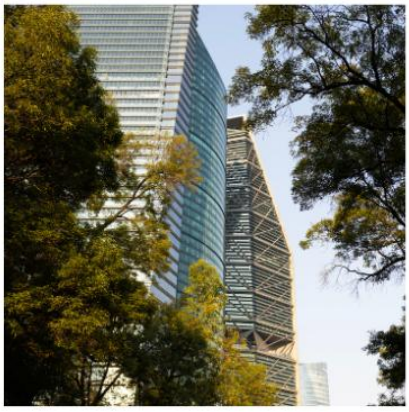
PROSPECT





Learning Handbook on European Local ENergy Assistance (ELENA)

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About the project

PROSPECT aims to strengthen the capacity of local and regional authorities (LRAs) across Europe to implement sustainable energy and climate actions by reducing reliance on public funding and increasing the use of innovative financing schemes (e.g., one-stop-shops, energy agencies, energy communities). The project offers a peer-to-peer Capacity Building Programme (CBP) tailored to the needs and time constraints of LRAs, available in multiple languages and structured in adaptable learning modules. Through large-scale outreach, including very small and remote LRAs, PROSPECT CUBE acts as an entry point to EU programmes and financing opportunities for authorities with limited experience in the field.

PROSPECT CUBE builds upon two successful Horizon 2020 initiatives: PROSPECT (2017–2020) and PROSPECT+ (2022–2025).

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List of abbreviations

Abbreviation	Description
AESS	Agency for Energy and Sustainable Development
CAPEX	Capital Expediture
CHP	Combined Heat and Power
CO_2	Carbon Dioxine
EC	European Commission
EE	Energy Efficiency
EIB	European Investment Bank
ELENA	European Local ENergy Assistance
EPC	Energy Performance Contracting
ESCO	Energy Service Company
ESIF	European Structural and Investment Funds (ESIF)
EU	European Union
FID	Final Investment Decision
GHG	Greenhouse Gas
GWh	Gigawatt-Hour
IEE	Intelligent Energy-Europe
FMI	Integrated Mobility Agency of Forlì
LRA	Local and Regional Authority
MOE	Municipally Owned Entity
MOU	Memorandum of Understanding
MS	Member State
OSS	One-Stop Shop
PDA	Project Development Assistance
PDS	Project Development Services
RES	Renewable Energy Sources
SECAP	Sustainable Energy and Climate Action Plan
SUMP	Sustainable Urban Mobility Plan
TA	Technical Assistance
TEA	Tipperary Energy Agency

1. Introduction

Local and regional authorities (LRAs) play a key role in delivering Europe's energy transition and climate objectives. Across Europe, municipalities, regions, public agencies, and local utilities are expected to accelerate investments in energy efficiency (EE), renewable energy (RES), sustainable mobility, and climate-resilient infrastructure. However, despite growing political ambition and increasing policy commitments, many authorities still face significant challenges in transforming climate and energy plans into concrete and bankable investments.

In many cases, the main barriers are not only financial, but also linked to limited internal capacity, insufficient technical expertise, complex procurement procedures, fragmented project pipelines, and difficulties in mobilising investments at scale. As a result, many promising initiatives struggle to move from planning to implementation.

In this context, ELENA – European Local ENergy Assistance – provides targeted technical assistance to help public and private actors prepare, structure, and execute mature investment programmes. Managed by the European Investment Bank (EIB) with funding from the European Commission (EC), ELENA drives critical project development activities that accelerate capital deployment and strengthen the long-term implementation capacity of LRAs across Europe.

1.1. Purpose of this handbook

This handbook aims to support LRAs and other relevant stakeholders in understanding the role of ELENA project development assistance (PDA) within broader sustainable energy and climate strategies. It introduces the main principles, eligibility requirements, implementation approach, and operational structure of the ELENA facility, while explaining how it can support the preparation and delivery of mature, investment-ready programmes.

Building on existing experiences and practices from ELENA-supported initiatives across Europe, the handbook combines conceptual explanations with practical implementation-oriented guidance. In doing so, it seeks to familiarise readers with the main operational logic and practical aspects associated with ELENA PDA, while helping them assess whether it may represent an appropriate mechanism for accelerating sustainable energy investments at local and regional level.

1.2. Target audience

This handbook is particularly relevant for European LRAs seeking to strengthen their capacity to prepare and implement sustainable energy and climate investments supported through ELENA PDA. More specifically, it may be useful for:

- municipalities and regional authorities involved in energy, climate, and infrastructure planning,
- municipal financial services and investment planning departments,
- energy agencies and intermediary organisations supporting project development activities,
- housing bodies and social housing operators involved in renovation programmes,
- transport authorities and mobility agencies developing sustainable urban transport initiatives,
- public utilities and municipally owned entities (MOEs) implementing infrastructure and decarbonisation projects,
- consultants, specialised energy service companies (ESCOs), technical experts, and financial intermediaries supporting project preparation and implementation.

In addition, the handbook may also be relevant for policymakers, project developers, and other stakeholders interested in understanding how PDA mechanisms can support sustainable energy investment planning at local and regional level.

1.3. How to use this handbook

This handbook is designed both as an introductory learning resource and as a practical reference guide for stakeholders exploring the ELENA facility and its role in supporting sustainable investment programmes. Its content progressively introduces the main concepts, operational requirements, delivery phases, and critical factors associated with ELENA-supported initiatives, while combining conceptual explanations with practical examples and implementation-focused insights.

Ultimately, it is intended for readers with varying levels of experience and may be used either as a complete learning resource or as a reference document for specific topics. While it can be read sequentially to provide a comprehensive overview, each section can also function independently, enabling readers to focus on the aspects most relevant to their immediate needs.

2. Understanding the ELENA PDA framework

For many LRAs, transforming high-level climate and energy objectives into investment-ready projects represents a significant structural challenge, with the project preparation phase constituting one of the most demanding stages of the process, often requiring:

- strong institutional readiness and technical expertise, and
- effective coordination across complex, multi-sector stakeholder environments.

Together, these two factors create substantial organisational and financial pressures long before implementation can begin (BOOSTEE-CE & TARGET-CE, 2020; DG Energy, 2024; EU CoM, 2022).

Within this context, PDA mechanisms have become increasingly important in supporting project maturation and delivery capacity. Rather than financing planned investments directly, these facilities support the preparatory activities required to advance projects towards implementation and ensure they meet the quality and due diligence standards expected by investors and financing institutions (EIB, 2024).

Among PDA schemes, ELENA has emerged as one of the main European facilities supporting the development of large-scale sustainable energy and urban mobility programmes at local and regional level.

2.1. What is the ELENA facility?

ELENA is a dedicated technical assistance facility managed by the EIB and funded by the EC, primarily through the Horizon 2020 Framework Programme for Research and Innovation and InvestEU. It was established in 2009 under the Intelligent Energy-Europe (IEE) II Programme with the mission to help public and private actors at local, regional, and national level accelerate the transition towards sustainable energy systems and climate-resilient infrastructure (European Investment Bank (EIB), 2026).

Unlike conventional grant schemes or direct infrastructure financing instruments, ELENA focuses exclusively on Project Development Services (PDS) through grant funding covering up to 90% of the preparatory costs required to transform early-stage concepts into viable investment programmes. In this context, it supports a range of preparatory and implementation-enabling activities, including:

- technical and legal advisory services related to feasibility studies, energy audits, and procurement design,
- aggregation activities aimed at bundling smaller projects to achieve the scale required for financing,
- implementation support activities facilitating stakeholder coordination, governance arrangements, and financial structuring processes (EIB, 2021; van der Veen & Kooijman, 2019).

To accommodate different urban and regional needs, ELENA channels its support through three distinct envelopes: (i) Sustainable Energy, (ii) Sustainable Residential, and (iii) Sustainable Transport. Through these areas it targets investments that generate measurable impacts primarily in terms of EE, RES deployment, sustainable mobility and greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions reductions (Gioti, 2024).

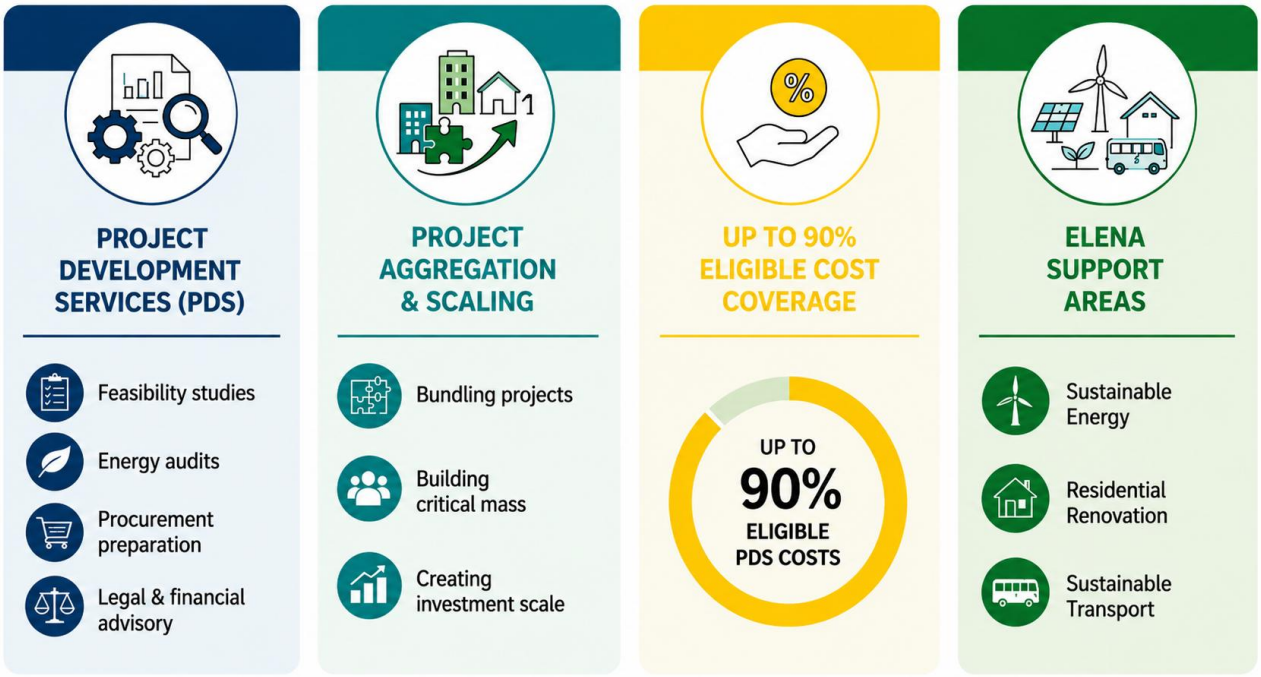


Figure 1. Main components of ELENA support (Source: Author's own elaboration / AI-enhanced)

In doing so, it helps cities and regions across EU Member States (MS) progress towards their broader energy transition objectives under the under the Energy Union strategy by strengthening local implementation capacity and addressing critical preparation barriers (Bertolini, 2021; Cicmanova & Garabetian, 2015).

2.2. How ELENA works in practice?

While specific administrative arrangements may vary depending on the sector, scope, and governance structure of each initiative, ELENA-supported programmes generally follow a common and structured operational pathway. Throughout its lifecycle, the facility serves as an end-to-end framework for public and private project promoters (i.e. beneficiaries of ELENA support), enabling them to systematically build organisational capacity, de-risk upfront costs, and prepare an investment-ready project portfolio, thereby bridging the gap between project design and implementation (EIB, 2021, 2024).

In practice, the process originates at the local or regional level, where beneficiaries identify strategic energy, climate, or mobility priorities and define the baseline objectives of the intended investments. Individual projects are then consolidated into a cohesive, large-scale pipeline capable of demonstrating sufficient scale, implementation potential, and measurable impacts. Once established, the resulting

investment programme is submitted to the EIB and assessed against eligibility criteria related to its maturity, structural capacity, and potential to mobilise investments[1]. Following approval, the ELENA grant is activated to finance targeted PDSs, supporting the technical, legal, financial and organisational groundwork required to enable project deployment (Bertolini, 2021; EIB, 2024).

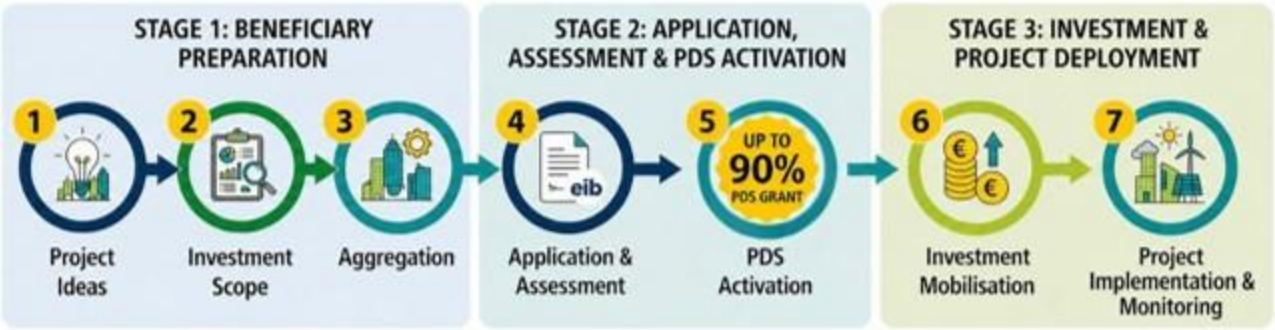


Figure 2. Operational flow of an ELENA-supported programme (Source: Author's own elaboration / AI-enhanced)

Equipped with a bankable investment portfolio, beneficiaries can then leverage the ELENA framework to attract and secure additional public and private financing for the planned investments. In this final stage, projects are implemented and monitored to ensure the successful deployment of infrastructure assets, the delivery of expected energy and climate benefits, and the creation of long-term socio-economic value (Cicmanova & Garabetian, 2015; EIB, 2021a; Todeschi et al., 2025).

2.3. Arrangements, types and characteristics

Beyond its main operational pathway, ELENA can be implemented through distinct arrangements that determine how technical assistance is delivered, managed, and financed across different governance and funding structures. Although these arrangements vary in their implementation model, they operate under a common set of financial and operational requirements that define the conditions under which support is provided and investments are expected to be mobilised. Together, these elements shape the distinctive characteristics of ELENA that differentiate it from conventional grant programmes and direct infrastructure financing instruments (EIB, 2021b).

Understanding the framework underpinning ELENA is essential for project promoters seeking to assess its suitability, navigate the available implementation options, and ultimately design eligible, high-impact investment programmes.

[1] Submitted programmes must meet strict eligibility criteria, including a minimum €30 million threshold and demonstrated technical readiness within 3-to-4-year time limits (EIB, 2024).

2.3.1. Arrangements

ELENA is designed to act as a project accelerator, linking project development support to subsequent capital investment. Accordingly, its structure is built around two complementary components:

(i) the provision of technical assistance (TA) to support investment planning and programme development,

(ii) the mobilisation of subsequent investments to enable capital deployment.



Figure 3. ELENA's financial structure and investment mobilisation mechanism (Source: Adapted from EIB, 2021,b)

2.3.1.1. The TA grant architecture

ELENA TA funding is based on non-repayable grants managed directly by the EIB on behalf of the EC. These grants support the activities and services (PDS) necessary for the preparation and delivery of eligible investment programmes, and are provided through a co-financing approach governed by the following parameters (EIB, 2021a, 2021b, 2024):

SCALE AND SCOPE. To maximise impact, ELENA primarily targets large-scale investment programmes with an expected total investment volume of €30 million or more, typically implemented within a three-year period (extended to four years for sustainable transport projects).

ELIGIBLE EXPENDITURES. Funding is allocated to both internal and external project development capacity, with eligible costs include internal staff expenditures associated with dedicated project management teams, as well as external expertise for technical feasibility studies, energy audits, legal advisory services, financial structuring, and procurement support.

CO-FINANCING RATE. ELENA covers up to 90% of eligible project development costs, requiring beneficiaries to provide the remaining minimum 10% share through their own internal resources or other eligible non-EU funding sources. This approach contributes to risk-sharing between the facility and the applicant while ensuring beneficiary commitment to project delivery.

TRANCE-BASED PAYOUT SCHEDULE. To ensure sufficient liquidity throughout the implementation period, grant disbursement is typically structured in three stages as follows:

- Pre-financing tranche - 40% of the grant is paid upon signature of the grant agreement.
- Interim tranche - Up to 30% is released upon approval of the progress reports.
- Final tranche - The remaining balance (at least 30%) is disbursed following successful completion of the action and verification of the final investment results.

2.3.1.2. Subsequent investment mobilisation

The second component relates to ELENA's core investment mobilisation principle, according to which technical assistance support is strictly conditional upon the successful implementation of the associated investment programme. ELENA therefore operates not as a conventional subsidy, but as an operational catalyst for investment generation (Bertolini, 2022; EIB, 2021a, 2021b, 2024).

Key elements of the facility's investment mobilisation mechanism include:

LEVERAGE FACTOR. Beneficiaries are contractually required to achieve a minimum ratio between the technical assistance grant received and the volume of capital investment successfully mobilised.

SECTOR-SPECIFIC LEVERAGE RATIOS. The facility applies different minimum leverage factors depending on the specific intervention area:

- Sustainable energy - Requires a minimum leverage factor of 20, meaning that every €1 of grant funding must mobilise at least €20 of capital investment, including in multi-envelope schemes combining general EE and residential projects.
- Sustainable residential - Applies a lower minimum leverage factor of 10, reflecting the fragmented nature and increased complexity of coordinating EE interventions across existing residential buildings.
- Sustainable transport - Requires a minimum leverage factor of 10 for innovative urban transport and mobility projects focused on energy savings and emissions reductions.

PERFORMANCE ACCOUNTABILITY. Because ELENA directly links technical assistance funding to investment outcomes, failure to achieve the agreed leverage targets or minimum investment volumes within the specified timeframe may result in a proportional reduction or recovery of the final grant payment.

INVESTMENT DELIVERY AND FINANCING PATHWAYS. Once the ELENA grant-funded phase is completed, resulting projects are financed through structured financial combinations, including:

- Energy Performance Contracting (EPC), mobilising private investment through ESCOs, with project costs recovered through contractually guaranteed energy savings.
- Debt financing, combining public-sector loans with commercial bank lending or other EIB financing facilities.
- Subsidies, layering national grants or European Structural and Investment Funds (ESIF) on top of private capital, provided they comply with applicable EU State aid rules.

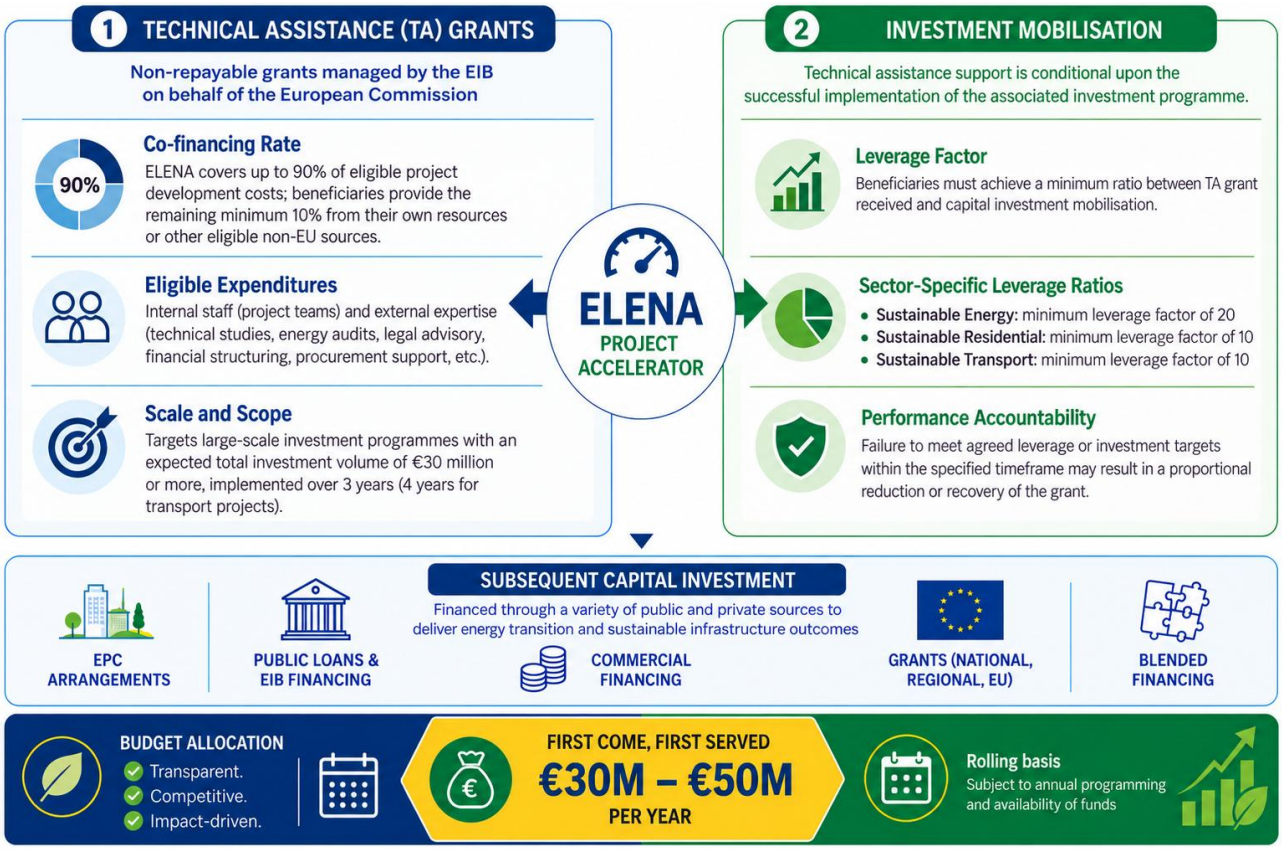


Figure 4. Integrated overview of ELENA's technical assistance and investment mobilisation framework (Source: Author's own elaboration / AI-enhanced)

2.3.2. Types

In terms of types, the Standard ELENA model remains the only fully operational delivery track, with alternative pathways being progressively explored by the EIB to increase flexibility, strengthen national ownership, and facilitate closer alignment with MS priorities. Although these approaches have not yet been formally validated by the EC, they provide insights into how the ELENA methodology could potentially be adapted to different governance and funding contexts (EIB, 2021b).

In that regard, regardless of their structure, all ELENA configurations - whether operational or conceptual - are founded on the same core financial and operational principles, which remain consistent across the board. The

defining variations among them concern the source of funding, the governance framework, and the entities responsible for managing and delivering the technical assistance, as summarised in Table 1 and further described below.

Table 1. Overview of the ELENA implementation arrangements

Type	Status	Funding and governance features	Main purpose
Standard ELENA	Operational	• EU-level funding (e.g. HORIZON2020/ InvestEU) • Directly managed by the EIB on behalf of the EC	Provides centralised PDA directly supporting local and regional beneficiaries
National ELENA	Proposed by the EIB (not validated by the EC)	• National and/or regional MS resources • Managed by designated national or regional bodies with EIB acting as advisor	Devolves delivery to domestic entities, enabling lower thresholds and tailored eligibility criteria
Standard ELENA with MS InvestEU Compartment		• Dedicated MS resources through InvestEU • Centrally managed by the EIB, with EC project approval	Localised implementation in line with national investment priorities and country-specific targets

Standard ELENA

Standard ELENA represents the original implementation model of the facility, offering direct, unmediated access to EIB-managed technical assistance for eligible project promoters across participating countries.

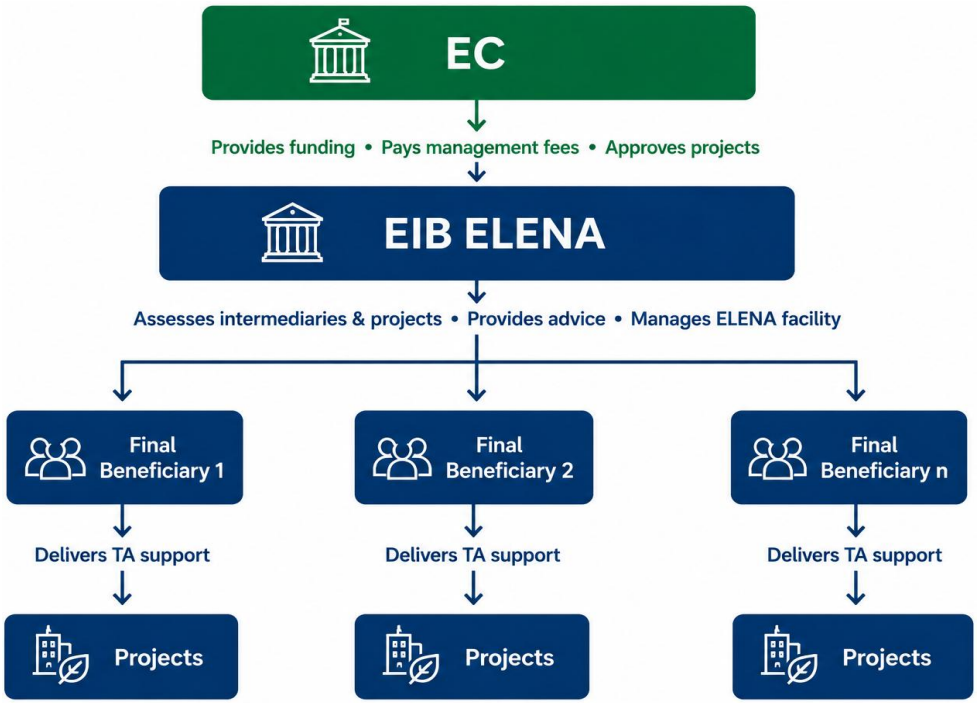


Figure 5. Overview of the Standard ELENA arrangement (Source: EIB, 2021b)

Under this approach, TA is financed through central EU-level resources and managed directly by the EIB on behalf of the EC. Accordingly, project promoters submit their applications directly to the EIB, which assumes full responsibility for the end-to-end lifecycle, including structural project assessment, grant management, performance monitoring, and compliance reporting.

WHY HAS THE ELENA FRAMEWORK PROVEN SUCCESSFUL?

- More than a decade of implementation experience across diverse national and local contexts.
- High leverage, with relatively limited grant support generating substantial investment volumes.
- Direct technical assistance for critical project development activities, often difficult to fund through conventional financing programmes.
- Performance-driven funding approach, linking grant support to investment delivery.
- Strong potential for replication and adaptation through national funding sources, including the European Regional Development Fund (ERDF), the Recovery and Resilience Facility (RRF), or other domestic funding mechanisms.

National ELENA

National ELENA has been proposed as a potential implementation model that would apply the core ELENA methodology through schemes established and managed entirely at national or regional level.

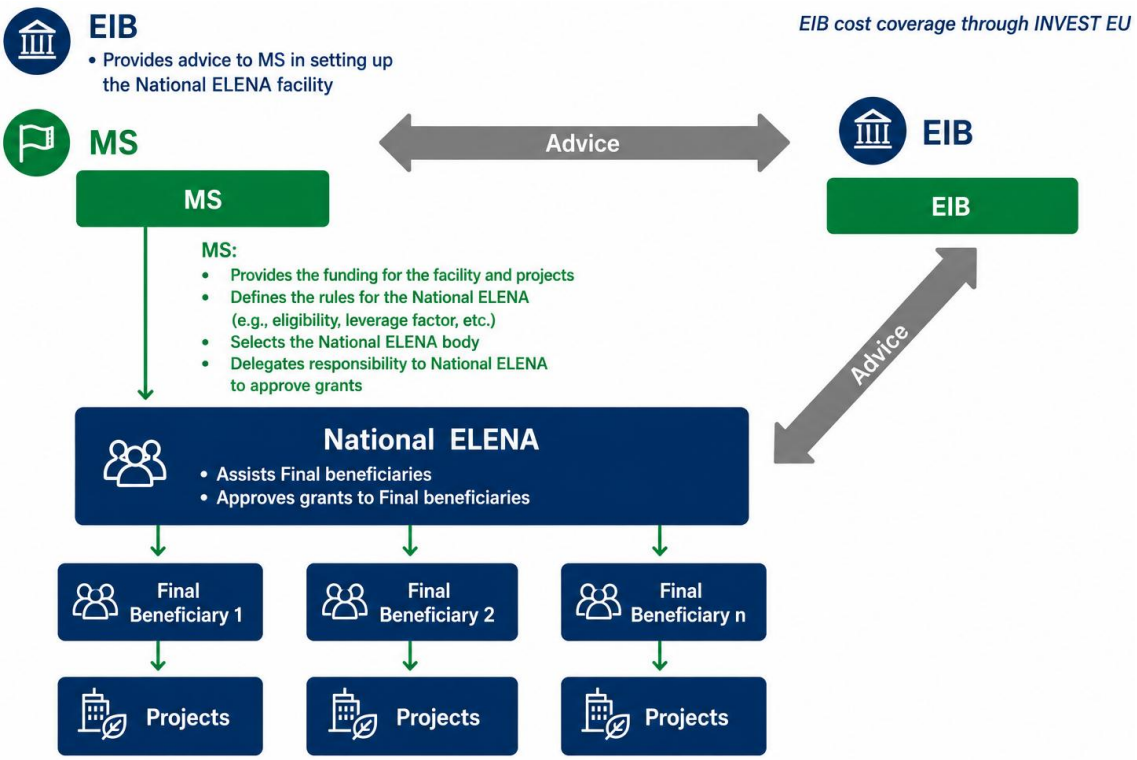


Figure 6. Overview of the National ELENA arrangement (Source: EIB, 2021b)

While maintaining the foundational objective of supporting project development and investment mobilisation, this arrangement would be financed through domestic funding sources rather than central EU allocations. Accordingly, implementation would be driven by designated national entities, such as energy agencies, promotional banks, ministries, or other public institutions.

WHAT ARE THE POTENTIAL ADVANTAGES OF NATIONAL ELENA?

- National-language delivery of technical assistance, improving accessibility for smaller organisations and project promoters.
- Lower investment thresholds, enabling support for smaller investment programmes.
- Greater flexibility in defining eligible sectors and investment programmes
- Greater flexibility in determining eligible project development costs, subject to the applicable funding regulations.
- Stronger alignment with national energy and climate investment priorities.
- Potential complementarity with existing EIB ELENA operations and domestic funding schemes.

By shifting administration to domestic actors, this approach enables technical assistance support to be precisely tailored to specific national and/or regional priorities, while systematically strengthening long-term, domestic project development capacity.

Standard ELENA with MS InvestEU Compartment

This arrangement has been proposed as a hybrid implementation pathway combining the standard EIB-managed ELENA framework with resources contributed through the InvestEU MS Compartment.

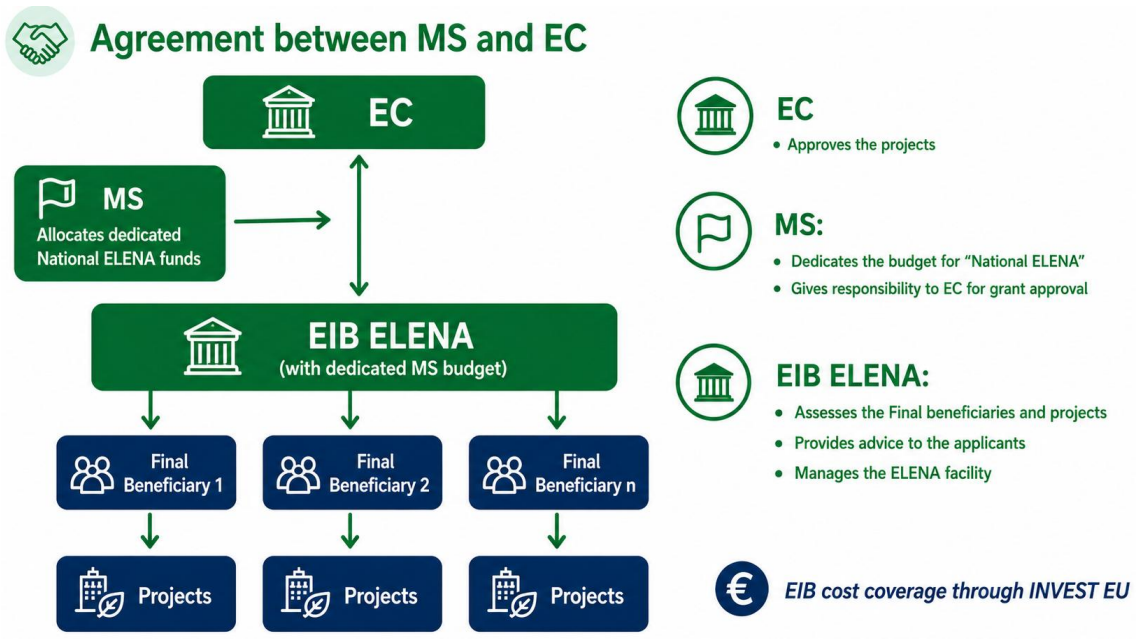


Figure 7. Overview of the Standard ELENA with MS InvestEU Compartment arrangement (Source: EIB, 2021b)

Under this model, countries could channel national allocations into the InvestEU framework while continuing to benefit from the EIB's implementation infrastructure, project assessment procedures, and operational oversight.

WHAT ARE THE POTENTIAL ADVANTAGES OF NATIONAL ELENA WITH THE INVESTEU MS COMPARTMENT?

- MS retain strategic control over dedicated national funding allocations.
- Facility management can remain with the EIB, avoiding the need to establish a dedicated national implementation body.
- Potential for limited customisation of eligibility conditions and investment priorities.
- Possibility to reduce leverage requirements or minimum investment thresholds, subject to agreement with the EIB and applicable regulations.
- Ability to target specific beneficiary groups, sectors, or investment priorities.
- Stronger alignment between ELENA support and national energy and climate objectives.

Consequently, this hybrid pathway allows technical assistance support to be tightly aligned with national strategic investment priorities and targeted regional outcomes, all while retaining the robust governance rules and proven operational discipline of Standard ELENA.

2.3.3. Characteristics

The implementation arrangements and operational configurations described in the previous sections collectively shape the distinctive features that differentiate ELENA from conventional grant programmes and direct infrastructure financing instruments, positioning it as a highly specialised project accelerator within the European sustainable energy financing landscape. Among the most prominent ones are:

- Targeting project development phases by funding preparatory, organisational, and technical activities rather than physical assets.
- Transforming relatively limited grant resources into substantial investment volumes through leverage requirements.
- Tying financial support to the successful delivery of planned investments.
- Balancing risk and commitment through shared financing responsibilities.
- Targeting large-scale investment programmes capable of generating systemic impact.
- Maintaining strong accountability through monitoring, verification, and performance controls.
- Supporting replication and adaptation across national and regional contexts.

Taken together, these features shape a distinct operational model that differs fundamentally from traditional funding approaches, as summarised in Table 2.

Table 2. Comparison of ELENA with conventional grant programmes and direct infrastructure financing instruments

Dimension	ELENA	Conventional grants	Direct financing
Primary funding object	PDS, internal capacity building, and technical/legal preparation	Specific non-repayable project activities, standalone studies, or localized equipment procurement	Capital expenditure (CAPEX), physical infrastructure assets, and civil works
Temporal intervention stage	Pre-investment phase: Prior to final investment decisions (FID) and formal procurement	Implementation phase: Disbursed during or immediately after project execution	Financial closure stage: Provided at the point of capital deployment and asset acquisition
Core performance metric	Volume of capital mobilised relative to the grant received (contractual leverage factor)	Output completion: Delivery of predefined activities within an approved budget	Asset performance: Operational commissioning, financial yields, and debt-service capability
Structural outcome	Creation of aggregated, mature, and bankable investment pipelines with scalable market impact	Delivery of isolated, individual projects without mandatory scaling or multiplier requirements	Direct deployment of specific infrastructure assets and long-term capital accumulation
Strategic role	Investment catalyst and project accelerator	Financial support mechanism	Capital provider

Focus Box 1: ELENA by numbers

The long-term impact of ELENA is reflected in the scale of investments mobilised and the energy and climate benefits generated across Europe. According to the latest available EIB data (2024):

- 166 completed and ongoing projects,
- More than €295 million in ELENA grants awarded,
- More than €9.5 billion in sustainable energy and transport investments mobilised
- Approximately 5,100 GWh/year of energy savings achieved
- Approximately 2,050 GWh/year of RES generation supported
- Approximately 2.15 million tonnes CO_2eq/year avoided

2.4. Eligibility and applicability

Although ELENA was initially designed to support local and regional energy investments, its scope has progressively expanded to accommodate a wider range of public and private actors involved in the development of sustainable energy, transport, and climate-related investment programmes. Eligibility is therefore determined not only by the type of organisation applying, but also by its capacity to develop, coordinate, and ultimately mobilise substantial investment programmes.

2.4.1. Who can apply?

ELENA is accessible to a range of public and private entities capable of developing and implementing eligible investment programmes. Depending on the structure of the proposed intervention, applicants may act individually or aggregate projects across multiple beneficiaries and sectors (EIB, 2021a, 2024).

Table 3. Eligible applicant categories and their typical roles in ELENA-supported investment programmes

Applicant category	Typical role within ELENA-supported programmes
LRAs	Develop, coordinate, and implement investment programmes in buildings, transport, public lighting, energy, climate, and urban infrastructure
Public bodies and institutions	Develop sector-specific investment programmes in areas such as education, healthcare, social services, housing, and public infrastructure
Energy agencies	Coordinate project aggregation, provide technical expertise, and support programme development and implementation
Social and public housing providers	Prepare and deliver large-scale residential renovation and EE programmes
Utilities, infrastructure, and transport operators	Develop and implement energy, heating, cooling, water, environmental, and sustainable transport investments
Financial institutions and investment intermediaries	Aggregate investment pipelines, support financing structures, and facilitate investment mobilisation across multiple beneficiaries
Private entities and project developers	Develop eligible investment programmes and support the implementation of investments aligned with ELENA objectives

While eligibility is relatively broad, applicants are generally expected to demonstrate sufficient organisational capacity, a credible investment pipeline, and the ability to mobilise investments that meet the scale and leverage requirements of the facility (EIB, 2021a).

2.4.2. What types of investment programmes can be supported?

At its core, ELENA is designed to support the preparation of coordinated project pipelines that can be replicated, scaled, and implemented over time[2]. In doing so, rather than focusing isolated standalone interventions, it facilitates the development of integrated programmes capable of mobilising substantial capital across multiple energy and climate-related sectors (EIB, 2021b, 2024).

More specifically, while the current ELENA portfolio shows a strong concentration on building-related EE interventions, the facility's operational scope extends well beyond, actively supporting a comprehensive range of eligible deployment activities - from smart grids and district energy networks to public lighting and sustainable urban mobility initiatives (EIB, 2021a). Reflecting this sectoral breadth, ELENA structures its technical assistance around three core intervention windows, as summarised in Table 4.

Table 4. ELENA intervention categories and indicative investment areas

ELENA category	Indicative investment areas
Energy Efficiency	• Non-residential and residential buildings, Public and street lighting, District heating and cooling systems, • Combined heat and power (CHP) plants, • Biomass boilers, • Smart grids, • Industrial EE measures, • Building-integrated RES
Residential Sector	• EE renovations in existing residential buildings, including single-family and multi-family housing, • Integration of RES generation technologies
Sustainable Transport	• Urban public transport, • Fleet electrification, • Charging infrastructure, • Alternative-fuel vehicles, • Tram systems, • Other energy-efficient mobility measures

In practice, ELENA-supported programmes often bring together activities from the three target windows within a single programme. This allows for the aggregation of complementary investments under a common implementation framework, thereby creating larger and more coherent portfolios capable of generating greater technical, financial, and environmental impact (EIB, 2024).

[2] The dedicated ELENA website provides information on completed and ongoing projects, including the corresponding technical assistance grants and investment volumes mobilised, offering useful benchmarks for prospective applicants.

The integrated ELENA operational model, linking project development support and eligible preparatory activities directly to multi-sectoral investment pipelines, is illustrated in Figure 8.

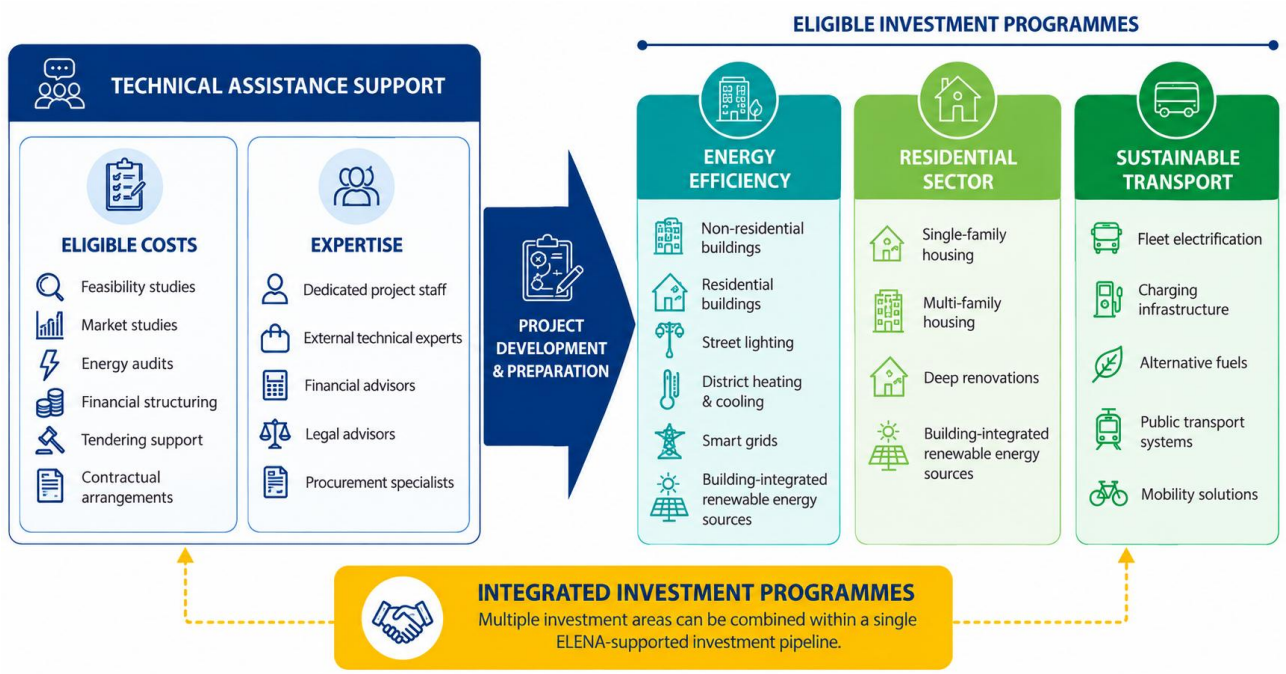


Figure 8. ELENA-supported project development activities and eligible investment programme categories (Source: Author's own elaboration / AI-enhanced)

Focus Box 2: ELENA in Practice - Where investments are concentrated?

Eligible ELENA programmes may encompass a wide variety of investments, ranging from building renovation and RES deployment to sustainable mobility and district energy systems. According to the latest available EIB data (2024), the most frequently supported investment areas within the current ELENA portfolio include:

- EE in non-residential buildings – 53%
- RES – 43%
- EE in residential buildings – 32%
- Street lighting – 31%
- District heating – 16%
- Urban transport and mobility – 15%
- Smart grids – 5%

Note: A single ELENA project may contribute to multiple investment areas; therefore, percentages do not add up to 100% (EIB, 2024).

2.4.3. What makes an investment programme eligible?

Beyond the eligibility of the applicant itself, ELENA assesses whether a proposed investment programme demonstrates the characteristics necessary to justify technical assistance support and generate meaningful investment outcomes. While applications are evaluated on a case-by-case basis, successful programmes typically combine sufficient scale, a clear need for project development support, and a credible pathway towards investment implementation and mobilisation (EIB, 2021a).

Table 5. Key eligibility considerations for ELENA-supported investment programmes

Eligibility consideration	Indicative requirement
Investment scale	Typically expected to mobilise investments of at least €30 million.
Need for technical assistance	Clear need for project development, organisational, technical, financial, legal, or procurement support.
Investment maturity	Investments that have progressed beyond the concept stage but still require preparatory activities before implementation.
Implementation commitment	Clear intention and capacity to implement the investment programme following completion of the technical assistance phase.
Investment mobilisation potential	A credible pathway towards mobilising public and/or private investment.
Eligible intervention areas	Investments falling within the sectors and activities supported under the ELENA framework.
Organisational capacity	Sufficient financial, technical, and managerial capacity to coordinate and deliver the programme.
Aggregation and replication potential	Ability to bundle projects and generate wider market impact, where relevant.
Contribution to EU objectives	Alignment with EU energy, climate, and sustainable mobility priorities.
EU added value	Ability to address investment barriers, strengthen local capacity, facilitate innovation uptake, or support wider market replication.

Focus Box 3: Typical Exclusions from ELENA Support

Not all sustainable energy or infrastructure investments fall within the scope of ELENA. Examples of activities generally excluded from support include:

- Construction of new buildings, regardless of their energy performance.
- Large-scale stand-alone renewable energy generation facilities not integrated into buildings.
- Long-distance transport infrastructure serving inter-city, regional, or transnational transport functions.
- Investments involving conventional fossil-fuel vehicles (e.g. diesel or petrol fleets).
- Large industrial facilities covered by the EU Emissions Trading System (EU ETS).
- Activities with unacceptable environmental, social, ethical, or legal implications.

Note: ELENA applications are assessed by the EIB on a rolling, first-come, first-served basis. Eligibility conditions may evolve over time in line with ELENA policies and EU priorities (EIB, 2021a).

2.5. Why ELENA matters? Benefits and added value for LRAs

For LRAs, the benefits of ELENA extend beyond the provision of technical assistance. By enabling the systematic preparation of investment programmes, the facility helps cities and regions strengthen their capacity to plan, structure, finance, and deliver complex energy and climate investments. In doing so, it contributes not only to successful project implementation, but also to stronger institutional capabilities and more mature local investment ecosystems (Bertolini, 2021; EU CoM, 2022; EIB, 2018).

In practice, the value generated through ELENA extends across three main dimensions, creating benefits that often outlast the individual investment programmes:

(i) Investment mobilisation and financing readiness
(ii) Strategic implementation and policy delivery
(iii) Institutional capacity and organisational strengthening

I. Investment mobilisation and financing readiness (financial dimension). One of ELENA's most significant contributions lies in its ability to transform project ideas into mature investment opportunities capable of attracting financing. By supporting the technical, organisational, financial, legal, and procurement-related activities required before implementation, the facility helps reduce project preparation barriers and improve the overall quality and bankability of investment programmes (Bertolini, 2022; EIB, 2024; Todeschi et al., 2025). Key benefits include:

- Improved investment readiness. ELENA supports the activities required to transform project concepts into mature and bankable investment programmes.
- Enhanced access to financing. By increasing project maturity and reducing preparation risks, ELENA can improve the attractiveness of investments to public funders, development banks, commercial lenders, and private investors.
- Mobilisation of substantial investment volumes. Through its leverage-based approach, relatively limited technical assistance grants can unlock significantly larger investment programmes.
- Facilitation of project aggregation. ELENA supports the bundling of smaller projects into larger investment pipelines, improving economies of scale and financing viability.

II. Strategic implementation and policy delivery (strategic dimension). Beyond project preparation, ELENA serves as a practical implementation enabler that helps LRAs convert strategic objectives into tangible investments. By supporting the development of coherent investment pipelines, the facility can

accelerate project delivery and facilitate the implementation of broader energy, climate, and sustainability strategies (Cicmanova & Garabetian, 2015; EIB, 2024). Key benefits include:

- Bridging the gap between planning and implementation. ELENA helps translate strategic plans and policy commitments into concrete investment programmes.
- Accelerating project delivery. Dedicated project development support can reduce preparation bottlenecks and shorten the pathway towards implementation.
- Supporting climate and energy objectives. ELENA contributes to the implementation of local and regional sustainability strategies, including Sustainable Energy and Climate Action Plans (SECAPs), Sustainable Urban Mobility Plans (SUMPs), and broader energy transition objectives.
- Enabling integrated investment approaches. The facility encourages the combination of multiple sectors and intervention areas within coherent investment pipelines, maximising synergies and territorial impact.

III. Institutional capacity and organisational strengthening (operational dimension). The benefits of ELENA often extend beyond the investments themselves. Through the project development process, LRAs can strengthen internal capacities, improve organisational practices, and build stronger collaboration networks capable of supporting future investment initiatives (Bertolini, 2022; EU CoM, 2022; Todeschi et al., 2025). Key benefits include:

- Strengthened internal project development capacity. ELENA enables LRAs to establish dedicated project teams and access specialised technical, financial, legal, and procurement expertise.
- Improved governance and cross-departmental coordination. The preparation of investment programmes often strengthens collaboration between technical, financial, environmental, procurement, and planning departments.
- Development of long-term investment pipelines. ELENA encourages a more systematic approach to project identification, prioritisation, and preparation.
- Knowledge transfer and ecosystem strengthening. Through engagement with advisors, financial institutions, energy agencies, ESCOs, and project developers, ELENA contributes to the development of more mature local investment ecosystems.

Ultimately, ELENA creates value not only through the investments it helps mobilise, but also through the organisational capabilities and partnerships it leaves behind. By strengthening investment readiness, supporting policy implementation, and enhancing institutional capacity, the facility helps LRAs build a stronger foundation for delivering future energy and climate investments.

3. Applying for ELENA support: A quick step-by-step guide

Unlike many EU funding instruments, ELENA does not operate through periodic calls for proposals; instead, applications can be submitted at any time and are reviewed on a first-come, first-served basis, subject to the availability of funds. At a strategic level, the process is managed by the EIB and requires navigating a structured, highly interactive pathway where EIB experts actively support applicants at every stage (EIB, 2021a, 2024).

From an operational perspective, the application journey typically progresses through four broad phases:

(i) pre-application,
(ii) application development,
(iii) EC review and approval, and
(iv) Funding Agreement and project launch.

In practice, however, applicants follow a series of more detailed steps, as illustrated in Figure 9 and further described below.

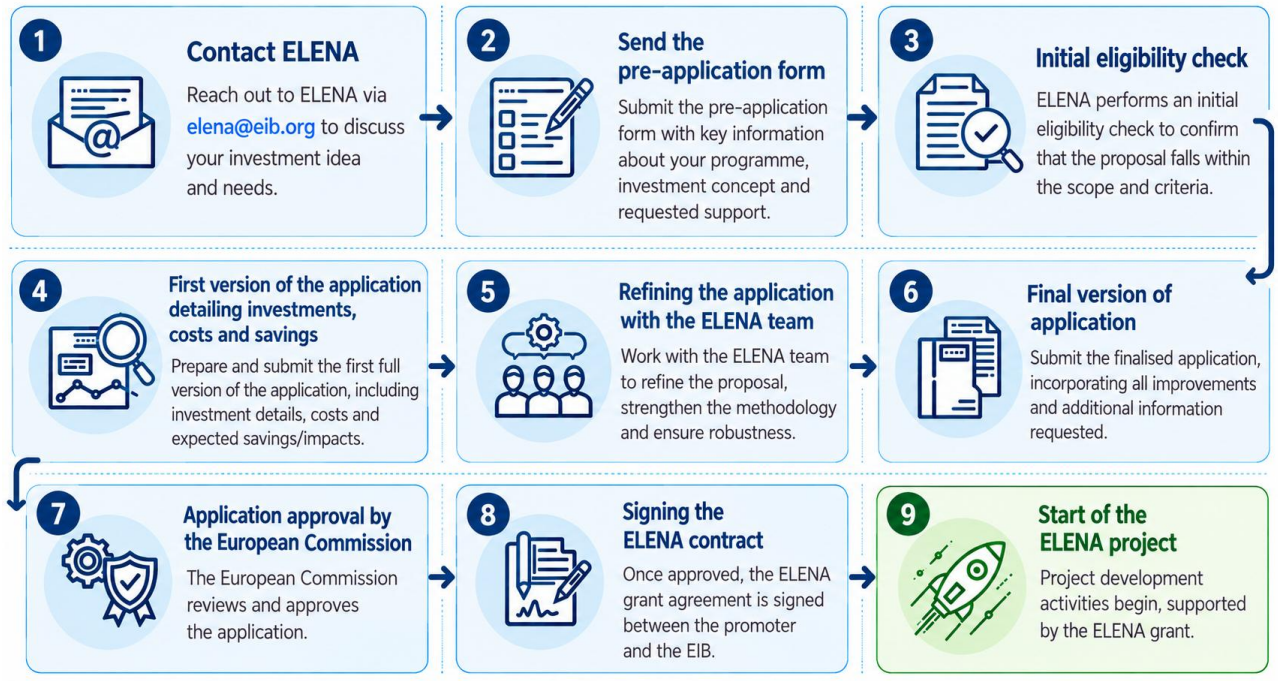


Figure 9. Overview of the ELENA application and approval process (Source: EIB, 2024)

3.1. Key phases of the ELENA application process

Once an investment programme has been identified and deemed suitable for ELENA support, applicants follow a structured process that combines formal assessment procedures with continuous interaction with the EIB. As proposals evolve from initial concept to implementation, both the investment programme and the requested PDSs are progressively refined and assessed to ensure alignment with ELENA requirements.

This section outlines the application journey, guiding project promoters through its main phases and steps.

3.1.1. Phase 1: Pre-application

The pre-application phase serves as an initial screening stage, allowing applicants to discuss their proposed investment programme with the EIB and verify its potential suitability for ELENA support. The objective is to confirm the programme's overall eligibility, identify any major gaps, and provide early guidance before significant resources are invested in preparing a full application.

Step 1. Contact the ELENA team

The process typically begins with an informal discussion between the applicant and the ELENA team. Potential applicants are encouraged to contact the EIB (elena@eib.org) to discuss the suitability of the proposed investment programme, clarify eligibility questions, and obtain preliminary guidance on the application process.

Step 2. Submit the pre-application form

Applicants are invited to submit a short pre-application form outlining the proposed investment programme, estimated investment volumes, expected impacts, and the rationale for requesting technical assistance and PDSs. This initial submission provides the EIB with the information required to perform a preliminary assessment of the proposal.

Step 3. Initial eligibility check

Based on the information provided, the EIB assesses whether the proposed programme appears eligible in principle and aligns with ELENA's objectives and selection criteria. A positive outcome allows the applicant to proceed to the development of a full application.

3.1.2. Phase 2. Application development

This phase focuses on the detailed preparation and progressive refinement of the application. A distinctive feature of ELENA is the close collaboration between applicants and EIB experts, who provide guidance throughout the process to ensure that both the investment programme and the requested PDS are appropriately structured and justified.

Step 4. First version of the application

Applicants prepare an initial version of the full application, providing detailed information on the proposed investment programme, expected investment volumes, financing arrangements, implementation timetable, anticipated energy and climate impacts, and the requested PDSs.

Step 5. Application refinement with the ELENA Team

Following the submission of the initial application, the proposal is refined through an iterative dialogue with the EIB. Particular attention is given to the maturity and bankability of the investment programme, the definition of the PDSs, implementation arrangements, expected impacts, and the achievement of the required leverage factor.

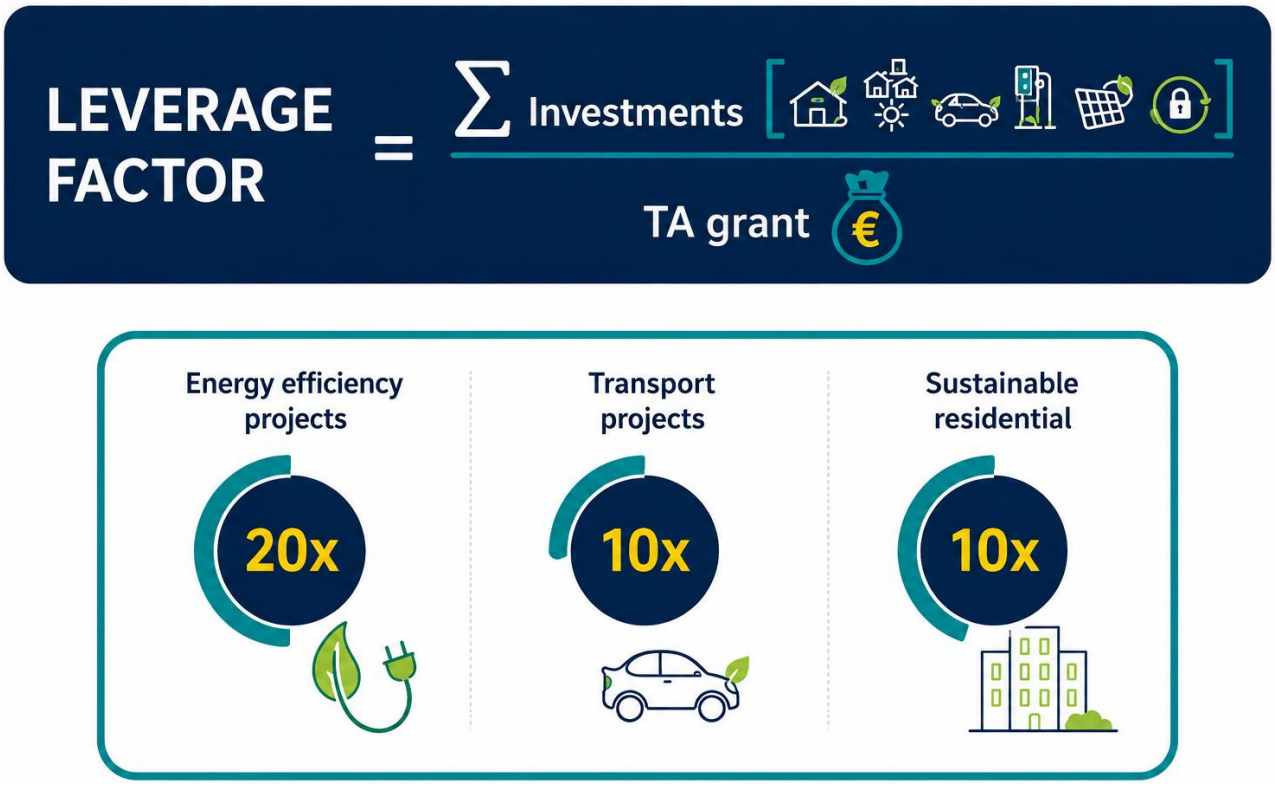


Figure 10. Calculation of the ELENA leverage factor and minimum leverage requirements by intervention category (Source: EIB, 2021b)

Step 6. Final version of the application

Once the proposal has been sufficiently developed, the final application is submitted to the EIB for formal review. Typically, the application includes:

- Description of the planned investment programme,
- Expected investment volume and financing plan,
- Expected leverage factor,
- Implementation timetable and governance arrangements,
- Expected impacts in terms of energy savings, RES generation, and GHG emission reductions,
- Replication and scaling potential,
- Description of the requested PDSs,
- Detailed work programme, deliverables, and budget breakdown,
- Justification of the requested technical assistance,
- Information on other grants or subsidies received, where applicable (EIB, 2021a).

The activities to be supported by ELENA should be clearly linked to identified implementation barriers and demonstrate how the requested support will contribute to bringing the investment programme to implementation. Cost estimates are generally rounded to the nearest €1,000 for investment programme elements and to the nearest €100 for PDS (EIB, 2021a).

3.1.3. Phase 3. EC review and approval

Once the EIB has completed its technical and financial assessment, eligible applications are submitted to the EC for formal approval, which represents the final validation stage of the ELENA application process.

Step 7. Application approval by the EC

Applications that successfully pass the EIB assessment are presented to the EC for approval based on their compliance with ELENA objectives and requirements. The Commission is ultimately responsible for the final funding decision, acting on the recommendation of the EIB.

Although applicants do not typically need to undertake additional actions during this step, the approval process provides an important layer of oversight and quality assurance, confirming that the proposed PDSs are justified as well as the maturity of the investment programme, and its expected contribution to EU energy and climate objectives.

A positive decision enables the preparation of the Funding Agreement between the EIB and the beneficiary, paving the way for the implementation of the approved project development activities.

3.1.4. Phase 4. Funding Agreement and project launch

This phase marks the transition from application preparation to project execution. Following approval, the beneficiary enters into a formal agreement with the EIB and can begin implementing the approved PDSs.

Step 8. Signing the ELENA contract

A Funding Agreement is established between the EIB and the final beneficiary, typically for:

- Three years for Sustainable Energy and Residential Sector projects;
- Four years for Sustainable Transport projects.

For legal purposes, the Funding Agreement is governed by Luxembourgish law and specifies the approved PDSs, eligible costs, expected investment volume, reporting and monitoring obligations, payment arrangements, and implementation targets (EIB, 2021a).

Step 9. Start of the ELENA-supported project

Following contract signature, beneficiaries may begin implementing the approved PDs. Depending on the programme, these may include feasibility studies, energy audits, procurement support, financial structuring, staffing, legal assistance, stakeholder engagement activities, and other preparatory measures required to bring the investment programme to implementation.

Although timelines may vary depending on the complexity and maturity of the proposed programme, the application and approval process is often completed within a few months, particularly when applicants engage early with the ELENA team and provide well-developed project information (European Investment Bank (EIB), 2024).

3.2. Self-assessment tools for prospective applicants

Prospective applicants can utilise a range of self-assessment tools and preparatory resources to evaluate whether a proposed programme may be suitable for ELENA support before launching a formal application. These resources range from simplified internal screening approaches to dedicated tools and guidance provided by the EIB.

3.2.1. Internal preliminary screening

An initial assessment can be carried out internally using simplified decision-making tools based on the main eligibility and selection requirements applied by the EIB during the assessment of ELENA

applications. Such approaches can help project promoters evaluate the suitability of a proposed programme before allocating significant resources to the preparation of a full application[3].

As illustrated in Figure 11, this preliminary assessment can be structured around a number of key considerations, including:

- whether the proposed programme falls within ELENA-supported areas,
- whether there is a clearly identified need for TA including technical, legal, financial, organisational, or procurement-related support activities, rather than direct investment financing,
- whether the expected investment volume is sufficiently large or, where appropriate, demonstrates potential for project aggregation,
- whether the proposed programme can be implemented within the applicable ELENA timeframe and implementation can realistically take place following the completion of the required PDSs.

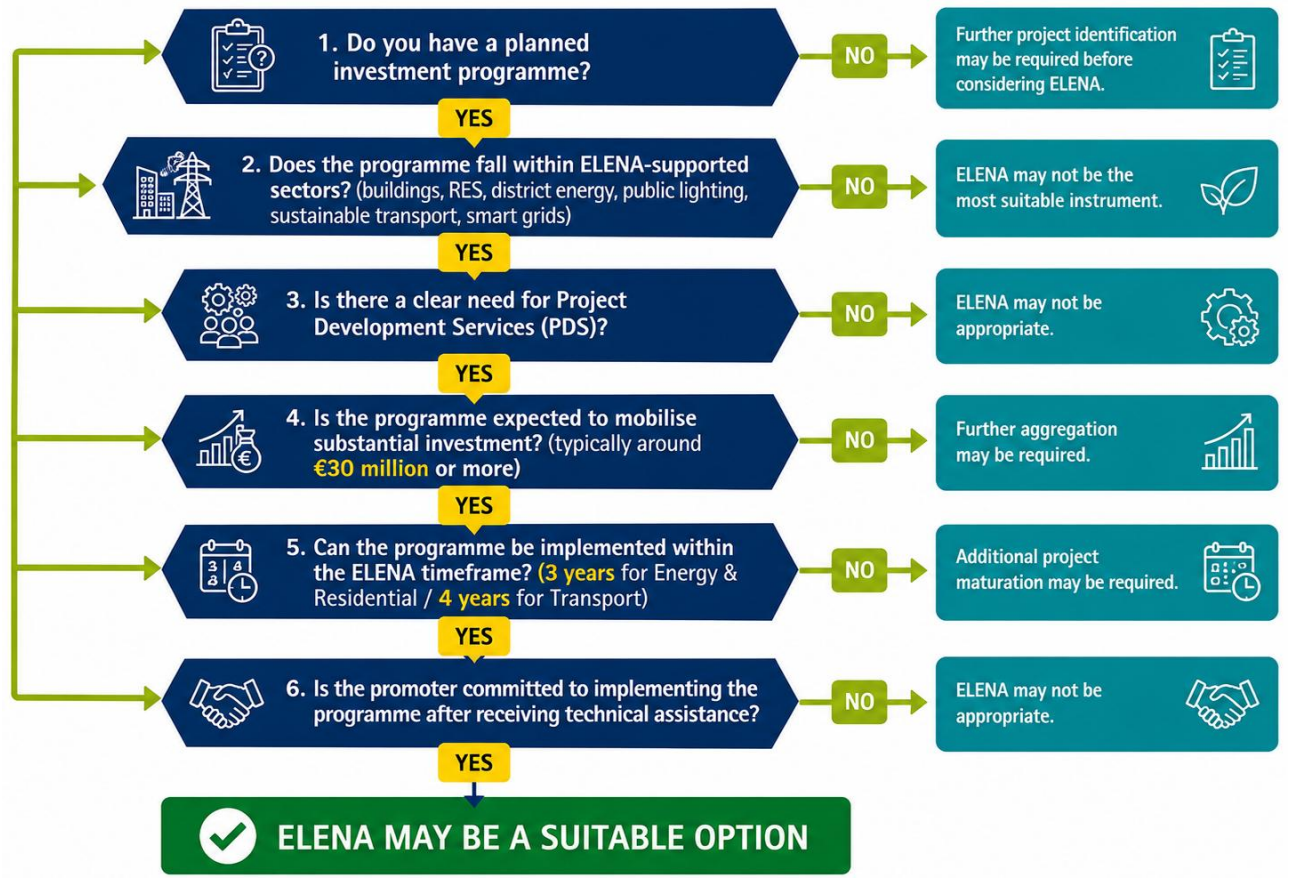


Figure 11. Simplified ELENA eligibility decision tree based on the EIB official pre-application form (EIB, 2026)

[3] For a summary of the main ELENA eligibility and selection requirements, see Section 2 of this handbook. Further guidance can be found on the official ELENA website and in the ELENA frequently asked questions (FAQs) document published by the EIB.

3.2.2. The EIB official pre-application form

To support this preliminary screening process, the EIB provides an official pre-application form, available through the dedicated ELENA website. This document enables applicants to present the basic characteristics of the proposed investment programme, define the scope of the requested PDSs, and provide an initial estimate of the expected leverage factor.

In practice, the pre-application form functions as a structured self-assessment tool, helping promoters determine whether their programme broadly aligns with ELENA requirements. Where the proposed programme appears suitable, the completed form serves as the basis for the pre-application stage and the initial consultation with the ELENA team, as well as the subsequent preparation of a full application.

3.2.3. Advanced digital assessment: the EIB Group Green Checker

For a more comprehensive evaluation of a project's environmental alignment, applicants may also use the Green Checker, an online tool developed by the EIB with funding support from the European Commission via the European Investment Advisory Hub. This digital platform enables both public and private organisations to systematically assess whether their planned infrastructure interventions align with the EIB's rigorous green financing criteria (EIB, 2021c).

By entering project-specific parameters - such as geographical location, technical specifications, and targeted energy measures - users can instantly generate a Green Eligibility Results Report that quantifies the project's expected environmental performance. In doing so, the tool provides reliable, high-level estimates of projected energy savings and GHG emission reductions, delivering the exact quantitative baselines required during the early stages of project preparation.

Crucially, while the Green Checker is not a mandatory or bespoke component of the ELENA application architecture, it serves as a highly valuable diagnostic instrument. Leveraging its data-driven outputs allows prospective promoters to structurally strengthen the evidence base of their dossier, demonstrating a verifiable environmental contribution from the very first submission.

4. Case studies

This section presents two illustrative case studies demonstrating how ELENA has supported the preparation and implementation of large-scale energy investment programmes. Together, they highlight different application contexts while showcasing common features such as project aggregation, dedicated PDSs, stakeholder coordination, and investment mobilisation.

4.1. ELENA-supported energy investments in Tipperary (Ireland)

GENERAL CONTEXT. Sustainable Tipp was established by Tipperary County Council and delivered by the Tipperary Energy Agency (TEA) through a county-wide One-Stop-Shop (OSS) model. The initiative aimed to accelerate EE and RES investments across residential, community, and public-sector assets while strengthening local investment capacity, mobilising investment at scale, streamlining project delivery, and contributing to Ireland's regional climate and decarbonisation goals.

HOW ELENA WAS APPLIED. ELENA technical assistance supported the establishment and operation of the Sustainable Tipp OSS. More specifically, the facility funded a range of PDSs - including energy audits, technical design and engineering, legal and procurement support, contractor engagement, and grant administration – and between August 2017 and January 2021, it successfully aggregated a diversified, multi-sectoral investment portfolio, ultimately mobilising €30.2 million in total CAPEX.

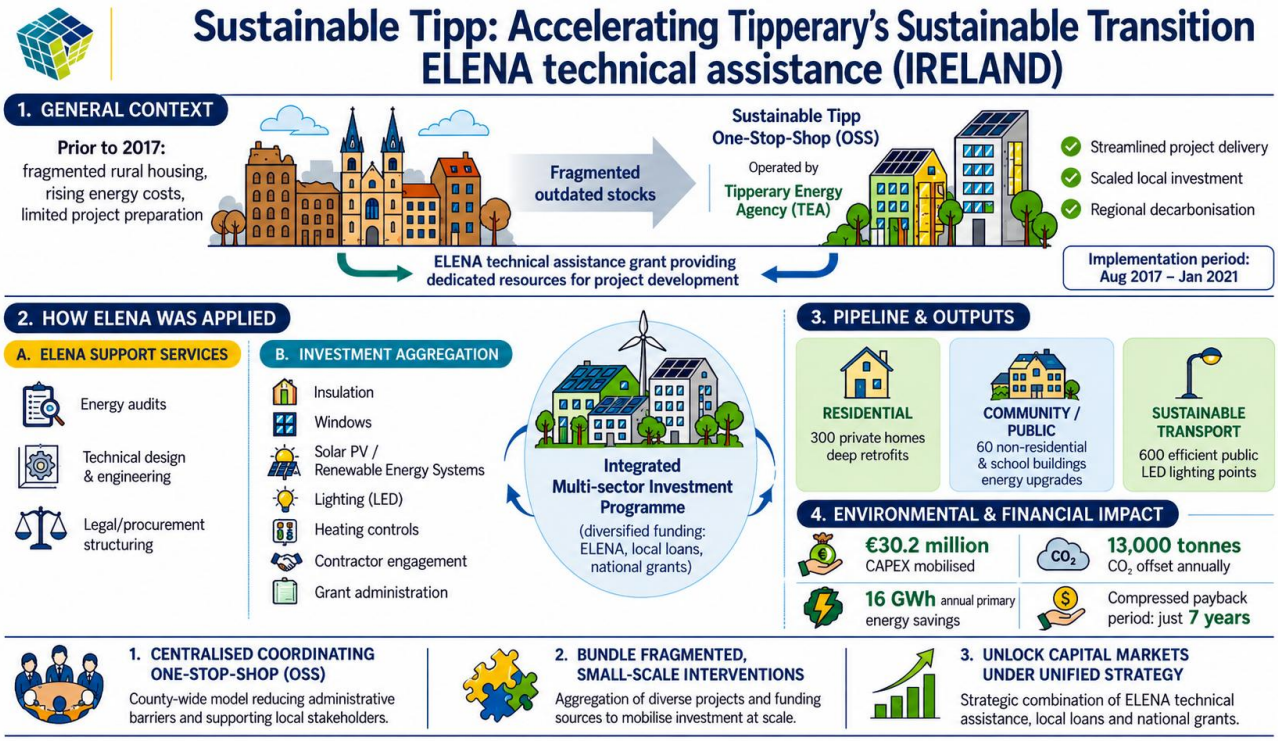


Figure 12. Sustainable Tipp OSS supported by ELENA technical assistance in County Tipperary (Ireland) (Source: Author's own elaboration / AI-enhanced)

In terms of outputs, the resulting ELENA-supported pipeline included:

- Residential sector, including deep energy retrofits in approximately 300 private homes.
- Community and public facilities, including comprehensive energy upgrades across 60 non-residential and school buildings.
- Sustainable transport and infrastructure, including the installation of approximately 600 energy-efficient public LED lighting points.

In addition, it generated approximately 16 GWh of primary energy savings annually and avoiding around 13,000 tonnes of CO_2 emissions each year, demonstrating the broader impact of the programme.

Through the strategic combination of ELENA technical assistance, local loans, and national grants, the programme achieved a payback period of approximately seven years while supporting long-term measures with expected lifespans ranging from 15 to 50 years.

KEY TAKEAWAY. The Sustainable Tipp case highlights the flexibility of ELENA in supporting integrated territorial investment programmes. It demonstrates how a coordinated OSS model can successfully aggregate numerous small-scale interventions, reduce administrative barriers for local stakeholders, and mobilise substantial investment under a common regional framework.

READ MORE ABOUT THIS PRACTICE. For deeper insights on the Sustainable Tipp, visit the official website of the initiative. In addition, find and download the case study factsheet on the PROSPECT Stories webpage.

For further information on the supporting agency's broader role in sustainable energy management visit the official TEA website.

4.2. ELENA-supported energy investments in Emilia-Romagna (Italy)

GENERAL CONTEXT. The TOP Condomini project was launched in the Emilia-Romagna region of Italy to accelerate large-scale residential energy renovations through regional OSS hubs supported by ELENA technical assistance. Targeting approximately 3,000 housing units, including both condominium and single-family buildings, the initiative aimed to facilitate project development, strengthen local capacity, and overcome market barriers affecting the residential sector.

HOW ELENA WAS APPLIED. ELENA technical assistance supported the establishment and operation of specialised regional OSS hubs managed by the Agency for Energy and Sustainable Development (Agenzia per l'Energia e lo Sviluppo Sostenibile -AESS) in Modena and Integrated Mobility Agency of Forlì (Forlì Mobilità Integrata - FMI). More specifically, the facility financed a range of PDSs designed to address technical, organisational, and market barriers associated with residential renovation programmes, such as:

- Energy performance assessments, including energy audits and technical-economic feasibility studies.
- Technical and organisational support for building owners throughout project preparation.
- Procurement support through to contract award and contractor appointment.

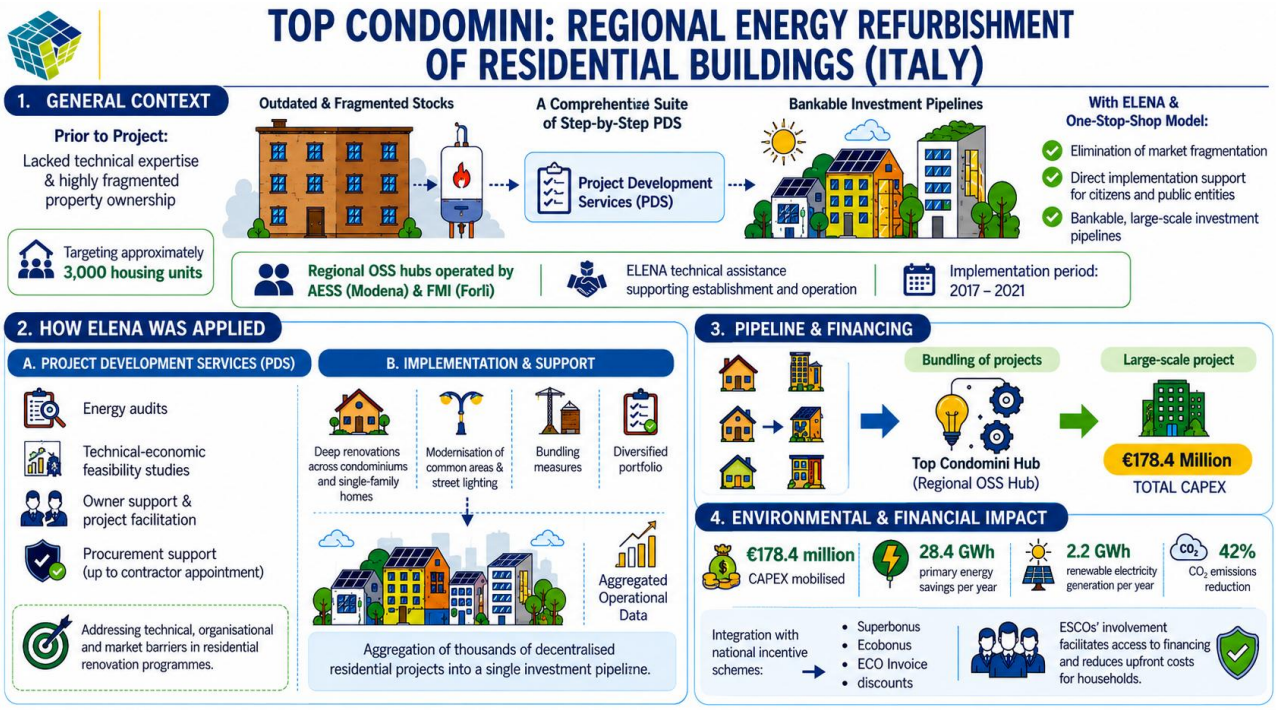


Figure 13. The Top Condomini project supported by ELENA technical assistance in the Emilia-Romagna region (Italy) (Source: Author's own elaboration / AI-enhanced)

By aggregating a large number of decentralised residential projects into a single investment pipeline, the programme mobilised a total investment volume of €178.4 million.

In terms of environmental impacts, the aggregated interventions delivered significant benefits, including:

- Primary energy savings, reaching approximately 28.4 GWh per year.
- RES generation, producing around 2.2 GWh of renewable electricity annually.
- GHG emission reductions, achieving a 42% reduction in CO_2 emissions.

Finally, the programme benefited from the combination of ELENA technical assistance with national incentive schemes, such as the Superbonus and Ecobonus programmes, while ESCOs' involvement further facilitated access to financing mechanisms and helped reduce upfront costs for participating households.

KEY TAKEAWAY. The TOP Condomini case demonstrates how ELENA can support the aggregation of highly fragmented projects into a coherent and bankable investment programme. It highlights the value of combining technical assistance, regional OSS structures, and national incentive schemes to overcome market barriers, mobilise private investment, and accelerate large-scale residential energy renovations.

READ MORE ABOUT THIS PRACTICE. For deeper insights on the TOP Condomini initiative, find and download the case study factsheet on the PROSPECT Stories webpage.

For further information on the supporting agency's broader role in sustainable energy management visit the official AESS website.

The PROSPECT inventory of success stories offers LRAs a practical and peer-validated reference framework for moving from strategic planning to operational deployment using innovative financing tools.

5. Critical conditions influencing ELENA-supported projects

The successful implementation of ELENA-supported programmes depends on a combination of technical, organisational, financial, and institutional factors. While the facility provides substantial support through targeted PDSs, its effectiveness ultimately depends on the ability of project promoters to develop robust investment pipelines, coordinate stakeholders, secure financing, and translate project preparation activities into concrete investments.

Understanding the main enabling factors, barriers, and risks can help prospective applicants design stronger programmes and improve implementation outcomes.

5.1. Drivers and success factors

The following factors have consistently proven to be catalysts for successfully preparing and implementing ELENA-supported programmes:

- Sustained political and institutional commitment, ensuring long-term support and strategic alignment within LRAs and continued backing throughout the application and execution phases.
- Clearly defined investment programmes, providing sufficient scale, maturity, and implementation potential to justify technical assistance support.
- Project aggregation mechanisms, enabling multiple smaller projects to be bundled into larger and more attractive investment portfolios capable of meeting ELENA leverage expectations
- Dedicated technical and administrative capacity, supporting the effective management of the requested PDSs within the required timeframe.
- Stakeholder engagement and coordination, facilitating collaboration among public authorities, building owners, investors, contractors, and other relevant actors.
- Well-structured governance arrangements, ensuring clear responsibilities, effective decision-making processes, and efficient inter-departmental coordination.
- Access to complementary financing, including public grants, loans, ESCO financing, and national incentive schemes required to support the execution of the investment programme.
- Strategic integration, linking ELENA-supported activities with broader energy, climate, and urban development objectives to maximise synergies and long-term impact.
- Early engagement with the EIB, supporting smoother planning stronger application development, and early identification of potential eligibility, financing, or implementation challenges throughout the project lifecycle.

5.2. Barriers and limitations

Despite its benefits, ELENA implementation may face a number of challenges that can affect programme development and delivery:

- Limited internal capacity, including shortages of technical, financial, or administrative resources.
- Fragmented project ownership, creating difficulties in aggregating smaller investments into a coherent programme.
- Insufficient project maturity, limiting readiness for implementation and investment mobilisation.
- Complex procurement and contracting procedures, potentially delaying programme delivery.
- Limited access to complementary financing, affecting the implementation of the planned investment programme.
- Regulatory and policy uncertainty, influencing project preparation and investment decisions.
- Weak stakeholder participation, reducing programme uptake and implementation effectiveness.
- Delays in project preparation or implementation, affecting investment mobilisation and delivery.
- Challenges in achieving leverage targets, limiting the overall impact of ELENA support.

5.3. Key risk dimensions

Successfully implementing ELENA-supported programmes requires proactive risk management, with project promoters carefully assessing the following key risk dimensions throughout the project lifecycle.

- Technical risks, including inaccurate baseline data, underestimation of project complexity, or delays in technical studies and assessments.
- Financial risks, including insufficient investment mobilisation targets, unfavourable shifts in commercial lending market conditions, or project cost overruns.
- Institutional and governance risks, including unclear organisational responsibilities, weak inter-departmental coordination, or sudden shifts in political priorities.
- Procurement and implementation risks, including slippages in tendering procedures, challenges or difficulties to contract award or qualified contractor selection, delays in project delivery.
- Market capacity risks, including low contractor availability, supply chain constraints, or insufficient market interest in the offered energy solutions.
- Regulatory and permitting risks, arising from changes in legislation, national incentive structures (e.g. sudden subsidy cuts), or delayed environmental/planning permits.
- Stakeholder disengagement, including low or drop-off in participation from key actors such as asset owners or financial institutions especially midway through the project lifecycle.

5.4. Synthesis of critical conditions affecting implementation

Table 6 summarises the main factors that influence the successful preparation and implementation of ELENA-supported programmes, together with common barriers and potential mitigation measures.

Table 6. Summary of critical conditions influencing ELENA-supported programmes

Dimension	Key drivers/enabling factors	Common barriers/risks	Mitigation measures
Political and institutional framework	• Sustained political commitment • Strategic integration with local energy and climate objectives • Clear governance arrangements	• Shifts in political priorities or administration • Weak coordination or siloed working environments • Institutional inertia and decision-making delays	• Formal political commitment at early stages • Dedicated governance and coordination structure/ clear roles and responsibilities.
Technical capacity and project preparation	• Early engagement with the EIB technical staff • Clearly defined technical scope based on reliable baseline energy data	• Limited internal technical expertise • Outdated or missing energy audits • Underestimation of technical complexity	• Deployment of PDS support to onboard external specialised expertise, where needed • Dedicated project management • Early technical assessment and feasibility study
Project aggregation and implementation	• Standardised aggregation procedures • High stakeholder trust • Pipeline readiness	• Fragmented project ownership • Procurement and contracting delays • Low beneficiary participation	• Standardised documentation and contractual templates • Early procurement planning • Continuous stakeholder engagement and communication activities
Financing and investment mobilisation	• Access to complementary funding sources • Strong and bankable investment programmes	• Commercial lending gaps or changes in financing conditions • Failure to achieve the contractual ELENA leverage factor	• Early financing strategy structuring, including blended approached • Engage with financial institutions throughout project preparation
Market and regulatory environment	• Stable and transparent support schemes • Active local contractor and supplier markets	• Changes to national support schemes or regulatory frameworks • Inflationary pressures affecting project costs • Contractor shortages and market constraints	• Implementation flexibility and contingency planning • Early market-engagement activities to stimulate interest • Regulatory developments monitoring throughout the project lifecycle

6. Summary of key takeaways

WHAT IS ELENA ABOUT? ELENA is a project development assistance facility managed by the EIB and funded by the EC. Its objective is to support the preparation of mature and investment-ready programmes capable of mobilising substantial investments in sustainable energy, RES, and sustainable transport sectors.

Unlike traditional grant schemes, ELENA does not finance physical investments directly. Instead, it supports the PDSs required to transform project concepts into bankable investment programmes. Depending on the type of project, ELENA can cover up to 90% of eligible project preparation costs, helping beneficiaries overcome technical, financial, legal, organisational, and procurement-related barriers that often delay or prevent implementation.

By strengthening project preparation and investment readiness, ELENA acts as a bridge between strategic planning and project implementation.

HOW IS ELENA STRUCTURED IN PRACTICE? ELENA operates through a structured project development process focused on preparing investments rather than financing implementation directly. Through dedicated technical assistance, beneficiaries receive support for activities such as energy audits, feasibility studies, technical design, procurement preparation, financial structuring, stakeholder coordination, and project management.

In practice, the ELENA lifecycle follows four main phases:

Table 7. Summary of the ELENA lifecycle

Phase	Key activities
Pre-application	An initial dialogue is established between the project promoter and the EIB. During this stage, the investment programme is defined, the need for PDSs is assessed, and the pre-application form is prepared and submitted.
Application development and assessment	Applicants prepare a full ELENA proposal detailing the investment programme, requested PDSs, implementation arrangements, expected investment volume, and anticipated impacts. The application is then assessed by the EIB and refined through an iterative review process.
Approval	Applications that successfully complete the EIB assessment are submitted to the European Commission for final approval.
Funding agreement and implementation	Following approval, a Funding Agreement is signed between the beneficiary and the EIB. The approved PDSs are then implemented, enabling the preparation, aggregation, financing, and eventual delivery of the planned investments.

Overall, ELENA is designed to transform fragmented project ideas into structured investment pipelines capable of mobilising substantial public and private capital.

WHAT ARE THE MAIN ELENA TYPES AND HOW ARE THEY APPLIED ACROSS SECTORS? ELENA currently operates under a standard model, whereby technical assistance is managed directly by the EIB and provided to eligible project promoters. Under this arrangement, the EIB is responsible for the assessment, administration, monitoring, and implementation oversight of supported programmes on behalf of the EC.

Building on the success and replication potential of this model, the EIB has proposed two additional configurations (not yet approved by the EC):

- The National ELENA, a proposed delivery model that would enable MS to deploy ELENA resources through national investment programmes and strategic priorities.
- The Standard ELENA with a MS InvestEU Compartment, a proposed delivery moel that would combine ELENA technical assistance with national InvestEU compartments, allowing MS to further strengthen project preparation activities within their own investment frameworks.

Under the standard operational model, the current ELENA portfolio is dominated by building-related EE projects; yet the facility is designed to support a much wider range of investment programmes, enabling interventions across three main investment envelopes:

- Sustainable energy, covering EE, RES, district heating and cooling, public lighting, smart grids, and other sustainable energy infrastructure.
- Sustainable residential, focusing on EE renovations in existing residential buildings and the integration of building-scale RES solutions.
- Sustainable transport, covering sustainable urban mobility measures, clean public transport, charging infrastructure, and related transport decarbonisation activities.

This flexibility enables ELENA to support diverse investment programmes while maintaining a common objective: accelerating the transition from project preparation to large-scale investment implementation.

WHAT MAKES AN INVESTMENT PROGRAMME ELIGIBLE? ELENA is designed for mature, large-scale investment programmes with a clear implementation pathway and strong investment mobilisation potential. Programmes are typically expected to exceed €30 million in planned investments and be capable of delivering results within the applicable implementation period.

A key eligibility consideration is the investment leverage factor, which reflects the programme's ability to translate technical assistance into tangible investments and measurable energy, climate, or mobility outcomes.

WHO SHOULD USE ELENA TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE? ELENA is intended for organisations responsible for planning, coordinating, and implementing large-scale sustainable energy and transport investments. Apart from LRAs, typical beneficiaries include:

- Public bodies and public agencies.
- Energy agencies.
- Public utilities and municipally owned companies.
- Housing organisations and social housing providers.
- Transport and mobility authorities.
- Infrastructure operators.
- Financial intermediaries and investment platforms acting on behalf of eligible beneficiaries.

ELENA is particularly valuable for organisations that possess ambitious investment plans but face limitations in technical expertise, project preparation capacity, procurement resources, or financing coordination.

WHEN IS ELENA SUPPORT MOST EFFECTIVE? ELENA generates the greatest value when technical assistance is used strategically to prepare large-scale investment programmes with a clear implementation pathway.

The most successful ELENA-supported initiatives typically combine:

- Sustained political and institutional commitment.
- Clearly defined investment programmes.
- Effective project aggregation mechanisms.
- Dedicated technical and administrative capacity.
- Strong stakeholder engagement and coordination.
- Well-structured governance arrangements.
- Access to complementary financing sources.
- Strategic alignment with broader energy, climate, and development objectives.
- Early engagement with the EIB throughout project preparation.

Under these conditions, ELENA can significantly reduce project preparation barriers, improve investment readiness, and accelerate the transition from planning to implementation, ultimately enabling the mobilisation of substantial public and private investments.

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