



Bringing about change

Local municipalities in central and eastern Europe as frontrunners in implementing green solutions

Final report of the LIFE RePower the Regions project

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Contents

Introduction	4
Explaining the process: Decarbonising municipalities in central and eastern Europe.....	5
Bulgaria.....	5
Czechia.....	9
Estonia	12
Hungary	15
Latvia.....	17
Poland.....	20
Romania.....	23
Slovakia.....	26
Ukraine.....	31
Conclusions and recommendations	34

Introduction

As a network of environmental and climate non-governmental organisations (NGOs) working on the just transition in over 25 regions scattered across central and eastern Europe, all with high-emission industries that are being phased out, at one point we began wondering how we can make our vision of a climate neutral Europe more concrete and grounded in reality. It is no secret that these regions are pilot projects in Europe's great scheme to achieve climate neutrality, but what does this actually mean on the ground for those undertaking to change how they produce and use energy, heat their homes, and get around their towns? This is how the idea for the LIFE Repower the Regions project¹ emerged.

We sat down and talked about how to actually decarbonise municipalities in such regions and created a project that was meant to provide support for towns or regions willing to embark on this journey with us. We see them as the first brave pioneers to step onto a path that will become much more common and easier in upcoming years, also thanks to the lessons learnt from the implementation of this and other similar projects, and – hopefully – from the improvements introduced into how decarbonisation is planned, framed and funded in future.

Since the network has worked on such areas for years, knows many of the local stakeholders, and was also interested in working on real and tangible examples of decarbonisation, we thought, 'Why not try to support a normal municipality in such a region and see what we can do together?' We decided to select not the most obvious large cities, but municipalities actually interested in becoming frontrunners in the implementation of innovative solutions, no matter their size or circumstances. As a result, we would have the advantage of working with public authorities who were brave enough to take on the challenge, but we would also experience all the obstacles that typical municipalities and counties of varying sizes have to face in planning a decarbonisation strategy, developing projects and finding funding for them.

And it has been quite a journey! The LIFE RePower the Regions project primarily focused on specific municipalities or countries in just transition regions, usually one in each country: Bulgaria, Czechia, Estonia, Hungary, Latvia, Poland, Romania, Slovakia and Ukraine. In each area we started with scoping the most urgent needs in terms of decarbonisation for the municipality or region and its citizens. We also mapped the existing legal frameworks, strategies and plans, project ideas, relevant stakeholders, and available administrative and technical capacities. We then went on to commission tailored studies that would allow for developing a more in-depth approach to the identified need, be it a sociological survey to determine the approach in the local community to clean energy (as was done in Novovolynsk in Ukraine) to technical studies that would establish the best solution for a particular problem, such as how best to provide cheaper

¹ CEE Bankwatch Network, LIFE Repower the Regions, [RePower the Regions: Ambitious and inclusive clean energy plans for repowering the just transition regions](#), January 2024.

clean electricity and heating to an energy poor community in the former coal-mining town of Petroșani in Romania.

Simultaneously, we identified what kind of capacity-building activities would be most useful for the public authorities and active members of the community to prepare them better for decarbonising their immediate surroundings. We then set up capacity-building plans and moved ahead with organising such events to reach those who could potentially drive local decarbonisation projects forward. Where possible, we provided hands-on support for finding additional technical assistance or funding opportunities and applying for them. A lot of our work involved facilitating the exchange and sharing of information, knowledge and contacts, all of which are absolutely essential when you want to implement a truly transformative project. For example, a simple overview of the type of information we found to be most useful for local municipalities was included in our *Guide to Decarbonisation Solutions*, translated into eight national languages.²

The report you are now reading provides a short overview of exactly what was done in each of the nine countries, without shying away from the many challenges and barriers to decarbonisation that we encountered. These range from administrative and legal bottlenecks, through political changes and instability, as well as missing capacities and expertise, to lack of easy access to funding for the developed concepts and projects. It is highly important for us that these challenges and bottlenecks be emphasised and described, but also that we provide a list of recommendations for possible solutions. This is because our long-term objective is to bring about a future in which European citizens can live in villages, towns and cities that have undergone full transitions, providing cheap clean and green energy, heating and transport to their residents.

Explaining the process: Decarbonising municipalities in central and eastern Europe

Bulgaria

LIFE RePower the Regions was implemented in Bulgaria by **Za Zemiata** or Friends of the Earth Bulgaria, an environmental non-profit association that consists of 23 staff and around 50 members. Za Zemiata works on zero waste, energy and climate, clean air, and economic justice, including a focus on European public funds. Za Zemiata's sustainable energy campaign aims to develop an alternative energy strategy for Bulgaria, which stresses the promotion of energy efficiency (EE) and renewable energy sources (RES) as alternatives to polluting energy production. Aside from the policy level, Za Zemiata simultaneously works on practical implementation of the solutions it proposes. The organisation has undertaken significant work in the Just Transition field in recent years despite the long-term political deadlock at the government level.

² CEE Bankwatch Network, [Preparing municipalities for the future: A guide to decarbonisation solutions](#), March 2025.

The municipality of Pernik

Pernik in western Bulgaria is a place where the legacy of mining still shapes both the economy and the energy system. Once known as the birthplace of Bulgarian mining, the town grew rapidly around extractive industries, but the decline of mining after the 1990s and the closure of the last mine in 2009 left behind a difficult and uneven transition. The focus of our activities was on Tsarkva, a neighbourhood of roughly 6,771 residents, mostly living in single-family and two-family houses. Tsarkva is especially significant because it combines the social realities of a former coal region with a practical opportunity to test new renewable heating and electricity options at neighbourhood scale.

The central problem identified for Pernik is air pollution and the lack of a credible decarbonisation pathway linked to the existing district heating system. The district heating plant in Pernik, operated by TPP Republika, is a major polluter with a poor technical record and frequent outages. The plant has not shown meaningful interest in decarbonisation and has remained largely absent from just transition discussions. This creates uncertainty not only about long-term emissions but also about energy security, because there are fears that the plant could eventually close without a viable replacement ready. In this context, Tsarkva stands out because it is not connected to the district heating system, which gives the neighbourhood an unusual degree of flexibility to adopt alternative solutions rather than simply trying to reform a failing fossil-based system.

The Municipality of Pernik is an important actor because it has shown openness to cooperation and to a just transition approach. In the past, it partnered with Friends of the Earth Bulgaria (Za Zemiata) through a memorandum of understanding focused on renewable alternatives. The Black Sea Energy Research Centre worked on the technical exploration of renewable district heating options, Greenpeace Bulgaria campaigned against continued pollution from the coal plant, and WWF Bulgaria supported local awareness and participation through youth assemblies. This combination of municipal initiative, research support and civil-society pressure suggests that, even in a difficult institutional environment, local alliances can open a path toward cleaner energy systems.

The significance of good data

In the first project stage, planning in Pernik was constrained by weak data availability. The contracted researchers had to rely not only on official sources but also on mapping exercises and their own field research because relevant national and municipal data were incomplete. This is more than a technical inconvenience: it affects the quality of local planning and slows the preparation of investment-ready projects. Stronger local energy data, building-level information and better coordination between public authorities and infrastructure operators would improve the feasibility of future interventions. Still, as cooperation with the local level improved, the municipality provided all the data that was delayed in the first year, allowing for the development of a very high-quality analysis. Ultimately, the study³ of the

³ Ekologichno sdruzhenie "Za Zemiata" (ZZ) / Friends of the Earth Bulgaria, [Study of sustainable solutions of the Tsarkva district in Pernik](#), January 2025.

renewable district heating potential of four municipal buildings in the Tsarkva district was developed into a comprehensive project ready for submission for funding to the ELENA programme or other European programmes for which the municipality of Pernik can apply. Crucially, the initial distrust of municipal officials towards our project and their reluctance to provide information was overcome and in the second part of the project they fully supported ideas for renewable district heating and energy cooperatives and currently believe that funding will be found for this project.

Choosing the right pathway forward for Pernik

Six possible technical pathways were compared for Tsarkva. Biomass was rejected because of low efficiency and concerns about air pollution. Wind power was considered weak because local conditions are unfavourable. Geothermal energy was seen as promising, especially in combination with solar systems. The possibility of using industrial waste heat from the local steel company Stomana Industry was also explored, with an estimated potential of 3 to 4 megawatts (MW) for heating and hot water. Solar energy emerged as a key option both for electricity generation and hot water production. However, the preferred scenario is a combination of solar panels and heat pumps, as it offers the strongest mix of economic viability, environmental performance and flexibility.

According to the analysis, solar water heating in the domestic sector could generate annual savings of about EUR 796 514, equivalent to around EUR 118 per resident. If the full photovoltaic potential were used, less than half of the electricity generated would be needed to run the heat pumps, while the rest could be fed into the grid and provide additional income. Total annual electricity cost savings are estimated at just over EUR 2 million, with residential buildings accounting for almost all of that amount. Environmentally, the proposed renewable package could cut CO₂ emissions by about 19,000 tonnes per year. Tsarkva therefore emerges not only as a neighbourhood in need of cleaner heating, but also as a pilot project where renewable electricity, heat pumps and local energy organisation could demonstrate what a socially useful just transition looks like in a Bulgarian coal region.

Bringing citizens on board

Za Zemiata also implemented an extensive programme for building the capacities of local municipal authorities and citizens, not only in Pernik itself, but also in other towns undergoing similar transitions, such as Bobov Dol, Kyustendil and Stara Zagora. The organisation also held events in the capital of Bulgaria, Sofia, so that the activities done and conclusions reached based on work in smaller municipalities could inform decarbonisation conversations at the central level. A large variety of events were organised tailored to the identified needs of the targeted audiences, ranging from larger citizen forums to smaller meetings with experts.

Among such examples of activities are four capacity-building events organised in municipalities going through transition: Pernik, Bobov Dol and Kyustendil. The focus was on educating the participants about the set-up of energy communities, the necessary documents, and understanding the different models. This

resulted in the inclusion of energy communities in their plans for new projects under the Just Transition Fund and the Recovery Plan in all three towns.

One citizen forum⁴ was held in Sofia on 27 June 2025. It brought together scientists, experts, journalists, and members of civil society alongside representatives of the Ministry of Energy and the European Commission. The forums enabled an open discussion of alternative perspectives on nuclear energy and large-scale infrastructure projects. A key outcome of the forum was the presentation of scientific, economic and technical assessments indicating that decarbonisation does not necessarily require costly new nuclear power plants or energy ‘mega-projects’. Instead, the sessions provided citizens with different viewpoints on decarbonisation pathways, broadening the public debate on the energy transition. The forum led to concrete recommendations, including making access to renewable energy easier for citizens and energy cooperatives and halting large-scale energy projects. Additionally, the presence of institutional representatives from the Ministry of Energy and the Representation of the European Commission in Sofia provided citizens with the opportunity to convey these recommendations directly, making their input more than just symbolic.

Za Zemiata organised a second citizens’ forum in October 2025 focusing on the topic of one-stop shops entitled ‘How do one-stop service centers support the building renovation process?’⁵ The forum gathered experts from environmental and social NGOs, government agency representatives, businesses, industry organisations, and citizens to discuss the concept and showcase successful examples from Europe and Bulgaria. Such models already exist in the European Union and around the world, helping people with building renovations through one-stop service centres. They provide comprehensive support – from technical advice and financial solutions to mediation with contractors and coordination of the entire process. This makes it easier for citizens and other stakeholders to access reliable information, expertise, and services, while building the necessary local capacity for sustainable renovation. At the same time, they overcome the main obstacles for property owners – complex procedures, fragmented services, and lack of clarity about financing options. All this, with input from other European countries through online live presentations of existing models, was discussed at the forum. A world café format ensued and deepened the discussion on what could function well in the local context and on the work that needs to be continued in the future.

Overcoming barriers and bringing about change

In Bulgaria, the main barrier remains the lack of real decentralisation in the management of EU funds and thus difficulties in accessing and influencing them by municipalities. EU funds are managed by the central government, which is sometimes not able to adapt to the needs and real issues faced by the municipalities

⁴ Todor Todorov, [Discussion: Playing The Nuclear Card In The Energy Transition – is there a need for new nuclear power in Bulgaria?](#), Za Zemiata, 28 July 2025.

⁵ Ekologichno sdruzenie “Za Zemiata” (ZZ)/ Friends of the Earth Bulgaria, [Форум: Центрове за комплексно обслужване за сградно обновяване – модели, опит и бъдеще в България](#), October 2025.

and has little capacity to discuss the situation in more detail with local administration. It should come as no surprise that strong centralisation of EU fund management leads to a higher level of bureaucracy and a lack of flexibility in implementing funds, and there is in fact no real possibility of directly managing funds regionally, making the situation for municipalities wanting to move forward on innovative ideas quite difficult.

Despite this immense challenge, huge steps were made within the scope of the project to implement change. Our work as NGOs is often not about flashy headlines, but about bringing solutions closer to real people in concrete places. This signifies working directly with communities, developing friendships and relationships beyond any differences, and supporting finding solutions in even the most challenging circumstances. In Bulgaria, as a result of our cooperation, the Tsarkva district in Pernik now has a comprehensive project for a district heating system for municipal buildings ready for submission for funding to European programmes, while energy communities have been added as project concepts for European funding in two of the just transition regions.

Czechia

The Centre for Transport and Energy (CDE) is a non-profit non-governmental organisation founded in 1998, which focuses on the environmental impacts of transportation and energy production, especially those on the Earth's climate. Since 2004, CDE has been involved in the implementation of the European emissions trading scheme (EU ETS) in the Czech Republic and is the leading Czech NGO in this field. Since 2018, CDE has been advocating for a climate friendly EU budget by showing the best and worst practices of EU funded projects in the Czech Republic. Currently, CDE is the go-to NGO in the Czech Republic in the fields of EU climate policy and just transition of coal mining regions. Since 2019, they have been closely following the European Green Deal agenda and working on increasing its understanding and acceptance in the country. In 2021, they issued an important study on the technical and economic potential of energy communities in the Czech Republic. Currently, they have become one of the very few Czech NGOs which are closely following the Fit for 55 package developments, including the Social Climate Fund. CDE representatives are members of several Monitoring Committees and official bodies.

The municipality of Jiříkov

Jiříkov is a small town in the Ústecký coal region close to the German border. Jiříkov boasts a long industrial history, but in recent decades it has experienced extensive socioeconomic disruptions that followed the decline of earlier forms of local industry. Although the town's current population is only around 3,500, it exemplifies many of the structural challenges faced by small municipalities in former coal regions: ageing infrastructure, fragmented heat supply, limited data and a strong dependence on conventional fuels.

Economically viable district heating

The district heating topic in Jiříkov was identified by local government representatives as both the most important and most feasible action in terms of local decarbonisation. The town used to have district heating

infrastructure which, unfortunately, was shut down for economic reasons. At present, Jiříkov meets heat demand mainly through gas and solid-fuel boilers, while electricity comes almost entirely from the conventional distribution network. The research commissioned within the scope of the LIFE Repower the Regions project⁶ provided indicative consumption figures for selected municipal buildings, including annual electricity use of 205 MWh and fossil gas consumption of about 1,010 megawatt hours (MWh). The calculated heat demand for these municipal buildings is around 5,300 gigajoules (GJ).

The municipality owns a relatively high number of buildings (more than 180 flats in 36 buildings) and is ready to plan its heating supply modernisation. Most buildings rely on local boilers powered by fossil gas, with some use of solid fuels and electricity. This creates both a challenge and an opportunity. On the one hand, the town does not have a municipal network that can simply be modernised. On the other, it can consider different technical and spatial models without being fully locked into legacy infrastructure. Solutions range from smaller networks serving a compact set of nearby buildings to more extensive central heat supply networks.

The decarbonisation study of the central heating system (CHP) in Jiříkov was prepared with the aim of creating a design for a functional CHP system for selected urban buildings, while reducing the production of carbon dioxide and increasing the energy efficiency of urban buildings. The study analysed the current state of energy sources and consumption, evaluated the available technologies and proposed an optimised solution for the district heating network. This was beneficial because the viability of different options depends heavily on whether heat prices can remain competitive for end users. This is an important reminder that decarbonisation projects in small municipalities must succeed economically as well as technically.

Building capacities for change

In Czechia, the main focus of the project was to bridge the European and national aims with a local decarbonisation process. First, we coordinated an important meeting with relevant stakeholders and technical experts to set the agenda and identify the main tasks of the local decarbonisation plan that would serve the needs of Jiříkov. This step was followed by plan finalisation and capacity-building activities. Within the second half of the project, we concentrated on elaboration of the project concept and sharing experiences with other stakeholders and actors via diverse events and discussions across the country. In the final part of the project our aim was to deliver the knowledge to the public and share the findings coming from the cooperation with the municipality, energy experts, and NGOs with relevant stakeholders and experts. It is important that the expert solutions designed in the decarbonisation plan can be further elaborated in the Local energy strategy of the municipality, so there is a will and intent to proceed with local decarbonisation in Jiříkov.

⁶ Centrum pro dopravu a energetiku / Centre for Transport and Energy (CDE), [Technical and economic decarbonization study of district heating in Jiříkov](#), November 2024.

Six capacity-building events were organised, mainly in the Ústecký coal region, but also in Prague. The events had two main purposes: laying the ground for the research and tackling local needs with regard to heating decarbonisation and energy poverty mitigation. The first one in Jiříkov was extremely important for all the following steps. It was key for the municipality to know that the strategy fully reflects its needs and economic situation and that we aim to assist in local decarbonisation that is meaningful. Later, the events were more focused on building local civil society capacity so they can tackle the challenges of energy poverty in their communities and consider energy communities as a viable solution for some of their problems.

A citizens' forum held in Prague on 21 October 2025 brought together municipalities, public officials, experts, and members of civil society to discuss energy efficiency and evidence-based policymaking. Discussions primarily focused on local energy management and implementation of the EU's Energy Efficiency Directive. The results of these discussions highlighted the need for stable policy frameworks, predictable funding, and stronger coordination between national and local authorities. A key takeaway was that energy savings are not only an environmental concern, but also an economic necessity. Participants agreed that predictable support schemes, sufficient administrative capacity, and sharing knowledge between municipalities are essential for meeting the Directive's objectives. Among the other key priorities identified were the need to improve communication between central and local governments and provide targeted support for regions.

Moving forward with implementing change

The main barriers for local decarbonisation are related to capacity as a high number of municipalities lack expertise. At the same time, they lack understanding of EU language and EU goals. It cannot be stated enough that cooperation and building relationships on the local level is often extremely time-demanding and requires a lot of dedication, even sometimes simply due to the fact of how long it takes to bring experts to more peripheral places.

Nonetheless, much was achieved within the scope of the project. The findings from the commissioned study **were adopted into Jiříkov's Local Energy Concept as a background document for future pathways and investments**. Many events were organised showing best practices for local energy transformation, technical solutions and grant schemes for funding, building local capacities for future endeavours. However, primarily, highly valuable relationships on the ground were built and strengthened, opening the door for further future collaboration. Our cooperation with Jiříkov addressed important issues that we have seen impact the local level, providing basis for raising these difficulties at the national level. For example, the decarbonisation study exposed that there is no clear message sent toward municipalities to invest in heating decarbonisation in the Czech Republic. Unpredictable political decisions on the national level, such as uncertainties around the implementation of ETS2 and illogical calculations of the emission factor for heat pumps, as well as unclear flows of financial resources to municipalities for decarbonisation and a permanent lack of capacities on the local level, are all huge barriers stopping towns from proceeding with climate action.

Estonia

The **Estonian Green Movement** (EGM) has been working on various environmental topics for over 30 years and has a well-established position in the country as an expert organisation. EGM has implemented many local, national, and international projects, campaigns and activities over the past 30 years. The organisation participates actively in various government working groups and is an active member of the Estonian Council of Environmental NGOs, the Estonian Roundtable for Development Cooperation, and the grassroots movement Living Tartu, which all provide a wide network for collaboration. Since 2015, EGM has been part of multiple pan-European projects that focus on climate change, linking local and global issues, limiting consumption, empowering communities and Just Transition. EGM also had a local project with focus on collecting and sharing the stories of people living in mining areas. The Estonian Green Movement has been involved in the Just Transition process in Estonia since its inception in the country in 2018. It has taken part in roundtables and multi-stakeholder meetings about the transition away from the production and use of shale oil as an energy source. Since the entry into force of the Just Transition Mechanism, EGM has been represented in the national steering committee for Just Transition. Under the umbrella of the Estonian Council of environmental NGOs, EGM is additionally represented in the Monitoring Committee of the 2021-2027 cohesion and recovery funds, the Sustainable Development Committee, the Development Plan for the Environment 2030, and the National Energy Sector Development Plan 2035.

Ida-Virumaa – Estonia’s just transition region

Ida-Virumaa is a county in the northeast of the country near the Russian border. It is one of Estonia’s most urbanised regions and also one of the most structurally dependent on fossil energy, especially oil shale extraction, electricity generation and related industrial activity. Strong emphasis falls on the county’s demographic and social profile: population decline, ageing, and a very high share of Russian-speaking residents all influence the design of any transition strategy. These conditions mean that decarbonisation in Ida-Virumaa is not simply a matter of replacing one energy source with another. It is also a question of social inclusion, language accessibility, economic restructuring and rebuilding local trust in public planning.

Identifying Ida-Virumaa’s challenges and opportunities

The energy system is outdated and heavily reliant on fossil fuel combustion. Because oil shale has played such a dominant role in the regional economy, energy reform in Ida-Virumaa must address both production and consumption. One of the most promising pathways is the creation of green energy through energy communities. This choice is important because it shifts attention from large, centralised replacement projects to more distributed forms of ownership and participation. Energy communities could allow municipalities, housing associations, public institutions and citizens to benefit directly from local renewable generation while also reducing energy costs and strengthening social acceptance.

A core issue in the Estonian case is the condition of the housing stock. Much of the region consists of apartment buildings from the Soviet era that have poor energy performance and substantial renovation

needs. The analysis we commissioned⁷ treats energy efficiency as inseparable from renewables deployment. In practice, this means decarbonisation cannot succeed if buildings remain inefficient and residents are unable to access renovation finance. The study therefore explores ways to combine rooftop solar, energy community structures and building renovation in order to improve affordability as well as emissions performance. This is particularly relevant in a region where socio-economic vulnerabilities are significant, and many residents have limited capacity to invest upfront in modern energy technologies.

Another notable feature of the Estonian case lies in the way it links technical and planning constraints. The region faces defence restrictions due to its location at the border with Russia that can obstruct the installation of solar panels or wind projects, and this means that regulatory and spatial planning reforms may be just as important as funding. In other words, the challenge is not only to identify good technologies but also to remove the institutional bottlenecks that prevent these technologies from spreading. This is especially important in a region where the old fossil fuel model was deeply embedded in the local economy and energy infrastructure.

Local participation is another challenge. Researchers encountered difficulties because relevant studies were limited and some organisations, companies and individuals showed low interest in participating. This made information gathering more difficult and points to a wider issue: successful transition planning depends on active local engagement, but such involvement cannot be assumed in communities that lack a strong tradition when it comes to participatory decision-making. Language barriers add another layer of difficulty. Poor proficiency in Estonian (as Ida-Virumaa has a high number of Russian speakers among its inhabitants) can hinder access to information for parts of the local population, which means transition plans must be communicated in ways that are genuinely accessible to Russian-speaking communities as well.

The solution proposed by EGM involves scaling up solar generation on private and public buildings, creating energy communities that can share the benefits of renewable production, and leveraging investments in efficiency so they multiply rather than remain isolated one-off projects. Community energy should be an instrument for regional transformation, because it can connect decarbonisation with local development, institutional learning and citizen participation.

One of the biggest challenges for the emergence of energy communities in Estonia is the outdated grid that allows only one-sided electricity flow, making it difficult for communities to share electricity. Concerning this specific issue, there are quite a few limitations as to what municipalities can do. Otherwise, budgetary and capacity limitations are apparent, and our experience with capacity-building events showed that also interest in such solutions varies on a municipal level.

⁷ MTÜ Eesti Roheline Liikumine / Estonian Green Movement (EGM), [Economic, geographical and social feasibility study of the introduction of community energy \(renewable energy cooperatives\) in Ida-Viru County by 2035](#), December 2024.

Building capacities for change

A citizens' forum was held on 6 September 2025 in the north-eastern city of Narva and designed to coincide with a cultural festival organised in cooperation with local community groups.⁸ Its success can be attributed to the merging of technical topics with discussions around local ways of living, community and art, while also introducing participants to a part of the country often isolated from public engagement. The discussion around energy communities was particularly useful for sharing expert perspectives and knowledge with participants, giving them a more realistic understanding of where and how these communities can best function. Framing energy-related issues in the context of community life, local identity and everyday life made the discussion more relevant and engaging for participants. It is worth noting that such events really do have to be tailored to the planned participants. An earlier attempt at a citizens' forum was not fully successful as it was a stand-alone event, making it more difficult to attract a dedicated audience. It had also been planned as a more technical presentation of possible energy community solutions, which we suspect was seen as too difficult a topic for the typical citizen. However, we took the lessons learnt on board and the September 2025 citizens' forum was attended by a higher amount of people.

One of our main focuses was helping emerging community energy projects come to life within our one-stop shops, bringing together the Savala energy community, local energy agency, TalTech experts who conducted our research, and local municipality representatives, creating a forum for mutual communication. The participants, especially the municipality representatives, showed their willingness to learn about the specifics of such initiatives so they would be able to understand it and participate in future discussions with other communities to further help decarbonise the region.

Four capacity-building events were also organised throughout Estonia, all of them focused on the future of Ida-Virumaa county. At first, the focus was on providing local stakeholders with the necessary resources so they can properly access EU funding from the Just Transition Fund and other sources. The available technical assistance that could support them in accessing this funding was also presented. We also prepared workshops that discussed the benefits of the Social Climate Fund for local decarbonisation activities.

Bringing about change in Ida-Virumaa

The implementation of the LIFE RePower the Regions project in Estonia allowed for the assessment of the economic, geographic, and social feasibility of rapid community energy uptake in Ida-Virumaa until 2035. It strengthened the capacities of municipalities to participate in decentralised renewable energy production and to bridge structural funding gaps on both local and national level. It also provided a strong basis for a shift in public perception, fostering a more positive narrative around energy cooperatives and community ownership models. As a result, we have an emerging energy community in Savala village in Ida-

⁸ Ekaterina Konakova, „Почему не приезжаю чаще?": гости фестиваля Station Narva в восторге от приграничного города, Delfi, 7 September 2025.

Virumaa that – once operational – will hopefully showcase a replicable form of community-based and citizen-led renewable energy production and be the first of many energy communities in Ida-Virumaa.

Hungary

Founded in 1989, the **National Society of Conservationists – Friends of the Earth Hungary** (NSC-FoE HU, MTVSZ) is an umbrella green NGO with 100+ local member NGOs across the country. It has 25 years of experience in organising complex national- and regional-level capacity-building, policy advocacy and awareness-raising campaigns. These tools are used to reach its climate and energy working group's mission: a community-led, participatory and socially just energy transition. MTVSZ has run its community energy programme since 2013 and its just transition programme⁹ since 2017, for both of which cooperation with local stakeholders, communities and municipalities is key.

Promoting just transition and empowering stakeholders to participate in the process is a long-term activity, especially in Hungary. Early on (2018-2020), MTVSZ organised capacity-building workshops for citizens in Borsod-Abaúj-Zemplén (BAZ) county on just transition topics. From 2021 onwards, MTVSZ and its NGO allies (in monitoring committees and subcommittees) focused on influencing the Territorial Just Transition Plan (TJTP) preparation and implementation process in the three designated just transition counties (BAZ, Baranya, Heves). In the process, Hungarian NGOs also advocated for a proper coal phaseout in Hungary. The implementation and spending of the Just Transition Fund in the country since implementation began in 2023 have been quite bumpy, with the process lagging and many public statements made over the years showing the intent to backtrack on coal phaseout commitments. Thus, it is well-timed that since 2023, MTVSZ's focus has been on helping and mentoring local communities and municipalities in developing transitive and tangible decarbonisation project planning within the framework of the LIFE project.

The municipality of Miskolc

Miskolc is Hungary's fourth largest city, an important industrial and administrative centre of Borsod-Abaúj-Zemplén (BAZ) county, situated in the northeast of the country. The city has struggled with the impacts of industrial restructuring for decades as a result of the decline of socialist-era coal mining and iron metallurgy. Its population has dropped by more than 50,000 since the 1990s and now stands at around 144,000. It is also strongly impacted by demographic issues, especially an ageing population and high emigration rates.

Miskolc is one of 100 EU municipalities that have committed to becoming climate-neutral and smart city by 2030. In 2018, Miskolc published its Sustainable Energy and Climate Action Plan (called CoolMiskolc), with proposals including community energy investments. This gives the city a policy framework within which local energy community initiatives can be tested and expanded. In March 2024, MTVSZ signed a climate 'partnership' contract with the Municipality of Miskolc MJV, ensuring that the Hungarian activities and

⁹ National Society of Conservationist – Friends of the Earth Hungary (NSC-FoE HU, MTVSZ), [Programok: Fosszilis függőség csökkentése](#), 2017.

outputs (studies and events) of the LIFE RePower the Regions project can also contribute to the successful decarbonisation of Miskolc.

The detailed local focus within the LIFE RePower the Regions project was on the Kilián and Bulgárföld districts of Miskolc, where many residents are retirees or low-income households unable to finance energy-saving investments on their own. In this setting, community energy emerges as a way of linking decarbonisation with social inclusion.

Developing concepts for community renewable energy projects

Two studies were conducted within the scope of the project. The first analysis¹⁰ in the region focused on the potential for community-owned or community-benefiting renewable electricity systems. Energy providers such as MIHŐ district heating company and MVM (electricity), alongside municipal bodies and social institutions, are all relevant actors. Experts reviewed existing Miskolc plans and consolidated them into recommendations. Working groups involving MTSZ and other contributors supported this process.

From the seven community-based decarbonisation models that were identified in the commissioned study, two representative projects were chosen with the greatest decarbonisation potential and social impact: the modernisation of district-heated residential buildings and the creation of energy communities in condominiums. For the two or three select building types frequently encountered in Miskolc city, a business and legal model and an optimised technical intervention proposal with a roadmap were developed in the second study.¹¹ This is an integrated, replicable 'Miskolc Model' that combines essential deep renovation – like fixing degraded facades, with smart and active systems – with community photovoltaics (PV) in the 'mixed energy community' project, or with PV and district heating modernisation in the 'smart DH' concept. These technical models were translated into visual decision-making tools that can be presented to residents.

The goal is to create locally adapted community energy models through which energy-poor households, local communities and small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) in the buildings and public-service facilities can all benefit, as access to cheaper green electricity will reduce energy bills. Therefore, community energy is seen as a social infrastructure project: one that can reduce energy bills, support vulnerable residents and strengthen local solidarity while also contributing to decarbonisation targets.

Building local capacities for change

The 16 local events organised in Borsod-Abaúj-Zemplén county (mainly in Miskolc) during the project were all integral parts of the whole decarbonisation and concept planning process, during which we could share information, collect inputs, engage local citizens and discuss the seven community energy concepts and

¹⁰ Magyar Természetvédők Szövetsége / National Society of Conservationists - Friends of the Earth Hungary (NSC-FoE HU), [Mapping community-led energy transition solutions \(electricity, heat\) in Miskolc \(Hungary\) from energy and social perspective](#), December 2024.

¹¹ Magyar Természetvédők Szövetsége / National Society of Conservationists - Friends of the Earth Hungary (NSC-FoE HU), [Integrált tanulmány Miskolc energiaközösségi megoldások](#), March 2026.

the two studies, while building local capacities and awareness about community energy and decarbonisation.

We also faced several challenges from which we learnt a lot. Our active cooperation with the municipal authority on promising decarbonisation solutions were hindered by bureaucracy, lack of data and political polarisation. Thus, after the first study, we agreed with experts and local stakeholders to shift our focus to residential decarbonisation concepts to be less dependent on modifications in public authority priorities. Another challenge was the missing dedicated funding for just transition (JTF and other EU fund spending delays and freezes), as well as delays and backtracking by the former Hungarian government in providing favourable legal, administrative and financial frameworks for community energy or residential building energy renovations.

Nonetheless, despite the challenges in Miskolc, MTSZ managed to engage a critical mass of local citizens and experts in decarbonisation planning and co-design as many as seven viable, possibly bankable decarbonisation projects that are prepared for implementation in the near future, perhaps under the more favourable legal, administrative and financial environment provided by the new Hungarian government.

Latvia

***Green Liberty** is a non-profit NGO founded in 1993. The organisation is active in providing input on improving policy, education, awareness raising in areas such as climate change, renewable energy, circular economy, sustainable lifestyles and consumption, as well as biodiversity. Green Liberty cooperates with other organisations within the scope of local and international networks (including CEE Bankwatch Network, CAN Europe, the European Environmental Bureau, INFORSE EUROPE and Beyond Fossil Fuels).*

As part of its previous work, Green Liberty has a lot of experience in organising capacity-building events on energy transformation topics for national and municipal stakeholders and energy experts. The organisation also provides trainings to NGOs on strengthening activism, advocacy work and campaign work in the rural areas and regions of Latvia. Green Liberty has extensive experience in planning and carrying out awareness-raising campaigns on energy transformation and climate-related topics. It is part of several working groups under the national committee working on the revision of the National Energy and Climate Plan and regularly prepares recommendations for policy documents related to energy transformation, climate policy, as well as holding meetings with stakeholders (on the national and EU level).

The Latgale region in Latvia

The main issue identified in Latvia was mobility and transport poverty within the wider just transition region of Latgale, located in the eastern part of the country, for which two cases were selected: the south-eastern city of Daugavpils and Rēzekne county.

Latgale is one of Latvia's designated transition regions and is economically weaker than many other parts of the country, which limits local investment capacity. Decarbonisation, in such a context, cannot be

reduced to high-cost flagship technologies. Instead, it must respond to everyday mobility needs in both urban and rural settings, especially where car dependence and transport poverty are already serious problems.

Cycling infrastructure in the city of Daugavpils

In Daugavpils, the focus was on cycling infrastructure. The municipality had already been planning a mobility plan, making it a useful moment to feed research directly into policy. However, the existing cycling network does not encourage a shift away from private cars. Problems include poor safety, weak connectivity between districts and the absence of basic supporting infrastructure such as bicycle stands near public buildings and multi-apartment complexes. A 2019 assessment ranked Daugavpils only 62nd out of 119 Latvian municipalities in terms of bicycle infrastructure per 1,000 inhabitants, reinforcing the conclusion that cycling has not yet been developed as a coherent mobility system.

To address this need, a study was finalised,¹² including suggested priority routes where cycling paths should be established and where existing paths could be improved (specific infrastructure improvements), concrete locations at public buildings where bike stands should be located, suggestions for low-cost monitoring of cycling traffic, and also suggestions on how the municipality should continue work on this topic. Also, specific recommendations were provided on the principles of where and how bike stands should be established, as well as what the best technical layout of bike paths is, based on experiences from other cities.

Rēzekne county's transport poverty

Rēzekne county presents a different but related challenge. Here the main issue is transport poverty in a large, sparsely populated rural area with a declining population and high dependence on private vehicles. Public transport connections are insufficient, while long-standing mobility difficulties could worsen when the second phase of the EU Emissions Trading System becomes operational in 2027. In practical terms, this means that rising costs for conventional fuels could hit rural households hard if alternative transport options remain weak. The Latvian case therefore connects decarbonisation to territorial inequality: without better mobility planning, climate policy could deepen exclusion for rural residents. A study was finalised¹³ containing specific recommendations for improvements in public transport timetables, information availability and the physical layout of bus stops, alongside other solutions for reduction of transport poverty.

In Daugavpils, earlier cycling plans and route investments had not yet produced a comprehensive and coordinated system. Cycling had not been treated as a municipal priority, resulting in fragmented routes, unsafe conditions and poor technical design. In Rēzekne county, public transport improvement had been mentioned in development programmes, but implementation was inconsistent and slow. These findings

¹² Zaļā brīvība / Green Liberty (GL), [Daugavpils city cycling infrastructure](#), February 2025.

¹³ Zaļā brīvība / Green Liberty (GL), [Public transport accessibility \(transport poverty reduction\) in the Rēzekne region](#), May 2025.

suggest that local authorities may acknowledge mobility decarbonisation in principle while still lacking the institutional focus and investment discipline needed for visible change.

The analyses propose targeted, strategic solutions rather than broad generic goals. For Daugavpils, that means building safer, better connected cycling infrastructure and integrating it into the city's broader mobility planning. For Rēzekne county, it would entail improving public transport routes, timetables and accessibility so that residents are less dependent on private cars.

Developing capacity for change

Two citizens' forums were held in Latvia: one on 12 June 2024 in Daugavpils¹⁴ and the other on 18 September 2024 in Rēzekne county.¹⁵ The forum held in Daugavpils, where traditions of civic participation are limited, was largely perceived by residents as an externally driven initiative, hindering mobilisation efforts. Nevertheless, the event proved useful in gathering the perspectives of citizens on the current state of cycling infrastructure in the city. Their input on what they view as the key challenges and the improvements they would like to see implemented was subsequently used to develop a cycling infrastructure roadmap for the city. In Rēzekne, where the forum was organised in close cooperation with a local citizens' advisory board, engagement was significantly stronger and discussions more substantive. The meeting generated valuable insights into mobility planning and helped raise awareness about future mobility challenges linked to the introduction of the second revision of the EU's Emissions Trading System, along with potential policy solutions. Importantly, the discussion encouraged members of the local community to self-organise in an effort to address these mobility issues as a collective.

Seven capacity-building events were held in Rēzekne, Daugavpils and Riga. First, local government and their staff were provided practical training on how to increase capacity and proactively incorporate renewable energy solutions, energy efficiency improvement measures, and zero-emission technologies into their construction plans. The second focus was on supporting Daugavpils municipal employees in gaining knowledge of cycling infrastructure planning. The representatives from the Daugavpils municipality met with relevant experts from the Riga.

Overcoming barriers

For Rēzekne county, the main barriers were linked to a lack of capacities, both in terms of the staff already overburdened with tasks and the area's minimal access to much needed financial resources. In such circumstances, our main achievement was bringing the topic of transport poverty to the table in the presence of decision makers (both from the local and national levels) and initiating discussions on multi-faceted solutions, not only traditional public transport systems. At the same time, the aim was to increase the common understanding of what transport poverty is and what mobility challenges rural areas face.

¹⁴ Zaļā brīvība / Green Liberty (GL), [Pasākums: vai Daugavpils var kļūt par velobraucēju galvaspilsētu?](#), 6 June 2024.

¹⁵ Zaļā brīvība / Green Liberty (GL), [Transporta nabadzība un zaļā pāreja: iedzīvotāji Viļānos aktualizē mobilitātes problēmas un dažādus risinājumus](#), 24 September 2024.

Ministry level civil servants gained better understanding of local mobility challenges and existing municipal barriers to implementing decarbonisation solutions. This can result in swifter implementation of Social Climate Plan measures, higher acceptance of ETS2, and the introduction of more effective measures for transport poverty reduction.

For Daugavpils, the main barrier is linked to political will, since power is very centralised there and municipal administration is not used to showing initiative. In Daugavpils, we brought together local politicians and municipal staff with citizens to discuss cycling infrastructure in the city, something that had never happened there before.

Energy transformation and decarbonisation planning in the easternmost regions in Latvia still requires plenty of awareness-raising and capacity-building measures, since the population in these regions (including municipal administrations and politicians) still do not fully understand the benefits of the transition. On the other hand, it is not an impossible task, as it is enough to create an understanding of the connection between economic benefits and energy transition to increase acceptance and willingness to work on these topics. At the same time, the economic struggles of the region also require extensive and tailored support. For smaller municipalities, such as those in Rēzekne county, this also means providing technical assistance in the preparation of projects and in carrying out feasibility studies. In the next EU budget, technical assistance support for such municipalities is a must if we want them to compete successfully with richer municipalities in accessing funds and implementing green solutions.

Poland

*The **Polish Green Network** (PGN) is an alliance of 11 major environmental and sustainable development associations and foundations from all around Poland. It was created in 1995 and registered in 2000. PGN advocates for social and environmental justice within sustainable development. Since 2008, PGN has been campaigning for climate protection and a socially just energy transition. PGN's aim is to influence the new energy policy in Poland to promote a zero-carbon energy transformation and more sustainable and climate-friendly energy production with focus on renewables, energy efficiency and community energy. In 2015, PGN co-founded the More than Energy (www.wiecejnizenergia.pl) movement to campaign for legislative changes that would unlock the potential of prosumers in Poland. PGN has run the movement's secretariat ever since and has organised the annual Community Energy Congress on community energy and energy savings among local, regional and national stakeholders. PGN has also been working very actively on the Polish NECP process from its very beginning. As a CEE Bankwatch Network member, PGN has also been involved in the People's Budget campaign launched to ensure that the next EU budget provides adequate funding opportunities to local, community-led transformative energy projects so that Europeans can make the most of the Clean Energy Package provisions on energy communities and active energy consumers. PGN has been involved in the Just Transition process in Poland since 2017 and was able to influence the draft versions of the Territorial Just Transition Plans to a very large extent in several regions. PGN continues to monitor the situation and is represented in a number of EU funds monitoring committees.*

The municipality of Kleczew

Kleczew is a small town in the Konin district of Eastern Wielkopolska, one of Poland's just transition regions. With a population of just under 10,000, Kleczew represents a municipality at an early stage of moving from a coal-based local economy toward a renewable and more energy-efficient future.

Heating is the main concern in Kleczew. Most buildings still rely on traditional, largely coal-based systems, which makes heat decarbonisation a priority task for the local community. Replacing these systems with cleaner technologies, such as heat pumps and photovoltaic installations, could reduce greenhouse gas emissions while also lowering energy consumption and operating costs. This framing is important because it links climate action directly to household economics. In a small town where many residents may evaluate transition measures mainly in terms of affordability, lower running costs are a critical part of the decarbonisation case.

Concrete progress is already underway. The municipality has launched projects to modernise the heating systems, notably through Poland's Clean Air programme, which supports households in replacing outdated heat sources and insulating single-family homes.

The risk of energy poverty

Social and economic issues receive explicit attention in Poland. Energy poverty is a major risk during transition processes. Households that struggle to maintain adequate indoor comfort may find it difficult to finance upgrades even when these would produce long-term savings. This means that policy design must combine environmental ambition with financial support and accessible advisory services. Without targeted public support, decarbonisation measures can bypass precisely those residents who would benefit most from lower energy bills and better housing quality.

To tackle this issue locally, PGN commissioned a study that delved into the issues faced by the building stock in the municipality, both individual households and publicly-owned buildings.¹⁶ The proposed solutions in Kleczew are practical and building focused. A central recommendation is the thermal modernisation of both public and private buildings. Better insulation and improved building envelopes are seen as essential because they reduce the amount of heat needed in the first place, making it easier and cheaper to switch to low-carbon heating technologies. Continued support for renewable heat and electricity options, especially heat pumps and rooftop photovoltaics, is also important. Together, these measures form a coherent approach: first reduce demand, then supply the remaining demand with cleaner systems.

¹⁶ Związek Stowarzyszeń Polska Zielona Sieć / The Polish Green Network (PGN), [Assessment of the decarbonisation potential of the building sector at the local level in the Kleczew commune](#), December 2024.

We also conducted a more in-depth energy audit for a complex of public school buildings,¹⁷ which serves as the key document required for energy retrofit applications. We also organised a meeting between local government representatives and the National Fund for Environmental Protection and Water Management, where civil servants were able to raise practical concerns regarding the transformation of heating systems in Poland.

Building local capacities

A citizens' forum was held on 22 September 2025 in Kleczew focused on practical questions related to energy transition support schemes for households. The audience expressed particular interest in obtaining information on how to reduce their domestic energy bills and get the most out of these schemes – clearly a topic of pressing concern for local residents. The forum also focused on the national Clean Air programme that aims to support the replacement of outdated heating sources with more environmentally friendly alternatives. However, bureaucratic barriers discourage many potential applicants. During the meeting, we analysed the individual situations of residents and explained the programme's rules in clear, accessible language.

Four capacity-building events were organised in both Konin and Kleczew, two towns in the Eastern Wielkopolska region. One event was set up in order to ensure that both the municipality and the research team were on the same level, that data is available and to better understand what the local challenges are when it comes to decarbonisation. Another of the events focused on teaching local NGOs how to use advocacy to bring about change at local, regional, national and international levels. One more important topic was focused on how to create transformative projects that contribute to local decarbonisation.

Initiating change

One of the more tangible outcomes of our work is creating potential for reduction in emissions. However, the project timeline was too short to fully decarbonise a building. The main achievement of the project lies in initiating the decarbonisation process at multiple levels and planting the seed of change across different social environments. Just as importantly, the project helped to build a foundation for something that had previously been absent: external support for just transition.

Before the project started, the community operated without meaningful support—there was no technical assistance, no structured guidance and very limited awareness of available pathways for improving energy efficiency or transitioning to cleaner energy sources. In such a context, even the first steps were inevitably challenging and at times uneven. Yet they were also necessary. Establishing a foundation for networks between local stakeholders, residents and institutions proved to be a critical element of progress, enabling the exchange of experiences, mutual learning and the gradual building of trust. Raising awareness was another key dimension of change. As knowledge about energy efficiency and decarbonisation increased, so

¹⁷ Związek Stowarzyszeń Polska Zielona Sieć / The Polish Green Network (PGN), [Energy efficiency audit for Wanda Chotomska school and kindergarten complex in Kleczew, executive summary in English](#), March 2026.

did the community's capacity to engage with these issues in a more informed and proactive way. What began as isolated efforts started to evolve into a more coordinated and conscious approach to local transformation. It is also important to note that this process would have been significantly more difficult without the support of a local climate advisor introduced through a sister LIFE project: LIFE after Coal.¹⁸ This role provided much-needed insider expertise and supported other actors in navigating the early stages of change.

Romania

***Bankwatch Romania** is an NGO set up in 2012, with the goal of monitoring large infrastructure projects financed by international financial institutions, especially in the energy sector, in order to prevent harmful environmental and social impacts. Starting in 2016, developments in the energy sector worldwide, echoed also in Romania, have taken our work towards mining region redevelopment and Just Transition. Our strategy includes informing and empowering local communities in the coal regions in Romania, research, litigation in national courts and at the EU level, and media outreach at the national and EU level. Apart from focusing on the process of implementing climate and energy policies and measures that aim at speeding up the clean energy transition and moving towards a low carbon economy, Bankwatch Romania's work also consists in monitoring the available financial instruments and their consistency with long-term climate and energy objectives. The organisation has followed the elaboration process of key documents in the climate and energy field, namely the National Energy Strategy and the National Energy and Climate Plan, and the Just Transition programme. Bankwatch Romania has been involved in the Just Transition process in the country since its inception in late 2019. It has been a member of the national Just Transition Working Group and the regional working groups for Gorj and Hunedoara, working also in close cooperation with local NGOs and stakeholders. Bankwatch Romania has also had a leading role in facilitating meetings and roundtables of local government representatives in Gorj and Hunedoara to facilitate coordination and the sharing of good practices.*

The municipality of Petroșani

Petroșani is the largest municipality in the Jiu Valley and one of the most important urban centres in Romania's coal transition landscape. The decline of the town's coal economy has been accompanied by the deterioration of centralised heating, ageing housing stock and widespread energy poverty. This makes heating policy central not only to decarbonisation, but also to social inclusion.

In 2018, Petroșani still had a substantial thermal energy distribution network, serving 2,265 apartments, 33 households, 11 public institutions and 187 businesses through 33 heat distribution nodes. Heat came from the Paroșeni power plant via the district heating company Termoficare. However, accumulated debts led Termoficare into insolvency and the network sharply contracted. In response, many residents switched to individual gas boilers. The analysis carried out within our project treats this shift as problematic rather than

¹⁸ The Marshal Office of the Wielkopolska Region, LIFE After Coal project, [Climate advisors](#), January 2023.

as a successful market correction, because it fragments the system, locks households into fossil gas dependency and often leaves vulnerable residents with high and volatile costs.

Energy poverty is one of the central concerns in Petroșani. Residents face both affordability and accessibility problems in relation to heating. These are intensified by an ageing housing stock, weak recent development and the collapse of the central system. The research argues that energy efficiency measures are needed to reduce long-term consumption and heating costs, but it also makes clear that efficiency alone will not solve the problem if the city lacks a viable and socially acceptable heat supply model. In that sense, Petroșani shows how decarbonisation planning in former coal regions must bring together infrastructure, housing and welfare considerations.

Despite recognition of the heating problem, residents still lack a stable long-term solution. Local authorities and civil-society actors have raised the issue repeatedly, and organisations have proposed more autonomous models, including energy communities, but implementation remains weak. Data collection was also difficult, and support from local institutions was needed to reconstruct parts of the technical picture. This reinforces a broader theme: poor data and institutional fragmentation make it much harder to turn just transition priorities into concrete local investment projects.

Providing solutions

Three technical scenarios were taken into account in the commissioned study:¹⁹ decentralised, semi-centralised and centralised heating. In the decentralised model, buildings or users would rely on more localised heating technologies. In the semi-centralised option, each of Petroșani's 33 heat distribution nodes would receive a ground-source heat pump, effectively creating a network of local energy hubs. The centralised model would rebuild a city-wide heating system in a cleaner form. Indicative investment costs are compared across the scenarios, including substantial sums for heat pumps and photovoltaic systems, showing that all options require serious capital expenditure. The discussion is not limited to investment size alone; it also evaluates which model can best balance cost, environmental performance, technical reliability and social acceptability.

The semi-centralised solution appears especially important because it offers a compromise between full central restoration and complete household-level fragmentation. By using the existing distribution-node logic while modernising the technology, it may preserve some benefits of collective infrastructure without requiring a return to the exact former model.

Getting citizens involved

Five capacity-building events were organised in Petroșani and Gorj County, bringing together local authorities, regional institutions, NGOs and other stakeholders involved in the energy transition process.

¹⁹ Asociația Bankwatch România / Bankwatch Romania Association (BW RO), [Solutions to combat energy poverty in Petroșani Municipality](#), December 2024.

The first event focused on presenting the findings of the research on energy poverty and decarbonisation pathways in Petroșani, while also creating a space for participants to discuss practical solutions, local challenges and opportunities to reduce energy poverty through energy efficiency and renewable energy measures.

The following events focused on increasing stakeholders' knowledge of key topics related to a just energy transition. Participants explored the potential of energy communities to address energy poverty, discussed local challenges and solutions in Gorj County and exchanged experiences on the implementation of just transition initiatives. A dedicated workshop also helped local actors improve their understanding of stakeholder engagement, coordination, communication, and project development, drawing on examples from other coal regions.

A citizens' forum was held on 13 December 2025 in Petroșani. Using stratified random sampling to ensure a socially diverse group of participants, the forum provided a highly inclusive and legitimate space to discuss pressing challenges related to energy poverty and the heating transition. Participants were introduced to the concept of energy poverty. They also learned about some of the immediate and long-term measures to address it. These include individual solutions (such as energy efficiency schemes and vouchers), public measures (including caps and social tariffs), and broader strategies such as green investments, renovation policies, and energy communities. Participants also talked about their experiences with public administration and the bottlenecks they face in accessing support. Attendees expressed their appreciation for having the opportunity to share their concerns and explore potential solutions. The citizens' forum was particularly inspiring, as it demonstrated the extent to which communities need structured spaces to express their concerns and expectations regarding the decarbonisation process as a whole. It was insightful to see the diversity of local needs and perspectives, highlighting the importance of tailoring solutions to specific community realities. The openness and constructive engagement of participants showed that citizens are willing to contribute when given the opportunity.

Creating meaningful space for engagement

The project's main achievement was creating a meaningful space for dialogue with citizens while simultaneously strengthening the capacity of local authorities to better understand and address energy transition challenges. LIFE RePower the Regions helped map real community needs and supported local actors in navigating decarbonisation-related policies and funding opportunities. It also contributed to building trust and improving communication between communities and public authorities. Bringing together a diverse group of stakeholders and building a common understanding of the links between energy poverty, decarbonisation, and regional development is key. The events increased awareness of available solutions, encouraged cooperation between different actors and strengthened local capacity to support the energy transition process.

Here, the key challenges to decarbonisation included: the limited administrative and technical capacity at local level, insufficient channels of communication with citizens and insufficient financial resources, as well

as difficulties in accessing and managing available funding. In addition, the lack of reliable and granular data makes it harder to design investments that accurately reflect local needs and socio-economic realities. These barriers often slow down implementation even when political will exists.

The major conclusion is that strengthening local administrative capacity and bridging the communication gap between authorities and citizens remain essential for a successful and socially fair energy transition. Policies and funding schemes should be simplified and accompanied by accessible technical assistance, proactive outreach, and better data support to ensure municipalities can design and implement tailored decarbonisation measures effectively. Greater coordination between national and local levels would further improve implementation and impact.

Slovakia

*The Slovak part of the project was implemented by the **Friends of the Earth – CEPA (FoE-CEPA)** association, which has long supported the endogenous development of Slovak regions. Instead of relying on foreign investors, the organisation builds on utilising internal capacities, local raw materials, and developing local economies. It applies this concept especially in the transition of municipalities to sustainable energy and achieving self-sufficiency without fossil fuels. In the Upper Nitra region, the termination of coal combustion at the Nováky power plant brought the topic of heat decarbonisation even to towns that were not directly connected to it. A specific example is the town of Partizánske, for which the association has prepared expert studies and analyses focused on low-temperature heating systems, the development of photovoltaics, or the use of local geothermal potential.*

The town of Partizánske

Partizánske is a town of about 20,000 inhabitants in the Upper Nitra region, one of Slovakia's coal-transition areas. The town is deeply marked by the legacy of brown coal processing, which has imposed long-term environmental costs. In this context, district heating has become the focus of decarbonisation planning. The central argument is that replacing an outdated and increasingly uncompetitive heating system with a modern fourth-generation district heating network could deliver environmental, economic and social benefits all at the same time.

Partizánske, similarly to other towns, is carrying a major modernisation debt. Yet the energy crisis that began in 2022 showed that district heating can protect consumers better than fragmented individual solutions, especially when fuel markets become unstable. This experience reinforced the case for investing in a carbon-free, municipally steered heating system aligned with European green policy.

The town has full control over its heating system. It is in a stronger position to choose the most appropriate long-term solution rather than being forced to optimise around a privately controlled incumbent. This local control matters because it allows for planning that balances environmental, economic and social objectives instead of focusing narrowly on short-term price considerations. Through initial analyses, it was also established the municipality could potentially draw on opportunities offered by the Just Transition Fund

and Modernisation Fund, and related financing instruments, which would create a plausible route from strategic intention to implementation.

Preparing the ground for decarbonisation

A lot of progress was made already before the initiation of the LIFE RePower the Regions project. FoE-CEPA supported the municipality in getting studies done on the situation in Partizánske, technical preparation and the involvement of scientific institutions tasked with producing the evidence needed to steer the project. This merging of municipal ambition, technical expertise and external funding possibilities is one of the strongest features of the Slovak example.

In total, two studies were prepared within the scope of the LIFE RePower the Regions project. FoE-CEPA first commissioned a pre-feasibility study²⁰ to analyse the district heating system in the town, focusing on an assessment of possible future scenarios. It evaluated the town's current heating system and compared three distinct development pathways to identify the most viable option: 1) maintaining the Status Quo, 2) developing the Southern Connection (Šípok – Luhy), and 3) developing the Northern Connection. This approach was taken because the town operates two isolated heating grids. If one network has excess heat or cheap renewable energy, it cannot transfer it to the other, driving up costs and lowering energy security. In addition, it is currently acknowledged that modern district heating requires a multi-source system and diverse energy sources can only be managed efficiently if the grids are interconnected. Therefore, we needed to develop scenarios to prove that investing in grid interconnection delivers higher financial and operational value than maintaining two separate, legacy systems. Later, the EIB Target consultants (discussed below) recommended and provided more details on the Southern Connection. Additionally, the study assessed connecting more buildings to the district heating system to utilise the boiler plant's excess capacity.

The second commissioned study²¹ took a closer look at what the key players in the town think about such a huge transformation of the heating transformation. The survey encompassed the town leadership, council members, municipal companies (like technical services and property management), and, of course, the residents themselves. The verdict? It was seen as a massive challenge ahead, but the respondents also indicated an unexpected ace up the sleeve. It became clear that people wanted to switch from putting out fires to bringing in innovation, meaning that to move to modern technologies, it is not enough to just keep patching up old pipes forever. The recommendations for the city were clear:

- **Upgrade 'Internal Capacities':** Municipal companies and the town office need a personnel and economic upgrade. People are needed who do not just know how to fix a boiler, but how to strategically manage the entire system and fund it through external grants.

²⁰ Priatelia Zeme-CEPA / Friends of the Earth-CEPA (FoE-CEPA), [Development of the district heating system in the town of Partizánske](#), June 2024.

²¹ Priatelia Zeme-CEPA / Friends of the Earth-CEPA (FoE-CEPA), [Social research – support of decarbonisation in the city of Partizánske](#), June 2024.

- **Break It Down into Plain Language:** District heating sounds boring and complicated. That is why the town must start talking to citizens in using simple, human language. Some great places for such debates are not just official notice boards, but classic residential building meetings (*domové schôdze*), where plans can be explained from the bottom up.

One surprising insight also came from the survey's focus group consisting of town residents aged 40+. One might perhaps expect fear of change or apathy from people, but this was by no means the case! During discussions, one of the participants stated: 'We want to live in a town that is a leader in something—whether it is on a regional, a national or even international level!' And why shouldn't they become the leading municipality in implementing a modern, green district heating system?

Already in the first phase of the project, FoE-CEPA supported the town in submitting its application for the EIB's TARGET²² programme (Technical Assistance for Regions Undergoing a Green Energy Transition) – successfully. In the second phase, the organisation acted as an intermediary between the consultants and the town. This played a key role in preventing misunderstandings and ensuring that consultants received the necessary context as quickly as possible. We were also able to facilitate contacts with local experts, who were subsequently contracted by the EIB.

The most important outcome, after completing any technical assistance, is the immediate transition to the implementation of key investment steps that enable the first measures to be put into practice. In Partizánske, the town has already initiated preparatory activities, even though the technical assistance has not yet been formally concluded. These activities include the interconnection of the primary heat transmission pipeline, which will ensure the hydraulic linking of two previously isolated district heating circuits within the town's district heating system. Another planned measure is the construction of a 500-cubic-metre (m³) thermal storage tank, designed for short-term heat accumulation and peak load balancing within the district heating network.

The EIB confirmed in informal discussions that it remains interested in supporting initiatives with high potential for implementation in the future. The preference is for fewer general meetings and fewer strategy-drafting exercises, and instead for more in-depth, targeted advisory support directly linked to subsequent implementation. It is also worth noting – and in many ways a compliment – that the conclusions of the technical assistance were largely grounded in the data that had been collected by FoE-CEPA since 2022, as well as in the analytical work carried out over the following years by consultants hired through several channels, including the LIFE RePower the Regions project.

The preferred solution combines multiple low-carbon sources into a single integrated system. A key advantage is the existence of two geothermal wells, which are expected to play an important role in the new heating mix. There is also clear potential to integrate several energy sources in one coordinated system so that heat can be supplied from the most efficient source at a given moment. This systems approach is

²² European Investment Bank, [Technical assistance for green energy transition](#).

characteristic of fourth-generation district heating and is one reason the project is strategically significant beyond the town itself. We expect Partizánske to become a model for other municipalities in Upper Nitra and perhaps more widely in Slovakia.

Building capacities for change

Aside from research, a lot of effort was put into building the capacities of the municipality, its personnel and the town's citizens. The greatest focus during our project was placed on the people without whom the city would not stay warm for even a single minute—the staff of the municipal technical services in Partizánske. They are the ones keeping the system running. Naturally, they also represented the group for whom the idea of transforming the district heating was the most challenging, simply because they felt a high **sense of responsibility for the town's safety**.

These employees bear the burden of delivering a 100% reliable heat supply to the entire town, year after year. Therefore, a generational technology upgrade felt more like an unknown risk than a clear advantage. Their practice has always been hands-on and proven: *if a boiler bursts, replace it; if a pipe cracks, fix it*. Since they do not typically follow global trends in modern heating and face a language barrier, shifting to high-tech solutions meant taking an enormous step outside their comfort zone. For this reason, the majority of the capacity-building events were tailored specifically for address their needs, for example explaining the reasons for modernising the district heating system, the case for implementing more solutions based on solar energy or available technical assistance opportunities. The aim was not to overwhelm them with theory but rather show what modern heating solutions could realistically and safely look like in Partizánske. The adaptation process is still ongoing, and not everything can be perfect right away. However, the ice has been broken. Our technicians have realised an important fact: **there is no going back to the old system**. Initial concerns have turned into pragmatic respect.

In addition, a citizens' forum was held on 6 June 2025 in Partizánske and involved a series of thematic events aimed at different audiences, including students and residents directly affected by several proposed changes to the local district heating system. Local residents play a crucial role in the decarbonisation of district heating systems. As both end users and paying customers of municipal services, they have a vested interest in ensuring that the transition to low-carbon solutions is efficient, transparent, and responsive to their needs. They also have significant potential to influence heat consumption – both individually through household behaviour and collectively through the responsible management of residential buildings. This is what makes their involvement in the early stages of project planning so essential, particularly when it comes to increasing public understanding and awareness in support of the clean-energy transition. Findings from the social research study²³ supporting the town's decarbonisation efforts indicate that residents aspire to see their town become a leader in innovative solutions, with the heating sector presenting an ideal opportunity to fulfil this ambition by the town becoming a trend-setter in sustainable and modern approaches to energy and heating.

²³ Pavel Bors, Marta Kahancová, Matúš Sloboda, [Sociálny výskum – Podpora dekarbonizácie v meste Partizánske](#), Život po uhlí, 28 June 2024.

Many of the events organised within the scope of the project by FoE-CEPA also included representatives of other towns in Slovakia or exchanges with municipalities from other countries in central and eastern Europe, as the project in Partizánske has garnered a lot of interest from other municipalities thinking of following in their footsteps.

Implementing change – the challenges

Decarbonisation infrastructure projects exceed the time, financial, and capacity limits of small municipalities. This is strikingly evident in those that operate their own heating systems, where the lack of qualified capacities is even more pronounced. Without external support, they will not embark on other essential transformations, such as modernising their heating supply systems. Instead, they will only implement partial, isolated measures. Providing expert support and technical capacity is the most valuable contribution one can offer to such municipalities – especially to those that have kept their district heating systems in their own hands and can freely decide how to modernise them.

Naturally, the project must be implemented in phases, which means that the best solutions for the next stages need to be developed in parallel with those currently underway. A transformation of this scale requires a parallel approach: while one phase is being built, the next must already be technically and strategically prepared to ensure smooth continuity.

What lies ahead is not only supporting the currently planned interconnection and the construction of the heat storage facility but also creating a sustainable biomass supply model. However, this model must be understood as a transitional solution. Biomass has its limits, and long-term reliance on combustion is not the goal. For the transformation to make sense, it must lead toward non-combustion energy sources – above all geothermal heat and heat recovered from the wastewater treatment plant, which are stable, renewable, and available without burning fuel. These sources must form the core of future phases. At the same time, we must remain sensitive to the real-world context. The district heating system must function every single day, regardless of how quickly the transformation progresses.

Unfortunately, the Slovak transition regions are facing unprecedented delays in the implementation of the Just Transition Fund. If there is no current possibility of having funding for hydrodynamic testing of geothermal wells, then implementing the solutions must wait. And while the municipality waits, people's homes must be heated with what is available – biomass. This is a pragmatic step, not the final state. The town has been waiting for more than a year for the evaluation of its application to finance hydrodynamic testing of existing geothermal wells and the utilisation of heat from the municipal wastewater treatment plant. By now, research projects could already be ongoing in cooperation with scientific and research institutions. Such unnecessary delays demoralise everyone involved. The obstruction of the Just Transition Fund's implementation weakens not only this effort, but also other green projects being prepared in the region – and slows down the shift toward the non-combustion energy sources that are essential for the future.

The first brave pioneers of change

A small town with limited capacity for a full transformation would, by its own account, never have found the courage to take such a path on its own. Until recently, the approach had been quite straightforward: when a boiler broke, it was replaced; when a pipe burst, twenty metres were repaired. Now, thanks to our long-term and expert cooperation, the city has decided to pursue a comprehensive transformation of its district heating system. This means treating it as an integrated energy project, rather than a series of isolated investments. Such an approach is essential for optimising the town's future energy demand and covering it through a combination of local low-carbon and renewable sources.

Now that the town has a clear, data-driven district heating transformation plan, validated by the expertise of the EIB, support for the project is on the rise. The municipality is currently applying for a EUR 22 million grant from the Modernisation Fund for phase one of the project. It would involve joining two isolated heating networks and replacing old pipes where necessary, spanning a total of 10 kilometres. The city has also been recently successful in joining the EUCF programme. In addition, it has created a new position of energy manager and established a working group led by the city manager to coordinate activities related to the city's energy transition.

Ukraine

***Ecoaction** is the biggest environmental NGO in Ukraine and one of the few that actively and strategically works on the issues of energy transition, particularly issues related to coal. Ecoaction is the first NGO in Ukraine that in 2018 started working on the topic of the just transition of coal regions. Together with German and Ukrainian partners, Ecoaction began cooperation with the local authorities of coal towns in the Donetsk region (eastern Ukraine). As a result, in 2019, six coal town mayors, three local NGOs and the regional Chamber of Commerce and Industry united and created a Platform for Sustainable Development of Coal Towns of Donetsk region, specifically around the topic of transitioning away from coal in a just way. This is the first such alliance in the history of independent Ukraine. Since 2021, Ecoaction has engaged other Ukrainian coal towns – in the Luhansk, Dnipropetrovsk, Lviv and Volyn regions. Since the start of the Russian full-scale invasion of Ukraine on 24 February 2022, Ecoaction continues to work on the topic of just transition advocating to make it an essential part of Ukraine's reconstruction processes. The country's Energy Strategy, Long-Term Low Emissions Development Strategy and National Energy and Climate Plan, all adopted after 2022, still maintain the focus on and specifically mention just transition of coal regions and coal phase-out as part of Ukraine's post-war future. At the same time, even at this difficult time, all coal municipalities with which Ecoaction works have confirmed their commitment to the topic and joint activities.*

Municipalities in the Volyn region of Ukraine

In Ukraine, the focus was on Novovolynsk and the neighbouring villages of Lytovezh and Poromiv, communities with populations of about 58,000, 4,000 and 5,000 respectively. These settlements have been closely tied to coal mining since the 1950s, and Novovolynsk in particular was built around the needs of the

mines. The first rounds of mine closures in the 1990s were not matched by adequate just transition planning, leaving communities exposed to economic and social stress. Now that the last mines are expected to close, decarbonisation is presented not as a secondary policy issue, but as a pressing necessity linked to local survival and resilience.

The immediate technical challenge is the poor state of the heating system. In Novovolynsk, district heating depends on fossil gas and loses around 40% of its heat, indicating severe inefficiency. At the same time, a large share of residents across Novovolynsk, Lytovezh and Poromiv use individual heating systems, which makes local conditions fragmented and often expensive. This combination of network loss and household-level fossil-fuel dependency is a major obstacle to a fair and efficient energy transition. If nothing changes, households may continue to carry high costs while municipalities struggle with obsolete infrastructure.

The search for solutions

Despite these difficulties, the communities have developed sustainable energy and climate action plans, and a subregional Just Transition Action Plan which covers all three communities. Novovolynsk also has an energy efficiency strategy and intends to renovate a significant number of buildings. These are important foundations because they show that local authorities are not starting from scratch.

A range of stakeholders have a role in improving the situation, including Novovolynskteploenergo as the district heating operator, the city council, the village councils of Lytovezh and Poromiv, and homeowners' associations of apartment buildings. This stakeholder mapping is important because any future intervention requires coordination across different governance levels and property regimes. Decarbonisation cannot be delivered by a single institution alone – it requires municipalities, utilities, local communities and building-level actors to move in the same direction.

Public awareness and social readiness also matter in Ukraine. Evidence gathered in the commissioned survey²⁴ suggests a relatively high level of awareness of different heating technologies. More than three-quarters of respondents were very or somewhat familiar with the available options. This is significant because public understanding can reduce resistance to change and improve the prospects for acceptance of new solutions. At the same time, awareness does not automatically translate into action, especially where households face income constraints and municipalities lack investment resources.

The region needs cleaner and more efficient heating systems, stronger building renovation efforts and better coordinated long-term planning. Reducing system losses in district heating would be one priority. Improving the efficiency of individual buildings and clarifying which areas should remain on network heat and which might adopt alternative solutions would be another.

²⁴ Центр екологічних ініціатив “Екодія” / Centre for Environmental Initiatives Ecoaction (EA), [Survey of the population on the decarbonisation of heating in the Novovolynsk, Lytovezh and Poromivka communities of the Volyn region](#), November 2024.

Building local capacities

The survey of the local population showed that people generally support heating sector decarbonisation processes. The focus was placed on capacity-building events targeting municipal employees who can implement specific solutions. Eight trainings focused on the topics of heat supply and RES for municipal buildings. Additionally, support was provided to local NGOs, training them to better communicate the topic on the ground and enable monitoring of local just transition plans.

On 11 December 2025, a citizens' forum focused on the just transition was held in Kyiv,²⁵ bringing together community representatives from coal and other carbon-intensive regions alongside government authorities and civil society. The event functioned as a platform for stakeholders from different regions and across governance levels to engage in dialogue, coordination and agenda-setting, helping to clarify shared challenges, identify gaps in the execution of the just transition, and create new connections between communities. Discussions focused on the importance of continuing to implement just transition measures in coal regions, the potential expansion of these measures to other carbon-intensive regions, and reviewing the available financial resources and existing funding shortfalls. Participants gained a better understanding of the significant challenges communities face in navigating the just transition, how other industrial communities fit into the just transition framework, and the pitfalls and opportunities involved in financing community projects.

Implementing change in Ukrainian coal regions

The main barrier for a successful just transition results from low availability of funds. Given Russia's full-scale invasion, the financial capacities of communities and the state are decreased. Therefore, finding and securing financing are key issues. This is coupled with the lack of capacity at the municipal level, as the quality of the workforce has decreased due to relocation and army mobilisation.

Nonetheless, as a result of the RePower the Regions activities, the Novovolynsk community has developed its Strategy for the modernisation of its central heating system, while Poromiv and Lytovezh have increased their understanding of the topic due to the trainings we conducted, opening new avenues for change in the near future. At the same time, the adoption of Ukraine's State Target Program for the Just Transition of Coal Regions until 2030, which includes Ecoaction's and the towns' recommendations, is a significant step towards decarbonisation. The development of Novovolynsk's Strategy for the modernisation of central heating system and the adoption of the State Target Program for the Just Transition of Coal Regions until 2030 are important steps in the implementation of just transition policy in Ukraine.

²⁵ Центр екологічних ініціатив "Екодія" / Centre for Environmental Initiatives "Ecoaction" (EA), [How to ensure just transition for carbon intensive regions of Ukraine: highlights from the fourth annual forum in Kyiv](#), 12 December 2025.

Conclusions and recommendations

As we have worked with local municipalities and counties in declining regions for years, much of what we experienced within the implementation of the project did not come as much of a surprise and we were prepared to address any issues we encountered to the level possible. Yet, for us, what seems to be exceptionally frustrating is that little of this actually reaches decision makers at central levels (national or international). We see, for example, that in the current proposals for the shape of the new EU budget, decision makers notice that things have not been moving as fast as they should, but the reasons for this situation are not sufficiently addressed in the suggested policy and funding frameworks. For this reason, this report on the LIFE RePower the Regions project serves not only as an overview of how such work can be conducted in small municipalities and transitioning regions throughout central and eastern Europe, frequently despite many unfavourable circumstances, but primarily as a form of identifying the major obstacles and challenges to decarbonisation processes and providing recommendations for how policy, funding and technical assistance frameworks can be improved.

At present, many European municipalities and regions face significant challenges in implementing transformative projects, including limited access to reliable data, insufficient technical and administrative expertise, and barriers to funding and innovation. Addressing these gaps is essential to accelerate the transition to low-carbon technologies.

Effective decarbonisation planning requires:

- better access to quality data;
- enhanced local capacity and targeted support; and
- better alignment between policy, financing, and technological solutions.

A central priority is improving the availability, quality and use of data. More detailed and standardised data collection systems are needed, supported by increased funding and a stronger focus on digitisation. Ensuring that data is accessible and aligned with local needs will enable municipalities to make informed decisions. Involving citizens in data collection processes can further enhance both the quality of information and public awareness of its importance for climate action.

At the same time, local municipalities require significantly greater support to plan and implement decarbonisation measures. Many, particularly smaller municipalities, lack the administrative and technical capacity to navigate complex funding systems or design effective projects. Strengthening this capacity through dedicated funding, expert support, and targeted training is crucial. Technical assistance should be tailored to local contexts and prioritise those with the greatest needs. In addition, simplifying access to funding programmes and promoting inclusive, transparent decision-making processes can help ensure that decarbonisation efforts are both effective and widely supported. Communicating the tangible local benefits of these initiatives is also key to securing community engagement.

Expanding access to technical assistance and capacity-building programmes is another critical element. Municipalities need practical guidance not only on decarbonisation strategies but also on financing, project development, and implementation. Ensuring that this support is accessible, targeted, and responsive to local challenges will help bridge existing capacity gaps and enable more municipalities to take action.

In parallel, there is a need to accelerate the deployment of green technologies. This includes identifying and promoting solutions that are already scalable and can deliver immediate impact. At the same time, emerging technologies must be systematically assessed to understand their potential and limitations. Where solutions are not yet viable, targeted support should be provided to overcome barriers, reduce costs, and facilitate their wider adoption.

Finally, stronger policy and financing frameworks are essential to underpin all of these efforts. Clear and ambitious national strategies can provide direction and long-term certainty, while supportive legislative frameworks can enable the uptake of clean technologies. Expanding subsidies for renewable energy and improving access to diversified financing mechanisms will further support implementation. National governments also play a crucial role in assisting municipalities with co-financing requirements, ensuring that local projects can move forward.

Taken together, these actions will lead to more informed decision-making; stronger local capacity; and faster, more effective deployment of decarbonisation solutions. By addressing both structural and practical barriers, they can significantly enhance the overall impact and inclusiveness of climate action at the local level.

In our first report from the project,²⁶ we provided a detailed list of recommendations that we consider the most essential for accelerating local decarbonisation. As we finalise the LIFE RePower the Regions project almost two years later, they remain equally important and relevant if we are truly committed to decarbonising the European Union. Until the implementation of decarbonisation projects at the local level, even in the smallest of municipalities, becomes fully economically, administratively and technologically viable, it will remain very complicated to ensure a speedy decarbonisation of the continent.

Improve data collection

- Introduce detailed data collection requirements.
- Increase funding and support for data collection.
- Increase funding for quality data collection with active citizen involvement.
- Raise awareness among citizens about the importance of data collection.

²⁶ Dan Dobre, CEE Bankwatch Network, [RePowering the regionsA comparative analysis of decarbonisation strategies in nine central and eastern European countries](#), December 2024.

- Prioritise data digitisation relevant to decarbonisation planning.
- Ensure data accessibility for local municipalities.
- Align data collection efforts with local needs.
- Introduce smart metering for granular energy data

Increase support for local municipalities

- Increase administrative capacity through funding for expert hiring or contracting.
- Expand capacity-building activities on decarbonisation topics, funding, and technical assistance.
- Streamline funding and technical assistance programmes for smaller municipalities.
- Increase targeted, place-based, and tailored technical assistance.
- Support awareness-raising campaigns to promote clean decarbonisation solutions.
- Prioritise inclusive and transparent decision-making processes with strong community engagement.
- Highlight the benefits of decarbonisation projects for local communities.

Develop transformative potential for decarbonisation

- Establish national policy frameworks with clear, ambitious goals, measures, and supporting instruments for real, long-term decarbonisation solutions.
- Prioritise the introduction of favourable legislative frameworks for clean decarbonisation solutions.
- Make subsidy schemes for renewables readily available, especially in the case of technologies that are still not the most economically viable but are innovative green solutions with high potential for future scalability.
- Identify, categorise, evaluate and supplement financing mechanisms as needed.
- Provide national government support for municipal co-financing needs in decarbonisation planning and implementation.
- Offer combined deep renovation grants, shifting from solely subsidising active technologies.
- Establish targeted technical assistance funds to cover the ‘soft costs’ of forming energy communities (e.g. legal foundation, engineering audits, EMS software).



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