FACILITATING THE ENERGY TRANSITION IN BULGARIA, HUNGARY, AND ROMANIA THROUGH RENEWABLE ACCELERATION AREAS

EU context for renewable energy acceleration areas

Given Europe's climate ambitions and the energy security crisis, the EU has adopted the REPowerEU Plan and RED III. These require Member States to accelerate renewable energy deployment through spatial planning, mapping, and designation of Renewable Energy Acceleration Areas (RAAs).

Launched in 2023, the RENewLand project supports this process in Bulgaria, Hungary and Romania with a science-based, stakeholder-driven methodology for transdisciplinary and integrated spatial planning.

This factsheet presents the progress, barriers, and recommendations for Bulgaria, Hungary, and Romania, and offers a comparative diagnosis and targeted policy guidance to accelerate progress toward the 2030 climate and energy goals.

The European legislative context

The revised RED Directive, adopted in October 2023, introduced two key use obligations that aim to balance the expansion of clean energy with land use, environmental protection, and energy grid needs.
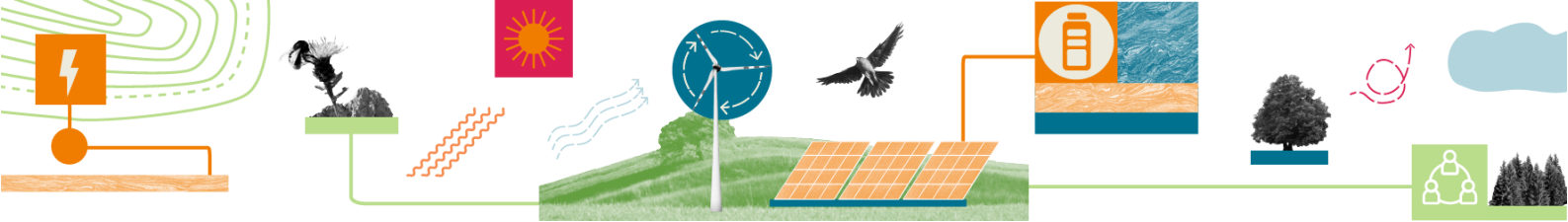
May 21, 2025
Mapping areas with potential for accelerating renewable energy

February 21, 2026
Designation of acceleration zones for renewable energy

The RENewLand project and its role in implementing renewable energy acceleration zones

To support this process, RENewLand has developed a harmonized methodology based on Geographic Information Systems (GIS) and multi-criteria decision-making (MCDM), including the Analytic Hierarchy Process (AHP), that integrates environmental, technical, and socio-economic criteria to ensure that renewable projects are sustainable and spatially coherent. It also incorporates an assessment of best practices in mapping and designating RAAs from other EU countries, and it is currently under pilot testing in counties and municipalities across the three target countries.

National Progress and Challenges

Bulgaria

Despite amendments to its Renewable Energy Act in 2023 and 2025, Bulgaria is behind on Article 15b. While responsibility lies with five ministries and an interministerial group, the RENewLand stakeholder consultations in 2024 revealed poor strategic planning, unclear mandates, and gaps in the legal framework, which prioritises wind but neglects solar energy, thereby risking further biodiversity degradation. Data challenges, weak digitisation, underused urban and industrial lands, grid constraints, limited municipal capacity, and scarce citizen participation further hinder progress.

Hungary

Hungary has yet to designate RAAs as of mid-2025, remaining in the preliminary mapping phase under Article 15b. Transposition drafts omit key requirements such as the Strategic Environmental Assessments, risking EU non-compliance, court challenges and public backlash. Fragmented governance limits access to data, while strict rules exclude many viable sites. RENewLand analyses show the existing potential for wind energy, but without fair mechanisms to share benefits, municipalities outside RAA boundaries risk economic marginalisation.

Romania

On paper, Romania has made the most visible policy strides, yet implementation is stalling. The government began transposing RED III in October 2024, and the most recent draft of a Government Emergency Ordinance outlines a framework for RAA mapping and designation. However, as of September 2025, the final version has not been adopted. Additionally, Romania's obsolete electricity grid is a critical bottleneck, and fragmented institutional responsibility persists at the operational level.
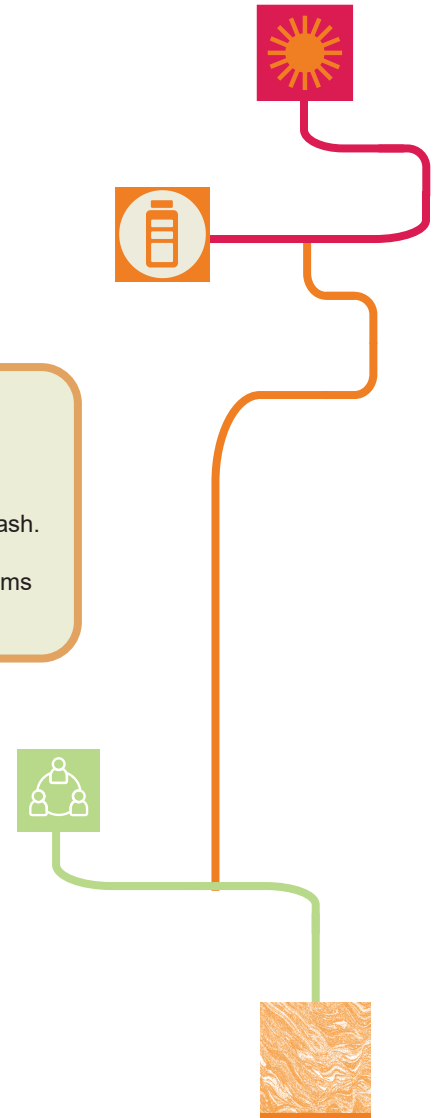
Common policy recommendations

A. Establish Permanent Multi-Stake holder Coordination Platforms	Set up permanent platforms bringing together ministries, grid operators, NGOs, industry, research, and municipalities to coordinate RAAs planning, ensure data sharing, align legal interpretations, and make the process transparent and coherent.
B. Adopt GIS-Based Multi-Criteria Methodologies	Adopt standardized GIS-based tools such as the model developed under the RENewLand project, to balance environmental, technical, and socio-economic factors, ensuring rigorous, transparent, and replicable site selection.
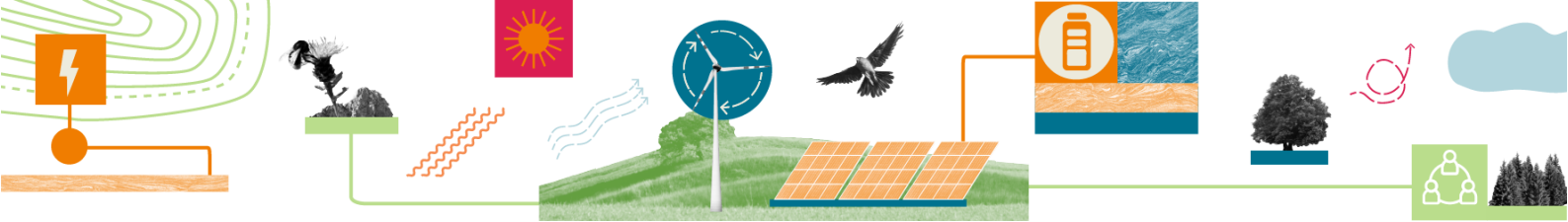
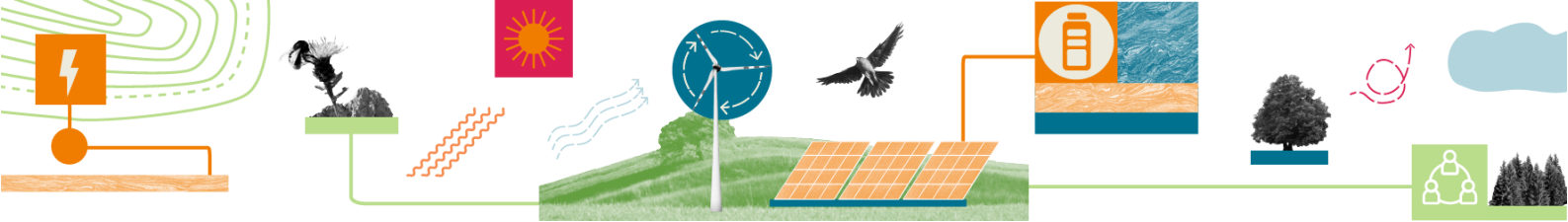|	
C. Prioritize Disturbed, Degraded, and Non-Agricultural Lands	RAAs designation must prioritize degraded, industrial, or non-agricultural lands, supported by national inventories and incentives, while explicitly avoiding sensitive areas (including but not limited to Natura 2000 sites and other national and international protected areas, ecological corridors which still need to be officially designated, or high-value farmland).
D. Implement Strategic Environmental Assessments and Biodiversity Safeguards	Make SEAs mandatory and ensure proper implementation for all spatial planning documents, collect and integrate biodiversity data, and apply safeguards such as seasonal restrictions, habitat restoration, and monitoring to reduce risks and align with EU Biodiversity Strategy 2030.
E. Align RAAs Planning with Grid Expansion Strategies	Coordinate RAAs planning with national grid development strategies, considering connection capacity in site selection, sequencing implementation, and publishing grid data to guide investors and planners..
F. Enhance Public Participation and Local Benefits	Embed early and transparent community involvement, interactive tools, and benefit-sharing mechanisms (e.g. cheaper electricity, community ownership, local jobs) to build trust and social acceptance.
G. Strengthen Institutional Capacity	Invest in staff, digital tools, training, and "one-stop-shops" to equip institutions, especially municipalities, to handle data, permitting, oversight, and coordination, ensuring timely delivery of the REPowerEU and RED III objectives within the EU deadlines.
H. Efficient and sustainable land use	Promote agrivoltaics and co-location of solar and wind to save land, boost efficiency, and reduce conflicts, supported by clear regulations, fair competition rules, and ecological safeguards.
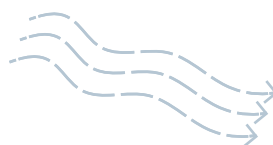
Country-Specific Policy Roadmaps

Bulgaria

must finalize RAA mapping and designation by the end of 2025, publish maps on a publicly accessible platform, integrate them into development plans, create a register of disturbed lands, and extend the RAAs coverage to solar energy.

Hungary

should revise its SEA legislation and align its technical standards with European norms. It should also adopt a landscape siting guide and introduce compensation for non-hosting municipalities.

Romania

must urgently pass relevant legislation, launch a central geospatial data platform, align RAAs with all spatial planning strategies, and embed biodiversity safeguards in all designation and SEA procedures.
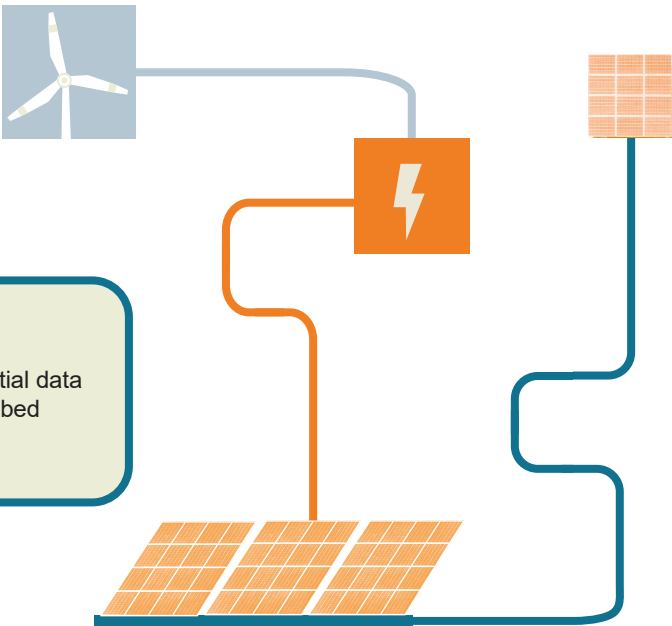
Conclusion

The energy transition in Bulgaria, Hungary, and Romania is both a necessity and a strategic opportunity. The RENewLand project has provided methodologies, stakeholder networks, and policy frameworks, but political will and administrative coordination are still needed. Through transparent, science-based planning and prioritizing low-impact areas, the countries can meet EU obligations and build a resilient, inclusive, and sustainable energy future.