spatial Planning Act).</p> <p>Building permit</p> <p>The costs for the building permit depend on the value of the building and vary from EUR 54.40 to EUR 724.90.</p> <p>Connection approval</p>

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	The costs of all analyses for the issuance of consent for the connection of RES power plants to the network shall be borne by the electricity operator (art. 369 par. 1 Energy Act 2014).
Share of permits that are legally challenged	N.A.
Share of legal challenges that are overruled	N.A.
Stakeholder interests	With regard to the participation rights in the spatial planning or EIA procedure, the status quo is seen by NGOs in the area of environmental protection as fairly satisfactory. However, the COVID-19 measures have deteriorated the quality of public discussion severely, because meetings cannot be held, and written requests are not replied to in the same level of detail and accuracy as this was the case in the (more direct) communication before 2020 (Lipič, 2021).

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