Layman's report

Repower the Regions: Ambitious and inclusive clean energy plans for repowering the just transition regions



CEE Bankwatch Network

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Project details:
LIFE project name: Repower the Regions: Ambitious and inclusive clean energy plans for repowering the just transition regions

Project acronym: LIFE22-CET-Repower the Regions

Project duration: 01.10.2023 - 30.06.2026

Project website: https://bankwatch.org/repower-the-regions-ambitious-and-inclusive-clean-energy-plans-for-repowering-the-just-transition-regions

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Countries involved:

- **Bulgaria** – Ekologichno sdruzhenie “Za Zemiata” (ZZ) / Friends of the Earth Bulgaria, 3 coal-mining regions (primary focus on Pernik, some activities in Bobov Dol and Stara Zagora)
- **Czech Republic** – Centrum pro dopravu a energetiku / Centre for Transport and Energy (CTE), 2 coal-mining regions (primarily Ustecký and Karlovarský)
- **Estonia** – MTÜ Eesti Roheline Liikumine / Estonian Green Movement (EGM), 1 oil shale region (Ida Virumaa)
- **Hungary** – Magyar Természetvédők Szövetsége / National Society of Conservationists - Friends of the Earth Hungary (NSC-FoE HU), 2 coal-mining regions (Baranya and Borsod-Abaúj Zemplén (BAZ))
- **Latvia** – Zaļā brīvība / Green Liberty (GL), 1 peat region (Latgale)

Countries involved:

- **Latvia** – Zaļā brīvība / Green Liberty (GL), 1 peat region (Latgale)
- **Poland** – Związek Stowarzyszeń Polska Zielona Sieć / The Polish Green Network (PGN), 3 coal-mining regions (Eastern Wielkopolska, Łódzkie, Upper Silesia)
- **Romania** – Asociația Bankwatch România / Bankwatch Romania Association (BW RO), 2 coal-mining regions (Hunedoara and Gorj)
- **Slovakia** – Priatelia Zeme-CEPA / Friends of the Earth-CEPA (FoE-CEPA), 1 coal-mining region (Upper Nitra)
- **Ukraine** – Centre for Environmental Initiatives “Ecoaction” (EA), 1 coal-mining region (Volyn)

Introduction – objective of the project

Main project findings:

The participation and leadership of carbon-intensive regions in transitioning to clean energy solutions are prerequisites for achieving EU climate neutrality by 2050. Building on this premise, RePower the Regions brings to the fore pioneering just transition regions in central and eastern Europe (CEE), targeting them to accelerate the decarbonisation process.

The project was implemented in just transition regions in 9 countries: Bulgaria, Czechia, Estonia, Hungary, Latvia, Poland, Romania, Slovakia, and Ukraine. Our scope includes areas transitioning from coal (BG, CZ, HU, PL, RO, SK, UA), oil shale (EE) and peat (LV). The 16 regions were chosen due to their unique situation as pioneering areas for energy transformation in CEE. These are also areas where our consortium members have done extensive work in recent years, creating a solid base for the planned activities.

Building on our previous experience with LIFE funding, RegENERateLife: Mobilising Regions for Energetic Re-development and Transformative NECPs, we worked to develop the first models for implementing inclusive and just local and regional clean energy plans. The RePower the Regions project developed the skills and capacity of local authorities and actors to enable the achievement of Fit for 55 and REPowerEU objectives. Using participatory planning methods and with the support of the scientific community, we created holistic plans and roadmaps for introducing solutions, such as energy saving, energy efficiency, local and community-led renewable energy initiatives, transport and mobility improvements, and detailed plans for renewables-based heating and cooling solutions (including district heating). Through gaining strong local support and providing practical guidelines for the development of sustainable

projects, we aimed to collect quality green investment proposals and trigger financing for the regions through advocacy activities, supporting pilot projects and disseminating information on good solutions.

The main objective within our project was to ensure that local clean energy plans are aligned with EU 2030 climate goals and have strong support locally, as well as to provide practical guidelines and roadmaps on how to repower the regions.

The **specific focus** of our work was decarbonisation planning in central and eastern European (CEE) just transition regions, through a focus in particular municipalities, which was implemented through creating holistic plans for energy saving, energy efficiency in buildings, the development of local and community-led renewable energy initiatives, heating and cooling solutions, as well as changing the transportation systems. This was supported by capacity-building activities at the local, regional and sometimes national levels, participatory consultation activities to increase social acceptance of the plans, information-sharing activities to improve existing legislation and develop funding opportunities and investment possibilities, and an extensive communication and awareness-raising campaign.



Slovakia Citizen Forum June 2025, (photo: Martin Guniš)

In each of the municipalities included in our project, our work has led to a significant change in their approach, either speeding up the process of decarbonisation planning (e.g. in Partizanske in Slovakia or Pernik in Bulgaria) or introducing such planning into municipalities that had previously not really been focusing on these matters (e.g., Jirikov in the Czech Republic). Our cooperation with municipalities has enabled identifying or confirming many of the challenges they face in these processes, such as low administrative capacities, issues with accessing funding and technical assistance, lack of appropriate data, etc. Due to our approach of tailoring the support, we have been helping the municipalities to bridge these gaps and find solutions. Our initial work was summarised in the **comparative analysis of decarbonisation strategies in nine central and eastern European countries**, which shows many of the systemic issues that the municipalities face in undertaking such activities, as well as providing specific insight into the particular problems they are tackling. We also focused on providing information about the outcomes and conclusions from the first year of our work to both national and EU decision-makers so that they can see what needs to be improved in order to make decarbonisation at the local level a reality.



Event in Brussels 'When transitions transform', May 2026

Main project findings

The needs on the ground

The underlying strategy of the project refers to both the **potential** and **needs** of the just transition regions to become pioneers of clean energy planning in CEE countries. The regions have been part of a unique common process of Territorial Just Transition Plans (TJTP) development that increases the readiness and awareness of local administration and citizens to plan for change and deliver more ambitious actions for decarbonisation than at the national level – such as coal phase-out dates in regions of Poland (Eastern Wielkopolska, Lower Silesia) or Slovakia (Upper Nitra), influencing the overall national-level climate ambitions. The work done in these regions also demonstrates openness to new approaches and new mechanisms of decision-making and governance.

Our approach has been supported by a number of research papers that have analysed the just transition process as one in which regional climate ambitions can surpass those at the national level and whereby the motivation and good examples made them some of the key areas for targeted political support (e.g. Commissioner Ferreira's visit to Jiu Valley in Romania or European Commission president Ursula von der Leyen's announcement that Ida Virumaa's TJTP had been approved during her visit to Estonia, both in October 2022). The invasion of Ukraine and soaring energy prices add new challenges for these regions but can also lead to releasing potential for a transition to clean energy, while also our 5-year experience working with just transition fund planning and implementation showed that the key for decarbonisation planning is to develop collaborations between different stakeholders to propose holistic solutions and overcome social, environmental and economic



Slovakia Citizen Forum June 2025, (photo: Martin Guniš)

challenges. We also believe that developing the capacity of various local actors and creating new mechanisms of governance and implementation monitoring are crucial to make the transition faster, more efficient and developed along a shared vision.

Based on the identified challenges and needs and our extensive experience and knowledge of the situation on the ground and of the best methods of working in CEE countries, our main idea was that ambitious and inclusive energy planning requires focused, well-planned and comprehensive activities to be conducted primarily directly on the ground in the regions, without forgetting about the importance of national and European efforts to improve legislation, spending and monitoring of funds, broad social participation, project selection processes, and all other practical aspects of energy transformation. Without all this, it is difficult to implement any projects or move processes forward.

What we wanted to achieve

To successfully support the achievement of European energy and climate targets, transition plans and strategies needed to be **institutionalised**, **cross-sectoral** and **tailored** to the level of innovation, ambition and specific geographic context of the involved authorities. The project methodology was developed to answer these needs.

Research

Data collection:

- Comparative secondary data analysis (including literature review and case studies)
- Primary data collection during activities (observation, focus groups, interviews, surveys, studies)

Feedback and data were collected on an on-going basis throughout the project to ensure adaptation to changing circumstances (e.g. following elections).

Data analysis within the scope of project activities was primarily qualitative, with more quantitative analysis for developing detailed energy plans/strategies (e.g. analyses of district and individual heating/cooling system characteristics, renewable source potential, building stock profiles, etc.) sub-contracted to appropriate experts from research centres / think tanks / universities.

Such an approach ensured that the developed materials are tailored to the actual situation and needs of the analysed regions, while maintaining a high quality, even within changing political and social circumstances.
In addition, the research will be used to develop models (case studies, methodology) that can be applied for similar clean energy planning projects in other EU regions, ensuring replicability and further exploitation of the project results.

Capacity-building activities:

- Interactive – this ensured exchanges on topics relevant to the participants and their active engagement;
- Knowledge-based – by providing practical examples, case studies, presentations, publications aligned to identified needs, expert input and targeted information on the particular region that ensured provision of relevant information;
- Based on focused targeting of audiences – as a result of earlier and on-going mapping activities, the capacity-building activities involved the most relevant stakeholders for a particular topic to ensure the relevance of the event for achieving project objectives;
- Involved targeted selection of topics covered by workshops – addressing knowledge gaps, stakeholder needs, funding opportunities, as well as the regional and local situation.

Awareness-raising campaign (targeting citizens of the municipality):

- Focused on the regional and local levels – ensured dissemination of necessary information in the local language about decarbonisation, examples of good projects, funding opportunities to build support for the implementation of clean energy plans;
- Targeting various parts of society with tailor-made messages through a communication campaign on social media channels (Facebook, BlueSky and LinkedIn), as well as offline communication materials such as leaflets.

Public consultations:

We organised citizen forums in various forms, such as World Cafés, Future Search or Consensus Forums, designed to work with large groups and to build capacity for action and developing long-term cooperation on complex processes.

Exchange of knowledge and experience; networking:

- In-person meetings – meetings held one-on-one and with small groups of relevant stakeholders are a very important part of our work, as they allow for a more focused approach to tackling specific objectives (such as raising ambition, capacity building, knowledge exchange);
- Expert visits – experts were invited to share their knowledge not only during organised training sessions, but also directly with relevant stakeholders, especially in reference to relevant pilot projects and in one-stop shops – spaces for discussing details about project concepts with experts;
- Networking meetings – another important method to increase capacity and knowledge is through facilitating contact between various stakeholders (from other similar regions, research institutes, various levels of government, etc.) as this allows for sharing and dissemination of previous experiences, knowledge, and project results.

What we achieved: key long-term achievements

We have been pioneering the just transition in central and eastern Europe since 2017. During this time, we have successfully increased decarbonisation ambitions in the nine countries in the regions in close cooperation with other non-governmental organisations. The consortium's extensive network of experienced national campaigners has been instrumental in building expertise not only on the just transition agenda but also on the specific decarbonisation needs of just transition regions – key areas for driving the green transformation.

Across all target countries, the project delivered tangible results in advancing local energy transition planning, strengthening institutional capacities, and supporting the uptake of renewable and community-based energy solutions.

In **Bulgaria**, a comprehensive renewable district heating project for four municipal buildings in the Tsarkva district of Pernik was developed and prepared for submission to the ELENA facility and other EU funding programmes. In parallel, the concept of energy communities was successfully integrated into municipal planning processes in Pernik, Bobov Dol, and Kyustendil, contributing to the development of new project proposals under the Just Transition Fund and the Recovery and Resilience Plan.

In **Czechia**, key findings from project research were incorporated into the Local Energy Concept of Jiříkov, providing an evidence-based foundation to guide future investments and strategic decision-making in the municipality's energy transition.

In **Estonia**, the project assessed the economic, geographic, and social feasibility of scaling up community energy in Ida-Virumaa by 2035. It also strengthened municipal capacities to engage in decentralised renewable energy production, helped identify ways to bridge structural funding gaps, and supported a shift in public perception towards more positive attitudes to energy cooperatives and community ownership models.

In **Hungary**, local energy challenges in both electricity and heating were mapped, leading to the development of seven community-based energy project proposals. These were designed with consideration of the regulatory environment and with active involvement of residents, municipalities, and local businesses. In addition, the “Miskolc model” was developed, including technical and economic feasibility studies and a roadmap for energy efficiency improvements, heating modernisation, and the establishment of energy communities in typical multi-apartment buildings.

In **Romania**, an energy efficiency plan for buildings in Petroşani (Jiu Valley) was developed based on a detailed quantitative analysis, with a strong focus on identifying vulnerable households and tackling energy poverty. This was complemented by capacity-building activities for local authorities and NGOs in Jiu Valley and Gorj, and by a citizen forum that brought together stakeholders to identify key challenges and solutions. The outputs informed a dedicated policy report on energy poverty.



Citizen Forum Rezekne Latvia,September 2024, (photo: Maksis Apinis)



Slovakia Citizen Forum June 2025, (photo: Martin Guniš)

In **Slovakia**, the city of Partizánske developed a data-driven district heating transformation plan, validated with support from the European Investment Bank. The municipality is currently applying for €22 million from the Modernisation Fund to implement the first phase, which includes connecting two separate heating networks and upgrading approximately 10 km of infrastructure. Institutional capacity was also strengthened through the creation of a dedicated Energy Manager position and a cross-departmental working group. The city additionally secured support from the EU City Facility (EUCF).

In **Ukraine**, the project supported the assessment of decarbonisation pathways for both individual and district heating systems in Novovolynsk, identified key barriers to implementation, and contributed to the update of the city's district heating modernisation strategy. At the national level, project inputs were reflected in the State Just Transition Programme for Coal Regions 2030. The project also strengthened the capacities of municipal staff on topics such as heat supply modernisation and renewable energy solutions for public buildings.

Building capacities for change

Another key achievement was the preparation and implementation of capacity-building activities throughout the project. We began by developing detailed plans outlining the scope and target groups for these activities across the region. To maximise their effectiveness, we also published an internal guide, **Navigating the Just Transition: A Manual for Effective Capacity-Building Events**. This user-friendly resource provides a concise overview of how to organise such events in just transition regions, addresses common organiser questions, and draws on the experience of CEE Bankwatch Network members.

Over the course of the project, we significantly exceeded our targets. We delivered 54 capacity-building events (planned: 27), 36 awareness-raising events (planned: 18), and 14 citizen forums (planned: 9). In doing so, we engaged more than 3,000 stakeholders in person and 2,700 online, far surpassing the initial target of 1,075 participants over 33 months.

These activities focused on key topics including renewable heating solutions, decarbonisation planning, energy communities, and practical guidance for establishing energy cooperatives.

In addition to the events above we further conducted 21 one-stop-shops (planned: 27), 10 national level roundtables and 1 EU level roundtable (planned: 4 national and 1 EU level), we set up 8 working groups (planned: 9) in different formats in each of the countries and last but not least we conducted 22 expert visits (planned: 18).

Final event in Brussels “When European Regions Transform - Policy Recommendations for Safeguarding Just Transition”

On 13 May, we hosted the event “**When European Regions Transform – Policy Recommendations for Safeguarding Just Transition**” at the European Parliament’s Info Hub in Brussels.

The event showcased the outcomes of over five years of CEE Bankwatch Network’s work on just transition across European, national, regional, and municipal levels, with a strong focus on Central and Eastern Europe. Taking place at a critical juncture in the discussions on the future EU budget, it provided timely insights and policy recommendations grounded in practical experience.

The programme was structured around three key themes: decarbonising municipalities in just transition regions; lessons learned from implementation in six EU countries; and strengthening support for just transition regions within National and Regional Partnership Plans.

Bringing together a diverse group of partners, policymakers, and practitioners, the event highlighted the importance of collaboration and multi-level governance in advancing effective and inclusive just transition processes.



Event in Brussels ‘When transitions transform’, May 2026

Impacting environmental, climate, social or economic policies at local, national, regional and international level

The members of the consortium have been monitoring the just transition regions since 2017, covering over 25 regions in central and eastern Europe through our member groups and in general over 35 just transition regions in the European Union through our various additional collaborations. We bring a unique comparative perspective as we are able to link our work on-the-ground locally on practical issues (such as decarbonisation planning within municipalities) with our activities aimed at informing national and EU-level policy.

Over the years, we have forged a strong position as experts consulted by various EU institutions, such as the European Commission, the Committee of the Regions and the European Parliament, consolidating our reputation as a leading organisation in the just transition field. Our expert knowledge and insights are sought on multiple aspects linked to transitioning regions. Notably, in 2024 we were included among the organisations on the advisory board for the soon-to-be-established Fair Transition Observatory and in the Just Transition Platform (JTP) Working Group on the Future of Just Transition in 2025. We have also been active in the other JTP Working Groups on Stakeholder Engagement and on Equal Opportunities.

In addition, in the various countries, we frequently participate in consultations of climate-related plans and programmes , such as national energy and climate plans, amendments to the JTF plan and related project selection criteria, Social Climate Plans, as well as commenting on draft calls for proposals, technical assistance, investment programs, national energy strategies to name just a few.

Key publications

Published 12 decarbonisation plans: the main focus is to enhance knowledge of decarbonisation pathways, develop a better understanding of energy transformation solutions, explore ways of unlocking EU funding mechanisms, and share best governance practices for inclusive, just and sustainable local and regional clean energy.

In **Bulgaria**, we cooperated very successfully with **Pernik** to develop renewables-based heating/cooling solutions for the city. The organisation focused on the Pernik **district of Tserkva**, conducting technical analyses and feasibility studies for heating and cooling solutions, as well as sociological surveys to gauge the support (very high) for such solutions.

In **Czechia**, we established cooperation with the **Jirikov municipality** and provided it with a technical-economic study on the decarbonization of the heat supply of selected municipal-owned buildings, prepared by an external expert team and created in close cooperation with the mayor and his colleagues. The results from the study have been incorporated into the municipal energy management strategy.

In **Estonia**, we worked on the whole **Ida-Viru** region to improve the regional energy decarbonisation plan by advocating for community energy to be added to the regional decarbonisation priorities and roadmap, as well as promoting the possibilities and advantages of decentralised energy production to the local municipalities and communities who could potentially be taking on such projects.

In **Hungary**, 7 community energy project concepts were identified in a detailed research study. This decarbonisation planning process and its follow-up (planning an economic-technical business plan focusing on 1-2 of the most viable projects) has been supported by discussions and capacity building for the stakeholders.

In **Latvia**, we worked on developing decarbonization plans for two municipalities in just transition regions – **Daugavpils city and the Rezekne region**, organising capacity-building events for municipality administrations, local citizens and NGOs and an awareness-raising campaign on the need for energy transition, including sustainable wind park development, as well as taking part in an expert working group, which developed national guidelines for sustainable solar park development.

In **Poland**, we focused on the community of **Kleczew in Eastern Wielkopolska** as one of the coal regions supported by the Just Transition Fund. Our joint efforts focused on concrete technical work and capacity-building activities. We prepared an analysis of decarbonisation strategies for the community, focusing on the heating system. In terms of capacity-building, we have established a relationship with local authorities, stakeholders, including the climate advisor, and organised several meetings, one of which is a citizens' forum explaining the governmental program 'Clean Air'.

In **Romania**, we supported the development of clean-energy roadmaps for **Gorj and Hunedoara**, focusing on energy efficiency, community-led renewables, and renewables-based heating and cooling. In **Petrosani, Hunedoara**, we explored and identified practical solutions and feasible investments to address energy poverty and support the decarbonisation of heating, working together with public authorities and citizens.

In **Slovakia**, we facilitated collaboration among municipalities that own heat supply systems to deepen their understanding of the technical, economic, and operational aspects of modern district heating solutions and developed a comprehensive district heating transformation plan for the town of **Partzanske**.

In **Ukraine**, we have focused on the **Volyn region**, supporting local actors in developing a strategic approach to decarbonisation and transformational projects aimed at developing renewable energy, energy efficiency and decarbonising district heating, with subsequent promotion of the results.

Decarbonisation briefings for at least 7 countries with summary in English

- Repower the regions: How to make a heating and cooling plan for municipalities. A methodology for creating a sustainable and just plan for district heating decarbonisation, September 2024
- RePowering the regions: A comparative analysis of decarbonisation strategies in nine central and eastern European countries, December 2024
- Bulgaria: Study of sustainable solutions of the Tsarkva district in Pernik, January 2025
- Czech Republic: Technical and economic decarbonization study of district heating in Jiříkov, November 2024
- Estonia: Economic, geographical and social feasibility study of the introduction of community energy (renewable energy cooperatives) in Ida-Viru County by 2035, December 2024

- Hungary: Mapping community-led energy transition solutions (electricity, heat) in Miskolc (Hungary) from energy and social perspective, December 2024, Integrált tanulmány Miskolc energiaközösségi megoldások, Vizuális tanulmány, March 2026
- Latvia: Daugavpils city cycling infrastructure, February 2025
- Public transport accessibility (transport poverty reduction) in the Rezekne region, May 2025
- Romania: Solutions to combat energy poverty in Petroşani Municipality, December 2024
- Poland: Assessment of the decarbonisation potential of the building sector at the local level in the Kleczew commune, December 2024
- Energy efficiency audit for Wanda Chotomska school and kindergarten complex in Kleczew, executive summary in English, March 2026
- Slovakia: Development of the district heating system in the town of Partizánske, Social research – support of decarbonisation in the city of Partizánske, June 2024
- Ukraine: Survey of the population on the decarbonisation of heating in the Novovolynsk, Lytovez and Poromivka communities of the Volyn region, November 2024

Summary report from citizen forums

Citizens' forums driving decarbonisation in central and eastern Europe: Lessons in public participation, Feburary 2026

Working groups final recommendations

RePowering the regions: How working groups can support local decarbonisation efforts, December 2025

Leaflets with pipeline project lists and descriptions (in national languages)

Bulgaria: Местни решения засправедлив енергиенпреход – Перник и Бобов дол, July 2025

Czech Republic: Průkopníci komunitníenergetiky v Česku, July 2025

Estonia: Puhtad jõed ja kaugküttesüsteemid Ida-Virumaale: Mida on selle saavutamiseks vaja?, July 2025

Hungary: Energia, közösségben: Fejlesztések Miskolc tiszta energiallátásáért

Latvia: Gatavi enerģētikas pārejai – transformējoši Latgalespašvaldību projekti, kamnepieciešams atbalsts, July 2025

Poland: Sprawiedliwa transformacja w toku: Inspirujące projekty z szansą na realizację, July 2025

Romania: Exemple de proiecte-far pentru o tranziţie justă a regiunilorcarbonifere din România, July 2025

Slovakia: Spoľahlivé teplo pre moderné mestá, November 2025

Ukraine: Пріоритетнітрансформаційні проєктивугільних громадВолинської області, July 2025



Project outcome

The outcomes of the RePower the Regions project have been used to strengthen regional and local capacities for clean energy planning, support the development of inclusive and evidence-based decarbonisation strategies, and promote stakeholder engagement across Central and Eastern Europe.

Through participatory planning processes, technical expertise, and collaboration with local authorities, communities, businesses, and civil society organisations, the project produced practical roadmaps, investment-ready project concepts, and methodologies for implementing clean energy solutions, including energy efficiency measures, renewable energy deployment, and sustainable heating and cooling systems.

Key recommendations emerging from the project include ensuring early and continuous stakeholder involvement, embedding clean energy planning within regional governance structures, strengthening technical and financial support for local actors, and aligning regional strategies with EU climate and energy objectives.

More on the impacts of Repower the Regions project.



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