

Repower the Regions After-LIFE Exploitation: Communication and replication plan



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

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

Project acronym: LIFE22-CET-Repower the Regions

Project duration: 01.10.2023 - 30.06.2026

Project summary

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

Coordinating beneficiary: CEE Bankwatch Network

Associated Beneficiaries: Ekologichno sdruzhenie “Za Zemiata” (**ZZ**) / Friends of the Earth Bulgaria, Centrum pro dopravu a energetiku / Centre for Transport and Energy (**CTE**), MTÜ Eesti Roheline Liikumine

/ Estonian Green Movement (**EGM**), Magyar Természetvédők Szövetsége / National Society of Conservationists - Friends of the Earth Hungary (**NSC-FoE HU**), Zelená brivība / Green Liberty (**GL**), Związek Stowarzyszeń Polska Zielona Sieć / The Polish Green Network (**PGN**), Asociația Bankwatch România / Bankwatch Romania Association (**BWRO**), Priatelii Zeme-CEPA / Friends of the Earth-CEPA (**FoE-CEPA**) and Centre for Environmental Initiatives “Ecoaction” (**EA**).

Project duration: 01.10.2023 - 30.06.2026

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1. Introduction

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

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

Building on our former experience with LIFE funding, we worked to develop the first models for implementing inclusive and just local and regional clean energy plans. The RePower the Regions project developed the skills and capacity of local authorities and actors to achieve Fit for 55 and REPowerEU objectives. Using participatory planning methods and with the support of the scientific community, we created holistic plans and roadmaps for introducing solutions, such as energy saving, energy efficiency, local and community-led renewable energy initiatives and detailed plans for renewables-based heating and cooling solutions (including district heating). Through gaining strong local support and providing practical guidelines for the development of sustainable projects, we aimed to collect quality green investment proposals and trigger financing for the regions through advocacy activities, supporting pilot projects and disseminating information on good solutions.

1.1 Project goal and objectives

Our **main objectives** ensured that the regions' clean energy plans are aligned with EU 2030 climate goals and have strong support locally, and to provide practical guidelines and roadmaps on how to repower the regions.

The specific objectives of the project were:

1. Support to regional and local authorities and their capacities to deliver, implement and monitor ambitious short- and medium-term clean energy plans and strategies for 2030 are increased in 9 countries through the planned capacity-building activities and provision of expertise.
2. Ambitious decarbonisation and energy efficiency solutions and planning are developed, and clean energy community-led projects are enabled in 9 countries through our awareness-raising and capacity-building activities, participatory consultation processes and provision of expertise.
3. Approaches that facilitate the integration of clean energy, and thus reduce fossil fuel consumption by 2030, are developed in 9 countries through our research-based and capacity-building-focused activities, advocacy and actions aimed at increasing investment opportunities.
4. The participation and engagement of all relevant public and private stakeholders is accelerated and increased in 9 countries through our awareness-raising and capacity-building activities, as well as participatory consultation processes.

1.2 Project area of implementation

We focused on 14 just transition regions with the potential to move toward a low-carbon economy. These included:

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

- **Poland** – Związek Stowarzyszeń Polska Zielona Sieć / The Polish Green Network (**PGN**), 1 coal-mining region (primarily Eastern Wielkopolska)
- **Romania** – Asociația Bankwatch România / Bankwatch Romania Association (**BW RO**), 2 coal-mining regions (Hunedoara and Gorj)
- **Slovakia** – Priatel'ia Zeme-CEPA / Friends of the Earth-CEPA (**FoE-CEPA**), 1 coal-mining region (Upper Nitra)
- **Ukraine** – Centre for Environmental Initiatives “Ecoaction” (**EA**), 1 coal-mining region (Volyn).

The 16 regions were chosen due to their unique situation as pioneering areas for energy transformation in CEE. These are also areas where our consortium members have done extensive work in recent years, creating a solid base for the planned activities.

2. Project outcomes

The outcomes of the RePower the Regions project included:

- strengthening local, regional and national capacities for clean energy planning,
- developing inclusive and evidence-based decarbonisation strategies,
- promoting stakeholder engagement in decarbonisation processes across Central and Eastern Europe.

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

Based on our in-depth analyses of the bottlenecks and challenges that our project faced in different countries, we identified issues that are typical for particular countries, regions or localities and those that are broader in scale and point to systemic problems that impact decarbonisation processes across countries. Therefore, another outcome was the development of a set of recommendations for how processes, data, funding, technical assistance and policy frameworks can be improved to accelerate decarbonisation. Key recommendations emerging from the project include:

- ensuring early and continuous stakeholder involvement,
- embedding clean energy planning within local and regional governance structures,
- strengthening technical and financial support for local actors,

- aligning regional and national strategies with EU climate and energy objectives.

More detailed recommendations from our work can be found in three publications:

- *RePowering the regions: A comparative analysis of decarbonisation strategies in nine central and eastern European countries, published in December 2024*
- *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, published in June 2026*
- *Repower the regions How to make a heating and cooling plan for municipalities A methodology for creating a sustainable and just plan for district heating decarbonisation*

3. After-LIFE exploitation, communication and replication plan

3.1 Main actions of the After-LIFE Plan

a. Exploitation

Within the *Implementation and Monitoring Framework*, published in June 2026, we completed a survey of the implementation of the LIFE RePower the Regions project in eight of the countries included in our project (Bulgaria, Czechia, Estonia, Hungary, Latvia, Poland, Romania, Slovakia). In this way, we could conduct an analysis of what worked and what did not work well within the project. This will be presented here in short to provide an overview of how the project can be further exploited, primarily **setting up a model of authority-citizen partnerships for the implementation of actionable decarbonisation plans.**

In general, we have found that the structure of the project worked well. The division of the project into clear steps was one of its strongest aspects:

- Scoping activities – involving initial analysis of the selected municipality or region and agreement on the concrete topic of the analyses
- Research activities – commissioned in-depth studies and analyses relevant to the municipality or region
- Capacity-building activities – tailored to the particular needs and situation in the region
- Decarbonisation plan follow-up – activities aimed at moving the developed plan to the next stage, e.g. grounding it in local strategic commitments, preparing it for the fund application process, developing commitment for its further implementation
- Comms activities – supporting the other activities

Nonetheless, many bottlenecks and challenges were identified throughout the project, which have been discussed in more detail in the publications listed in chapter 2 here. The obstacles include the following: lack of access to the data needed for the commissioned analyses, low civic participation levels, low administrative, technical and financial capacities, changing political landscapes or willingness to take on innovative projects, lack of regulatory and legislative frameworks for decarbonisation, poor access to financial support, etc.

Therefore, in many of the cases the initial approach taken had to be slightly adapted to ensure the most favourable result possible. Fortunately, our approach from the very beginning was one of adapting to changing circumstances and finding ways of working with the municipalities in even the most challenging situations. For example, in Hungary, in the municipality of Miskolc, after changes in local government, the project beneficiary adjusted the approach to focus in more detail on a smaller number of projects that could be implemented by citizens rather than by the municipality itself.

However, we consider the citizen-authority model that we have implemented to be an absolutely essential one in what we see as still the initial stages of decarbonising European municipalities, as it allows for:

- A strong focus on developing local capacities that are necessary to ensure long-term project impact and further exploitation and replication of the project results
- An approach that encompasses flexibility and immediate troubleshooting to adapt to changing circumstances
- Sharing knowledge locally of existing technical assistance, technological, funding, legislative and policy frameworks
- Bringing the necessary expertise and case studies that can inspire the implementation of innovative solutions
- Increased buy-in by local communities who are provided with information and a possibility to voice their opinions in a meaningful manner
- Facilitating the development of networks and contacts with other similar municipalities, relevant experts, research centres, etc. and also within the municipality or region itself among various stakeholders
- Developing trust and relationships with local municipalities and regions that will make future similar endeavours easier

One of our main takeaways from the many project monitoring discussions we have had is that this project should be continued and further used to develop similar solutions for other towns or to continue to provide support for those within this project that have not yet managed to bring their projects close to implementation.

b. Communication

In communication during the project, we were following the LIFE RePower the Regions *Communication and dissemination plan* that was designed at the beginning of the project to plan relevant activities and communication channels in order to involve all stakeholders interested in the outcomes of the project.

The main communication approach was to change prevailing public and political attitudes to decarbonisation by promoting models that guide the implementation of inclusive and just clean energy plans at local and regional levels. This goal was achieved by bringing together different stakeholders, from decision makers to community members, enabling them to exchange, discuss and implement best practices while amplifying community voices in the media. The results and lessons of these actions have been integral parts of our evaluation of the project.

Communication after the project finishes will focus on dissemination of the results and multiplying the impact of the outcomes of the project.

Just-transition.info will continue to serve as one of the communication channels where we promote good practice examples through adding relevant podcasts, blog posts, publications and other materials that can serve as inspiration for different actors.

A special dissemination tool – an interactive toolkit ‘Repower the Regions: Ambitious and inclusive clean energy plans for repowering the just transition regions’ has been created and published in June 2026 to gather all results of the project and share them with wider audience. The toolkit has a creative storytelling approach in which the project Repower the Regions is a main narrator of the story and takes the readers through the achievements and successes of the project. Thanks to this approach, the interactive, visually appealing tool, and planned extended promotion, we aim to reach wider audience and share project results. Our national partners will continue using their websites for the promotion of various project deliverables.

Bankwatch is also a member of several climate coalitions and networks, within which we will also disseminate the project results, such as the Energy Saving Coalition, The European Alliance for a Just Transition, Climate Action Network (CAN) and the Beyond Fossil Fuel coalition. Through these and various other platforms, we will continue to share our work.

Our communication strategy was aimed at attracting potential investors, such as the European Investment Bank, the European Bank for Reconstruction and Development and other public development banks, as well as small and medium-sized enterprises. To this end, we convened face-to-face meetings, round-table discussions, webinars and social media events. Our communication plan achieved its target of reaching a large audience of at least 100,000 members of the general public, thanks to strategic targeting and amplification of our messaging in the national and international media.

We expanded our media coverage of the just transition process and decarbonisation project through communication activities, such as pitches to journalists and direct send-outs of opinion pieces and stories

from the targeted regions. Our proactive and direct engagement with journalists proved to be an effective tool for amplifying our messaging and propelling the topics of decarbonisation and energy transformation to the forefront of the media and political agenda. Around important events, we intensified our media outreach by providing select journalists with interviews, quotes and background information, sharing human-interest stories on topics such as progressive energy communities in the regions, and promoting relevant publications. During the project we identified strategic journalists (such as Eliška Volencová from The European Correspondent) and we will continue this cooperation in order to make sure that the topics we work on are covered by media.

The benefits of decarbonisation and energy transformation will be increased through a series of social media posts showcasing good examples from other regions and providing information on various aspects of decarbonisation, targeting residents in respective regions and the broader public. Our main channels of communication include various social media platforms (Facebook, Bluesky, LinkedIn, Instagram), where we will further promote publications, such as podcasts, blog posts and specifically designed informational social media posts with attractive visuals on decarbonisation benefits. We will also have special edition of our LinkedIn newsletter devoted to just transition and results of this project. Additional amplifiers of messages include publications in the media, on the local, regional, national and EU levels, which will increase topic relevance and help in delivering information to local communities.

Going forward, the Bankwatch communications team will continue to monitor communication and dissemination indicators through ongoing analyses of our social media, website outreach and media presence. This will include tracking internet traffic data, changes in activity flow, the distribution of user views, and user visit depth. Additionally, we will use our campaign monitor tool to monitor statistics related to the newsletters and emails we distribute.

c. Replication

The project's replication potential is supported by a comprehensive toolkit containing methodologies, research approaches, databases, case studies, and good practices that can be adapted to different regional contexts. Replication can be achieved by combining capacity-building activities, participatory planning methods, and targeted awareness-raising efforts, while tailoring actions to the specific readiness and needs of each region. Continued support through EU policies, funding programmes, and knowledge-sharing networks will be essential to scaling up these approaches across Europe and beyond.

The ground for project replication was in fact already set during the implementation of the project through the inclusion of other municipalities in our capacity-building activities, expert visits, webinars or roundtables. In our opinion, there is high probability for project replication in most of the countries that we included in our project, e.g.

- Bulgaria: high interest in the project from municipalities neighbouring Pernik, particularly Bobov Dol and Kyustendil; interest was also shown in the project results at the national level in Sofia

- Estonia: the first energy community is currently being set up in Ida-Virumaa, which will lead to more such initiatives popping up; the recommendations developed by the Estonian Green Movement for energy communities were also met with interest at the national level
- Slovakia: high interest was shown by other municipalities in the Upper Nitra region in the fourth-generation district heating project developed for Partizanske; also by other actors more broadly throughout Slovakia, as well as by towns in other countries in central and eastern Europe

We have also prepared a methodology ‘Repower the regions: How to make a heating and cooling plan for municipalities. A methodology for creating a sustainable and just plan for district heating decarbonisation’, published in September 2024, which can be used further to support municipalities embarking on such an endeavour. The methodology proposed in this study for local heating and cooling planning at the local level is supplemented by a set of specific legislative and regulatory recommendations at the state level.

However, it is imperative that a lot of the bottlenecks, challenges and obstacles that we identified throughout project implementation be remedied to make the decarbonisation process easier for future implementors of decarbonisation projects.

3.2 Target groups of the After-LIFE Plan actions

Our target audience will be local and regional authorities, the main implementers of clean energy transition plans, local communities and civil society organisations, with emphasis on vulnerable community members, as well as relevant national and EU-level stakeholders, such as policy makers as they are the key drivers of climate and energy legislation, allocating funding that can enable clean energy plan deployment and increase chances for replication of successful examples; last but not least for amplifying our message, national and international media will be targeted.



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