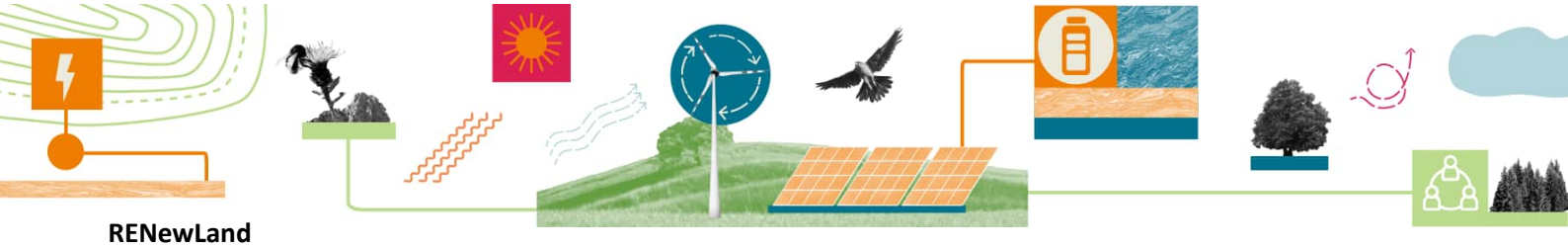


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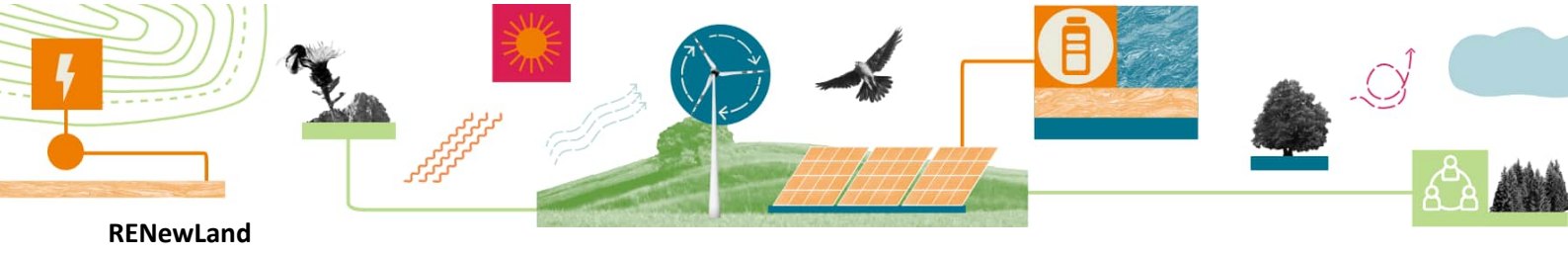
# **REPORT**

## **Summary of discussions with Romanian stakeholders in the RENewLand project**



# Main challenges and risks identified regarding the process of identification, mapping and designation of renewable energy acceleration areas in Romania

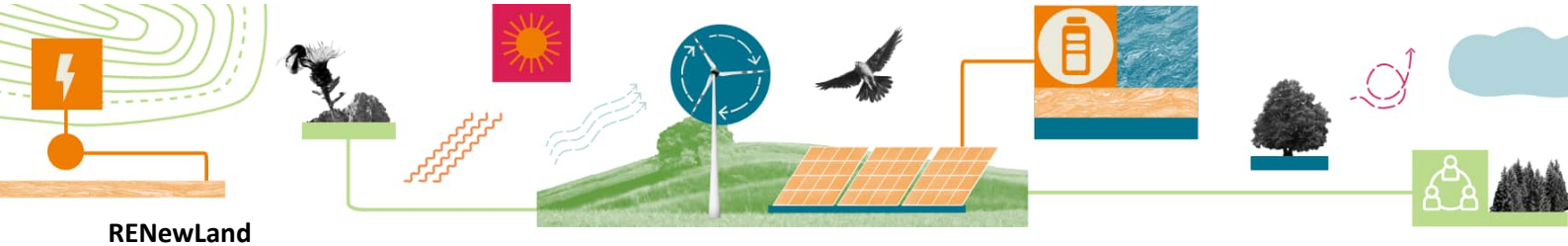




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## 1. About the project - purpose and objectives

The RENEwLand project addresses the challenge of sustainable and accelerated renewable energy development, focusing in particular on onshore wind and solar energy in Romania, Bulgaria and Hungary.

The main objectives focus on sharing critical information and knowledge and facilitating the processes of identifying, mapping and designating suitable areas for renewable energy production with minimal impact on nature and for the benefit of local communities, in line with the European Green Pact and REPowerEU.

By encouraging a multi-sectoral approach, the project aims to ensure that the designation of accelerator areas aligns with scientific and sustainable principles, mitigating risks to biodiversity, managing social expectations and meeting renewable energy targets. The project aims to raise society's awareness and support smart land-use planning, with a focus on integrated spatial planning as a key component in achieving a low-emission future through renewable energy.

## 2. Description of the stakeholder consultation process in two roundtables

From 7 to 21 March 2024, two roundtables were held in Bucharest, the first with representatives of the energy sector, developers and investors in renewable energy production systems, as well as energy distribution and transmission companies, and the second with representatives of environmental and rural sustainable development NGOs, territorial planning institutions and environmental assessment consulting firms in Romania, with the purpose to:

- collect and understand views on national challenges (existing and envisaged) in terms of land use, spatial planning and authorisation, including legal, technical, institutional, environmental and social issues for solar and wind energy development;
- identify the main challenges related to the accelerated development of renewable energy;
- identify potential solutions for strategic spatial planning for accelerated renewable energy development, including the designation of acceleration areas for specific types of renewable energy in our country.

The two roundtables were preceded by the dissemination of a questionnaire on the topic addressed to identified stakeholders. The roundtable discussions were guided by the questions included in the questionnaire, the results of which are summarised in Chapter 3 of this Report.

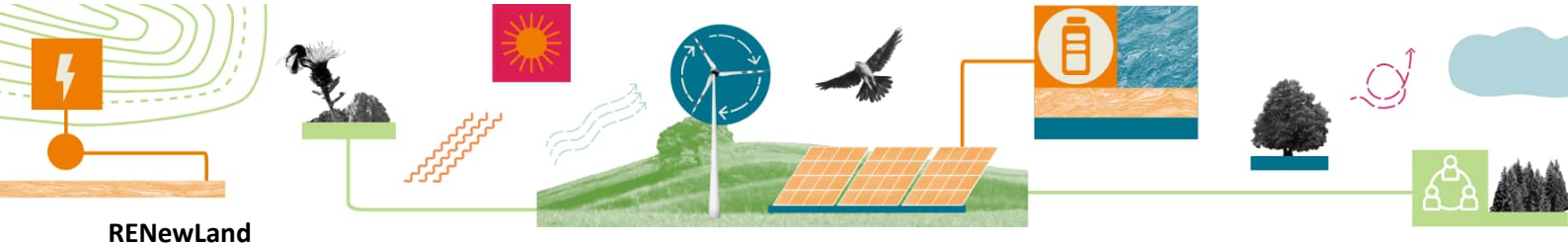
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In order to ensure synergies with other relevant projects, the 2nd roundtable was attended by Mr. Viorel Popescu, professor-researcher, as coordinator of the study *Initial assessment for identifying opportunities and obstacles in the implementation of Romania's renewable energy strategy*, who presented the main results of the scoping study conducted by TNC-The Nature Conservancy and MANU-Macedonian Academy of Sciences and Arts. The three objectives of this assessment were:

1. Identify legal and technical barriers and opportunities, as well as the scope and scale for identifying areas for siting renewable energy projects;
2. Identify available data to conduct a low-conflict planning process for solar and wind projects
3. Identify key stakeholders, policy processes and other entry points to determine the potential for TNC to work on smart siting of renewable resources in Romania so that the exercise can be accepted and implemented.

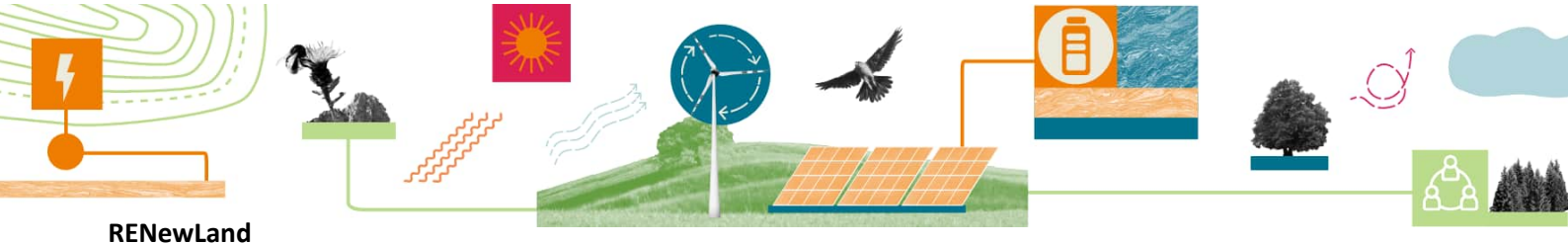
Conclusions of the presentation:

- A stakeholder-led process is to be encouraged to ensure that the results will be accepted by the various relevant actors (governments, industry, civil society, communities) and ultimately owned by them for implementation according to national mandates;
- The purpose of a science-based process and stakeholder involvement is to improve decision-making and establish a framework that can be easily updated;
- This approach is not just a planning exercise; it is about considering the cumulative effects of multiple human activities, multiple levels of biodiversity and environmental data, ultimately leading to better outcomes for nature, people and the economy;
- A key aspect, especially when thinking about acceleration areas for renewable energy projects, is that environmental aspects can be integrated BEFORE decisions are made on project siting, which increases project profitability and minimises environmental and social concerns.

### 3. Summary of questionnaire results

The 8-question questionnaire was distributed to over 40 people. Some of them responded online, and some (mainly participants of the first roundtable) expressed their views during the meeting. Their opinions were centralised in the minutes of the meetings, and no opposing views were recorded against the written responses, only

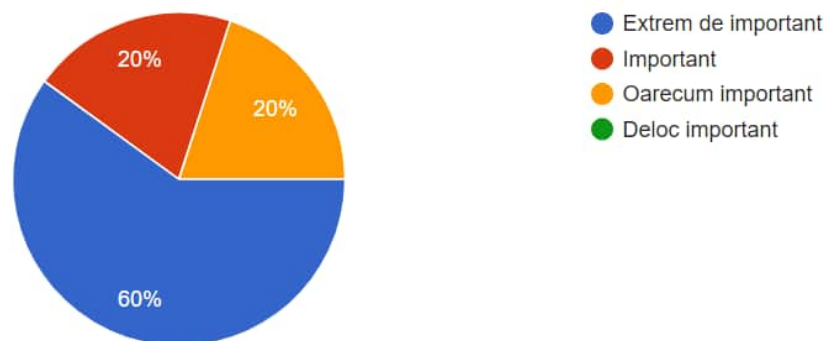




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ideas and arguments in support of or in addition to those received. The questions and the summary of the answers collected in written form are reproduced below:

1. How important is a rapid energy transition (replacing fossil fuel-based energy sources with sustainable renewable sources such as wind and photovoltaics) to achieving a sustainable future for the country?



2. What are the 3 main obstacles to the accelerated development of onshore wind and photovoltaic RES in our country?

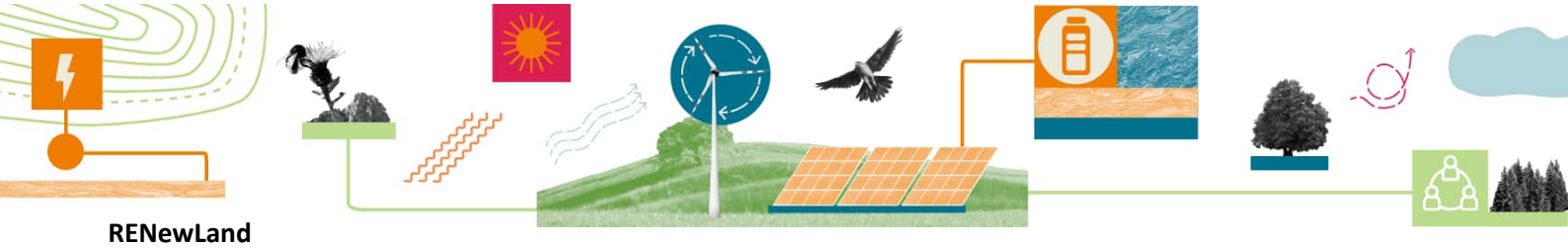
The answers to this question can be classified into several broad categories:

- **Administrative/bureaucratic issues** - related to project development (delays, bureaucratic, often discretionary administrative processes)
- **Project financing** (lack of a functional support scheme such as CfD, slow steps towards PPPs, cost of financing - high interest rates,
- **Predictability of investments** (lack of a clear picture for investors - e.g. an overlay map of grid connection locations and areas where the investment would have minimal negative impacts on nature)
- **The capacity of the transmission and distribution network** to take up the energy produced, including the storage component (need for a significant increase in network investments, balancing of the network)
- **Biodiversity impacts** - are a strong constraint and need to be addressed and addressed according to best practice, but there are solutions to optimise impacts and reduce them
- **Structural issues** - available/skilled labour force, socio-economic context (regional divergences)

3. How would you describe the current situation of national and local spatial planning of RES (photovoltaic and wind) in Romania?

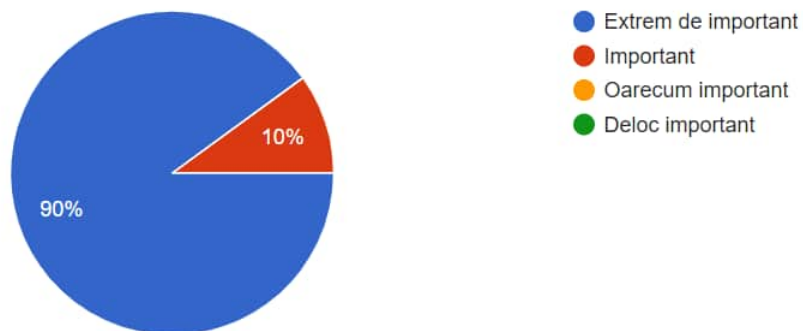
The answers to this question also varied and we divided them into 3 categories:





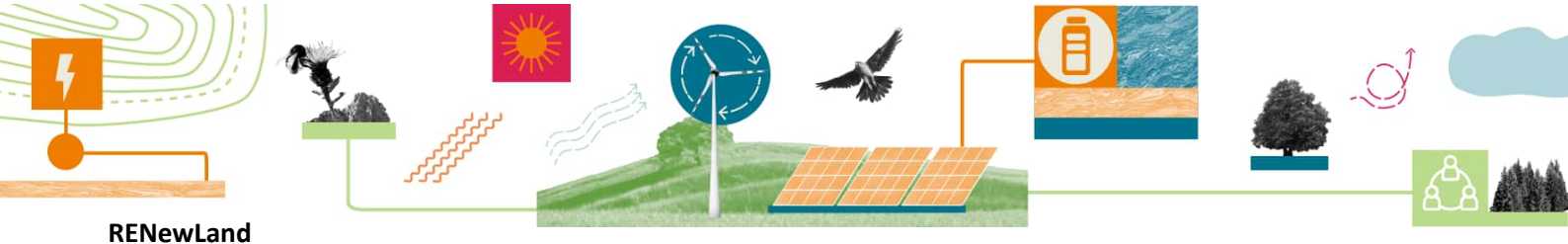
- **A. No planning** (Incoherent, discretionary and administratively burdensome, random, not based on sound studies on spatial planning, environmental impacts, especially on biodiversity, and national strategic plans. Current planning does not consider a strategic approach to minimise environmental impacts. Environmental assessments only take place at the level of each investment and do not address potential cumulative impacts. Moreover, "planning" is probably too much, there are economic actors in the field, in the territory, who are working towards investments.
- **B. Favourable** (We are seeing a welcome increase in investment in rooftop solar on homes and institutions, but it is worrying that there is increasing pressure to take land off the grid for solar farms. Agricultural land should remain agricultural and investment should be focused on rooftops. We have noticed that there are overlapping PUZs and there is fierce competition on different optimal project locations.
- **C. I don't know any information**

4. In December 2019, the European Commission proposed the European Green Deal, a flagship initiative that aims to make the EU a climate-neutral continent by 2050, underpinned by a comprehensive plan to boost economic growth while addressing the pressing challenges of climate change, environmental degradation and biodiversity loss. How important do you think it is that the planning, designation and use of future acceleration areas are based on a systemic, multi-sectoral approach to avoid environmental degradation and biodiversity loss?



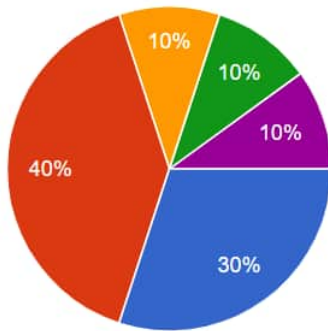
5. Do you consider that the determination of the total area of designated areas for accelerated deployment of renewable energy capacity from wind and photovoltaic should be correlated with specific targets (for these types of energy) related to the 2050 time horizon?





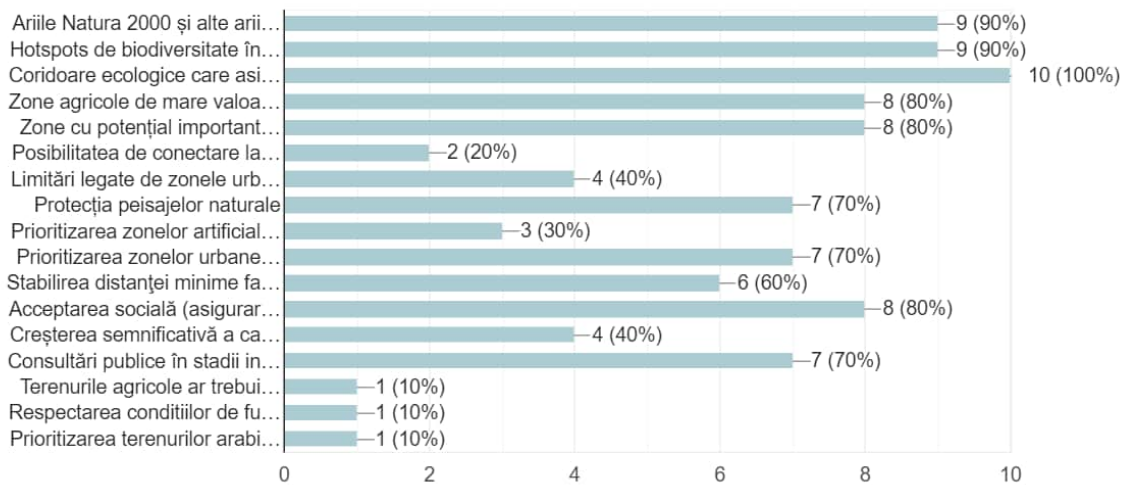
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There were multiple answers to this question. The highest weight (40%) was given to the answer: *NO, it is not necessary that the total area of designated areas for accelerated renewable energy development is designated from the outset, but rather that it should be a multi-stage process over shorter time horizons, with the first phase targeting the 2030 NREAP targets, closely followed (with 30%) by the answer: YES, the total area of areas designated for accelerated renewable energy development should be designated from the outset by reference to the need to achieve the 2050 related RES targets.* Importantly, a number of two additional responses pointed out that: 1) *designating such areas in haste can put huge pressure on agricultural land, which is wrong* and 2) *designated areas must take into account current urban and spatial planning regulations and environmental regulations*



- Da, suprafața totală a zonelor desemnate pentru dezvoltarea accelerată a energiei regenerabile ar t...
- Nu, nu este necesar ca suprafața totală a zonelor desemnate pentru dezvoltar...
- Zonele desemnate trebuie sa tine seama de reglementarile din domeniul...
- Desemnarea unor astfel de zone in graba, poate pune o presiune uriasa p...
- Nu am o opinie în acest sens

6. What are the main factors to consider when designating renewable energy acceleration areas for onshore wind and solar?



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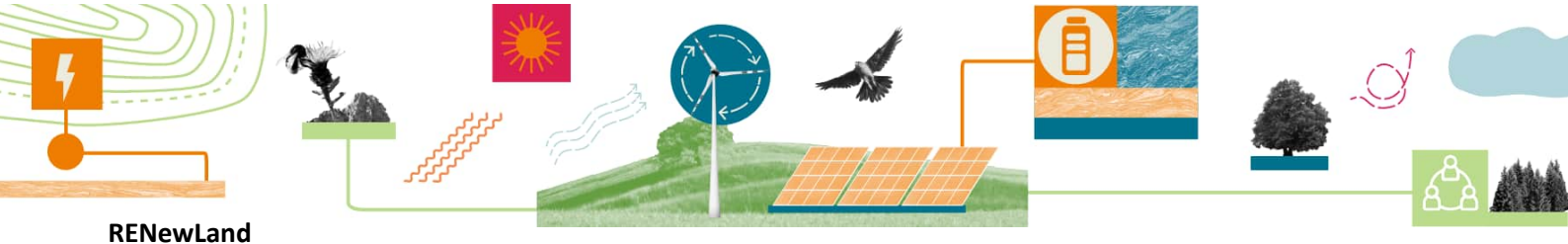
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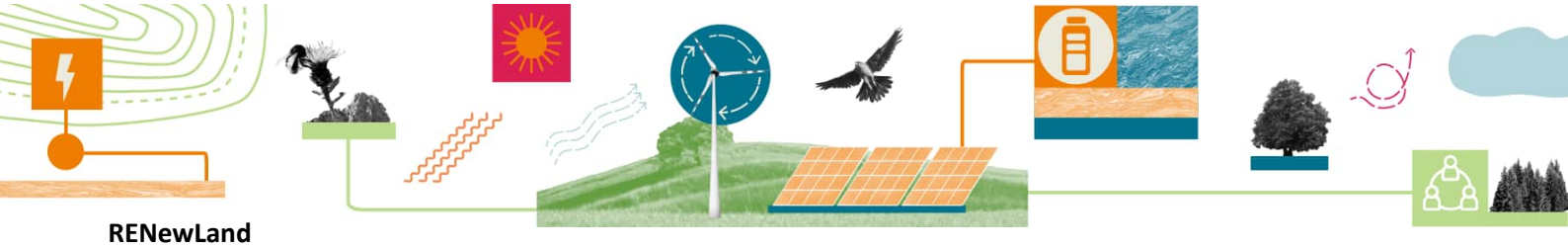
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The answers to this question were predetermined, with participants being able to choose only from these options. In addition, not all participants in the roundtables completed the online questionnaires, some of them preferring to express their views directly in the debates. Thus, they mentioned that in addition to the answers recorded in the form, two other important criteria should be taken into account: 1) the capacity of the transmission and distribution network for the energy produced, 2) consumption and climate-reduction of greenhouse gas emissions. From the responses registered online the highest weight was given to the elements of natural capital and biodiversity: 1) Ecological corridors ensuring the movement of species outside protected natural areas, especially for birds, bats, etc., 2) Natura 2000 areas and other natural areas protected under national legislation (e.g. nature parks, national parks, reserves) and biodiversity hotspots outside protected natural areas, 3) High Nature Value (HNV) agricultural areas and Areas with high potential for ecological restoration (e.g. Wetland/floodplain restoration sites), in or outside protected natural areas, along with Social Acceptance (ensuring socio-economic impact assessments to find areas where acceptance by local communities is increased), 4) Protection of natural landscapes, Prioritisation of urban areas suitable for solar energy, such as rooftops, starting with public buildings, identification of areas of no or minimal environmental impact, assessment of cumulative effects of future acceleration areas, including existing infrastructure, and last but not least, Public consultations at early stages, continuous, meaningful, transparent stakeholder involvement.

In addition, from the perspective of the participants in the debates, low-quality arable land in areas with many monocultures, and artificial/anthropogenic areas outside urban areas are suitable for the development of renewable energy parks but special attention should be paid to the minimum distance from the nearest human settlement for wind energy in parallel with a significant increase in the administrative capacity of the authorities to authorise such investments.

7. To what extent are you interested in actively participating in the development of principles and criteria for the accelerated and sustainable development of renewable energy in the country, carried out within the RENewLand project?





8. Can you (the organisation/institution you represent) contribute geographic or other data and information (GIS files) to the methodology and mapping process of the accelerated RES (onshore wind and PV) areas in the project?



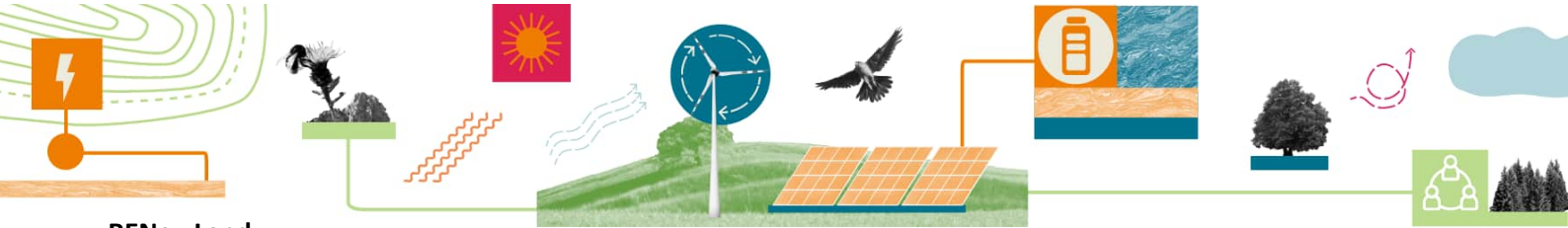
## 4. Main challenges, risks and solutions identified concerning wind and solar acceleration areas

(based on results from questionnaires and workshops) (0.5-1 page per challenge)

The main challenges and risks identified can be divided into 5 main categories which are summarised below:

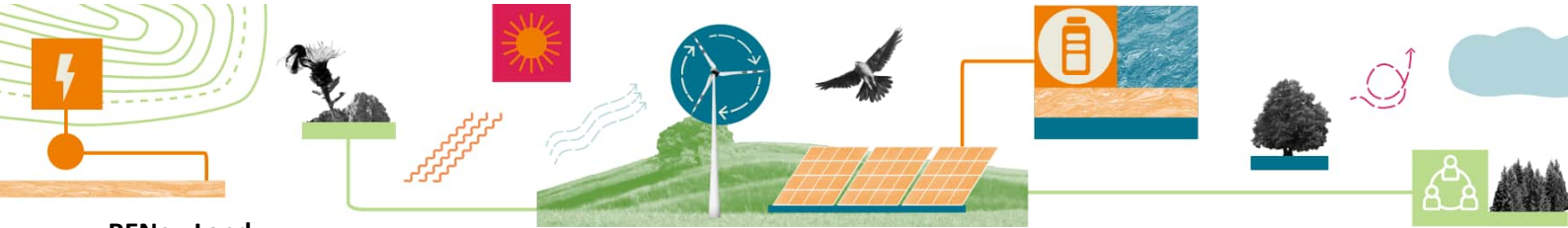
- 1. Energy system capacity:** When we talk about energy production we need to understand the need to match energy production with energy consumption, and energy production areas with consumption areas. At present there is no planning of areas for the development of energy production capacities. In order to designate acceleration areas, there is a risk that areas with energy potential will be overcrowded with investments, which will create a technical problem related to electricity transmission and distribution. Balancing the grid is very important as RES capacities increase, which is why it is necessary to develop the electricity storage sector. In practice, there is no organised planning in power plant development and investors are guided by renewable potential and distance from the grid. The planning of RES power plants in general (except acceleration areas) should also take into account where investments are planned in different economic sectors (industry, transport, etc.) as well as spatial planning. Acceleration areas should also be linked to local development needs and encouraged in less economically developed areas. There is a need to plan





the development of new RES power plants on existing (even disused) sites/infrastructure where they would have a minor impact on biodiversity or on agricultural land already used for biofuel production. Another important aspect of planning the development of RAAs is Romania's energy relationship with neighbouring EU and non-EU countries, where Romania is in permanent competition with some neighbouring countries, in which case caution is advised (there is a risk of congestion in cross-border areas);

2. **Integrated planning:** In addition to the planning side of SER development, another impediment is related to planning/mapping in the context of biodiversity, where there is currently a risk due to the legal non-recognition of ecological corridors, despite existing data obtained as a result of the implementation of various projects in the ecological connectivity sector. In addition to the delay in the designation of ecological corridors in Romania, there is a situation where ecological corridors identified in the field are not mentioned in the management plans of Natura 2000 sites, with a major risk that important ecological corridors outside protected natural areas are not taken into account/excluded in the planning of the renewable energy sources (the example of Dobrogea was given, where wind farms have been authorised wherever there are no Natura 2000 sites, without taking migration corridors into account).
3. **Circumvention of environmental requirements and major impacts on biodiversity:** plans for the designation of RAAs will be subject to the Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA) procedure and investments in the plan will go through simplified environmental procedures. In other countries, impact assessment procedures such as SEA are applied more correctly, but in Romania, the experience is different: the importance of the environmental opinion is reduced, because most of the time, even if SEA is carried out and an environmental opinion is given to the strategic document, the measures of such an opinion are not taken into account. Thus, the SEA is seen as a formality, the environmental opinion to the strategic document is not considered to have the legal force of a normative act and the measures included in it are not respected. If the designation of acceleration areas were made in areas without biodiversity, the fast-track procedure would not be a problem. There is a need to establish a set of generally applicable sustainability criteria, especially for projects, because environmental impact assessments sometimes conclude that some investment projects have a positive impact on the environment, although the reality is completely different. A proper impact assessment needs to be carried out on a case-by-case basis, which cannot be ensured through an SEA procedure. Moreover, even when impact assessment is carried out at the project level, environmental studies often do not correspond to reality. The example was given of an area in Buzău county, where an attempt was made to map areas of sensitivity for bats in the area of a wind farm (resulting in 400 dead bats). Thus,



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if each case is not carefully analysed and the classic steps of the environmental impact assessment for each project are omitted, the risk of affecting the species and their habitats is very high. Monitoring is a critical element during the implementation of the investment, but also during the operational phase, followed by data analysis and the application of appropriate and adapted impact mitigation measures. A very important criterion is the establishment of exclusion zones to be avoided in the process of mapping and designation of acceleration areas.

4. **Lack of institutional capacity:** although at the European level, there is a desire to move towards renewable energy production, decarbonisation of industry and electrification of the transport system, at the national level there is a lack of capacity and know-how on the part of the Romanian authorities in designating these areas, both in terms of data (spatial data in the field of territorial planning, biodiversity, etc.) and human and financial-administrative resources. The very short timeframe by which the mapping of all acceleration areas (May 2025) and their designation for at least one type of renewable energy (February 2026) must be completed makes this situation even more pressing. The lack of institutional capacity is not only limited to the entity directly responsible for the mapping and designation of these zones, i.e. the Ministry of Energy but to all central authorities that should contribute data, information and human resources to this complex process, such as the Ministry of Environment, Water and Forests, the Ministry of Development, Public Works and Administration, the Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development, the Ministry of Economy, Entrepreneurship and Tourism and other institutions under their subordination or cooperation. Bureaucracy, delays in examining the documentation submitted for authorisation and even legislation that often contains contradictory provisions are other risk elements identified by participants.
5. **Better integration of local community interests.** It is important that the development of energy projects is not only accepted by communities but also brings real direct benefits to members of local communities. The roundtables presented both examples of local acceptance and benefits for local people in the vicinity of renewable energy power plants (mainly wind power) and examples of negative attitudes and low benefits for some communities in the areas where these plants are being developed, in favour of the personal interests of local government representatives. It is clear that depending on the area and the relationship with investors, the openness and fairness of local authorities, the attitude of local people and the benefits to communities differ. But both developers and authorities need to ensure proper consultation with citizens and maximum benefit to communities in the vicinity of power plants and energy production facilities, which will lead to greater acceptance and even support for renewable energy projects.

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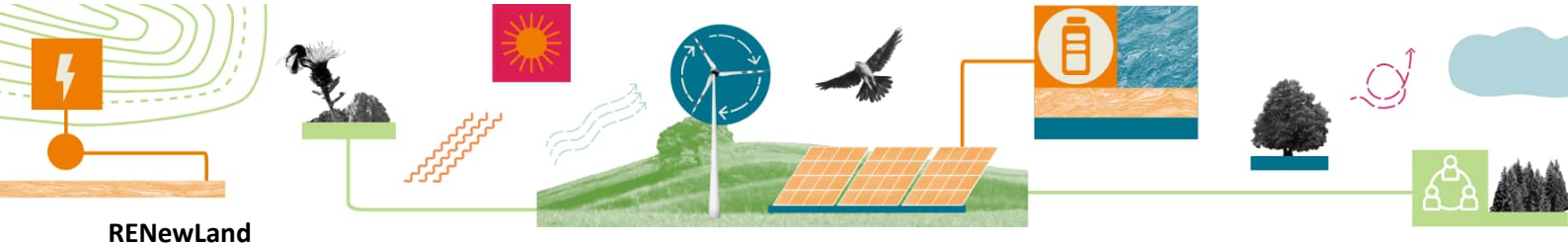


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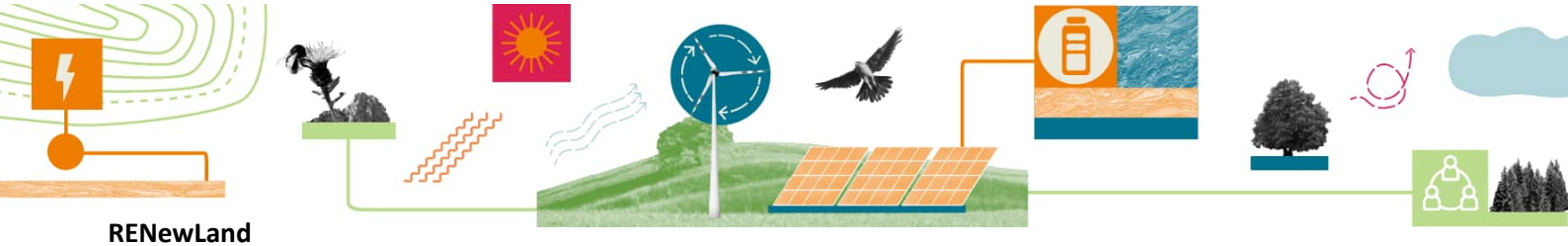
## 5. The next steps needed to turn the identified challenges and risks into principles for accelerated and sustainable renewable energy development.

*(1-2-page description of all additional meetings which need to be conducted and information to be collected to be able to develop the principles)*

The next step in the REewLand project is the dissemination of this Report with the main aim of informing and raising awareness among the most relevant decision-makers in the sectors of Energy, Environment, Development and Agriculture and discussing all the risks and challenges identified by stakeholders, regarding the process of mapping and designating areas suitable for accelerating the development of solar and onshore wind renewables. Furthermore, it is important to develop a database of data sources and information that will serve to map as accurately as possible the areas suitable for accelerating renewable energy projects. These sources include National Bird Action Plans and related maps, management plans for Natura 2000 sites, both integrated maps and management measures related to the location of nearby energy investments, zoning and management measures in national and nature park management plans, terrestrial ecological corridors (Ministry of Environment, Water and Forests has data from connectivity studies carried out in EU funded projects), air corridors (for Eastern Europe some crossing lines are identified, minimum 1-year monitoring is needed, Euro Bat data, EBRD guide, sensitivity maps, maps/areas of degraded land subject to ecological reconstruction funded by PDD 2021-2027, map of degraded agricultural land-brownfields, etc). These maps/databases are used to establish sensitive areas (exclusion areas from accelerated planning) so that the remaining mapping and designation criteria can be applied outside of these areas.

Once exclusion zones are established, a mandatory element is the correct identification of the resource potential and capacity potential of the network; these factors must be introduced into the methodology for mapping and then designating acceleration areas. A collaboration with energy industry entities is essential to agree on principles and indicators for designation from an energy perspective.





## 6. Conclusions

During the roundtables, the need for clear, scientific and spatially supported criteria for mapping areas suitable for accelerated renewable energy development and subsequent designation was strongly emphasised.

The development of investment in renewable energy is desirable, but not at the cost of losing biodiversity and food production and ignoring the views of local communities. It is important that the development of energy projects is not only accepted by communities but that they bring real direct benefits to local community members and that they are involved in the process of designating renewable energy acceleration areas from the outset.

The idea of creating acceleration areas also came about to create a predictable paradigm at the European level, because at the moment we do not have a single market and there is no predictability of these developments at the European level. Thus, the aim is to improve the investment environment at the European level to become globally competitive.

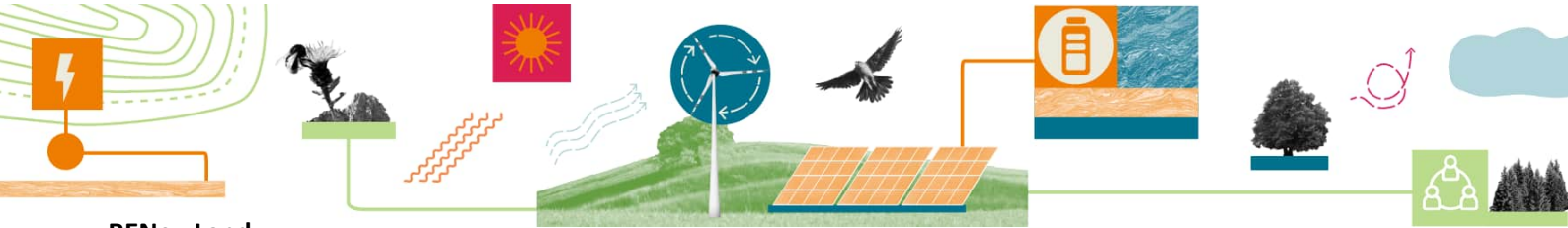
The establishment of acceleration areas should not circumvent environmental regulations.

A distinction should be made between mapping (mapping all potential based on criteria) and designating acceleration areas for certain types of RES, which should imply a low environmental impact; so that investments in acceleration areas can go through a quick screening on environmental impact, which does not exclude the implementation of precautionary measures or monitoring, while the siting of renewables outside acceleration areas should continue to go through full environmental procedures.

Technological innovation is key to reducing impacts on biodiversity. At the moment technology including using Artificial Intelligence is on an upward trend. The big problems of wind impacts on species (birds and bats in particular) will be solved by technologies, photovoltaic panels will also be changed and much higher yields will be achieved in smaller areas. Almost all manufacturers come up with complementary elements and there are suppliers of such solutions and if the impact study foresees such measures, they can be taken over by the regulatory acts. Thus, the response in the stakeholder questionnaire that the designation of acceleration areas should be done progressively over different time horizons/stages is again supported.

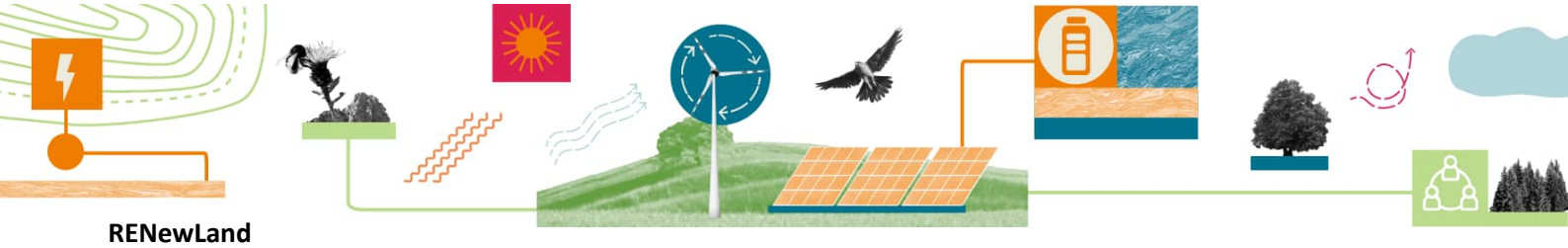
Romania has pledged to move away from coal by 2032, which is why we need an accelerated increase in renewable capacity to be put in place. Not only the needs of the energy sector must be taken into account, but also the importance of





decarbonisation of other sectors such as transport, industry, etc. where green hydrogen (produced from renewable sources) will play an important role. This justifies stepping up efforts to produce green energy while respecting environmental and social principles and transparency in decision-making.





## - Annex 1 - Abbreviations

**EBRD** - European Bank for Reconstruction and Development

**CfD** - Contracts for Difference

**GIS** - Geographic Information System

**HNV** - High Nature Value Agricultural Areas

**MANU** - Macedonian Academy of Sciences and Arts

**NGO** - Non-Governmental Organisation

**SDP** - Sustainable Development Programme

**NIPESC** - National Integrated Energy and Climate Change Plan

**PPA** - Power Purchase Agreement

**PUZ** - Zoning Urban Plan

**RAAS** - Renewable Acceleration Areas

**REPowerEU** - Energy policy in EU countries' recovery and resilience plans

**TNC** - The Nature Conservancy

**SEA** - Strategic Environmental Assessment

**RES** - Renewable energy sources

**EU** - European Union

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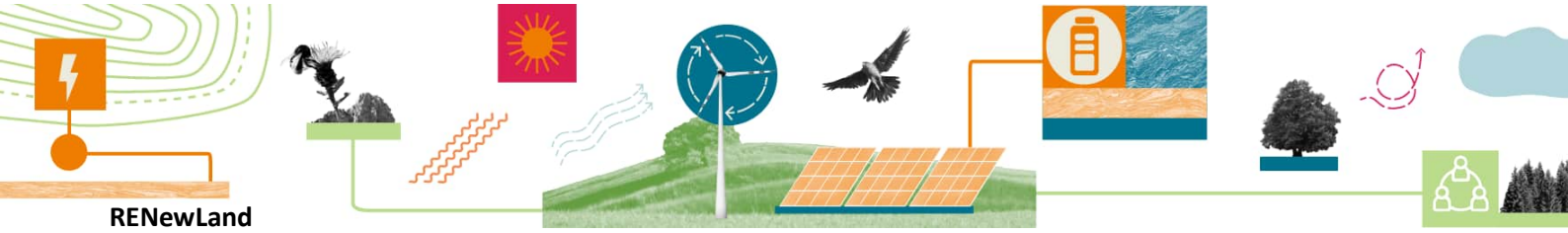
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