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An array of photovoltaic panels are pictured at a solar power park in Kozani, Greece on April 6, 2022. Greece's power transmission operator says it recently hit a new benchmark, using exclusively renewable energy for a brief time. Konstantinos Tsakalidis/Bloomberg/Getty Images hide caption

Renewable energy sources covered Greece's electricity demands for about five hours last Friday, the Independent Power Transmission Operator, or IPTO, said. Renewables also posted a new record that day, reaching a peak of 3,106 megawatt hours (MWh) of electricity.

The company, which owns and operates the Greek electrical transmission system connecting power plants with customers, says the achievement will open the door to making its energy mix greener in coming years.

Greece relies on a range of sources for electricity, with no one source accounting for more than 50%. In August of 2022, natural gas and renewable sources, such as wind and solar, accounted for the most power. IPTO also draws electricity from hydropower, as well as from lignite or "brown coal," one of the dirtiest fossil fuels.

As of 2019, Greece's total energy consumption per capita (including electricity, oil and other segments) ranked 52nd in the world, with 108 million Btu per person, according to the U.S. Energy Information Administration. By that metric, Greece used around a third as much energy as the U.S., which reported 304.41 million Btu per person.

The country's accomplishment comes after a decade in which its reliance on fossil fuels has gradually declined, at the same time as it has boosted the capacity of renewables and large hydropower plants, according to The Green Tank, a Greece-based nonprofit environmental think tank.

Greece's system isn't the only one to have hit the 100% mark with renewables: The much larger California Independent System Operator, which serves about 80% of the state, reported that it briefly achieved it in the spring.

Renewable energy has seen "an unprecedented boom" in recent years, including a 45% jump in capacity in 2020, the International Energy Agency reported. In the U.S. this year, the gains include wind power outpacing both coal and nuclear energy.

The Hellenic Association of Photovoltaic Companies (Helapco) says new figures reveal that Greece's solar sector is growing faster than expected and could reach the nation's 2030 target of 13.5 GW by 2026. By the end of the year, its cumulative PV capacity could exceed 9.2 GW.

Stelios Psomas - policy officer at Helapco, a Greek trade group - said that Greece installed 920.6 MW of new PV capacity in the first half of this year. He said about 580.1 MW are utility projects larger than 1 MW, 281.9 MW are commercial and industrial projects, and 58.6 MW are residential projects.

However, Psomas told pv magazine that Greece's newly installed PV capacity for the year is approximately 1.5 GW, based on Helapco's data, although this figure has not yet been officially published.

Greece's PV projects receive remuneration in various ways. In recent years, one of the best-performing segments has been small solar projects, up to 500 kW or up to 1 MW for energy community solar parks and farmer-specific projects.

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Web: <https://www.hollanddutchtours.nl/contact-us/>

Email: [energystorage2000@gmail.com](mailto:energystorage2000@gmail.com)

WhatsApp: 8613816583346

