CEESEU-DIGIT

Central and Eastern Europe Sustainable Energy Union's Design and Implementation of regional Government Initiatives for a just energy Transition

The synthesis report on six intergovernmental dialogue and consultations with key stakeholders
Deliverable D3.1

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1. Contents

2. List of pictures

3. Background of the CEESEU-DIGIT project

The Central and Eastern European Sustainable Energy Union's Design and Implementation of regional Government Initiatives for a just energy Transition (CEESEU-DIGIT) aims to build the capacity of public administrators in Central and Eastern Europe to develop Energy and Climate Action Plans (ECAPs) that not only promote increased energy efficiency, sustainable energy, reduced carbon emissions and improved climate change adaptability, helping the region to contribute towards meeting the EU's climate goals, but also plans that follow the intent of the Commission to "leave no-one behind" in the process of the just transition to energy security and the goal of a climate-neutral Europe. To ensure a clear understanding among partners, the project's Advisory Board, and the EC that an ECAP+ includes sufficient and well-targeted attention to the social justice components of the clean energy transition, the term ECAP+ is used in the project.

CEESEU-DIGIT's primary objective is to build capacity in 6 carbon intensive regions in 6 countries in the CEE for holistic regional ECAPs aligned with NCEP national targets supporting the Green Deal, and will involve marginalised and vulnerable groups, especially energy-poor households. A second objective is to assist municipalities to formulate, fund, and implement their ECAPs aligned with regional ones. At both levels, extensive capacity building will be extended to assist with building ECAPs.

Drawing municipalities into energy regions will help cross-pollinate ideas, share knowledge and tasks, and apply for financing. Public-sector capacity building (WP2, WP3) will help (a) formulate a holistic ECAP+ with energy provisions and carbon footprint reduction while improving climate-sensitive social goods - mobility, parks, playgrounds, clean air and water, biodiversity conservation; (b) address energy poverty - heating/cooling, adequate ventilation/lighting, domestic hot water, cooking; (c), attend to constituents and act on behalf of their needs; (d) understand financing options and how to apply for these; and (e) work with the private sector to mute opposition to the CET and to encourage and incorporate funding of ECAP+ initiatives by business (WP5). A just Clean Energy Transition (CET) needs to maximise support, minimise opposition, and overcome apathy, requiring social science/social psychology theory to be applied (WP3). Non-public sector stakeholders (key players, context setters, the crowd, and subjects) will each be targeted by specific social and conventional media outreach (WP6).

Dissemination will be (a) upward to national levels, the CoM, and the EU for use in energy transition planning (WP5, WP6); (b) across a broader CEE geography via the Central and Eastern Europeans Sustainable Energy Union (CEESEN), a recently established NGO, to have by the end-of-project 2500 members using its online

platform to share best practices, lessons learnt, and ideas that can advance the EU's climate goals (WP6).

As a result of implementing the CEESEU-DIGIT project, it is anticipated that several important longer-term impacts will be achieved, a selection among which include:

- 6 high-quality ECAP+s formulated that align GHG reduction targets with 2030 goals and address the special needs of energy-poor, elderly, and minority communities, to include people with disabilities;
- Public/private participation of 900 people in ECAP+ planning meetings to voice their concerns;
- 18 Regional Work Groups are formalised to provide ongoing input into ECAP+ implementation and a longer-term, holistic vision for a just transition;
- At least 66 public sector employees are capacitated to develop regional ECAP+s including mapping of stakeholders and collection of baseline data, and to utilise participatory governance structures to ensure involvement of all stakeholders, especially groups that are often marginalised (energy poor, ethnic minorities, migrants, elderly, people with disabilities, Roma, etc.);
- At least 200 people from civil society and vulnerable groups are capacitated to advocate on behalf of their interests in relation to energy policy/transition;
- Regional/municipal governments designate 7% of their budget to energy transition activities.

4. Relevance of this Deliverable

This synthesis report presents the outcomes, key insights, and lessons learned from six intergovernmental dialogues and associated stakeholder consultation processes implemented across Central and Eastern European (CEE) regions as part of Work Package 3 (WP3) of the CEESEU-DIGIT The overarching goal of WP3 is to develop integrated, inclusive, and just Energy and Climate Action Plans (ECAP+) through a collaborative and multi-level governance framework.

The report focuses on emphasizing horizontal intergovernmental communication and engagement between regional and municipal public actors. It also captures the broad stakeholder engagement processes that align with Private sector stakeholders, among others, are included in energy planning in 6 targeted regions through regional competency to create and compile an integrated and just energy & climate action plans is demonstrated in 6 partner regions.

5. ECAP+ document structure

As part of the project and its implementation the designated document structure were formulated. Main goals of the development of **a new type of uniform, holistic, cross-sector Energy and Climate Plans (ECAP+)** for regional implementation are:

• promoting a just energy transition,

• placing great emphasis on adaptation and landscape-level planning compared to the already existing energy and climate plans with particular regard to vulnerable/marginalized social groups and energy poverty, as well as the social aspects of climate sensitivity and climate protection goals,

• ensuring alignment with EU 2050 goals related to carbon neutrality,

• preparing these documents in coordination with the goals set in the National Energy and Climate Plans at the national level,

• increasing financial support and planning for just energy transition.

A new approach to ECAP+ document created within the CEESEU-DIGIT project put a special attention to the aspects like: just transition, Energy poverty, Energy and climate approach alignment, action plan with the available financing options, Energy security, political environment.

The technical parts: Baseline Emission inventory, Risk and vulnerability assessments are based on the Covenant of Mayors and SECAP schemes.

Structure of the document is following:

ECAP+ (draft of the new approach to the regional-level Energy and Climate Plan document)

1. Introduction

1.2. ECAP+ aims and objectives

1.3. Aims towards just transition

1.3.1. Definition of just energy transition

1.3.2. Energy security

1.3.3. Energy poverty

1.3.4. Addressing climate change

2. Regional ECAP+ summary

3. Vision

3.1. Regional vision in regards of ECAP+ targets and existing plans

(Summary of the regional vision enclosing concrete statement, giving targets and timeframe that include aims towards just transition, participation and involvement of community and stakeholders.)

4. State of art

4.1. Situation on the European and National Level

4.2. Regional authority

4.2.1. Description

4.2.2. Role and scope of the authority

4.3. Overview of existing plans

(existing plans in the region and their short description and summary)

4.3.1. Just transition in existing plans

(definition of the just transition if exists within the existing plans presented on the regional or national level.)

4.4. Regional Profile

4.4.1. Demography

4.4.2. State of regional infrastructure and buildings

4.4.3. Business environment

(relevant sectors, profitability, trends, Gross domestic product - GDP)

4.4.4. Geography

4.4.4.1. Regional climate situation

4.4.4.1.1. Annual overview

(solar and wind activity, temperature, precipitation)

4.4.4.1.2. Extreme weather and climate events

4.4.5. Political environment

(levels of government, political parties, political trends, efficacy and effectiveness of communication among Multi-Level Government entities – MLG Governance)

4.5. State of energy in the region

4.5.1. Energy sources

4.5.1.1. Natural resources in the region

4.5.1.2. Non-renewable Energy Sources

4.5.1.3. Renewable Energy Sources

4.5.2. Energy consumption

4.5.3. Energy infrastructure

4.6. Potential of the region

(Possible directions of improvement within the sectors mentioned below for BAU and "green transition" visions)

4.6.1. Infrastructures improvement

4.6.2. Buildings energy efficiency improvement

4.6.3. Potential economic growth

4.6.4. Renewable energy potential

4.6.5. Digitalization of energy system potential

4.6.6. Adaptation planning for climate disruption

5. BEI (Baseline Emissions Inventory) analysis

5.1. Inventory year

5.2. Number of inhabitants in the inventory year

5.3. Emission factors approach

5.4. Emission reporting unit

5.5. BEI results in terms of final energy consumption and emissions

5.6. Energy projections until 2030

6. Risk & vulnerability assessment (RVA)

6.1. Expected extreme climate events at regional/local level

6.2. Estimated impact of extreme events for activities and infrastructures

6.3. Groups at risk because of the impact of events

(on the scale: 1-10, where 10 = most-at-risk)

7. Regional energy security

7.1. Strategies and policy

7.1.1. National level

7.1.2. Regional level

7.2. Actual status of energy supply

7.3. Critical infrastructure and cybersecurity

(state of the Critical infrastructure in the region)

7.3.1. Actual status of cybersecurity level of infrastructure

7.3.2. Existing plan for cybersecurity improvement

7.4. Vulnerability to physical attack/hardening of energy infrastructure

(in a reference to the Ukrainian War and their energy supply being attacked and disrupted)

8. Energy poverty

8.1. Energy poverty description

8.1.1. Energy poverty definition

(Definition of the energy poverty, if considered in the existing plans presented in regional/national level.)

8.2. Energy poverty indicators

8.2.1. Vulnerable groups indicators

(people unable to keep proper home sufficiently warm, excess winter mortality, people living in bad state buildings, people at risk of poverty or social exclusion – borderline and energy poor households, excess summer heat morbidity and mortality etc.)

8.2.2. Structural indicators

(Dwelling comfortably cool during summer, dwelling comfortably warm during winter)

8.2.3. Cost indicators

(Costs covered by households in the energy poverty situation, Energy prices to be considered - electricity prices, fossil fuels etc.)

8.3. Preventive actions

8.4. Mitigation actions

8.5. Trainings

9. Just Energy Transition and mitigation measures

9.1. Mitigation measures for reduction of GHG emissions

9.2. Other assessment and adaptation options

9.3. Existing solutions for marginalized groups

9.4. Legislation/policy on RES and energy efficiency

(National or regional level)

9.5. Involvement of stakeholders and citizens

(engaged stakeholders, activities, identified priorities of the stakeholder groups, ways of implementing the stakeholders interests within the ECAP+ development process)

9.5.1. Legislative authority

9.5.2. Citizens participation

9.5.3. Local business

9.5.4. Vulnerable groups

9.5.5. Other groups

10. Financial assessment

10.1. Financial instruments and opportunities

10.2. Regional Sustainability Plans

10.3. Actions and measures on energy prices

10.3.1. energy taxation

10.3.2. feed-in tariffs for energy communities

11. Implementation

11.1. Implementation process

11.2. Coordination and organizational structures

12. Monitoring

12.1. Monitoring of CO2 emissions

12.2. Monitoring of energy poverty status at regional/local level

12.3. Monitoring Tools

6. Intergovernmental dialogue & stakeholders' engagement

Intergovernmental dialogue

Part of the tasks of Work package 3 - Development of Integrated, holistic, cross-sectoral energy plans - were identifying and training regional facilitators and local facilitators by each partner.

Regional facilitators

Regional facilitators are specific organizations that agreed to take on responsibility for leading the regional ECAP+ development process. Staff from these organizations received training on how to proceed this, including how to engage in dialogue with municipal governments to acquire feedback on regional plans.

In the table below there are regional facilitators identified by partners during CEESEU-DIGIT project duration:

Country	Region develping ECAP+	Organisation developing ECAP+	Is the organisation developing ECAP+ a project partner? Yes/No	Name of the organisation	Type of organisation
Estonia	Ida-Virumaa County	IVOL	Yes	Associated partner. Union of Ida-Virumaa County Municipalities (IVOL)	local government administration body
Slovenia	Podravje Region	LEASP	Yes	n/a	n/a
Poland	Mazovia Region	Regional Authority	No	Urząd Marszałkowski Województwa Mazowieckiego w Warszawie	local government administration body
Czech Republic	Broumovsko	Regional association	No	Strategická rada pro rozvoj Broumovska	regional association (similar to local action group)
Latvia	Vidzeme region	Regional authority	Yes	n/a	n/a
Croatia	Medjimurje County	Regional authority	No	Međimurska županija	regional government unit

Table 1. Regional Facilitators identified in CEESEU-DIGIT project in each region.

3 out of 6 regions developing ECAPs (Estonia, Slovenia, Latvia) are project partners.

3 out of 6 (Poland, Czech Republic, Croatia) are not project partners, even though they are involved in developing ECAPs.

A variety of organisations are involved, including:

- Local/regional government bodies (e.g., Poland, Croatia)
- Regional associations (e.g., Czech Republic)
- Specialised agencies or unions (e.g., Estonia – IVOL)

Local facilitators

Local facilitators are specific organizations that agreed to take on responsibility for consultative process that effectively incorporate stakeholder interests in the ECAP+ creation.

In the table below there are Local facilitators identified by partners during CEESEU-DIGIT project duration:

Country	Local facilitator for consultative process	Is the organisation recognised as a local facilitator for consultative process a project partner? Yes/No	Name of the organisation
Estonia	Cumulus OÜ	Yes	Consultation firm procured by the regional authority
Slovenia	LEASP	Yes	n/a
Poland	MAE	Yes	n/a
Czech Republic	Jaroslav Šefc	No	local consultant working for ENVIROS
Latvia	Vidzeme Planning region	Yes	n/a
Croatia	MENEA	Yes	n/a

Table 2. Local Facilitators identified in CEESEU-DIGIT project in each region.

5 out of 6 countries have their local facilitators recognized as project partners: Estonia, Slovenia, Poland, Latvia, and Croatia.

Only the Czech Republic has a facilitator (Jaroslav Šefc) who is not a project partner, but an external local consultant.

Role in the ECAP+ development proces

In the table below there are summarised descriptions of CEESEU-DIGIT partners about their role in the ECAP+ development proces.

Country	Name of Organization	Role of the organisation in the ECAP+ developmet process
Estonia	TREA, UTARTU	Supporting implementation of the plan and reviewing existing plans and suggesting improvements (based on ECAP+ approach)
Slovenia	LEASP	project manager/ECAP+ developer
Poland	Mazovia Energy Agency	Coordinator of the process and the ECAP+ development with the cooperation with the Regional Authority
Czech Republic	Jaroslav Šefc	Partner
Latvia	Vidzeme Planning region	Expert
Croatia	Medjimurje Energy Agency Ltd.	Coordinator of the process and the ECAP+ development with the cooperation with the Regional Authority

Table 3. The single description of each partner about their role in the ECAP+ development process.

Intergovernmental dialogue & stakeholders engagement materials and methods

The engagement process were facilitated within many activities within the project:

- Trainings of Regional Authorities
- Trainings of local and regional facilitators
- Trainings of Municipal participants
- Engaging key stakeholder (vulnerable groups, private sector).

CEESEU-DIGIT project developed materials to facilitate this process with specific methods. These materials are:

- D4.2 – Engagement recommendations
- D4.5 – Training materials for public and political engagement.

Participation of municipal participants

Partners have successfully initiated the engagement of municipalities by securing Letters of Support from the 25 largest municipalities and other from the participated regions reached within the activities of the CEESEU-DIGIT project to ensure their interest in participating in project activities and the development of regional ECAPs.

The approach to reaching other municipalities and regions within each country focused on involving actors from multiple governmental levels, not just those directly linked to the specific ECAP+ regions. This inclusive approach aimed to demonstrate that the input of other local and regional authorities is valuable and could encourage them to start similar planning initiatives.

To support this goal, partners applied a range of outreach methods. These included tailored communication through websites and social media, emphasizing how climate and energy planning could bring local benefits such as job creation, cost savings, and improved quality of life. Partnerships were formed with local organizations, NGOs, universities, and businesses to leverage resources, expertise, and networks. Public recognition of early movers among municipalities was used as motivation for others to get involved.

In addition to general messaging, partners made personal efforts to build stronger relationships with stakeholders. This included sending newsletters with relevant updates, meeting stakeholders in their own cities or towns, and holding face-to-face discussions with technical staff and political representatives. These direct interactions were critical to developing understanding, securing buy-in, and making the topic more relatable.

Workshops, webinars, and information sessions were organized to build awareness and promote participation. Events co-organized with local and regional authorities were more successful than those hosted independently, as local involvement increased attendance and ownership. Partners also provided technical support, guidance materials, and visual examples of successful sustainable energy projects to inspire action.

Financial incentives and funding opportunities were explored to encourage engagement, and regional collaboration was promoted as a way to pool resources and share best practices. All outreach efforts were documented through participant lists, photographs, and meeting minutes, with proper visibility given to LIFE logos and project branding. Each participating country or region committed to holding at least one outreach event, often combined with other planned project activities.

As part of the CEESEU-DIGIT project, regional partners undertook a targeted approach to engage cities and municipalities that are already in the process of developing or implementing Sustainable Energy and Climate Action Plans (SECAPs) or Energy and Climate Adaptation Plans (ECAPs). The objective of these efforts was to identify common challenges, uncover potential synergies, and establish a platform for peer-to-peer learning among municipalities with varying levels of experience in climate and energy planning.

To achieve this, partners began by mapping out towns, cities, and municipalities within their regions that had either already adopted SECAPs/ECAPs or were actively working on them. Once identified, the partners reached out directly to relevant municipal experts and local authority representatives to set up dedicated meetings. These meetings were designed not only as fact-finding exercises but also as opportunities for open dialogue and the exchange of good practices that could be replicated in other communities.

During the meetings, several core themes were explored. These included the key barriers and challenges that local authorities had encountered during the development of their plans, such as lack of access to reliable data, difficulties in securing participation from key stakeholders, or internal capacity limitations. Partners also gathered insights into the specific climate and energy goals set by the municipalities—ranging from carbon neutrality targets and emissions reductions to increases in the use of renewable energy sources.

A significant focus was placed on the availability and use of local resources, with discussions centered around how natural assets like wind, solar, water, and biomass were being harnessed to support clean energy initiatives. Municipalities also shared their experiences in deploying innovative technologies, such as energy-efficient buildings, smart grid systems, and electric mobility infrastructure. Attention was given to identifying bottlenecks in technological deployment, particularly in relation to energy networks, which could hinder further development.

Another important area covered was community engagement. Municipalities provided valuable input on the strategies they had implemented to involve citizens, local businesses, and other stakeholders in the planning and execution of climate initiatives. These approaches ranged from educational campaigns and public consultations to participatory budgeting and awareness-raising events. The role of citizen support was widely acknowledged as critical to the success of local climate actions.

Financing and funding were also key topics of discussion. Partners collected information on the financial models and funding mechanisms used to support the implementation of climate and energy projects. This included EU grants, national subsidies, private investment opportunities, and innovative financial tools such as

energy performance contracting. The aim was to compile an overview of successful funding strategies that could be shared with less advanced municipalities.

All findings from these meetings were systematically documented. Partner organizations ensured the use of attendance lists for trackability and took photos as part of the project's visibility requirements. Responses from discussions were recorded in standardized Excel templates shared via the project's SharePoint platform. In cases where it was deemed beneficial, partners prepared brief minutes of the meetings and developed communication materials such as news articles or social media content to highlight the outcomes and share them more broadly with the public and other stakeholders.

Each participating country or region held at least one such meeting, often integrating it with other project tasks that involved similar forms of stakeholder engagement. These actions not only contributed to the overall knowledge base of the project but also laid the groundwork for long-term cooperation and capacity building among municipalities at different stages of energy and climate planning.

Implementation of consultative processes for key stakeholders

Partners focused on identifying and training local facilitators to lead consultative processes that reflect diverse stakeholder interests. To achieve effective participation, citizen juries were utilized—an approach particularly suitable for Central and Eastern European countries, where traditions of public engagement are often limited. The methodology also drew from social science and psychology to ensure broad representation of community voices.

These trained facilitators supported the organization of stakeholder meetings, ensuring meaningful and respectful discussions. Facilitators were prepared to manage group dynamics, including strategies to limit disruptions such as grandstanding, so that debates remained focused and inclusive.

Regional partners worked closely with stakeholder groups to identify development priorities that reflect local needs and visions. These priorities were then translated into key actions and objectives within the regional energy and climate plans. The approach emphasized a holistic perspective that went beyond energy systems to include broader community benefits such as improved mobility, green spaces, cleaner air and water, and biodiversity protection.

Throughout the process, partners documented meetings and results, with special attention to any conflicts or disagreements. The ways in which facilitators helped

manage and resolve these tensions were also recorded, ensuring transparency and providing a learning base for future engagement activities.

Organised meetings

As part of the CEESEU-DIGIT project, regional partners organized a series of meetings in each pilot country, targeting two key groups: those interested in implementing energy and climate initiatives, and those who had already carried out such actions in their communities.

For stakeholders seeking ways to begin implementation, Estonia held three meetings with a total of 15 participants. Slovenia hosted 18 meetings, involving three municipal representatives. In Poland, six meetings were conducted with local authorities, drawing 74 participants in total. Latvia organized four meetings with municipal representatives, involving 78 participants altogether, while in Croatia, two meetings were held with local authorities, attended by 38 participants.

For stakeholders with prior experience in implementing energy and climate actions, Estonia organized two meetings with 25 participants. Poland held two similar meetings involving 32 participants. In Latvia, one meeting was conducted with 21 participants, and in Croatia, three meetings took place, gathering a total of 35 participants.

Summarised meetings you can see in the table below.

Meetings				
	Participants interested in energy and climate planning		Participants implementing energy and climate plans	
	Local Authorities	Number of participants (Total)	Local Authorities	Number of participants (Total)
Czech Republic	n/a	n/a	2	5
Croatia	2	38	3	35
Estonia	3	15	2	25
Latvia	4	78	1	21
Slovenia	18	3	n/a	n/a
Poland	6	74	2	32

Table 4. Organised meetings by CEESEU-DIGIT partners (source: t3.1.4 Process reporting on intergovernmental engagement)

## 7. Insightful look into each partner region from the engagement process

Within the project duration we were noticing differences and similarities between the partner countries of CEESEU-DIGIT project within CEE regions. This chapter has an insightful look into these aspects.

Involvement of regional and municipal authorities

The project partners were asked to estimate the level of engagement of the Regional Authority in the preparation of the ECAP+ document. The results are shown in the graph below.

What was the level of engagemnt of your regional authority in the preparation of the ECAP+?

6 odpowiedzi
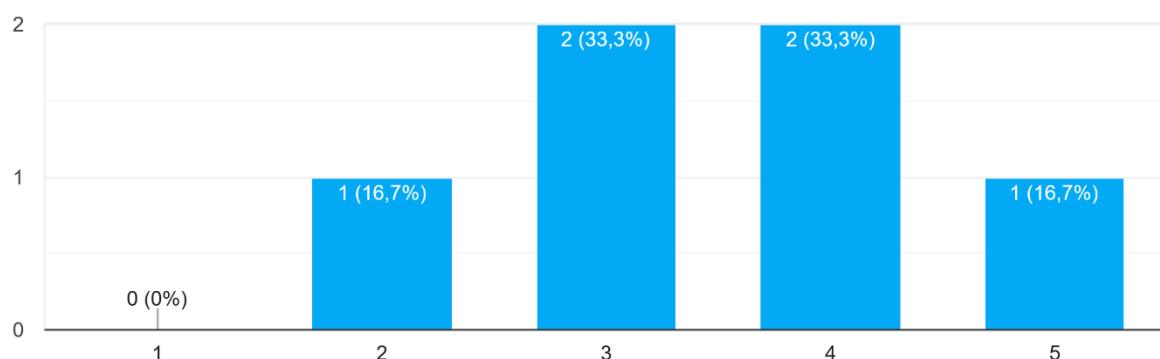
Picture 1. A chart with the assessment of the engagement from Regional Authority in the ECAP+ development process in the regions of CEESEU-DIGIT (The scale ranges from 1 -very low participation) to 5 -very high participation).

The ratings, given on a scale from 1 (very low) to 5 (very high), ranged from 2 to 5. Most regions assessed the engagement at levels 3 and 4, suggesting that regional authorities were present and involved, though not always to the same extent.

One region reported a very high level of engagement with a score of 5, reflecting strong institutional collaboration. Conversely, another region rated the engagement as 2, indicating limited support or interaction. The rest fell in the middle, reflecting moderate engagement.

Partners were asked a question regarding the involvement in the process. The answers are shown in the diagrams.

How were regional and municipal authorities involved in the ECAP development process?
6 odpowiedzi
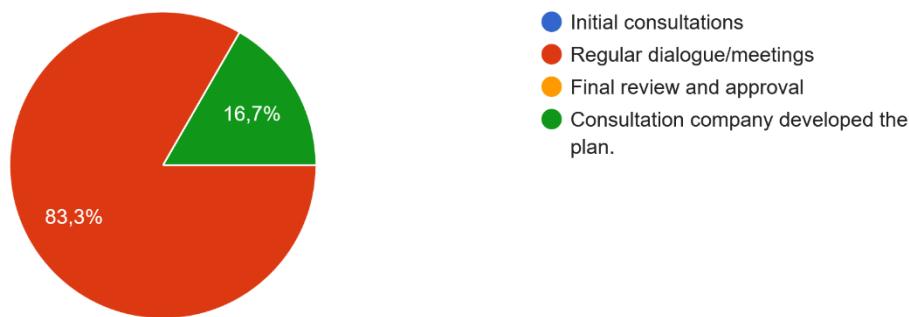
Picture 2. A diagram with summarised CEESEU-DIGIT partners answers regarding the way of engagemnt of regionam and municipal authorities.

In this diagram we can clearly see that the most common way of engaging regional and municipal authorities by CEESEU-DIGIT partners were Regular dialogue/meetings which ensure the communication and realisation of the goals and the established plan to prepare the documents and pursue the project activities which require this kind of level of involvement.

Number of Municipalities

An important aspect directed to partners were the number of municipalities involved in the ECAP+ development process within each of the region engaged in the project:

Czach Republic: 23

Croatia: 6-7

Estonia: 6

Latvia: 11

Poland: 47

Slovenia: 10-12

The number of municipalities involved in the ECAP+ development process varies significantly across the participating regions, reflecting differences in regional structures, governance capacity, and existing collaboration frameworks. These

differences should be considered when comparing implementation progress, resource needs, and the scalability of actions across regions.

Pictures of proceed meetings

Below you can read a brief summary of the meetings and activities conducted in the CEESEU-DIGIT project across participating countries:

Czech Republic: Two meetings were held with local authorities already implementing SECAPs. Discussions highlighted the importance of multi-municipality coordination, the usefulness of national subsidies for SECAP development, and challenges such as low public engagement and limited local capacities.

Croatia: Multiple meetings were held, including presentations at regional councils and sessions with local authorities. Key topics included the importance of inclusive planning, energy poverty, funding mechanisms, and SECAP development challenges such as limited budgets and the need for stronger community participation.

Estonia: Several meetings were organized with both interested and experienced local authorities. These focused on project goals, circular economy strategies, and implementation. Discussions also involved national climate targets and financing.

Latvia: Workshops emphasized the role of energy managers and the importance of energy management systems in municipalities. A key meeting in Limbaži showcased the first SECAP, highlighting energy efficiency goals across sectors and measures for reducing consumption and supporting vulnerable groups.

Poland: A range of meetings were held to introduce the project, discuss energy planning, and share best practices. Topics included energy communities, energy poverty, legal barriers to solar investments, and challenges in data collection. Community engagement remains a hurdle, especially in rural areas.

Slovenia: Eighteen bilateral meetings were held between LEASP and municipalities to discuss local energy planning, investment strategies, and PV potential. These meetings also promoted the national platform for renewable energy projects and upcoming funding opportunities.

The level of participation from local municipalities in the ECAP+ development process

Another aspect needed to be highlighted is the level of participation of local municipalities in the ECAP+ development process.

How would you assess the level of participation from local municipalities in the ECAP development?

6 odpowiedzi
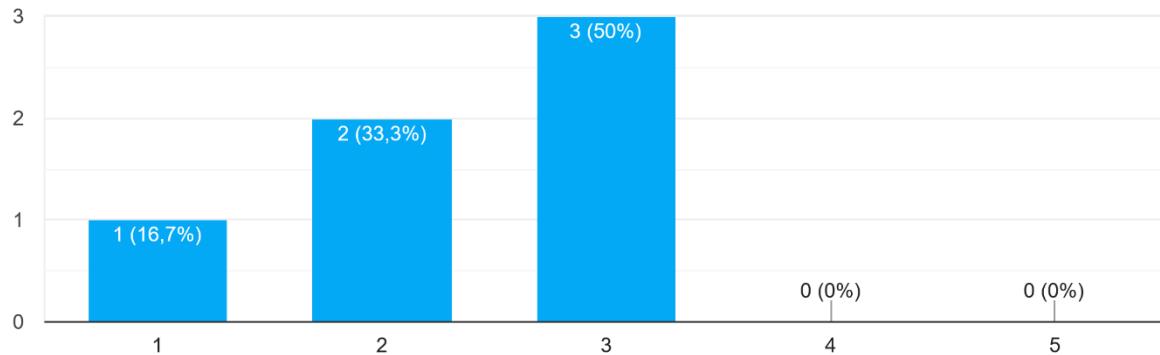
Picture 3. A chart with the assessment of the participation from local municipalities in the ECAP+ development process in the regions of CEESEU-DIGIT (The scale ranges from 1 -very low participation) to 5 - very high participation).

The majority of respondents rated the participation of local municipalities in the ECAP+ development as low to moderate. Most selected a rating of 3, indicating a moderate level of engagement. There were no responses indicating high or very high participation. Overall, the responses suggest that while municipalities were somewhat involved, their participation was not perceived as strong or fully satisfactory.

The most helpful areas of involvement of municipalities in the ECAP+ development process

The involvement of the municipalities in the development process were necessary. CEESEU-DIGIT partners answered which areas were the most helpful within the formulation and activities proceeding stage.

In which area was the involvement of municipalities in the ECAP development most helpful?
6 odpowiedzi
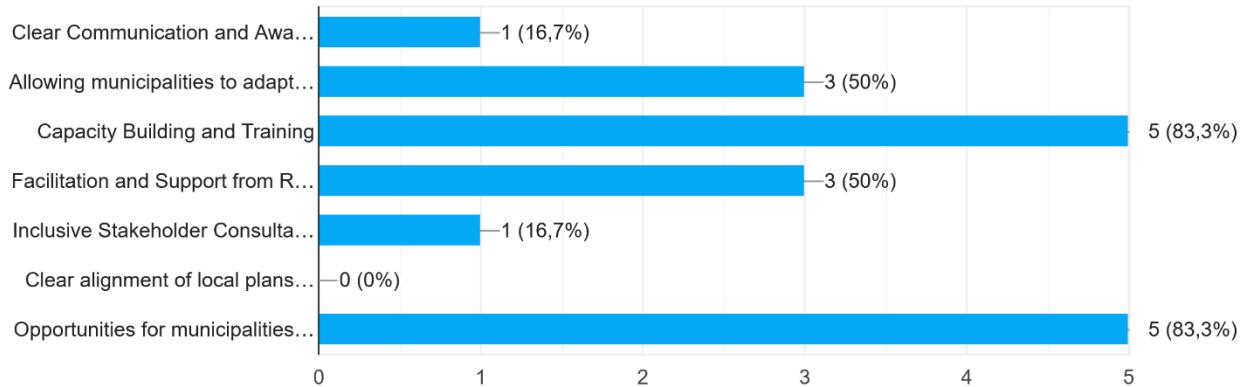
Picture 4. A chart with Assessment of Municipal Participation in ECAP+ Process in the regions of CEESEU-DIGIT.

The area mentioned most consistently across all responses is Capacity Building and Training, followed closely by Opportunities for municipalities to learn from each other, exchange experiences, and share best practices. These two areas appear in nearly every response, highlighting their perceived value in supporting local engagement and learning.

Allowing municipalities to adapt the ECAP+ to their specific local conditions, needs, and priorities was also frequently mentioned, showing that flexibility and relevance to local contexts were important aspects of meaningful participation.

Facilitation and Support from Regional Authorities was referenced multiple times, indicating that regional-level guidance played a helpful role in the process.

Inclusive Stakeholder Consultation was mentioned only once, suggesting it may have been perceived as less impactful or not as directly associated with municipal involvement.

In summary, municipalities found the most helpful aspects of their involvement in the ECAP+ development to be related to capacity building, peer learning, contextual adaptation, and regional support. These elements contributed to more effective engagement and ownership of the ECAP+ process at the local level.

From the provided responses, "Clear alignment of local plans with national and regional climate policies (e.g., NECPs and SECAPs)" was not mentioned by any respondent as an area where municipal involvement in the ECAP+ development was most helpful.

Specific actions ensuring the inclusion of vulnerable social groups in the planning process

How did you ensure the inclusion of vulnerable social groups (e.g. seniors, youth, low-income, energy-poor etc) in the planning process?

6 odpowiedzi
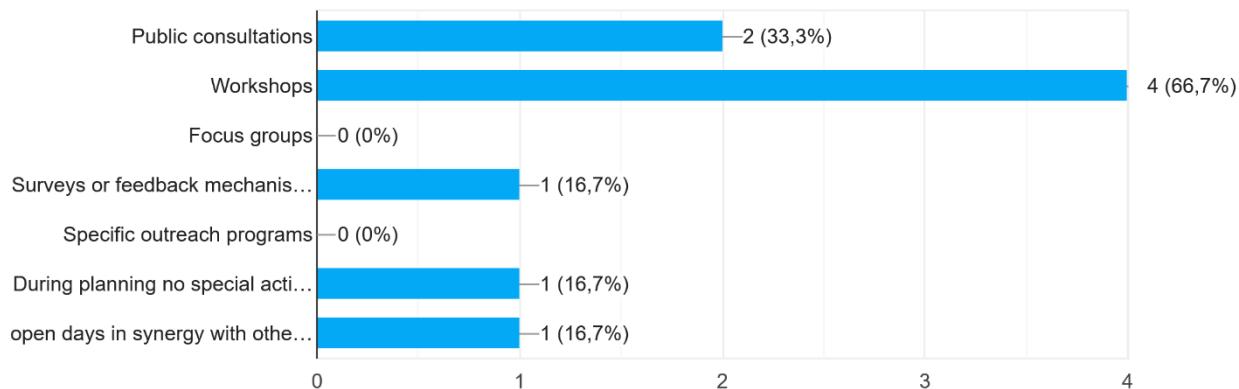
Picture 5. A chart with methods of vulnerable social group inclusion in the planning process in the regions of CEESEU-DIGIT.

The most frequently reported method for including vulnerable social groups in the planning process was the use of workshops, mentioned in the majority of responses. In some cases, these workshops were complemented by open days, public consultations, and individual consultations, often carried out in synergy with other ongoing projects. These methods reflect a general reliance on broad, participatory formats that allowed vulnerable citizens to engage within existing planning activities.

Public consultations and survey or feedback mechanisms were also used, indicating some effort to solicit input from wider community segments, including potentially marginalized voices.

However, the data also shows significant gaps. Notably, focus groups and specific outreach programs—which are widely regarded as effective for reaching and engaging vulnerable populations—were not mentioned at all. Their absence suggests a lack of targeted approaches that could have better addressed the unique barriers these groups face in participating.

Additionally, at least one response indicated that no special activities were undertaken for the inclusion of vulnerable social groups. This highlights an uneven level of commitment or capacity among municipalities to address social inclusion systematically.

24

Public consultations and surveys were also mentioned, reflecting attempts to gather broader feedback and create more inclusive dialogue. However, one respondent explicitly stated that no special activities were carried out for vulnerable social groups, indicating inconsistency in the approach across different municipalities or regions.

In summary, while several proactive methods were used—particularly workshops and public engagement tools—the inclusion of vulnerable social groups was not systematically ensured across the board. There appears to be a need for more structured, consistent, and tailored strategies to guarantee that the voices of marginalized communities are meaningfully integrated into the planning process.

Methods to encourage meaningful participation of stakeholders

What methods did you use to encourage meaningful participation in stakeholder meetings?
6 odpowiedzi
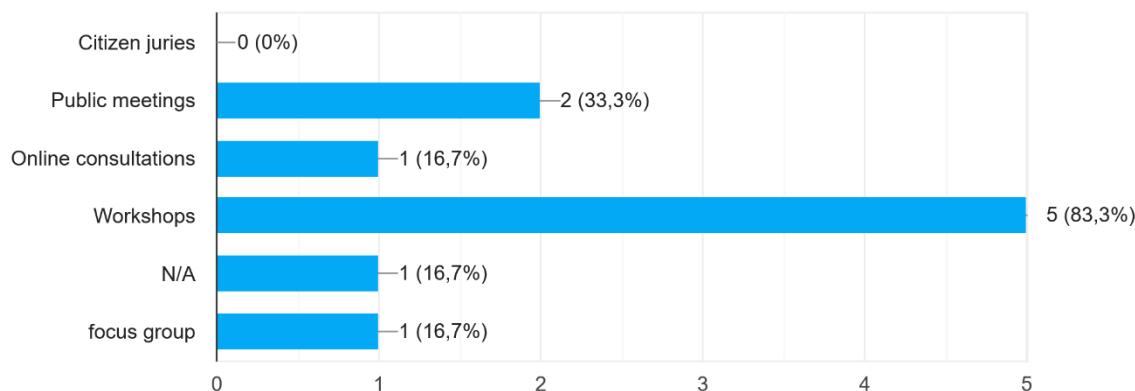
Picture 6. Methods that encouraged meaningful participation of stakeholders in the CEESEU-DIGIT project regions.

Based on the responses to the question "What methods did you use to encourage meaningful participation in stakeholder meetings?", the most commonly used approach was workshops, cited in nearly every response. This indicates a strong preference for interactive, discussion-based formats that allow stakeholders to engage more actively in the planning process.

Public meetings were also used by some, reflecting efforts to create open spaces for dialogue and information sharing with a broader audience. Additionally, focus groups and online consultations were mentioned, suggesting some municipalities experimented with more targeted or accessible formats to reach specific groups or overcome participation barriers.

25

However, not all partners reported using any particular methods, with at least one stating "N/A." This points to variability in the level of effort and strategy employed to ensure meaningful participation across different contexts.

In conclusion, workshops served as the cornerstone of stakeholder engagement, supported in some cases by complementary formats such as public meetings, online tools, and focus groups. While these approaches provided a foundation for participation, the responses also suggest room for greater consistency and innovation in how meaningful engagement is encouraged in stakeholder meetings.

8. Main priorities identified within the stakeholders' groups

Across the CEESEU-DIGIT project countries, stakeholders involved in the ECAP+ development process identified a set of recurring priorities and challenges shaped by local conditions, administrative structures, and capacities.

Stakeholders' main priorities included:

- **Inclusive and participatory planning**: In several regions (notably Croatia and Poland), stakeholders emphasized the need to ensure broader community participation and stakeholder engagement, especially to overcome low levels of public interest and ensure that energy plans reflect real community needs.

- **Addressing energy poverty**: This was especially relevant in Croatia and Latvia, where stakeholders highlighted the necessity of identifying and supporting vulnerable groups through targeted measures within SECAPs/ECAP+ plans.

- **Capacity building and coordination**: The Czech Republic and Poland noted challenges related to local administrative capacities, with particular emphasis on the importance of multi-municipality coordination and the need for institutional support or subsidies to develop robust action plans.

- **Data accessibility and technical expertise**: In Poland and the Czech Republic, difficulties in accessing reliable energy data and the need for methodological support were raised as central issues. Latvia and Estonia highlighted the importance of skilled local energy managers and the adoption of energy management systems in municipalities.

- **Financing and economic opportunities**: Across all countries, stakeholders underlined the importance of securing funding mechanisms—national subsidies, EU programs, or innovative financing models—to enable plan implementation. Economic opportunities, especially in the clean energy sector and job creation, were commonly discussed.

- **Technology deployment and infrastructure development**: In Slovenia and Estonia, local authorities showed interest in assessing photovoltaic potential, smart energy solutions, and infrastructure upgrades, with the aim of increasing energy efficiency and integrating renewable sources.

- **Alignment with national targets**: Estonia and Latvia, in particular, stressed the need for regional and municipal plans to support national climate and energy goals, ensuring consistency between local actions and broader policy frameworks.

Overall, the ECAP+ development process has helped surface a shared recognition among stakeholders of the urgent need for both practical support (financial, technical, and administrative) and strategic coordination to ensure the success and sustainability of climate and energy action plans at the regional level.

9. Challenges in Engaging Stakeholder Groups

Engaging certain stakeholder groups in the planning process presented a number of challenges, particularly with vulnerable populations. Partners consistently noted difficulties in reaching and motivating these groups to participate. Vulnerable citizens—such as seniors, low-income individuals, or those experiencing energy poverty—were often hard to involve due to limited communication channels, low energy literacy, or a lack of understanding about the importance of their role in the planning process. Several partners emphasized that meaningful engagement required trusted intermediaries, such as social workers or community organizations like the Red Cross, to bridge the gap and facilitate participation.

Another recurring issue was the **limited capacity and resources** available for outreach, especially in municipalities with constrained budgets or staff. This resource scarcity made it difficult to invest in tailored communication or support strategies necessary to effectively engage harder-to-reach populations.

Beyond vulnerable groups, there were also challenges engaging **public officers and the private sector**. In some cases, public officers showed signs of **stakeholder fatigue**, having participated in numerous planning processes and consultations. Meanwhile, the **private sector** was reported as difficult to engage, potentially due to misalignment of interests or lack of perceived relevance.

Some partners also observed a **lack of genuine interest** from the people who could benefit most from the process. While some vulnerable individuals who did attend meetings were well-informed and proactive, those in greatest need of support were often the least likely to participate, either due to skepticism, disengagement, or a lack of available time and energy.

In summary, while some stakeholder groups—like local governments and informed citizens—were relatively easy to engage, the process revealed significant barriers in reaching those who are most at risk and often most in need of support. These challenges highlight the importance of targeted, resource-supported outreach strategies to foster more inclusive and equitable stakeholder participation.

10. Proposed Engagement Methods for Future Improvement

Project partners and regions offered several thoughtful suggestions for enhancing stakeholder engagement in future planning processes, particularly with vulnerable and hard-to-reach groups.

One widely supported recommendation is the **use of trusted spokespeople from within vulnerable communities**. Having a familiar and respected figure lead or support engagement efforts can help build trust and make individuals feel more comfortable participating.

Another key proposal is to **create more informal, relaxed meeting environments**, especially when engaging vulnerable groups. Participants should not feel as though they are being treated as a problem to be fixed, but rather as valued contributors whose lived experiences are crucial for shaping effective solutions. In this context, **individual meetings supported by social workers or community-based professionals** were identified as a particularly effective approach.

Project partners and regions also emphasized the importance of **tailoring engagement methods** to the specific needs, interests, and contexts of each stakeholder group. Rather than applying a one-size-fits-all approach, engagement should be both **topically relevant** and **personally meaningful** to the target audience. Offering information on **funding opportunities**—such as grants or subsidies—was cited as a way to spark genuine interest, especially among groups who might otherwise remain disengaged.

Moreover, several partners stressed the value of having **dedicated and skilled professionals** manage stakeholder engagement. These professionals should be capable of translating complex topics into relatable terms, ensuring participants feel informed and empowered.

Lastly, **focus groups** were suggested as a potentially useful tool, allowing for more targeted discussions and deeper understanding of group-specific concerns.

In conclusion, future engagement efforts could benefit significantly from approaches that emphasize trust, personalization, relevance, and professional facilitation—especially when working with vulnerable populations or stakeholders with limited prior involvement in planning processes.

The strategies implemented by project partners to facilitate intergovernmental dialogue and collaboration varied in their success. While some regions reported limited or no notable achievements, others highlighted effective practices. Key approaches included establishing clear communication channels through regular meetings and email correspondence, fostering strong personal and

professional relationships, and engaging stakeholders who already work with vulnerable groups. Some partners organized online meetings focused on relevant topics to maintain interest and participation. One region emphasized its role as a connector between local and national levels, acting as a contact point for renewable energy projects and supporting a top-down approach initiated by national ministries. Despite mixed results, these examples illustrate the potential for structured, inclusive, and well-coordinated efforts to strengthen intergovernmental collaboration.

11. Summary

This deliverable provides valuable insights into intergovernmental dialogue and stakeholder engagement across the partner regions of the CEESEU-DIGIT project. The structure of the document underscores the critical importance of engaging stakeholders in the planning process, emphasizing the need to incorporate their feedback, visions, and needs. Special attention is given to the inclusion of vulnerable groups, whose voices must be heard to ensure transparency, inclusivity, and trust in the development of climate action plans.

The report also examines the roles of regional and local facilitators in the ECAP+ development process. One of the key findings reveals that direct involvement of regional authorities results in higher levels of engagement compared to municipal authorities. This is largely because regional authorities are directly responsible for the document and clearly understand their role. In contrast, municipalities often exhibit lower engagement, partly due to limited clarity about their responsibilities. This highlights the need for clearer communication, guidance, and capacity-building efforts targeted at the municipal level.

To foster effective intergovernmental dialogue and stakeholder inclusion, a range of tools and methods were applied to encourage open communication, gather diverse perspectives, and build consensus. However, not all partners made full use of these tools, likely due to limited institutional capacity or inexperience with participatory processes. This points to the need for further support and training to ensure consistent and meaningful engagement across all regions. These engagement methods were especially crucial when working with vulnerable groups, who often require specialized approaches, tailored tools, or the involvement of trained professionals to ensure their needs are adequately represented.

Several priorities and concerns were identified during stakeholder engagement. Environmental sustainability, social equity, and better alignment between policy levels were commonly highlighted. At the same time, specific challenges emerged in engaging certain groups. Public officers, particularly at the municipal level, often lacked clarity on their role and relevance to the planning process, requiring more direct communication and support. Private stakeholders were also difficult to involve due to competing priorities or limited awareness of the project's benefits. Demonstrating the relevance of the process and providing opportunities for co-creation proved effective in encouraging their participation.

The report concludes with a discussion of recommended engagement strategies based on practical experience. These include tailored outreach, leveraging trusted community figures, and creating informal, inclusive spaces for dialogue.

Ultimately, continuous and inclusive stakeholder engagement is fundamental to the success of ECAP+. It ensures the process remains transparent, responsive, and rooted in the real needs of communities. Equally vital is strong cooperation between regional, local, and national authorities, as multi-level coordination enables the creation of resilient, coherent, and context-sensitive climate action plans. Integrating perspectives across all governance levels not only strengthens ownership but also significantly improves the likelihood of long-term, sustainable implementation.