

“ROOFTOP SOLAR INSTALLATIONS ARE THE QUICKEST SOLUTION TO PROVIDE GAS-FREE POWER TO EUROPEAN HOMES AND BUSINESSES”



Solar energy continues its unstoppable growth in Europe. SolarPower Europe's mid-year analysis shows that European solar is set to overshoot even their highest deployment projections for 2022 and support the continent's shift from gas. This year is set to see 39 GW of new European solar capacity replacing the equivalent of 4.6 BCM of gas. Dries Acke, Policy Director at SolarPower Europe, explain us in the following interview the role of solar in Europe for the next years.

Dries Acke Policy Director at SolarPower Europe

Experience: Dries is responsible for the policy work of the association. He joined SolarPower Europe from the European Climate Foundation, where he was director of the energy programme for over a decade. Dries holds a master's degree in contemporary history from the Catholic University of Brussels and Leuven, Belgium, and a post-graduate degree in international relations from the Karl-Rüprecht University in Heidelberg, Germany.



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What role does photovoltaics play in the current context?

By 2030, the European Commission expects **solar to be the largest electricity source in Europe**. In May, the landmark EU Solar Strategy was presented as part of REPowerEU – the European Union’s war response plan to Ukraine. It is clear that solar has a leading role in replacing Europe’s Russian gas supply – especially in the medium-term when the skills shortage, and permitting bottleneck, can be unlocked.

What is the best tool to boost it quickly in Europe?

Utility-scale solar will have an integral role in the solar transition, though right now, due to permitting barriers facing utility-scale projects, **rooftop solar installations are the quickest solution to provide gas-free power to European homes and businesses**. A residential solar rooftop can be installed in under a day, and conservative estimates say that European rooftops can provide around one quarter of the continent’s electricity needs.

As part of their Solar Strategy, the European Commission will introduce a European Solar Rooftop Initiative, which ensures **solar on all new residential buildings by 2029**, and on all suitable public and commercial buildings by 2027. It will be crucial to ensure we have the trained solar workforce capable of rolling out these solar rooftops.





What forecasts does SolarPower Europe handle for this year?

Our pre-war market predictions for 2021 expected **29.9 GW of additional EU solar capacity would be added in 2022.**

Given the economic and security challenges Europe is facing, we have revised that estimation upwards to potentially 39 GW of new EU solar capacity – which is equivalent to around 4.6 BCM of gas, or 84 LNG tankers.

Is there a direct impact of the Russia-Ukraine war on project development?

There is limited direct impact of the Russian war on project development.

Effects are more apparent through the related inflation pressure, where we see a pattern of solar growth, as businesses and citizens seek to protect themselves from energy price hikes.

The International Energy Agency's 2022 [Worldwide Energy Investment](#) report reveals that since 2020, globally, the pace of clean energy investment has accelerated significantly to 12%. Within clean energy, solar makes up around half of all renewable power investments.



Should Europe have shown more ambition to date?

From a climate perspective – yes. We’ve seen extreme temperatures, flooding, and forest fires across the continent. Had we heeded warnings 20 years ago and launched the renewable transition earlier, we would not be feeling the climate crisis today – or at least we would be feeling it less!

Dependency on imported fossil fuels, and their volatile pricing profile, has always come with risk. **Earlier moves towards domestically generated renewable energy, with diversified and resilient supply chains, would have helped mitigate that risk.**

We have to learn from the mistakes of the past and secure appropriate ambition. In upcoming negotiations between EU co-legislators, EU member states must uphold a minimum 45% renewable target for the EU for 2030. This is what the European Commission has proposed as part of the REPowerEU war response to alleviate the continent’s dependency on Russian gas. To fall back on the 45% goal now would undermine European solidarity with the Ukrainian resistance, while compromising ability to meet crucial climate targets.

Which countries are the most in need of photovoltaics to reduce dependence on gas?

Amongst major EU economies, Eurostat ranks **Spain and Italy as the countries with some of the highest rates of dependency on gas imports.** These are also European countries with incredibly abundant sunshine – their solar revolution is really ‘low-hanging fruit’ and would significantly support their energy resilience.