Streamlining administrative and assessment procedures for geothermal projects

POLICY BRIEF

The GEOENVI project identified **complex licensing** and related **delays as a significant barrier** to the deployment of geothermal projects. Streamlining the licensing process and the associated **Environmental Impact Assessment,** while maintaining rigorous environmental standards should be a priority for regulators.

This policy brief intends to cast light on the current state of play and offers several recommendations on how to streamline the licensing and permitting process to avoid unnecessary delay.

CURRENT CHALLENGES

Geothermal energy, like other energy technologies, requires licenses on any potential effects from its operation. Obtaining these licenses can be a very complex and therefore lenghty process. This can be caused for instance by the involvement of multiple responsible authorities or the need of the project for multiple licenses.

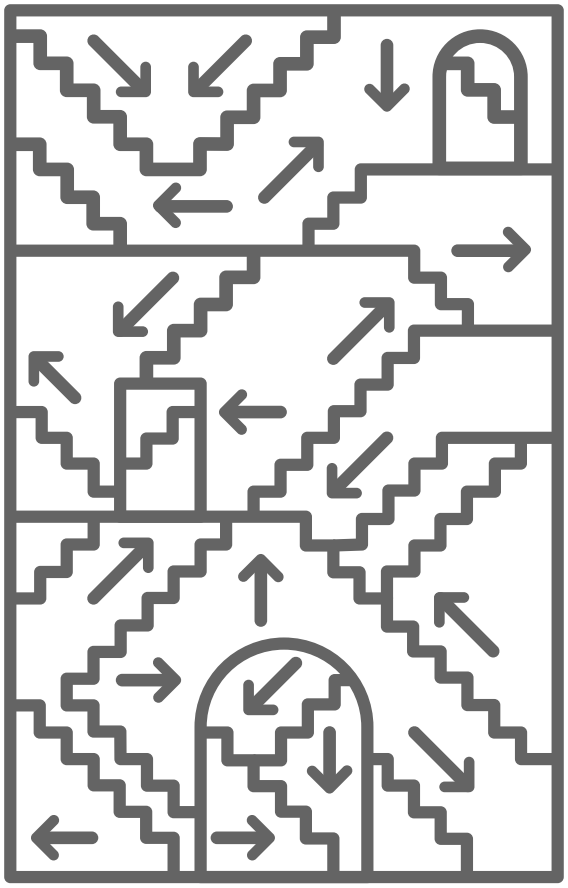
Exploration and **exploitation licenses** represent an official authorisation to pursue feasibility studies into the geothermal resource and its harvesting respectively. Their duration differs from country to country.

An **Environmental Permit** is required prior to obtaining these licenses, and is received based on the **Environmental Impact Assessment** (EIA). This is the **lengthiest part of the authorisation process.** The time taken to obtain this permit differs in each country.

There is **limited dedicated guidance to conduct an EIA,** and moreover, the EIA does not take into account the **individual nature of deep geothermal projects,** which can pose unnecessary burden for applicants to report on environmantal impacts of lesser relevance.

Another challenge is the **lack of centralised management and cooperation between responsible bodies,** which leads to further delays and creates a scope for license trade, when a license is obtained by an actor unable to pursue the project.

The EIA is lengthy, provides limited guidance and is not tailored to geothermal energy



There is a lack of centralised management, leading to delays and burdens

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR POLICY MAKERS

Organising the permitting process as a "one-stop-shop", with single management of the entire approval procedure.

Setting-up a Best Practice Guide for knowledge and information exchange among all the actors involved.

Ensuring competent authorities possess the necessary knowledge, skills and training to assess the license and permit applications.

Controlling the technical and financial capability of license applicants to ensure the full execution of the projects.

Drafting a simple EIA guideline dedicated to deep geothermal, listing the specific impacts that have to be evaluated, and naming the environmental and social benefits.

Defining the Best Available Technologies to be adopted for deep geothermal project deployment as an important reference for the EIA.

Prodiving flexibility in the process, by introducing the possibility to update the previous full EIAs to a new situation.

KEY TAKEAWAYS

There is a recognised need for streamlining the administrative processes of licenses and permits applications for geothermal projects. The **technical prescriptions of the EIA guidelines are too complex** without respecting the specific nature of deep geothermal.

This policy brief is accompanied by a **draft proposal for guidelines on streamlined licensing accessible** and **concrete recommendations for the EIA.**

Together with a detailed overview of the recommendations and countries comparison it can be accessed here.

Contact: Fausto Batini, Magma Energy Italia
fausto.batini@magmaenergyitalia.it

Coordinated by: EGEC
com@egec.org

https://www.geoenvi.eu

GEOENVI

This policy brief is part of a series conducted in the framework of the GEOENVI project. Its aim is to respond to the need for harmonisation of environmental regulations and to address concerns about potential environmental effects of geothermal projects in Europe. GEOENVI strives to facilitate the incorporation of geothermal strategy in Europe's energy transition, while respecting sustainability and creating a robust strategy to answer environmental concerns. The project developed a unique Life Cycle Assessment methodology for evaluating geothermal projects.

GEOENVI has received funding from the European Union's Horizon 2020 research and innovation programme under grant agreement N° 818242