



# CEESEU-DIGIT

Central and Eastern Europe Sustainable Energy Union's **D**esign and **I**mplementation of  
regional **G**overnment **I**nitiativ**e**s for a just energy **T**ransition

## D3.4. Evaluation Report

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## 1. 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, November 2022-May 2025) aimed 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+ has been used in the project.

CEESEU-DIGIT's primary objective was 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 was to assist municipalities to formulate, fund, and implement their ECAPs aligned with regional ones. At both levels, extensive capacity building has been extended to assist with building ECAPs.

In principle, drawing municipalities into energy regions assists in cross-pollinating ideas, sharing knowledge and tasks, and applying for financing. Public-sector capacity building (WP2, WP3) helped (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), constituents to 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) by definition 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) were each targeted by specific social and conventional media outreach (WP6). Dissemination took place (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 Network (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 was anticipated that several important longer-term impacts would 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+ 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.

## 2. Relevance of this Deliverable

This deliverable evaluates the project's understanding of the policy landscape necessary for informed ECAP development [Objectives **O3.3** (national/regional energy and non-energy policies that affect plan development have been thoroughly mapped) and **O4.1** (increase the capacity of local/regional actors - public administrators and civil society organisations - to advocate for national policy changes to support the just energy transition)]. Concomitantly, **O6.4** requires, in effect, the dissemination of best practices for inclusive stakeholder engagement. Furthermore, DIGIT's outcomes are intrinsically linked to achieving broader project goals including but not limited to **O2.1** (building confidence among project stakeholders in compiling their ECAP+ and applying for funding for its measures), **O2.2** (municipal/regional administrators acknowledge energy poverty among their constituents and include this issue in their ECAP+), **O3.4** (the regional competency to create and compile an integrated and just ECAP+ is demonstrated in the 6 partner regions), and **O4.4** (promote the sustainability of participatory policy models and planning instruments) through direct and indirect contributions, i.e., empowering municipalities by providing essential knowledge for them to demonstrate regional competency in integrated energy and climate action planning, and by bringing in a bottom-up approach, demonstrating the long-term sustainability of the participatory models developed.

In the context of the European Union's commitment to an equitable (i.e., "just") Green Transition and the specific challenges faced by CEE countries – including perhaps especially a historical reliance on carbon-intensive industries, high rates of energy poverty, a democratic deficit and low trust levels (in both government and in cooperative action) implying low levels of stakeholder engagement in climate-related actions – this deliverable together with the final report offer crucial insights on developing locally relevant ECAPs, on building local capacity to advocate for policies that address energy poverty within the transition, and on fostering inclusive and participatory planning processes that ensure community buy-in. In so doing, DIGIT is thereby contributing to the broader objectives of the LIFE programme as well as informing the EC and CINEA in particular of the challenges and complexities in Central and Eastern Europe in attaining the objectives of the European Green Deal.

## 3. Executive Summary

This evaluation focuses primarily on the achievements of CEESEU-DIGIT in relation to its work plan objectives, while also delving into the efficacy of the actions and results of the project. The

evaluation is centred on Deliverable 3.3, the Evaluation Plan drawn up in February 2023 shortly after the project commenced. Major findings from the evaluation include the following:

Five new ECAP+ documents were developed and rolled out in the participating regions, with minor amendments made to Estonia's pre-existing ECAP. The process involved identifying local challenges and opportunities to tailor the plans to specific regional contexts.

The developed ECAP+s generally adhered to the project's objectives, integrating social justice components to varying degrees across the different countries. They aim to contribute to national and EU climate goals while addressing local energy needs.

Stakeholder inclusion efforts were made, particularly in participatory governance training, involving local officials, civil society, and vulnerable groups. However, the direct input from regions and municipalities into the ECAP+ content was often minor, except in Latvia, impacting local ownership.

In relation to capacity building of local level administrators and technical personnel, a total of 1242 individuals received training, exceeding the overall target of 1231. Estonia notably excelled in training civil society, while Poland trained the most local officials. Trainees generally provided positive feedback on the training sessions, highlighting the usefulness of the content in enhancing their understanding of energy and climate planning. Trainers identified best practices that included providing practical, hands-on examples, ensuring accessibility of materials, and tailoring content to the specific needs and contexts of the participants.

Progress towards the formal adoption of ECAP+s by regional and municipal authorities varied. While some regions showed strong commitment, others faced institutional hurdles or a lack of clear pathways for official endorsement and integration into existing planning frameworks.

Actual implementation of measures proposed in the ECAP+ documents is largely pending, as implementation phases typically occur after adoption. Not surprisingly, challenges in securing long-term funding and establishing robust monitoring mechanisms are identified as potential barriers to effective implementation.

Financial plans were developed for each ECAP+, outlining potential funding sources from EU, national, and private sectors. These plans aimed to provide a roadmap for financing energy and climate actions, though accessing pre-financing and managing complex application processes remained challenges for smaller municipalities.

This evaluation identifies various policy and legal barriers that could impede the implementation of ECAP+s, such as bureaucratic complexities, lack of supportive national legislation for certain energy solutions (e.g., energy communities), and inconsistencies between national and local regulations.

The project developed several tools and methodologies to support ECAP+ creation and implementation, including guidelines for participatory governance, capacity-building modules, and frameworks for financial planning. These aimed to standardize and facilitate the planning process across regions.

The project successfully achieved its primary objective of developing ECAP+s and significantly exceeded its training targets. However, the delivery of its bottom-up objectives, particularly regarding comprehensive stakeholder inclusion and capacity building assessment, was hampered by data collection and compliance issues as well as possible deficiencies in outreach to and inclusion of vulnerable groups.

The project encountered inefficiencies due to personnel changes, data collection difficulties, and partners' varying levels of commitment. The sustainability of the ECAPs+ is questionable due to limited institutionalization and ownership, while replicability depends on addressing these identified challenges and ensuring strong local buy-in.

Recommendations for future action include strengthening local ownership and institutionalization of ECAPs+, providing demand-driven capacity building and targeted support, demonstrating clear pathways for funding and implementation, and entrusting ECAP+ development to regional energy agencies for the inclusion of smaller municipalities.

## 4. Limitations to the Evaluation

Several hurdles arose during the 2.5 years of the project's implementation, which required a degree of re-examination of intended outputs as partners added quantitative and qualitative information into secured, shared spreadsheets. Compliance with this requirement has proved difficult for some project partners, due to personnel changes that led to a loss of institutional memory. Another factor that affected evaluation results was the large amount of time between the time of first contact with project regional governments (when the proposal was being prepared) the start of the project (approximately 18 months). This resulted in changed circumstances in several participating locations. For example, in Estonia the region contracted a consultant group to create a local plan that lacked many of the elements of DIGIT's ECAP+. This less ambitious plan was already agreed to by both the regional development authority and the region's municipalities. Deviations from this plan were usually not welcomed, making it difficult to improve the plan, especially the inclusion of energy poverty. Despite the region being the most vulnerable county in Estonia to underemployment and marginalisation of its Russian-speaking inhabitants, regional leaders claimed that "energy poverty did not exist". Furthermore, the partner, from Poland, can be surmised to have aimed too high in relation to the number of municipalities included in the project. This partner is active in the most populous Voivodeship (1st-level subnational administrative district) in the country, one that includes Warsaw but that was intended in DIGIT to exclude Warsaw itself. Nonetheless, the ECAP+ the partner created includes data from all 314 gminas (municipalities) in Mazovia, a tally that does in fact encompass Warsaw - but did not reveal this fact to the project coordinator until specifically queried in the last month of the project. The partner claims inclusion of 117 gmina that were contacted and took part in meetings and webinars. Whether this "took part" was consistent or a single instance is not clear, but what is evident is that the partner is unable to state what actions have taken place in any of the gmina that follow even one of the intended three pillars of an ECAP+: emissions reduction, climate adaptation, responding to energy poverty. In retrospect, it would have been better for the partner to focus on one, or even a few, of the 42 powiats (equivalent to counties) in Mazovia and subsequently springboard from this geographically limited and proven ECAP+ to enlarge it for the entire Voivodeship.

## 3. DIGIT's Objectives

The list below contains all DIGIT objectives as listed in the Project Agreement. In keeping with the fundamental relevance of the evaluation - that is, an assessment of effectiveness of the

interventions - not all the objectives are thoroughly evaluated herein, in Section 13. For example, O1.1 (Establish effective project leadership that monitors critical indicators and takes corrective action if needed) concerns project management, the steering committee meetings, and other meetings called by work package leaders to assure that the inputs for the various deliverables were being fielded, documented, and discussed among partners - items that are more appropriately discussed in the final report than in an evaluation.

O1.1 Establish effective project leadership that monitors critical indicators and takes corrective action if needed

O1.2 Establish effective consortium communication and content management

O1.3 Establish a monitoring system to coordinate, monitor and evaluate developments and outcomes in terms of delivery on time and in good quality

O1.4 Ensure the project is completed on time and within budget

O1.5 Maintain close coordination with LIFE PO to ensure that project contributes to the EC's and the stakeholders' needs and overall EC and LIFE programme objectives

O2.1 In each region, stakeholders concerned with municipal responsibility for adhering to their country's National Energy & Climate Plan (NECP) are confident of assistance for compiling their obligatory Energy and Climate Action Plan (ECAP) and receive guidance in applying for its funding

O2.2 Regional stakeholders (including the private sector) understand their rules and obligations under national policy for a just transition that also accounts for combating energy poverty among the municipality's populace, such that communities embrace the just transition concept

O2.3 Civil society interest and pressure groups in each region advocate for sustainable and just energy solutions, energy security, biodiversity protection, and integrated adaptive landscapes

O2.4 Groups/key individuals opposing the European Green Deal/energy transition mute their antagonism

O2.5 Stakeholders form effective, non-confrontational collaborative groupings in each region with the aim of seeking consensus

O3.1 Regional public sector actors have engaged in dialogue with their municipal governments concerning energy and climate adaptation planning

O3.2 Private sector stakeholders, among others, are included in energy planning in 6 targeted regions

O3.3 National/regional energy and non-energy policies that affect plan development have been thoroughly mapped

O3.4 Regional competency to create and compile an integrated and just energy & climate action plans is demonstrated in 6 partner regions

O4.1 Increase capacity of local/regional actors (public administrators and civil society organizations) to advocate for national policy changes to support just energy transition

O4.2 Improve ability of local/regional actors to promote the interests of marginalized groups and just transition at the national level

O4.3 Develop capacity of local/regional actors to communicate with external actors (such as political parties) to increase social and political support for just energy transition

O4.4 Promote sustainability of participatory policy models and planning instruments developed in WP2 and WP3

O4.5 Advocate for regional transition interests at the EU level – Presentation of findings to MEPs nationally in 6 member states and once in Brussels

O5.1 Increase capacity of public (and private) sector actors in obtaining conventional financing for ECAP planning and just transition within each of the six selected regions.

O5.2. Identify promising innovative financing sources for just transition that are appropriate for CEE region and seek adoption of them throughout the targeted regions

O5.3 Increase knowledge and awareness on financing sources for just transition projects via investment from outside of the targeted regions and assess their suitability

O6.1 Develop a dissemination plan that lays out the visual identity, communication channels and engagement strategies to be used with each target audience. Special focus will be on communicating with vulnerable groups.

O6.2 Host International conference related to just ECAP development in CEE region to bring together policy makers, public administrators and other relevant actors from CEE and Europe.

O6.3 Strengthen the Central and Eastern European Sustainable Energy Network (CEESEN) (formed within the previously funded H2020 PANEL2050 project) to act as both a voice for the region at the EU level and as a platform for connecting together public administrators, policy makers and other key actors working for just green transition in the CEE – with at least 2500 members.

O6.4 Publish CEE best practices for incorporating vulnerable groups into active support of municipal just transition planning and implementation, including two publications in peer-reviewed research journals.

O6.5 Promote CEESEU-DIGIT results on local, national and EU levels

O6.6 Promote continued use of CEESEU-DIGIT approach in partner countries and rest of CEE after project ends

## 4. Development and Roll-Out of the ECAPs+

The table below summarizes the state-of-play for the six ECAP+/ECAP documents, what actions municipalities have started rolling out from implementing the document, as well as a brief summation by the partners on what they encountered while engaged in promoting the development of their plans.

With the exception of Latvia (where the partner, VPR, is part of regional government) the input from regions and municipalities into the document was less than desired. This poses a threat both to buy-in in the present, and to the durability of the plan into the future. Additional capacity building is needed to raise the capability of regions and municipalities to develop, implement, and monitor their own ECAPs. This supports the recommendation made in the prior CEESEU project that greater support should be provided to existing and nascent regional energy agencies that can pool expertise to provide the necessary technical support to municipalities to carry out implementation actions. Energy agencies can also limit wish-list desires to those that are sound (from the perspectives of emissions reduction and/or climate adaptation) and are thus more likely to be financed. Moreover, regional energy authorities can be advocates for energy poor households in scenarios where local governments either deny that the problem exists or take the opposite approach, stating that “everyone in their jurisdiction is poor”.

Furthermore, only half of the partner countries had, by the end of the project, submitted applications for financing of ECAP+ measures. Although, in the immediate months after the end of the project, several more applications were submitted. It is reasonable to assume that additional financing might be applied for in the future, based on the actionable items in the respective plans. However, this is primarily due to the presence of DIGIT project partners and their continued affiliation with municipalities and regional administrations. As DIGIT was originally planned as a 2-year project and later extended to 2.5 years, it is reasonable to conclude that longer project durations (3 years or more) would be preferable to accurately assess the durability of ECAP+ as living documents, as opposed to being a check-box item that can be subsequently ignored.

In line with the Project Agreement's intent to ascertain if there are discernible country-pair differences (the Baltic states EE and LV, the Visegrad states PL and CZ, and the western Balkan states SI and HR, the table below demonstrates heterogeneity across all countries - that is, no pairings, but significant differences in the status quo among the countries. This is due to differences in national legislation, the strength of the NECPs in response to the Just Transition, regulations on energy communities and definitions of energy poverty, local reliance on fossil fuels, and levels of education and knowledge. More effort is needed to bring countries within the CEE to a common level of understanding in contending with the climate crisis and the need to decrease emissions to meet the EU's 2050 goal of climate neutrality.

Country	Region	No. of municipalities in region	ECAP+ completed Yes/No	ECAP+ written by region %	Involvement of region in ECAP+ completion %	Municipal involvement in ECAP+ completion %	Submitted to national authority Yes/No	Financing applied for Yes/No	Implementation commenced Yes/No
<b>Croatia</b>	Medjimurje County	25	Yes	0	20	10	No	Yes	Yes
<b>Slovenia</b>	Podravje Region	41	Yes	0	0	10-15	No	No	Yes
<b>Czech Republic</b>	Broumov Region	23	Yes	0	0	10	No	Yes	Yes
<b>Poland</b>	Mazovia Region	117	Yes	5	15	5	Yes	No	Yes
<b>Estonia</b>	Ida-Viru County	7	Yes (prior to start of DIGIT)	0	0	10	Yes	Yes	Yes
<b>Latvia</b>	Vidzeme Planning Region <i>Latvia is an outlier because partner VPR is part of the regional authority,</i>	11	Yes	100	100	10	Yes	No	Yes

	<b>Actions started</b>	<b>Problems encountered, strengths / weaknesses identified, new opportunities; solutions to energy poverty and vulnerable groups</b>
<b>Slovenia</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Continuous energy renovation of public buildings owned by Medjimurje County and local governments (the process of applying new projects upon the publication of relevant public calls and tenders)</li> <li>- Continuous energy renovation of private multi-apartment buildings (the process of applying new projects upon the publication of relevant public calls and tenders)</li> <li>- Implementation of preliminary energy audits in energy-poor households with special focus on providing specific advices on energy savings and distributing energy-saving products to achieve cost and energy savings</li> <li>- Establishment and nurturing of existing cooperation with social institutions and non-governmental organizations (NGOs) to provide continuous support to vulnerable groups</li> <li>- Implementation of information campaigns, education and raising awareness activities of energy poverty among vulnerable groups as part of ongoing projects</li> <li>- Continuous implementation of energy audits and energy certification of public and private sector buildings (in the event of changes in legislative regulations regarding mandatory energy certification or in the event of expiry of existing energy certificates) as this is a requirement in Croatia for applying to relevant calls and tenders related to energy renovation</li> <li>- Installation of photovoltaic systems on family houses upon publication of relevant calls and tenders (the 2025 call is already announced with the application process starting in June 2025) - the interested applicants can ask for support in regional energy agency (MNEA)</li> <li>- Implementation of educational workshops for employees and owners of commercial, service and industrial buildings on</li> </ul>	<p>The process of collecting energy data took a relatively long time (large amount of energy data is available in different databases and are under the control of different organizations and institutions, some data are limited or unavailable, so it was necessary to make good estimates which again requires great expertise), regional authority mostly relied on the engagement of the regional energy agency when developing the document, since they are more specialized in the topic.</p> <p>Regional authority regularly seize opportunities to inform cities and municipalities in Medjimurje county about financing options for energy and climate related projects, and they also propose and continuously implement projects with energy and climate component (energy renovation of buildings in their ownership, installation of renewable energy systems, co-financing the increase in the use of renewable energy sources in family homes in the county, etc.).</p> <p>During the development process cooperation with regional government was more intensive than with local governments, although MNEA regularly informed municipalities located in Medjimurje County throughout the entire development process, greater engagement was also better observed among municipalities that already have SECAPs, as a large part of the measures defined in them were included in the ECAP document itself.</p> <p>Measures connected to energy poverty and vulnerable groups include the following:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- implementation of information campaigns, educational and awareness-raising activities connected to energy poverty among vulnerable groups</li> <li>- providing financial assistance to vulnerable groups by different forms of economic support</li> <li>- establishing collaboration with social institutions and Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs) to assist vulnerable groups</li> <li>- establishment of a regional information center for energy consulting and assistance to energy-poor households</li> <li>- implementation of preliminary energy audits in energy-poor households with special focus on providing specific advices on</li> </ul>

	<b>Actions started</b>	<b>Problems encountered, strengths / weaknesses identified, new opportunities; solutions to energy poverty and vulnerable groups</b>
	<p>more efficient energy use and the possibilities of achieving energy savings</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Continuous modernisation of public lightning by local governments upon the need and changes in regulations</li> <li>- Constant improvement, expansion and promotion of bicycle traffic and bicycle paths as part of encouraging sustainable tourism in the region</li> <li>- Continuous planting of trees in the area of traffic, pedestrian and cycling infrastructure, as well as parks and other public areas in Medimurje County in the frame of ongoing projects or upon publication of relevant calls and tenders</li> </ul>	<p>energy savings and distributing energy-saving products to achieve cost and energy savings</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- using energy-efficient household appliances and lighting</li> </ul>
<b>Czech Republic</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Installation of solar power plants on the roofs of public buildings with integration into community or individual self-sufficiency schemes</li> </ul>	<p>A crucial issue is that there is still no regional authority that could officially approve the document. The solutions have been presented many times within the project discussions - the plan to "present" the document to the regional development agency and use the document as some kind of an extension of the regional development plan is one option.</p> <p>The other option is in the updated Act on Regional Development where LEASP manages (together with the Consortium of Energy agencies of Slovenia - KLEAS) to propose changes in the phase of public hearings. The changes have been accepted to the proposal of the Act and it just needs to be approved. To the article on the tasks that are being performed in the region in the public interest, we have been able to add the following wording: "preparation, coordination, monitoring and evaluation of regional plans for the exploitation of renewable energy sources and efficient energy use". LEASP anticipates that this will set the stage for the development of regional ECAPs.</p>
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-Replacement of lighting with LED at the elementary school in Police nad Metují</li> <li>-Replacement of heat source with a new one at the elementary school in Police nad Metují</li> <li>-Insulation and replacement of windows and doors at the</li> </ul>	<p>Cooperation with the region is good, but at the level of individual municipalities, it is very poor. ENVIROS is struggling to maintain good communication with them. Only the two largest municipalities communicate to some extent. Therefore, it is difficult to obtain information on the steps for the implementation of measures. We only know that a few measures included in the ECAP+ have already been</p>

	<b>Actions started</b>	<b>Problems encountered, strengths / weaknesses identified, new opportunities; solutions to energy poverty and vulnerable groups</b>
	<p>kindergarten in Police nad Metují</p> <p>-Replacement of windows and doors at the post office in Police nad Metují</p> <p>-Replacement of lighting with LED at the TS (technical services) premises in Police nad Metují</p> <p>-Replacement of boilers at the TS premises in Police nad Metují</p> <p>-Insulation, replacement of windows and doors at the TS premises in Police nad Metují</p> <p>-Replacement of lighting with LED at the municipal office and kindergarten in Šonov</p> <p>-Replacement of boilers in an apartment building in Broumov</p> <p>-Partial renovation of an apartment building in Broumov</p> <p>-Replacement of boilers in an apartment building in Broumov</p> <p>-Partial renovation of an apartment building in Broumov</p>	<p>implemented. It is not possible to ensure the approval of the ECAP+ in all municipalities. At the regional level, there is no authority that could approve the ECAP for the entire region.</p> <p>However, our assessments — including natural gas and electricity consumption, renewable energy potential, etc. — does include all municipalities.</p> <p>The municipalities that did not actively participate simply do not have specific measures developed for their own assets.</p>
<b>Poland</b>	<p>MAE conducted workshops for vulnerable groups as well as workshops for the municipalities re. Energy Efficiency, RES, Energy Poverty, regional planning, financing of green measures and solutions, promotion of better energy saving habits and ecological practices.</p> <p>No known practical measures have started being implemented.</p>	<p>Weaknesses: Only a narrow selection of activities to be implemented as energy or climate measures; Limited data availability; energy poverty is recognized as a phenomenon but still there are no substantive solutions to deal with it; limited local capacity (financial, technical, administrative) to implement integrated solutions; the need for education continues. Strengths: Existing funding mechanisms; growing awareness and political commitment toward inclusive climate action through the EU's influence and creating the environment for such actions; renewable energy technologies are becoming more affordable.</p> <p>Opportunities: Community energy projects; ECO-Advisors in Mazovia Region in each municipality; job creation through local energy efficiency projects and renewable installations. Threats: Fragmentation of initiatives; climate denialist on the political stage.</p>

	Actions started	Problems encountered, strengths / weaknesses identified, new opportunities; solutions to energy poverty and vulnerable groups
	<p>-As set in the first meeting with Union of Ida-Viru County Municipalities (IVOL) and Municipalities' representatives, the main focus should be on renovation actions – residential and municipal sectors with the need to first analyse the current building stock and future circumstances (spatial shrinkage, population decrease).</p> <p>-Renovation programmes have started - multiple information days, 2 renovation fairs and consultations in conjunction with the improved national renovation grant support conditions for the region and have led from basically 0 renovation in last 10-15 years to noticeable interest in renovation – in the national reconstruction call, ~20% of applications and support decisions went to the county (in Estonia there are 15 counties in total).</p> <p>-Energy communities' topic has been one of the focus areas. An analysis, the "Feasibility and future of community energy in Ida-Virumaa" has been completed and in cooperation with TREA and UT an application to the LIFE program has been submitted. Independently, IVOL is working on another grant application.</p>	<p>According to current regulations, local governments are not obligated to address energy-related concerns in achieving their region's climate and energy objectives. Climate and energy strategies are undertaken voluntarily and may be integrated into local government operations as sector-specific plans. The administration of municipalities is governed by the Local Government Organization Act, which assigns various responsibilities such as managing housing and communal services, waste disposal, public transportation, road maintenance, and others. However, the mandate is primarily focused on organization rather than enforcement. Because the plan had to be completed (and already was, at the start of DIGIT) in order to access national grants, there has been substantial resistance to modify the plan. TREA's intent was to focus on implementation and then reveal the need for changes.</p> <p>The pre-existing ECAP was evaluated and compared with the ECAP+ anticipated from DIGIT. Based on evaluation and discussions of plan owners it appears that there are multiple challenges in implementing it.</p> <p>There are two main general limitations:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>*Local Government role and decision-making power regarding territorial mitigation and adaptation is weak. Challenges with jointly-made multi local governments energy and climate plans</li> <li>*Challenges with jointly-made multi local governments energy and climate plans in regard to agreement on the specifics each municipality needs.</li> </ul> <p>Additional topics to address if the ECAP will be subsequently open to review:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>*Planned actions are too general and it is difficult to extend that to taking implementable steps.</li> <li>*The ECAP should have territorial coverage and targets, but the county is affected by the oil shale industry that is under state level control.</li> <li>*Energy poverty has not been addressed – in a region where population decrease is so significant and the lead sector, a fossil energy industry, is being phased-out and jobs are being lost, addressing energy poverty (at minimum based on national definitions) is vital.</li> </ul>

	Actions started	Problems encountered, strengths / weaknesses identified, new opportunities; solutions to energy poverty and vulnerable groups
		<p>Renovation was basically non-existent in Ida-Viru at the start of the project, as people still retain the Soviet model of unlimited energy for heat supplied by the State.</p> <p>There had been virtually no application for state renovation funding for years prior to DIGIT, but now in cooperation with focusing on that topic in region with help of EIB-ELENA and very generous grant support, together with awareness raising including two renovation fairs, multiple renovation seminars, and apartment association visits, it seems that the ice has started to thaw – there have been many applications from Ida-Viru and support decisions made by KredEx, the state grant agency. But we must wait to see how many buildings will actually be renovated at the end of the day. There are still possibilities that they will not use grants allocated, e.g. if final renovation cost quotes will not be agreed by building management and contracts will not be signed.</p>
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-New project started regarding the low temperature heating (international project Green4HEAT);</li> <li>-One municipality multi apartment unit will be connected to the district heating system with the support of a municipality to tackle energy poverty (Mārciena village, Madona district);</li> <li>-Several new electrical vehicle charging stations are being installed in the region;</li> <li>-New green and blue infrastructure projects are being proposed and implemented in municipalities to tackle climate change problems like excess rain water and more pronounced heat (e.g., Valmiera city);</li> <li>-Multi apartment units' renovation process to increase energy efficiency and tackle energy poverty is continuing (project RenoWave);</li> <li>-New solar and wind farms are being developed in the region;</li> <li>-H2Value project on hydrogen (strategy and pilot testing) has started.</li> </ul>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1) Energy community regulation has been implemented in Latvia recently, which helps regulate and encourages development of new energy communities;</li> <li>2) Vidzeme planning region does not have a legal power or financial resources on its own to influence, oversee and manage municipalities and their actions in the energy and climate topics. We can only have an indirect influence by educating, informing and implementing projects on a point to point basis rather than as a continuous process;</li> <li>3) A good tendency has been observed, that during the years of implementing activities (information, communication, collaboration with local municipalities) in the fields of energy and climate, the municipal specialists have built their capacity in data gathering and monitoring as well as their understanding of energy and climate issues;</li> <li>4) The legislative framework in Latvia at the moment does not permit mandatory or semi-mandatory or even specific support for multi apartment buildings that are in very poor technical conditions. They still need to gather a majority consensus from the apartment owners, which often makes the renovation impossible. It is possible that the legislation could change to make the renovation process easier and faster.</li> </ol>

	Actions started	Problems encountered, strengths / weaknesses identified, new opportunities; solutions to energy poverty and vulnerable groups
		<p>5) A big problem is low quality fire-wood burning in individual households. Furnaces are often old, with low burning efficiencies, chimneys are comparably close to the ground and the quality of the firewood is often low, people still tend to burn plastic, paper and any other household waste that is combustible, thus increasing air pollution and health risks.</p> <p>6) Eight-toothed bark beetles have been very damaging to our forests in recent years as reported by all of the Vidzeme municipalities. As the climate gets warmer, it is observed that this insect proliferates more rapidly.</p> <p>7) It is hard to implement new ideas and make changes according to best practices because of general poverty in the region, and locations with greatest needs to combat energy poverty (including low quality living conditions, lack of mobility options, low energy efficiency etc.) have the fewest resources, lowest education and a lack of understanding. Households' energy flexibility is low and social and welfare issues come before energy and climate issues.</p> <p>8) Vidzeme has a quite successful Ukrainian refugee acceptance and integration situation. They are being provided with temporary homes and job opportunities as well as social welfare and material support.</p> <p>9) Centralised cooling systems are not installed in Vidzeme yet. Historically there hasn't been a big need for cooling solutions. There are financial and technical barriers, but most people haven't yet realised that this is an issue that will only grow and we need to rethink our housing solutions to adapt to climate change.</p> <p>10) Within the Green Deal, Latvia has placed a major focus on wind energy increase. There are several issues connected with it: in the National Plan there is mentioned the installed power that should be reached in Latvia, this number has already been reached, but new wind farms are being considered. There is no information in the legislation as to when we stop. The law says that wind farms are allowed in all the territory of Latvia (except border zone to Russia), and no cumulative evaluation is required, also there is a ban for putting wind farms on agricultural lands, so now the focus for wind farms are on the forest areas, which means also losing forest territories and habitats and fragmenting forests. This situation is concerning to many environmental organisations in Latvia.</p>

## 5. Adherence to DIGIT's ECAP+ Objectives

The table below shows in a traffic-light pattern the level of adherence (green = full, yellow = partial, red = not at all) to the ECAP objectives agreed by all partners at the start of the project. Note that this table is comprised of self-reporting by the partners rather than an independent assessment. This may have introduced biases into the table.

In general, the Baltic States EE and LV show lower adherence to the objectives, while the Western Balkan states SI and HR demonstrate the closest adherence to the full set of objectives. But there is no clear paired-state difference among the six countries, with one exception being that of feed-in tariffs, where only the Visegrad states PL and CZ indicate inclusion into the ECAP+ document. This is likely to be a consequence of the enabling legislative environment. Nonetheless, the differences among the five partners that started their ECAP+ from scratch illustrate that greater oversight by project management during the plans' development might have yielded a more-coherent result across all participating countries. This however points to the general sense of independence within all partners, with only nominal attention to a single outline to which all are asked to adhere. That local conditions or demands may preclude certain objectives being included indeed is possible, but for future projects of this type, it may be better to hew more closely to guidelines even if this requires greater effort with translations as the plans are being developed and fleshed out. Concomitantly, partners should be more attentive to bringing problems encountered to the project coordinator and for discussion at the biannual project meetings.

<b>Section of ECAP+</b>	<b>Status</b>						<b>Comments</b>
	EE	LV	SI	HR	CZ	PL	
1. Introduction to DIGIT's ECAP+ structural guidelines							
1.1 CEESEU-DIGIT project description and objectives	■	■					
1.2. ECAP+ aims and objectives	■	■					ESTONIA: 2 main targets
1.3. Aims towards a just transition	■	■			■		
1.3.1. Definition of the just energy transition	■		■	■	■		ESTONIA: Mentioned in introduction
1.3.2. Energy Security	■	■			■		ESTONIA: Security of energy supply
1.3.3. Energy poverty	■						ESTONIA: General poverty and its trends only mentioned
1.3.4. Addressing climate change							
2. A coherent and concise summary of the regional ECAP+							
Section 3: Vision							<p>SLOVENIA: Podravje – a smart and sustainable region that optimally utilizes local renewable energy sources and uses innovative technologies to ensure efficient energy production and distribution through advanced networks. The inhabitants of Podravje live in a clean, healthy and energy-self-sufficient environment.</p> <p>Poland: Vision of Mazovia Region by 2050: The Mazovian Voivodeship is a well-developed, climate-neutral region with a high standard of living for the population regardless of where they live. Mazovia is a region that is safe and prepared to face diverse natural threats, with an innovative economy ready to adapt flexibly to changing environmental conditions.</p>
3.1. Regional vision regarding ECAP+ targets and existing plans							LATVIA: THE VISION OF VIDZEME PLANNING REGION: Increasing the share of clean, safe and renewable energy to strengthen the Vidzeme region's capacity to adapt

<b>Section of ECAP+</b>	<b>Status</b>						<b>Comments</b>
	EE	LV	SI	HR	CZ	PL	
							to climate change, reduce GHG emissions and exploit the region's competitive advantages by promoting a just transition, a circular economy and reducing energy poverty.
4. State of art							
4.1. Situation at the European and National level							ESTONIA: In introduction  LATVIA: Comprehensive summary of the the European and National level legislation  SLOVENIA; focus more on EU level  CROATIA: In addition to the key European strategic documents several ones at Croatian level are listed relevant for energy transition and climate change.
4.2. Regional authority							SLOVENIA: There is no regional authority. But there is a full description of the situation we have
4.2.1. Description							
4.2.2. Role and scope of the authority							
4.3. Overview of existing plans							
4.3.1. Just transition in existing plans							CROATIA: Definition of just transition is only provided at the national level, while on the regional and local level the concept is still in its infancy. More efforts in awareness raising activities and implementing best practice examples are needed since only two counties on the national level have the opportunity in using the resources of Just transition fund.
4.4. Regional profile							ESTONIA: In different sections
4.4.1. Demography							
4.4.2. State of regional infrastructure and buildings							

Section of ECAP+	Status						Comments
	EE	LV	SI	HR	CZ	PL	
4.4.3. Business environment	Yellow	Yellow	Green	Green	Yellow	Green	
4.4.4. Geography	Yellow	Green	Green	Green	Green	Green	
4.4.4.1. Regional climate situation	Red	Green	Green	Green	Green	Green	
4.4.4.1.1. Annual overview	Green	Green	Green	Green	Green	Green	
4.4.4.1.2. Extreme weather and climate events	Red	Green	Green	Green	Green	Green	
4.4.5. Political environment	Red	Green	Green	Green	Yellow	Green	POLAND: The description is more general ("political", diplomatic) and not directly naming political parties. The RA were not content to describe it in such details
4.5. State of energy in the region	Red	Green	Green	Green	Green	Green	ESTONIA: Only emissions
4.5.1. Energy sources	Yellow	Green	Green	Green	Green	Green	
4.5.1.1. Natural resources in the region	Red	Green	Green	Green	Green	Green	ESTONIA: Just mentioned, not with volumes etc.
4.5.1.2. Non-renewable energy sources	Red	Green	Green	Green	Green	Green	
4.5.1.3. Renewable energy sources	Yellow	Green	Green	Green	Green	Green	ESTONIA: Challenges due national defence restrictions described
4.5.2. Energy consumption	Red	Green	Red	Green	Green	Green	SLOVENIA: Not addressed here as it is addressed under 5. BEI
4.5.3. Energy infrastructure	Yellow	Yellow	Green	Green	Green	Green	ESTONIA: District heating sector described
4.6. Potential of the region	Red	Yellow	Green	Green	Yellow	Green	
4.6.1. Infrastructures improvement	Yellow	Red	Green	Green	Yellow	Green	ESTONIA: District heating!
4.6.2. Buildings energy efficiency improvement	Green	Green	Green	Green	Yellow	Green	ESTONIA: Volume and reconstruction % described
4.6.3. Potential economic growth	Red	Red	Green	Green	Red	Green	
4.6.4. Renewable energy potential	Red	Yellow	Green	Green	Yellow	Green	ESTONIA: Challenges due national defence restrictions described
4.6.5. Digitalization of energy system potential	Red	Red	Green	Green	Red	Green	

<b>Section of ECAP+</b>	<b>Status</b>						<b>Comments</b>
	EE	LV	SI	HR	CZ	PL	
4.6.6. Adaptation planning for climate disruption	Green	Green	Green	Green	Red	Green	
5. BEI (Baseline Emissions Inventory) analysis	Red	Green	Yellow	Green	Green	Green	ESTONIA: Only emissions  LATVIA: Made in several sectors: housing; agriculture; forestry; industry; transport; waste management; energy production and consumption  SLOVENIA: Public sector and household energy data was possible to obtain and/or make good estimations. For the service sector there it was impossible to obtain representative data
5.1. Inventory year	Yellow	Green	Green	Green	Green	Green	ESTONIA: 2019 (emissions)  LATVIA: 2022 (Chosen based on the availability of the data)  SLOVENIA: 2023  CZECHIA: 2019
5.2. Number of inhabitants in the inventory year	Green	Green	Green	Green	Green	Green	LATVIA: 276037 (2022.)  SLOVENIA: 329753
5.3. Emission factors approach	Yellow	Yellow	Green	Green	Green	Green	ESTONIA: Not mentioned, but source is not LCA  LATVIA: Used emission factors of electricity, heat production and different animal GHG production.  SLOVENIA: Use of standard emission factors  CZECHIA: Standard

<b>Section of ECAP+</b>	<b>Status</b>						<b>Comments</b>
	EE	LV	SI	HR	CZ	PL	
5.4. Emission reporting unit							ESTONIA: CO2e  LATVIA: t (or kg) CO2 eq.  SLOVENIA: tCO2  CZECHIA: CO2
5.5. BEI results in terms of final energy consumption and emissions							LATVIA: Made in several sectors: housing; agriculture; forestry; industry; transport; waste management; energy production and consumption  CROATIA: BEI is covering only industry and entrepreneurship, buildings, transport and public lightning with no special focus on agriculture, waste management, etc.
5.6. Energy projections until 2030							LATVIA: Based on the available municipalities' plans
6. Risk & vulnerability assessment (RVA)							LATVIA: To ensure that the Strategic Plan reflects the diverse interests and priorities of society, Climate working group was organized during the development process, the results of which have been integrated into the Climate Adaptation Action Plan and the sectoral actions planned to reduce GHG emissions. The Climate Working Group assessed climate risks and sectoral vulnerabilities and defined concrete adaptation measures to prevent and mitigate climate risks.  CZECHIA: Duplication
6.1. Expected extreme climate events at regional/local level							CZECHIA: Duplication
6.2. Estimated impact of extreme events for activities and infrastructures							ESTONIA: Adoption challenges for business; settlement, infrastructure and transport; inhabitants; natural environment  CZECHIA: Duplication

<b>Section of ECAP+</b>	<b>Status</b>						<b>Comments</b>
	EE	LV	SI	HR	CZ	PL	
6.3. Groups at risk because of the impact of events	Red	Yellow	Green	Green	Red	Green	LATVIA: Inhabitants in flood areas; elderly people, people with blood pressure issues, children, women. People living in areas affected by extreme heat and heat island phenomena
7. Regional energy security	Yellow	Red	Green	Green	Yellow		ESTONIA: Security of supply
7.1. Strategies and policy	Yellow	Red	Green	Green	Yellow		POLAND: Mixed with 4.1. Situation on National level and 4.3. Overview of existing plans and 1.3.2 Energy Security
7.1.1. National level	Yellow	Red	Green	Green	Yellow		POLAND: Mixed with 4.1. Situation on National level and 4.3. Overview of existing plans and 1.3.2 Energy Security
7.1.2. Regional level	Yellow	Red	Red	Yellow	Red	Yellow	CROATIA: There are no policies nor strategies on regional level, especially concerning energy security. It is a part of national security.  POLAND: Mixed with 4.1. Situation on National level and 4.3. Overview of existing plans and 1.3.2 Energy Security
7.2. Actual status of energy supply	Red	Yellow	Green	Green	Yellow	Green	
7.3. Critical infrastructure and cybersecurity	Red	Red	Green	Green	Red	Green	CZECHIA: Not relevant for the region.
7.3.1. Actual status of cybersecurity level of infrastructure	Red	Red	Green	Green	Red	Green	CZECHIA: Not relevant for the region.
7.3.2. Existing plan for cybersecurity improvement	Red	Red	Green	Green	Red	Green	
7.4. Vulnerability to physical attack/hardening of energy infrastructure	Yellow	Red	Yellow	Yellow	Red	Green	ESTONIA: Not in plan, but in crisis plan (classified)  CROATIA: It is a part of the national strategies and policies.
8. Energy poverty	Red	Green	Green	Green	Green	Green	
8.1. Energy poverty description	Red	Green	Green	Green	Green	Green	
8.1.1. Energy poverty description	Red	Green	Green	Green	Green	Green	

<b>Section of ECAP+</b>	<b>Status</b>						<b>Comments</b>
	EE	LV	SI	HR	CZ	PL	
8.2. Energy poverty indicators							CROATIA: Indicators have not yet been unified at the national level, so this chapter contains a general overview of potential indicators that could be monitored at the regional level.
8.2.1. Vulnerable groups indicators							CROATIA: Indicators have not yet been unified at the national level, so this chapter contains a general overview of potential indicators that could be monitored at the regional level.  POLAND: Named in 8.2. Energy poverty indicators
8.2.2. Structural indicators							ESTONIA: Reconstruction level  CROATIA: Indicators have not yet been unified at the national level, so this chapter contains a general overview of potential indicators that could be monitored at the regional level.  POLAND: Named in 8.2. Energy poverty indicators
8.2.3. Cost indicators							ESTONIA: District heating only  CROATIA: Indicators have not yet been unified at the national level, so this chapter contains a general overview of potential indicators that could be monitored at the regional level.  POLAND: Named in 8.2. Energy poverty indicators
8.3. Preventive actions							POLAND: Preventive actions mixed with Mitigation actions
8.4. Mitigation actions							POLAND: Preventive actions mixed with Mitigation actions
8.5. Trainings							ESTONIA: In actions  POLAND: RA decision to delete this subchapter

Section of ECAP+	Status						Comments
	EE	LV	SI	HR	CZ	PL	
9. Just Energy Transition and mitigation measures	Yellow	Yellow	Green	Green	Green	Green	
9.1. Mitigation measures for reduction of GHG emissions	Yellow	Yellow	Green	Green	Green	Green	
9.2. Other assessment and adaptation options	Red	Red	Green	Green	Yellow	Green	
9.3. Existing solutions for marginalized groups	Red	Red	Green	Green	Yellow	Green	
9.4. Legislation/policy on RES and energy efficiency	Yellow	Yellow	Green	Green	Yellow	Green	ESTONIA: National only
9.5. Involvement of stakeholders and citizens	Red	Red	Green	Green	Yellow	Green	POLAND: Indicating the importance of this action but not mentioned the specific tasks, priorities etc
9.5.1. Legislative authority	Red	Red	Green	Green	Yellow	Green	
9.5.2. Citizen's participation	Yellow	Red	Red	Green	Yellow	Green	ESTONIA: Energy and other communities' creation in actions
9.5.3. Local business	Yellow	Red	Red	Green	Yellow	Green	
9.5.4. Vulnerable groups	Red	Red	Green	Green	Yellow	Green	
9.5.5. Other groups	Red	Red	Green	Green	Yellow	Green	
10. Financial assessment	Red	Red	Green	Green	Green	Green	
10.1. Financial instruments and opportunities	Red	Green	Green	Green	Green	Green	
10.2. Regional Sustainability Plans	Red	Red	Red	Green	Yellow	Green	
10.3. Actions and measures on energy prices	Yellow	Red	Red	Green	Yellow	Green	ESTONIA: Briefly for municipality
10.3.1. Energy taxation	Red	Red	Red	Green	Yellow	Green	
10.3.2. Feed-in-tariffs for energy communities	Red	Red	Red	Red	Yellow	Green	CROATIA: The legislative framework has been adjusted, but in practice there are still numerous obstacles to the successful operation of energy communities including feed-in-tariffs.

Section of ECAP+	Status						Comments
	EE	LV	SI	HR	CZ	PL	
11. Implementation	Yellow	Green	Green	Green	Yellow	Green	
11.1. Implementation process	Red	Green	Yellow	Green	Yellow	Green	
11.2. Coordination and organizational structures	Red	Green	Yellow	Green	Yellow	Green	
12. Monitoring	Yellow	Green	Green	Yellow	Yellow	Green	ESTONIA: Aim in plan is to develop this  CROATIA: A systematic and effective monitoring model has not yet been fully established, so the document includes an overview of the possibilities for monitoring various indicators based on the national overview.
12.1. Monitoring of CO2 emissions	Red	Green	Red	Yellow	Yellow	Green	ESTONIA: Aim in plan is to develop this  CROATIA: A systematic and effective monitoring model has not yet been fully established, so the document includes an overview of the possibilities for monitoring various indicators based on the national overview.
12.2. Monitoring of energy poverty status at regional/local level	Red	Yellow	Red	Yellow	Yellow	Green	CROATIA: A systematic and effective monitoring model has not yet been fully established, so the document includes an overview of the possibilities for monitoring various indicators based on the national overview.
12.3. Monitoring Tools	Red	Red	Green	Yellow	Yellow	Green	ESTONIA: Aim in plan is to develop this  CROATIA: There are several monitoring models at the national level that can be applicable at the regional level.

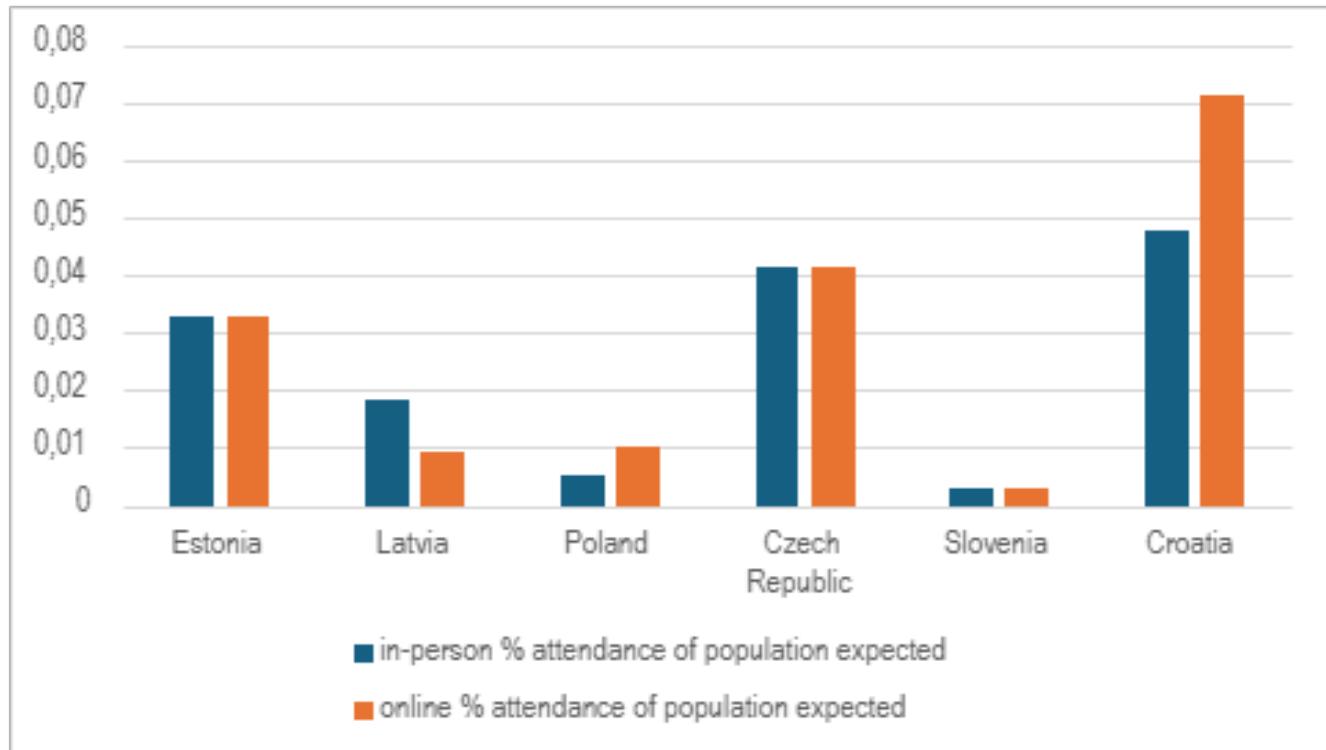
## 6. Implementing DIGIT's Bottom-Up Objectives: Stakeholder Inclusion

DIGIT intended to identify interested stakeholders (defined as individuals or organisations likely to be affected by the Green Transition, whether positively or negatively, and who wish to participate in decision making opportunities or voice their support/objection) with two intentions - first to add grassroot demand for the development of inclusive, just ECAPs, and second to counter opposition to the Green Transition. These intentions were only modestly met, perhaps because people across the CEE are more used to top-down decision making which they then apply to their daily lives and actions. It may also be possible that climate action remains far from the daily struggles of low-income people across the CEE. Putting food on the table and paying for heat are more important than attending meetings to discuss an energy transition demanded by Brussels.

To put numbers to the above, the table below shows the stakeholder participation rates, both in-person and online, for the events partners held, as tallied by the partners. In contrast, and referencing only a single data point, the EC-funded Step-In project (Using Living Labs to Roll Out Sustainable Strategies for Energy Poor Individuals - Greece, Hungary, UK)<sup>1</sup> identified a set of 77 potential stakeholders from which 33 attended the workshops, representing a 43% inclusion rate.

	<b>Population estimate, DIGIT municipalities</b>	<b>In-person % attendance of population</b>	<b>Online % attendance of population</b>
Estonia	76 510	0,0327	0,0327
Latvia	273 835	0,0183	0,0091
Poland	499 725	0,0050	0,0100
Czech R.	24 273	0,0412	0,0412
Slovenia	329 753	0,0030	0,0030
Croatia	104 937	0,0476	0,0715

<sup>1</sup> <https://ec.europa.eu/research/participants/documents/downloadPublic?documentIds=080166e5c972dc4b&appId=PPGMS>



Estonia identified 62 potential stakeholders, Latvia 33, Poland 57, Czech Republic 14, Slovenia 32, and Croatia 20. Partners were asked to group the stakeholders they engaged with provided that they share similarities in priorities and engagement activities. More than half of the stakeholders represent public sector organisations, while just one from Croatia was classified as representing vulnerable groups (tenants in multi-apartment buildings, beneficiaries of social welfare benefits - elderly, single-parent families, etc.). This may represent a shortcoming within partner organisations, as they are all, with the exception of the University of Tartu, technically orientated. Were they to bring onboard a staff person who focuses solely on the social aspects of the energy transition, there would likely be superior outcomes in identifying and engaging with groups outside of the public sector. Highlighting this conclusion is that just 3 of 17 such stakeholder interest groupings represent civil society organisations.

When considering the Green, Just Transition, partners summarized the stakeholders' priorities for future development in their communities and the region into the broad categories below:

- Policy making:
  - More intense involvement in the creation of regional and local policies
  - Cooperation among municipalities, gaining experience and collecting input for supra-regional negotiations
  - Obtain additional institutional support from upper levels (ministries, regional governments)
  - Advocate for inclusive participation in decision-making at all levels (local to national)
- Energy security and energy poverty:
  - Transition to renewable sources and achieving energy self-sufficiency
  - Fair and cheap access to energy especially for rural citizens
  - Better utilization of existing supporting mechanisms for vulnerable citizens
  - More professional support from the relevant institutions (energy agencies, municipalities, cities, counties)
- Infrastructure:

- Initiating further investments in the modernization of the existing infrastructure which is outdated (existing gas and electricity networks)
- Mobility:
  - Improved public transportation
- Private sector:
  - Align national and European climate policy requirements with business interests.
  - Local businesses face a decline in competitiveness; this is a region affected by population outflow, particularly of young people. The willingness to implement progressive measures is low, with energy costs being the main priority.
  - Transitioning business operations to low- or zero-carbon models, investing in clean technologies such as solar, wind and circular economy systems
  - Encouraging socially responsible business with a special focus on vulnerable groups of citizens
  - Retraining and upskilling employees for green roles, supporting equity in hiring, particularly from underrepresented or transitioning communities, partnering with local institutions to create inclusive talent pipelines for the green economy
  - Collaborating with governments and civil society to leverage funding and scale green projects
  - Promotion and investments in sustainable tourism
  - Creating new partnerships outside borders for further investments in existing business, using RES in their own utilities.
- Financing:
  - Financing all the needed investments, decreasing the expenses
  - Subsidies for energy-efficient appliances
  - Utilizing additional and innovative financing mechanisms to achieve better business efficiency,
  - Supporting more incentives for local communities and local business investing in green technologies
- Education and capacity building:
  - Increase capacity in order to better advocate for rights in the transition process
  - More intensive involvement in educational activities related to energy and climate topics for later development of new project ideas
  - More intensive involvement of citizens and other stakeholders in local and regional planning
  - Building and supporting pathways to higher education and careers, promote growth in sustainable industries (renewables, clean tech, green manufacturing)
  - Assist small and medium enterprises (SMEs) in adopting sustainable practices
  - Encourage and support green start-ups, social enterprises, and innovation hubs.
- Best practices:
  - Foster better alliances between relevant energy and climate projects

When queried about disputes, arguments, or contentiousness during the stakeholder engagement activities, almost ¼ of the responses (23.5%) indicated that there were. These fell into the following groups:

- The unwillingness of some municipalities to cooperate - there is an unmet anticipation for a more progressive approach

- The measures proposed are too progressive and cost-intensive, so that some municipalities were unwilling to cooperate in designing actionable measures
- Why should there be an energy and climate plan if we are not able to fulfil higher priority obligations, emissions reduction requirements from the EU/national authorities are anyway there by other acts (e.g. requirement to renovate to C-class energy consumption, new buildings to attain A)
- Problems of managing the multi apartment units, where individual households had no influence over the energy bills due to the joint settlement, resistance towards the investments and refurbishment of the buildings, and a sense that there is no need for changes in lifestyle or the adoption of energy efficient behaviours

Asked about such negative attitudes were overcome/resolved and the role of the regional facilitator, several practices were identified:

- People objecting came to terms with reality, with the facilitator presenting the issues in a positive light and in a way that makes it clear why the energy transition is necessary
- Listening to the people and their problems, giving them space to voice these, offering advice
- The most effective argument was that the climate plan is increasingly becoming a prerequisite for accessing various funding programmes — especially national support schemes. In addition, since the climate plan will likely become mandatory anyway (based on the draft Climate Law Act), it makes sense to start planning activities early
- The climate plan helps to identify the most effective interventions and set clear priorities — after all, we will have to reduce emissions one way or another
- Some proposed measures were ultimately excluded from the ECAP+
- Due to a lack of data and willingness, no measures were proposed in some municipalities

To obtain feedback from the stakeholders themselves, an email and a reminder was sent in local languages (national languages plus for EE and LV, Russian) to every one of the 218 stakeholders identified by partners (an example, sent to Slovenian stakeholders, is shown in the below screenshot). To encourage additional responses, partners were asked to repeat the request to their guests attending in-person the final CEESEN conference in May 2024. From among all these plausible stakeholders and outreach efforts, 15 responded to the Google Form questionnaire, which the evaluation team in their outreach emails stipulated could be readily translated into the local language via Google Translate, representing an engagement rate of only 6.9%. Two-thirds of respondents are either Polish or Latvian (Poles outnumbering Latvians 2:1), with just a single respondent from SI, HR, and CZ, and two from EE. How to overcome this degree of apathy among stakeholders is not a topic for this evaluation but should be thoroughly considered in future projects undertaken by the CEESEN team.

i <ceeseu.ut@gmail.com>  
 to bcc: vss ▾  
 Če sami niste sodelovali pri ECAP, vas vladno prosimo, da to e-pošto posredujete sodelavcu v vaši organizaciji, ki je bil aktivno vključen v razvojni proces ECAP. Njihovi vpogledi so za nas bistveni. (Tamara Vajda?)  
 Spoštovani deležniki,  
 Na vas se obračamo, ker je bilo vaše strokovno znanje bistveno za razvoj lokalnega energetskega in podnebnega akcijskega načrta (ECAP), ki je v skladu s cilji pravičnega zelenega prehoda EU. Vaša perspektiva, ki predstavlja poslovne, družbene interese ali občinsko usklajevanje energije/podnebja, je bila ključna pri oblikovanju smeri in vpliva načrta.  
 Ko se približujemo zadnji fazi projekta DIGIT in dokončamo načrt, iščemo vaše povratne informacije, da bi razumeli vpliv vašega sodelovanja in pogledov. Ta kratek vprašalnik, ki vam bo vzel približno 10 minut, bo zbral vaše vpoglede o:  
 • Obseg, do katerega so bili vaši pogledi vključeni v ECAP.  
 • Zaznani vpliv vaših prispevkov na razvoj načrta.  
 • Področja, kjer bi lahko vaš vnos dodatno uporabili.  
 • Vaša splošna izkušnja s procesom sodelovanja DIGIT.  
 Vaše povratne informacije so bistvenega pomena za oceno učinkovitosti našega sodelovalnega pristopa in za zagotovitev, da ECAP odraža različne potrebe in prednostne naloge vaše skupnosti. Te informacije bodo izboljšale naše procese, okrepile prihodnje sodelovanje in obravnavale ključno vprašanje vključenosti pri oblikovanju ECAP.  
 Prosimo, izpolnite vprašalnik do 10. aprila na tej povezavi:  
<https://docs.google.com/forms/d/e/1FAIpQLSNWcz1FAt-RFzMMkrAb5CRDCZoapA104nHyuoni-zs7eiE6ng/viewform?usp=header>  
 Vaš odgovor je popolnoma anonimен. Upoštevajte, da čeprav je vprašalnik v angleščini, ga lahko enostavno prevedete v svoj materni jezik in uporabite svoj materni jezik tudi za pisne odgovore.  
 Če imate kakršna koli vprašanja, nam pišite na [ceeseu.ut@gmail.com](mailto:ceeseu.ut@gmail.com)  
 Hvala za vaše nadaljnje dragoceno sodelovanje.  
 S spoštovanjem,  
 Ekipa za vodenje projektov DIGIT

University of Tartu - Coordinator CEESEU  
 Skytte Institute of Political Studies  
 Lossi 36, 51003 Tartu, Estonia

Two-thirds (10/15) of respondents represent public sector entities (local or regional government, or a regional planning organisation), 2 represented energy interest groups, and one each represented a small-to-medium size service sector company, a social welfare organisation, and an educational institution. While the response rate and the lack of cross-sectoral depth among respondents precludes making a comprehensive assessment of stakeholder perceptions in regard to DIGIT, the following factors emerge from this survey:

When asked if they believe that the "climate crisis" (as some people have labeled it) impacts their region currently or in the near future, 20% of respondents stated either "No, the climate crisis is not real, it's exaggerated to force us to adopt specific political goals" or "No, our region is likely to be sheltered from the effects of global climate change". Of these believing "not real", one is a municipality in Estonia, the second a municipality in the Czech Republic; while an Estonian energy interest group evinced its belief that its region will be sheltered from the climate crisis. This is not too surprising given that the closure of the shale oil industry (oil shale mining and the subsequent production of fuel distillates / electricity) will profoundly and negatively impact the DIGIT region in Estonia, which has already been battered by the closure of the heavy industries the Soviet Union left behind after Estonia achieved independence in 1991.

Respondents were asked if before they attended the first meeting for the DIGIT project, would they say they were for or against an equitable green transition. Again, as with the climate crisis responses, three respondents noted either "neutral" or "against," but there was no shift in attitude when asked, "And now, are you for, neutral toward, or against an equitable green transition?". Again, we caution against over-interpretation of these statistically insignificant responses, but having noted this, we can think that there has been little progress in shifting negative attitudes toward a just, green transition during the course of the project, which was one of the objectives of its work.

Respondents were queried about their greatest and second greatest concerns when contemplating the EU's push for a Green Transition. The following table demonstrates the outcomes, in which the countries are paired in the Baltics/Visegrad/Western Balkans groupings.

Country of respondent	Greatest concern	Second greatest concern
Estonia	Old buildings are very expensive to renovate	Loss of jobs, long-term unemployment
Estonia	High energy costs result in inflation	Unreliable electrical power, not available 24/7 ("energy security")
Latvia	Landscape degradation (visual, auditory, biodiversity impact of wind farms, for example)	Lack of access to financing for climate adaptation (flood, drought, fire, extreme heat/cold)
Latvia	Old buildings are very expensive to renovate	Lack of investment in, or inability to, retrain people who lose their jobs (the "skills gap")
Latvia	Old buildings are very expensive to renovate	Lack of access to financing for emissions reduction of carbon dioxide or methane
Czech Republic	I do not support or endorse EU green transition policies	Landscape degradation (visual, auditory, biodiversity impact of wind farms, for example)
Poland	High energy costs result in inflation	Environmental justice (inequities increase, poor people cannot afford energy-saving measures)
Poland	High energy costs result in inflation	Energy costs are unaffordable for some people ("energy poverty")
Poland	Energy costs are unaffordable for some people ("energy poverty")	Regulatory uncertainty
Poland	Lack of access to financing for climate adaptation (flood, drought, fire, extreme heat/cold)	High energy costs result in inflation
Poland	Regulatory uncertainty	Environmental justice (inequities increase, poor people cannot afford energy-saving measures)
Poland	Unreliable electrical power, not available 24/7 ("energy security")	Old buildings are very expensive to renovate
Poland	Regulatory uncertainty	Lack of access to financing for climate adaptation (flood, drought, fire, extreme heat/cold)
Slovenia	Loss of jobs, long-term unemployment	High energy costs result in inflation
Croatia	Environmental justice (inequities increase, poor people cannot afford energy-saving measures)	Energy costs are unaffordable for some people ("energy poverty")

Renovation cost is cited as the most concerning in the Baltic states and crops up just once as of second greatest concern in Poland. This may reflect on the larger numbers of Soviet-era substandard multi apartment units located in these countries. High energy costs leading to inflation are most important in Estonia and Poland, and of secondary importance in Poland and Slovenia. Job loss, energy poverty and environmental justice - the "just" component of the Green Transition - are noted at 8/30 opportunities, suggesting that these issues require further substantial efforts to allay fears and suspicions.

To delve further into the meetings organized by partners and/or municipalities involved in DIGIT, respondents were queried as in the table below, where the two-country regional groupings are included:

Country	No. of meetings by <b>promoters</b> of an equitable green transition you attended since January 2023	No. of meetings by <b>opponents</b> of an equitable green transition you attended since January 2023	Did you actively participate in the meeting(s) you attended by asking questions or voicing your concerns or opinion?	If you participated actively, do you feel that your question/concern was adequately answered/addressed during or after the meeting(s)?	If your question/concern was inadequately answered or addressed, what do you think could have been done better during or after the meeting(s)?	Do you recall what the topics were that the meeting organizers discussed? (Multiple answers were encouraged from a list of options)	Do you feel that the discussion during the meeting(s) you attended was inclusive or more top-down compared to your expectation?
Estonia	1-3	none	No	No	I didn't ask any questions.	Sorry, I don't recall	No, it was as if we were being told what to do, and how to do it
Estonia	8-10	none	Yes	No		Renewable energy options, Energy security - making sure there are 24/7/365 energy supplies	Partially, sometimes we were not invited to share thoughts and opinions
Latvia	4-7	1-3	Yes	Yes		Renewable energy options, Building renovations for energy costs savings, Mobility (cars, roads, bicycles, bike lanes, chargers, public transit, pedestrianisation), The ECAP document under preparation for the region and its municipalities	Partially, sometimes we were not invited to share thoughts and opinions

Country	No. of meetings by <b>promoters</b> of an equitable green transition you attended since January 2023	No. of meetings by <b>opponents</b> of an equitable green transition you attended since January 2023	Did you actively participate in the meeting(s) you attended by asking questions or voicing your concerns or opinion?	If you participated actively, do you feel that your question/concern was adequately answered/addressed during or after the meeting(s)?	If your question/concern was inadequately answered or addressed, what do you think could have been done better during or after the meeting(s)?	Do you recall what the topics were that the meeting organizers discussed? (Multiple answers were encouraged from a list of options)	Do you feel that the discussion during the meeting(s) you attended was inclusive or more top-down compared to your expectation?
Latvia	more than 10	1-3	No	No		Negative environmental and health effects of wind energy	Partially, sometimes we were not invited to share thoughts and opinions
Latvia	8-10	none	Yes	Yes		Defining the equitable (maybe they used the word "just") green transition, Energy costs, Renewable energy options, Building renovations for energy costs savings, Mobility (cars, roads, bicycles, bike lanes, chargers, public transit, pedestrianisation), Financing of renewable energy, building renovation, Energy poverty - the inability of poor	Yes, fully inclusive, democratic processes were functioning

Country	No. of meetings by <b>promoters</b> of an equitable green transition you attended since January 2023	No. of meetings by <b>opponents</b> of an equitable green transition you attended since January 2023	Did you actively participate in the meeting(s) you attended by asking questions or voicing your concerns or opinion?	If you participated actively, do you feel that your question/concern was adequately answered/addressed during or after the meeting(s)?	If your question/concern was inadequately answered or addressed, what do you think could have been done better during or after the meeting(s)?	Do you recall what the topics were that the meeting organizers discussed? (Multiple answers were encouraged from a list of options)	Do you feel that the discussion during the meeting(s) you attended was inclusive or more top-down compared to your expectation?
						households to afford adequate heating / cooling	
Czech Republic	none	none	No	No		I did not attend any meetings	No, it was as if we were being told what to do, and how to do it
Poland	more than 10	none	Yes	Yes		Renewable energy options, Building renovations for energy costs savings, Financing of renewable energy, building renovation, The ECAP document under preparation for the region and its municipalities	Partially, sometimes we were not invited to share thoughts and opinions

Country	No. of meetings by <b>promoters</b> of an equitable green transition you attended since January 2023	No. of meetings by <b>opponents</b> of an equitable green transition you attended since January 2023	Did you actively participate in the meeting(s) you attended by asking questions or voicing your concerns or opinion?	If you participated actively, do you feel that your question/concern was adequately answered/addressed during or after the meeting(s)?	If your question/concern was inadequately answered or addressed, what do you think could have been done better during or after the meeting(s)?	Do you recall what the topics were that the meeting organizers discussed? (Multiple answers were encouraged from a list of options)	Do you feel that the discussion during the meeting(s) you attended was inclusive or more top-down compared to your expectation?
Poland	1-3	none	No	No		Defining the equitable (maybe they used the word "just") green transition, Renewable energy options, Building renovations for energy costs savings, Energy poverty - the inability of poor households to afford adequate heating / cooling	Yes, fully inclusive, democratic processes were functioning
Poland	1-3	none	Yes	Yes		Energy costs, Building renovations for energy costs savings, Financing of renewable energy, building renovation, Energy poverty - the inability of poor households to afford adequate heating /	Yes, fully inclusive, democratic processes were functioning

Country	No. of meetings by <b>promoters</b> of an equitable green transition you attended since January 2023	No. of meetings by <b>opponents</b> of an equitable green transition you attended since January 2023	Did you actively participate in the meeting(s) you attended by asking questions or voicing your concerns or opinion?	If you participated actively, do you feel that your question/concern was adequately answered/addressed during or after the meeting(s)?	If your question/concern was inadequately answered or addressed, what do you think could have been done better during or after the meeting(s)?	Do you recall what the topics were that the meeting organizers discussed? (Multiple answers were encouraged from a list of options)	Do you feel that the discussion during the meeting(s) you attended was inclusive or more top-down compared to your expectation?
						cooling	
Poland	4-7	none		Yes		Defining the equitable (maybe they used the word "just") green transition, Energy costs, Renewable energy options, Building renovations for energy costs savings, Financing of renewable energy, building renovation, Energy poverty - the inability of poor households to afford adequate heating / cooling, The ECAP document under preparation for the region and its	Yes, fully inclusive, democratic processes were functioning

Country	No. of meetings by <b>promoters</b> of an equitable green transition you attended since January 2023	No. of meetings by <b>opponents</b> of an equitable green transition you attended since January 2023	Did you actively participate in the meeting(s) you attended by asking questions or voicing your concerns or opinion?	If you participated actively, do you feel that your question/concern was adequately answered/addressed during or after the meeting(s)?	If your question/concern was inadequately answered or addressed, what do you think could have been done better during or after the meeting(s)?	Do you recall what the topics were that the meeting organizers discussed? (Multiple answers were encouraged from a list of options)	Do you feel that the discussion during the meeting(s) you attended was inclusive or more top-down compared to your expectation?
						municipalities	
Poland	8-10	none	Yes	Yes	Defining the equitable (maybe they used the word "just") green transition, Renewable energy options, Financing of renewable energy, building renovation, Energy poverty - the inability of poor households to afford adequate heating / cooling, Energy security - making sure there are 24/7/365 energy supplies, The ECAP	Yes, fully inclusive, democratic processes were functioning	

Country	No. of meetings by <b>promoters</b> of an equitable green transition you attended since January 2023	No. of meetings by <b>opponents</b> of an equitable green transition you attended since January 2023	Did you actively participate in the meeting(s) you attended by asking questions or voicing your concerns or opinion?	If you participated actively, do you feel that your question/concern was adequately answered/addressed during or after the meeting(s)?	If your question/concern was inadequately answered or addressed, what do you think could have been done better during or after the meeting(s)?	Do you recall what the topics were that the meeting organizers discussed? (Multiple answers were encouraged from a list of options)	Do you feel that the discussion during the meeting(s) you attended was inclusive or more top-down compared to your expectation?
						document under preparation for the region and its municipalities, Soliciting your inputs for the ECAP plan	
Poland	1-3	none	No			Defining the equitable (maybe they used the word "just") green transition, Building renovations for energy costs savings, Financing of renewable energy, building renovation, The ECAP document under preparation for the region and its municipalities, Energy communities	Yes, fully inclusive, democratic processes were functioning

Country	No. of meetings by <b>promoters</b> of an equitable green transition you attended since January 2023	No. of meetings by <b>opponents</b> of an equitable green transition you attended since January 2023	Did you actively participate in the meeting(s) you attended by asking questions or voicing your concerns or opinion?	If you participated actively, do you feel that your question/concern was adequately answered/addressed during or after the meeting(s)?	If your question/concern was inadequately answered or addressed, what do you think could have been done better during or after the meeting(s)?	Do you recall what the topics were that the meeting organizers discussed? (Multiple answers were encouraged from a list of options)	Do you feel that the discussion during the meeting(s) you attended was inclusive or more top-down compared to your expectation?
Poland	more than 10	1-3				Defining the equitable (maybe they used the word "just") green transition, Renewable energy options, Financing of renewable energy, building renovation	Partially, sometimes we were not invited to share thoughts and opinions
Slovenia	4-7	8-10	Yes	Yes	I don't know.	Sorry, I don't recall	Partially, sometimes we were not invited to share thoughts and opinions
Croatia	none	none	No	No		Energy costs, Building renovations for energy costs savings	Yes, fully inclusive, democratic processes were functioning

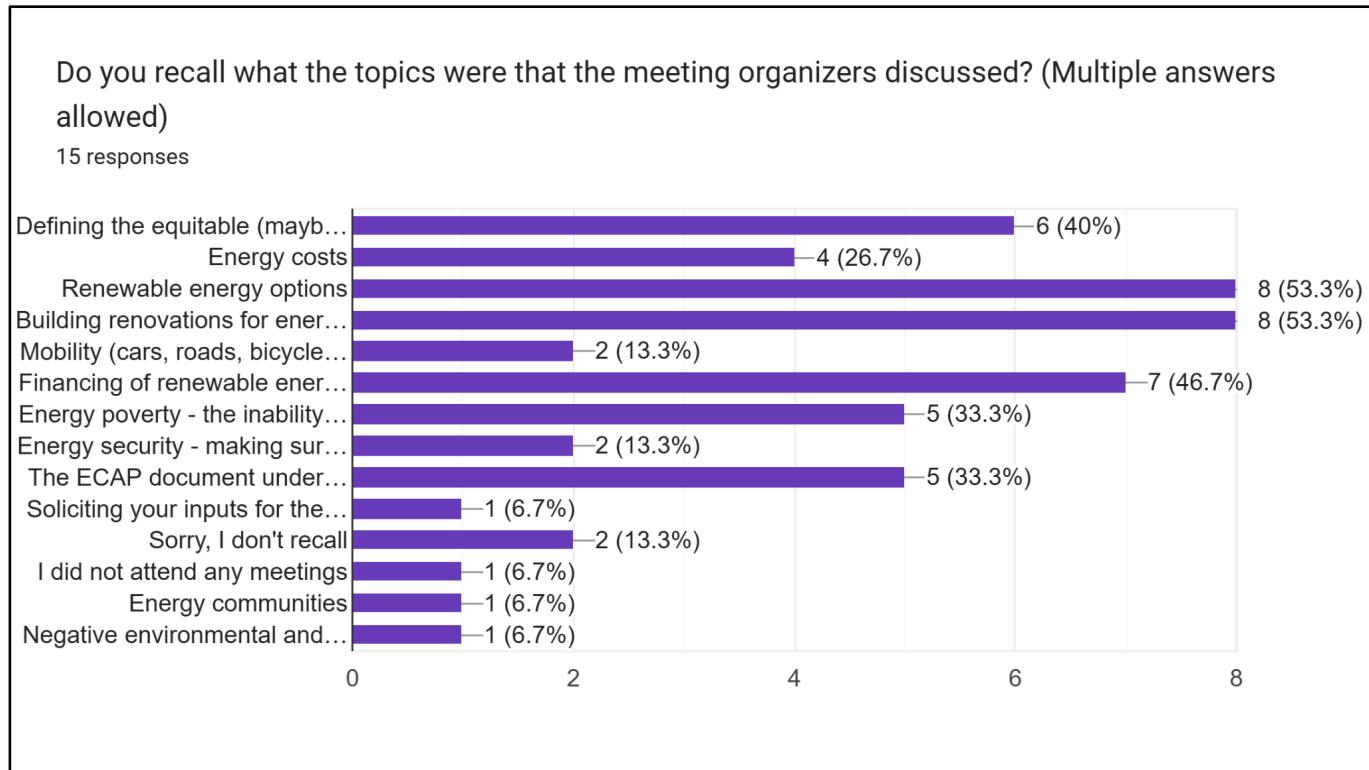
To summarize the statistics:

- 60% of respondents attended from 4 to more than 10 meetings held by proponents of the Green Transition, demonstrating a considerable degree of interest in ECAP+ development
- 27% of respondents attended from 1-10 meetings organised by opponents to the Green Transition
- 54% actively participated in meetings by asking questions or voicing their concerns or opinion

- Yet 46% of respondents felt that their questions/concerns were inadequately answered/addressed during or after the meeting(s) they attended
- Slightly less than half of respondents (47%) felt that the meetings they attended were fully inclusive, and that democratic processes were functioning
- The remaining 40% of respondents conceded that the discussion was only partially inclusive - sometimes they were not invited to share thoughts and opinions - or worse, where 13% claim that it was as if they were being told what to do and how to do it
- Among individuals registering greatest negativity as regards the implementation of democratic processes during meetings are 4 of the 5 respondents in the Baltic States
- The sole Czech respondent attended no meetings at all, perhaps answering because they felt more dictated to than included in decision making
- Conversely, Polish respondents were more eager to voice engagement in full or at least partial democratic processes during meetings

This does raise the issue mentioned previously, that it is very possible that partners will be able to engage stakeholders more effectively if they retain staff with a community or social engagement background. Such a person would be able to better engage with civil society than the current employees - despite efforts made by partners Climate Alliance and the University of Tartu to build this capacity during steering committee meetings. While welcomed at the time, retention of principles seems to have been low, based on this limited survey.

In reference to the topics raised and discussed at stakeholder meetings, the figure below is indicative of a focus on renewable energy, building renovations, financing (of renewable energy systems or of building renovation), and defining what is meant by the “just” component of the Green Transition.



Based on the above information, it is difficult to avoid the conclusion that the bottom-up approach that DIGIT anticipated as being the driver in developing an ECAP+, followed by a well-supported roll-out of the proposed actions by civil society and the public in general, fell short of what was desired. This may partly be due to the emergence of Central and Eastern Europe from nearly 50 years of inclusion in the Soviet sphere. Life under the communist systems across the CEE region required subservience to the state, to not voice opinions or opposition to government edicts. Among older generations, this attitude is likely to still influence willingness to participate in open meetings. For younger generations, even though they were born in countries free from Soviet influence, they have been educated in systems that are still in the process of transition. As these systems continue to move towards European standards, and the relative wealth of citizens continues to rise, it can be expected that participation should also continue to rise. This, though, has to dovetail with better outreach by ECAP planners, project partners, and local governments.

## 7. Capacity Building of Local Level Administrators & Technical Personnel

### 7.1 Training Effort

The Project Agreement stated DIGIT's intention to train and build capacity for 1231 people (refer to table below). As is the usual case for such enumeration, it is difficult to ascertain who is being double-counted, and why: for example, trainings might be offered on stakeholder engagement

and on financing of ECAP+ actions, in which the same person working for a small municipality participated. Is this now one or two people trained? What if it is two people from a slightly larger municipality, each with specific job descriptions that do not overlap, an overlap that is often the case in small municipalities where one person may be multi-tasking across several areas? Instead of concerning themselves with such issues, partners were asked to simply head-count people attending each training session, thus accepting that "discrete individuals trained" is not an identifiable metric.

TARGET GROUPS FOR TRAINING	TARGET NUMBER
Public sector employees on ECAPs	<b>66</b>
Training public sector employees on participatory governance	<b>66</b>
Public sector on adaptation planning	<b>100</b>
Public sector on MLG	<b>155</b>
Local elected officials	<b>300</b>
Regional stakeholders (public and private)	<b>300</b>
Civil society and vulnerable groups	<b>200</b>
Training on finances (1 person per 100 000 inhabitants)	<b>44</b>
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>1231</b>

Individual partners were allocated specific target numbers to reach, and these as well as the achievement are shown below, for each country. What is immediately evident is that reporting has not been done using the target groups identified and listed in the Grant Agreement, but for Poland and Estonia, for example, the allocations of 235 and 199 were far exceeded, although not across-the-board, since only ¼ of local elected officials in EE were trained as compared to the target while conversely 4 times the number of financial officers received training. Capacitation of civil society/vulnerable groups far outstripped the allocated target in both countries.

Target groups	ESTONIA ALLOCATION	Total number of participants	411
Public sector employees on ECAPs	11	Public sector employees	59
Public sector employees on participatory governance	11	Local elected officials	12
Public sector on adaptation planning	17	Private sector - local/regional SMEs	36
Public sector on MLG	26	Private sector - Industry	10
Local elected officials	50	Civil society	219
Regional stakeholders (public and private)	50	Vulnerable groups	18

Civil society and vulnerable groups	33	Financial officers	4
Training on finances (1 person per 100 000 inhabitants)	1	Others	54

Target groups	LATVIA ALLOCATION	Total number of participants	176
Public sector employees on ECAPs	11	Public sector employees	132
Public sector employees on participatory governance	11	Local elected officials	12
Public sector on adaptation planning	17	Private sector - local/regional SMEs	8
Public sector on MLG	26	Private sector - Industry	5
Local elected officials	50	Civil society	3
Regional stakeholders (public and private)	50	Vulnerable groups	12
Civil society and vulnerable groups	33	Financial officers	1
Training on finances (1 person per 100 000 inhabitants)	1	Others	3

Target groups	POLAND ALLOCATION	Total number of participants	610
Public sector employees on ECAPs	11	Public sector employees	369
Public sector employees on participatory governance	11	Local elected officials	5
Public sector on adaptation planning	17	Private sector - local/regional SMEs	7
Public sector on MLG	26	Private sector - Industry	2
Local elected officials	50	Civil society	0
Regional stakeholders (public and private)	50	Vulnerable groups	103
Civil society and vulnerable groups	33	Financial officers	27

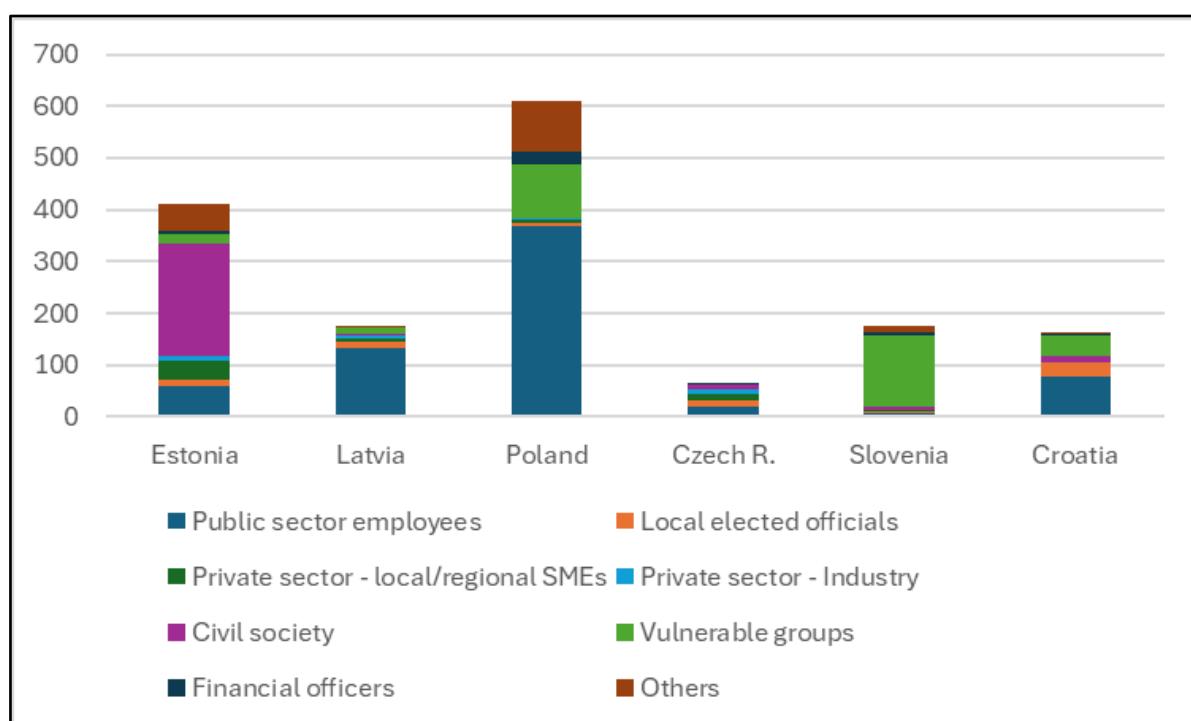
Training on finances (1 person per 100 000 inhabitants)	37	Others	97
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Target groups	CZECHIA ALLOCATION	Total number of participants	63
Public sector employees on ECAPs	11	Public sector employees	20
Public sector employees on participatory governance	11	Local elected officials	13
Public sector on adaptation planning	17	Private sector - local/regional SMEs	11
Public sector on MLG	26	Private sector - Industry	8
Local elected officials	50	Civil society	9
Regional stakeholders (public and private)	50	Vulnerable groups	0
Civil society and vulnerable groups	33	Financial officers	2
Training on finances (1 person per 100 000 inhabitants)	1	Others	0

Target groups	SLOVENIA ALLOCATION	Total number of participants	175
Public sector employees on ECAPs	11	Public sector employees	6
Public sector employees on participatory governance	11	Local elected officials	3
Public sector on adaptation planning	17	Private sector - local/regional SMEs	5
Public sector on MLG	26	Private sector - Industry	0
Local elected officials	50	Civil society	6
Regional stakeholders (public and private)	50	Vulnerable groups	137
Civil society and vulnerable groups	33	Financial officers	6
Training on finances (1 person per 100 000 inhabitants)	3	Others	12

Target groups	CROATIA ALLOCATION	Total number of participants	164
Public sector employees on ECAPs	11	Public sector employees	77
Public sector employees on participatory governance	11	Local elected officials	29
Public sector on adaptation planning	17	Private sector - local/regional SMEs	0
Public sector on MLG	26	Private sector - Industry	0
Local elected officials	50	Civil society	11
Regional stakeholders (public and private)	50	Vulnerable groups	40
Civil society and vulnerable groups	33	Financial officers	4
Training on finances (1 person per 100 000 inhabitants)	1	Others	3

Summing all the total number of participants across all six countries, 1599 participants received training compared to the total target of 1231. Estonia dominates for civil society in a laudable effort, while Poland trained the most local officials due to the large size of the Mazovia municipalities. Latvia fell short by about half its allocated target for civil society/vulnerable groups, the Czech Republic, trained only 9 persons from these groups and Poland trained no one. Perhaps this is indicative of the weakness of civil society in the Visegrad states. The chart below offers a consolidated view of the trainees by each partner.



Further details on the 54 discrete training sessions can be found in D2.2, *Trainings conducted for public and private entities*.

## 7.2. Feedback from Trainees

Municipal staff were emailed and asked to complete a Google Form short questionnaire on the capacitation undertaken by DIGIT partners. Of the 224 municipalities within the project, 11 answered: HR 4, LV 4, PL 2, and SI 1. Asked how much they knew about an ECAP before being approached by the partner, 4 answered "nothing at all" (PL, SI, HR), 2 "a little" (PL, LV), 4 "some knowledge" (LV, HR), and 1 "a lot" (LV). There is no discernible pattern of pre-existing knowledge among the countries.

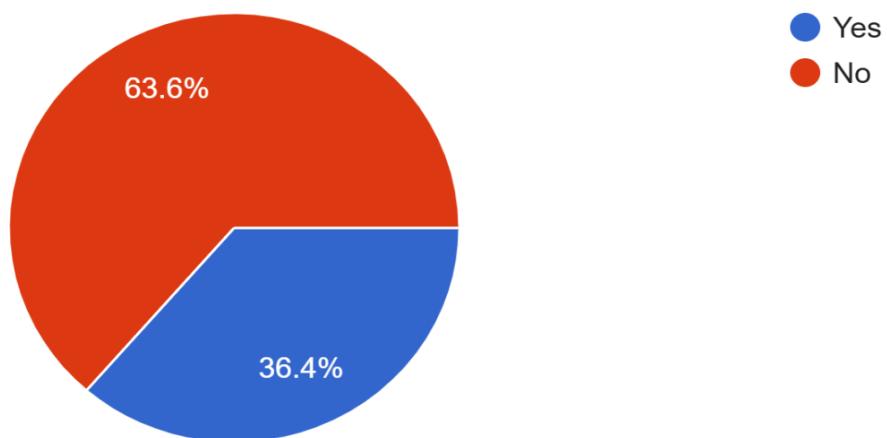
Asked how well the partner explained the components of the ECAP+ and associated funding opportunities (emissions reductions, climate adaptations, energy poverty), 8 indicated "perfectly" while 3 (2/4 in HR and the 1 in SI) thought the explanation to be generally good, but some minor details were missing. And when asked how easy it was to include other municipal staff in the development of the ECAP+, 3 (LV, HR) indicated it is very difficult as staff expertise and resources do not exist, 3 (again LV and HR) marked this as somewhat difficult, and the remaining 5 remarked it to be "somewhat easy." There are no solid patterns within these responses but note that neither the category "very easy" nor "no need" were marked.

Next, asked if the process of obtaining colleagues' buy-in to the ECAP+ was easy or complicated, 3/4 in LV stated "very" or "somewhat" complicated, and these were the largest of the responding municipalities - the 4th LV municipality thought it was "somewhat easy", which suggests heterogeneity within countries. The same breakdown for "easiness" is reported by the 4 HR municipalities. SI and PL report it to have been somewhat easy to do so. Categories not selected include "very easy," "very complicated," "colleagues were uninterested", and "only the Mayor is needed to approve the ECAP". One municipality in HR expanded on the issue in the follow-up question that asked respondents to explain the process: "Our municipality is already engaged in energy and climate planning at local level regardless of lack of staff and financial resources because the topic was recognised as needed by municipal staff and citizens. The head of the municipality attended the relevant meetings and workshops organised for the CEESEU-DIGIT project and during the events shared key challenges in relation to the energy and climate situation in the municipality and suggested the relevant measures based on internal discussions among municipal staff".

As regards sufficient capacitation for municipalities to independently work on an ECAP, the charts below suggest that knowledge gaps remain. This demonstrates some alignment with the premise that regional energy agencies are the best professionals able to create ECAPs and to keep abreast of funding opportunities to enable actions. 4 of 11 respondents selected that it's better for such agencies to do this.

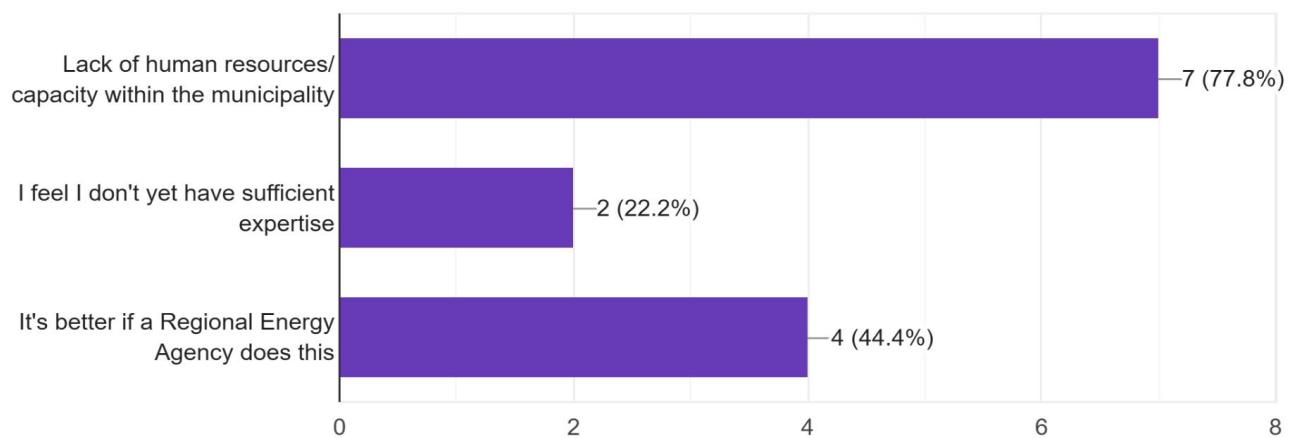
## Would you now be able to create and update an ECAP on your own?

11 responses



## If you selected "no", why?

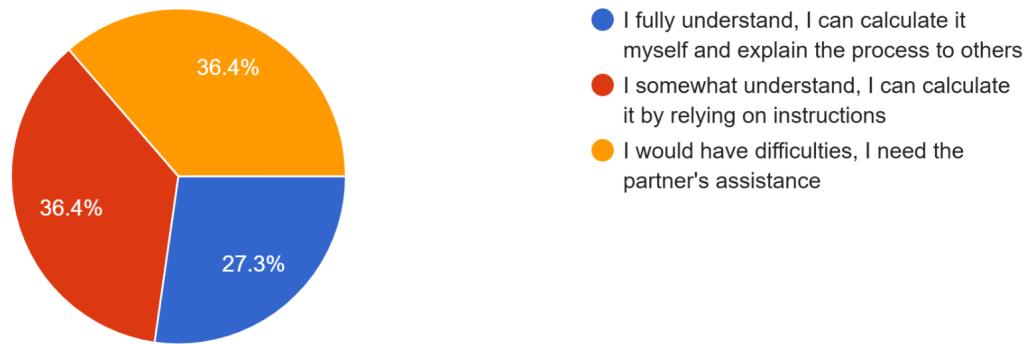
9 responses



Asked about their ability to calculate emissions on their own, the chart below shows responses. Just over ¼ of respondents (LV and PL) feel able to make the calculations independently.

### How much do you understand about how to calculate CO2 emissions?

11 responses



Regarding the inclusion and participation of the municipalities' inhabitants while developing the ECAP+, the 4 HR municipalities concurred that they were somewhat included, while neighbouring SI stated "almost never". In LV, 3/4 municipalities thought this to have taken place "only a little", the remaining one stating "somewhat". Only the municipality in PL that opted to remain anonymous answered "very much". When asked to expound on this, 2 LV and the 4 HR municipalities did so:

- General ideas in public surveys (LV)
- Statistical data was collected on households and entrepreneurs; however, it is difficult and even impossible to impose targets on the private sector to achieve. Building insulation has become more popular in recent years, but this also involves teamwork and joint decision-making (LV)
- Yes, the measures were defined based on their inputs (HR)
- Many of them don't have enough knowledge about topics but they have the intention and will to get more info about it (HR)
- They certainly emphasize the importance of investing in the renovation of houses and other buildings regardless of their purpose, additional financing options to ensure the sustainability of energy projects that are more financially challenging, etc. All of this was proposed during relevant workshops and meetings within the project and more or less included in the ECAP+ document (HR)
- Their input was taken into consideration. The general public is not too familiar with energy and climate issues (HR)

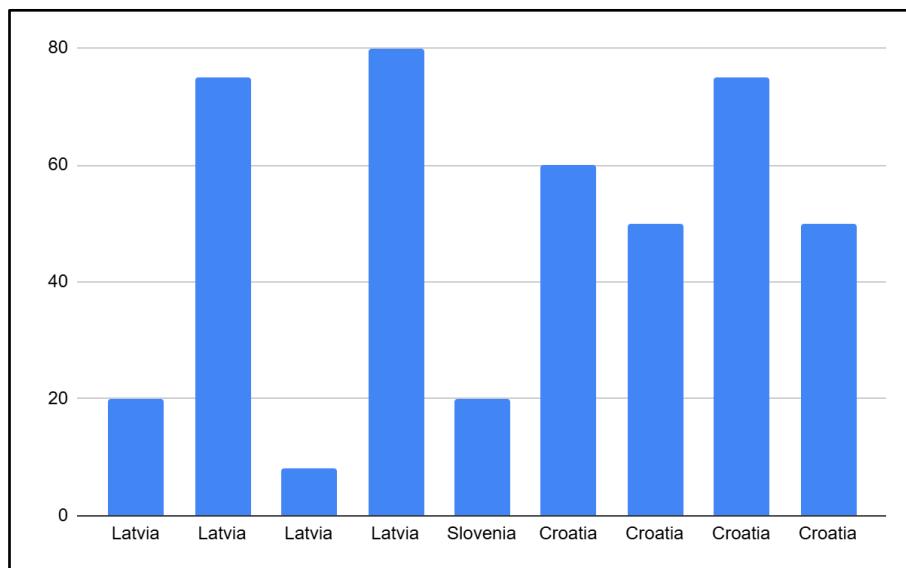
These answers support the idea that reliance on grassroot demand for energy and climate action in the CEE might be problematic – due to some combination of lack of interest among the citizenry and lack of experience in democratic processes among municipal staff (HR)

Regarding energy poverty and its inclusion in the ECAP+, the SI respondent contends that energy poverty does not exist in the municipality. One LV respondent answered, "energy poverty exists in my municipality, but I think it is insufficiently discussed in the ECAP+", while the other 3 in LV think energy poverty to be "somewhat" included as do the 4 HR respondents. Conversely, the 2 PL municipalities answered "yes, to a satisfactory level", indicative perhaps of greater emphasis on behalf of energy poor households in the Polish ECAP+s.

Queried if municipalities applied for funding of any proposed action within the ECAP+ by themselves, or if it was done by the partner, 2 of 4 in LV responded it to have been the partner while the other 2 claimed that they applied on their own without partner support. PL shows the same 50:50 split for its 2 responding municipalities. In SI (1 respondent) the partner applies, and in HR the answers are more mixed, 1 with the partner applying, 2 on their own but with partner support, and 1 on their own entirely.

For offering feedback to partners, respondents were asked to rate the work accomplished with the partner on a scale of 1 to 10, 10 being excellent. The median score is 7.5, with 10 of 11 respondents scoring between 5 and 10. One outlier (PL) scored it as 1, but it chose to remain entirely anonymous so the evaluation team could not follow up to ask if this score was a misunderstanding of the scale, or if it is a true judgement of the cooperative work between partner and municipality.

Respondents were next asked about their view on the probability of their municipality meeting its ECAP+ goals by 2030. In PL, 2 respondents opted to not answer this question, which explains their absence in the chart below. Nobody thought that the goals would be met in full, and one respondent in LV (Cēsis municipality) believes little progress will be made, contending in the follow-up question that this is due to the transport sector being the largest contributor to CO<sub>2</sub> emissions.



Of the remaining 3 municipalities in LV; the pessimistic one predicates their assessment on the lack of funding opportunities, while the other 2 are more optimistic: "We have completed some measures and improvements are planned for the coming years in areas that were not predicted, such as electric transport. The central heating provider has also received support in an EU project to make improvements. These are essential aspects to help achieve the goal" and "We have already reached approximately 50% of goals. Biggest challenge is to make apartment buildings go to renovation process." HR respondents indicated that: "This will be mostly influenced by the towns and somewhat larger municipalities in county area who have more budget and experts available than us"; "All depends on available finance resources and budget or external funds"; "There is interest from most municipalities at the county level in applying for energy and climate projects to jointly contribute to the goal, the regional energy agency provides ongoing support both in the application process and in the implementation of successful projects, etc."; and

"There has been progress related to some goals, while others are still very distant. Technological breakthroughs could play a significant role". Dominating these sentiments is the need for funding to reach goals.

Among the 11 municipalities, inconsistent pre-existing knowledge of ECAPs exist and challenges in involving municipal staff and securing internal buy-in due to limited expertise are commonly encountered. Most municipalities lacked confidence in independently calculating emissions, and despite varied approaches to citizen engagement and energy poverty inclusion, few were optimistic about meeting ECAP+ goals by 2030, citing funding as the primary barrier.

### **7.3. Best Practices Derived from Trainers' Assessment**

Another Google form was administered to all partners conducting trainings in their respective countries. Answers regarding the most useful methods for training local level administrators stated that:

- "It is extremely challenging to choose the best option, as it largely depends on the trainees' baseline knowledge of the topic. However, in general, I believe the most effective approach is not to present everything, but to focus on the key highlights. This helps capture their attention and motivates them to explore the topic further on their own or entice them to attend further trainings."
- "I'm not entirely sure we've found the best approach yet; it often depends on their level of interest in the topic—whether it stems from a pressing need, a specific area of responsibility, or relevance to their work. However, a "carrot and stick" approach seems to work to some extent. For example, explaining why the topic is important or will soon become necessary (due to laws, standards, or upcoming EU directives) can be effective. Highlighting how addressing it now, with proper knowledge and preparation, can yield better results and provide more time for tailored planning also helps. Equally important is presenting a clear "toolbox" of solutions and practical information during the event. Up-to-date, region-specific data and information are particularly impactful, as they resonate more directly with participants and their circumstances."
- "I find using examples familiar to the attendees the most useful as they can most likely relate to the topic and understand it better. I try to explain the topic in a way that they understand by using current events/plans/examples to simplify the topics. Most frequent methods I use are those where attendees work in groups discussing thematic questions - I find it to be useful because they discuss the topics amongst each other, which makes them feel freer to express their opinions and views, unlike when they have to voice their opinion to all participants at once."
- "Workshops and discussions with real life examples, helping them to understand and share the knowledge, especially interactive workshops because local level administrators can ask questions if they have difficulties in understanding some parts of the topic and enable us to provide them answers and clarifications. Use of real-life cases and practical examples from their own local context, group discussions, visual aids such as infographics, flowcharts etc., breaking concepts into simple steps, incorporating visuals, encouraging peer learning, and applying interactive, context-specific training techniques."
- "Engaging experts who specialise in the topic, give the floor for questions and discussions; connecting the topics with the financial options/possibilities/grants."

Trainers encountered challenges, some of which could not be readily overcome.

- Not every topic is interesting for all of them (e.g., marketing the topic of multi-level governance is not that easy), not very responsive if the mentioned topic is beyond their competences or outside of their interest (e.g. they are not aware if the cruciality of the topic yet)
- Participant engagement is always a challenge, poor participant response, little interest in climate related topics
- If a training has a longer duration, participants tend to become impatient and less engaged.
- Participant engagement – some participants were less actively involved and showed hesitation in engaging, particularly when more complex topics were discussed.
- Differences in knowledge levels – varied backgrounds and levels of experience among participants made it difficult to maintain a consistent pace that met everyone's needs.

Asked to reflect changes in the way training is offered in the future, respondents shared ideas.

- Content wise it is hard to change maybe - we have a lot of experiences with energy and climate plan development and energy efficiency, renewable energy topics, but cannot influence higher decision makers enough. The interest, need, and perceived importance of the topic among officials and specialists are often dictated by decision-makers. In reality, it is the responsibility of senior management to prioritize and emphasize the topic.
- Perhaps the training could be divided into smaller groups based on their level of knowledge, allowing each group to explore the topic at a different depth. For next time, we would consider sending short videos in advance to align the participants' baseline level of knowledge.
- Inform the attendees about the topic in an email prior to the workshop/training, as a way to introduce the topic which might make it easier for them to understand it and to be (more) willing to attend planned activities.
- To ensure a high response rate, perhaps state the direct benefits of the participation, better event promotion among target groups, etc.
- Be more creative with the topics, building the community that trusts in the proposed program and would like to be engaged anyway
- Our approach to motivating public sector employees, especially decision-makers, is to include a session on finances—specifically focusing on financing opportunities, grants, open calls, and similar topics. This strategy often successfully engages top decision-makers from municipalities, such as mayors and directors of municipal administrations.
- Another effective method is to present good practice cases. Whenever possible, we enhance this by arranging site visits.
- Breaking concepts into simple steps - shortening training segments with more breaks. Also, more interactive activities.
- Offer them direct benefits from participating in workshops, such as additional individual counselling for future applications
- Include more interactive activities to encourage participation, assess participants' knowledge beforehand to adjust the pace, and provide additional materials and follow-up Q&A sessions.

Asked what additional resources, tools, or activities could enhance participants' engagement in future trainings, some respondents reacted negatively to additional reading materials - for

example: "The format of reading materials, in our opinion, is not suitable, as only a small portion of people are willing to dedicate time to reading. We see video creation as a much more effective approach. In the past, creating videos was very costly, but AI can significantly assist in content creation, video production, or even generating subtitles for videos in foreign languages". Others see provision of pre-session reading materials as an appropriate tactic to elevate interest, for example: "Providing additional reading materials for participants to take home could be a valuable way to help them grasp more complex topics. These materials should go beyond plain text and include visual aids that help illustrate key concepts, technical solutions, methods, and other relevant information". Another respondent concurred with the idea of pre-session reading material: "Pre-training reading materials with summary of the training topic to help participants to arrive with baseline knowledge of the subject. Also, follow up email with presentation and summary of key points, links to important materials and contact information if they have further questions."

Asked for any additional ideas for improving the training of public sector employees in their regions, a few ideas were offered:

- Municipalities or clusters of municipalities need a dedicated person to be engaging with ECAPs and who would have a general understanding of the issues involved.
- Emphasize the real-life examples and good practices and collecting regular feedback to evaluate the impact of workshops and to adjust future trainings based on the real, actual needs of participants.
- it is important to address the topics for the specific administrative position; Polish administrators are convinced when they can learn more about the financing options.
- The introduction of blended learning approaches, which integrate in-person training with online resources and tools, offering participants greater flexibility and continuous support.

Several facets emerge when summarizing the responses, i.e., trainers routinely face challenges in engaging local administrators on the sometimes-complex topics embedded in their ECAP+, and they also note varied baseline knowledge and a lack of inherent interest in certain topics. Training methods deemed effective generally focused on key highlights, emphasized practical tools and region-specific data, used familiar examples, and facilitated group discussions to encourage participation. This suggests three possible best practices for future trainings:

1. **Tailored content and delivery:** Implement pre-training videos or foundational materials to standardize baseline knowledge and offer differentiated training tracks or smaller groups to accommodate varied expertise levels.
2. **Enhance engagement through practical hands-on work and link with funding opportunities:** Prioritize interactive workshops with real-life, region-specific examples, integrate discussions on financial opportunities (grants, loans, from multiple supra-national and national/local funding sources) to motivate municipal staff, and clearly communicate the direct benefits of participation.
3. **Leverage technology and follow-up:** Record YouTube videos (possibly using AI) as an alternative to lengthy reading materials, and provide post-training summaries, key resources, and contact information for ongoing support and Q&A/FAQs.

## 8. Identification of Vulnerable Groups

DIGIT partners identified who and what comprise those groups within their respective regions. The responses demonstrate that partners need to make a greater effort at precisely defining these audiences. The partial understanding of vulnerable groups may be a significant factor in why capacity building activities by partners achieved mixed results.

	Estonia	Latvia	Poland	Czech Republic	Slovenia	Croatia
1. Who are the vulnerable groups in the target area?	Single parents, households in energy poverty - we can classify these in different ways, but they are all income related Municipality-owned institutions, groups, e.g. people in elderly care, disabled people	Vulnerable groups affected by the clean energy transition in the sense of households in energy poverty and buildings in very poor condition	households in energy poverty youth, students elderly people national minorities - it is question if they stay in Poland or not	Households with debt (~20% of households) Pensioners with a family house (bad energetic condition) other social groups with a big family house in a bad energetic condition	Those affected by poverty, especially elderly people in the rural areas, sometimes buildings in a poor energetic condition. However, people take a lot of care about what others see from the outside.	Roma community - buildings in a very bad energetic condition and shape, isolated settlement without access to basic infrastructure; several problems with building ownership and permits and building registry retired people groups in need of social care e.g. disabled single-parent families, families with multiple children, unemployed people
2. What kind of characteristics do they have? Basic		E.g. families with 3 or more children, elderly people etc. Defined	language can be a problem	over 60 No insulation, old windows etc.		

	Estonia	Latvia	Poland	Czech Republic	Slovenia	Croatia
demographic information Geographic Population Age Gender Average education level Average income Other useful info		<p>regarding the file attached.</p> <p>Asking for help is very hard for them, they consider it degrading</p>				
3. Where are they located in the target area? In one group (settlement) close to each other, or spread?	In towns, almost everywhere, spread	More in the countryside (small villages), households with ineffective individual heating, and not the cities	spread all over the target region	spread	Rural areas especially, spread everywhere, the target area is mainly rural, with a couple of urban centres.	Roma communities in one group, separated villages/settlements, infrastructure problems mentioned above  Others spread, everywhere - also in cities and countryside
4. Do they currently have any representative organization,	Municipalities, union of housing associations - covers the whole country, they deal with energy poverty, have projects	Municipalities, social specialists, building management companies	multiple organization dealing with them in different approaches and not particularly all of them at once, municipalities,	People in Need - they do social work  Local Action Groups	Each municipality takes care of their inhabitants in need. A large number of small municipalities. Social workers -	yes, representatives in the council, separate organizations e.g NGOs for Roma people  political party for the retired people, organizations, they may

	Estonia	Latvia	Poland	Czech Republic	Slovenia	Croatia
municipality etc. to hold their interests?		owned by municipalities, also NGOs	schools and local authorities		however households need to be registered to access social assistance. Many people do not ask for help for many reasons.	have some contact with social workers and municipalities. Social Work Institute - taking care of them.  Women long-time unemployed - help from the municipality to employ the women and help these households. They may have some contact with social workers and municipalities. Social Work Institute - taking care of them. Family Center Regional Service.  Unemployed - Croatian Employment Service; Family Center Regional Service
5. How is it possible to reach out to them? What kind of media do they consume? Online, printed or both?	Print - e.g. local newspaper articles, leaflets. Social media is not the best platform to reach out to them. People have more trust in printed media. Single parents may read social media. Facebook groups locally for sharing information.	Mostly print, e.g. posters, newspapers, leaflets delivered to mailboxes	Social/online media, printed - posters, school, leaflets, maybe local newspapers, television	mostly printed, e.g. leaflets, magazine articles	Facebook campaigns maybe. Printed media - leaflets, posters - involving postal service (it may be expensive), local media is under conditions.	they also have access to social media, + radio, television, they do not really consume printed media printed media, television, radio, and also internet access and social media

	Estonia	Latvia	Poland	Czech Republic	Slovenia	Croatia
	Local radio in Russian - very important for local people.					
Can we reach the vulnerable target group directly, or only the representative organization?	Events, workshops - through municipalities, printed media can work directly	Through social specialists, municipalities	through the organizations, municipalities and schools	Both	Reaching out to them is possible, however partially, not in the whole area. Through the municipalities, social workers. Network of energy advisors reaching out to poor people - they need to come on their own to be in the system. Social media - direct reach.	through the organizations, representatives, directly in social media and internet, leaflets and posters can work as well
6. Are they familiar with the term energy transition?	Many people consider it as a negative thing, it is hard for them to assess what it means in reality. They know it exists, but the messages do not target them	Not really, maybe some of them understand the problem, but not really aware	not aware - they might care about nature and want to do something for their children and grandchildren	Not really, however there are some activities to inform them (mostly printed media, magazine,	It depends - some of them are aware of it, but this is not their most important problem. Lower level of education. It also depends on how it is	they have probably heard about it, but not well informed and not interested

	Estonia	Latvia	Poland	Czech Republic	Slovenia	Croatia
				leaflets) energy experts giving advice in person	presented in the media.	
7. Who should be the contact person? Any idea?				People in Need	small rural municipalities, they have the possibility to spread the information, maybe the advisory network and the social workers as well.	yes
What kind of capacity do they need for advocacy?	It depends on the group. Retired people / disabled people - here we should differentiate. Single parents may not have any representative organization.	-	they are more aware than before, but they are not able to advocate for themselves on their own, but through organizations. they should be considered in programs, e.g. funding	Government is not strong in social issues. None of the target groups are well organized, they do not identify as strong groups, therefore they do not have advocacy plans	They can access funding for energy renovation, but they do not often know about it. They need support on how to apply for financial help. They do not always have the proper information.	they have other problems to deal with first, and they are not really interested in climate and energy issues. In other issues they can facilitate advocacy through the representatives.  they have the political party - advocacy can be facilitated by them  they have direct contact with the social workers in needs of advocacy work

	Estonia	Latvia	Poland	Czech Republic	Slovenia	Croatia
How can they reach that? What do they need for it?	Information, support - to apply for funding, raising their awareness	-	It can be more important to educate municipalities, and not inhabitants directly. they need money and people representing them on regional and national level as well			
How can CEESEU-DIGIT support their interest?	Energy savings, innovation, energy efficiency, renovation		practical household level tips, tricks, how to save energy and money, how to apply for funding etc. information and awareness raising about a better future and a green transition - they can educate their parents as well		Support on how to apply for financial help, information and awareness raising, campaign - tips, tricks and practical and literal information	funding options and support for applying, energy saving tips without much investment, more the practical side of the energy and climate issues, how to make saving
Messages - about sustainability goals	More practical information, real energy saving tips, possibilities for loans and other funding possibilities, awareness rising on this topics, what energy	Energy efficiency measures with good examples and pilot buildings, smaller		energy efficiency and energy saving tips, tips for funding		proper firewood heating leaflet can be interesting

	Estonia	Latvia	Poland	Czech Republic	Slovenia	Croatia
	transition and green transition means - especially the positive aspects	improvements they can do right now - the low hanging fruit, practical support				
Messages - about the project	For public officers, municipal help, professional support		what is going on in the region - information, influencing, awareness raising, proper heating (coal) posters - fuel quality, manage the fire, maintain the chimney etc. - can be useful	the region is not dealing with coal mines closing; problems: debt, household energy conditions		

All partners mentioned “printed materials” as one, if not the most important, way to reach out to vulnerable groups. However, only PL and HR had developed and were widely using such printed materials. SI, when presenting financing options for vulnerable groups (such as Eco Fund subsidies), uses materials prepared by the financing institutions — the Eco Fund and/or Borzen (which offers subsidies for PV installations, e-bikes, e-cars, etc.). SI also produced printed materials for one event involving vulnerable groups, but those were developed within another project. Other partners may have adopted solutions similarly to Slovenia's.

The Polish partner held a workshop for vulnerable households and asked participants to complete a short survey. Eleven respondents completed the survey instrument, one of which is shown below as an example. Google Translate provides the English from the Polish printed and handwritten text.

Workshops OPS Praga Południe 22/04/2024				
No.	Question	Answer		
1	How old are you?	<input type="checkbox"/> 0 – 17	<input type="checkbox"/> 18 – 29	
		<input type="checkbox"/> 30 – 39	<input type="checkbox"/> 40 – 49	
		<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> 50 – 59	<input type="checkbox"/> 60+	
2	What do you think are the main benefits of saving energy?	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Lower energy bills.	<input type="checkbox"/> Less dependence on imports of energy resources.	
		<input type="checkbox"/> Environmental protection.	<input type="checkbox"/> All of the above.	
3	What do you think are the main challenges related to energy saving?	<input type="checkbox"/> The high cost of energy-saving appliances and light bulbs	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Insufficient knowledge about ways to save energy.	
		<input type="checkbox"/> Lack of motivation to save energy.	<input type="checkbox"/> All of the above.	
4	How often do you turn off lights and electrical appliances when not in use?	1 Never	2 Rarely	3 Sometimes
			<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> 4 Often	5 Always
5	Do you use energy-saving light bulbs and appliances in your home?	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes, in all rooms. <small>szczególnie</small>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Yes, in some rooms.	
		<input type="checkbox"/> No, I rarely use energy-saving light bulbs and appliances.	<input type="checkbox"/> No, I do not use energy-saving light bulbs or appliances.	
6	What steps do you take to save energy when washing and drying clothes?	<input type="checkbox"/> I wash clothes at lower temperatures.	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> I air dry my clothes instead of putting them in a dryer.	
		<input type="checkbox"/> I use energy-saving programs on my washing machine and dryer.	<input type="checkbox"/> I am not taking any special steps.	

CEESEU-DIGIT has received funding from the Programme for Environment and Climate Action (LIFE) under grant agreement No. 101077297.

No.	Question	Answer	
7	What are, in your opinion, the main sources of electricity in Poland?	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Hard coal <input type="checkbox"/> Renewable energy (e.g. wind, solar).	<input type="checkbox"/> Nuclear energy. <input type="checkbox"/> I don't know.
8	Would you like to learn more about how to save energy at home?	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Yes	<input type="checkbox"/> No
9	What are the most important things we can do to save energy in a simple way at home?	simply bigger bonuses, e.g. once a week.	
10	Which electrical appliances use the most energy?	prefer, mitrókele kuchuku, electric mesujudi, kucheari.	
11	Can using energy-saving light bulbs and appliances reduce your energy costs?	YES	
12	How can we encourage others to save energy?	to tell you not to worry & to get rid of a lot of stress in times of stress and anxiety	
13	What are the new technologies that can help us save energy in the future?	we will	



CEESEU-DIGIT has received funding from the Programme for Environment and Climate Action (LIFE) under grant agreement No. 101077297.



The Croatian partner prepared materials for vulnerable groups, brochures and guidelines prepared in the frame of other projects dealing with energy poverty including projects CO-EMEP and EmpowerMed, publication of two articles in local newspapers, and a leaflet on how to save energy. The infographics, the brochures and the leaflet were already distributed directly to vulnerable groups during the home visits and to relevant institutions working with vulnerable groups including local and regional governments, the Institute for Social Work, and the Red Cross, which offered distribution to vulnerable groups. Concerning the Roma community, the partner was able to include them in a minor way, only during the home visits for the ones who live outside their Roma community since many of them have moved on to other settlements in the country because they wanted better living conditions and to break away from the existing way of life). To reach out to the Roma community the partner implemented several meetings with relevant organisations and institutions working with them directly such as the Red Cross and the Institute for Social Work as well as regional and local governments in the County area. These meetings aided identification of vulnerable groups in the County, shared information on relevant supporting measures existing at regional and national levels and developed further steps to be taken to ensure deeper engagement with Roma households in the future.

The Croatian infographics, leaflet, and newspaper articles are shown below, translated into English through Google Translate.

## Proper use of firewood



- IMPROPER USE OF FIREWOOD harms our health and the environment.
- AIR POLLUTION: the most serious environmental health risk
- DO NOT use RAW OR WET wood, as a lot of energy is spent on drying the wood itself, not heating it.
- Place the lighter on the TOP of the BURN, not the bottom.
- DO NOT USE TREATED WOOD because it releases toxic particles when burned.
- CLEAN THE CHIMNEY REGULARLY to make combustion more efficient.
- WITH MODERN HEATING EQUIPMENT, heating efficiency can be increased up to 90%.

MEDIMUR ENERGY AGENCY LLC

The creation of the infographic was co-financed by the European Union as part of the CEESEU-DIGIT project through the LIFE program. The opinions expressed are solely those of the authors and do not necessarily reflect the views of the European Union or CINEA. Neither the European Union nor the granting body can be held responsible.

MNEA CLOSES THE CEESEU-DIGIT PROJECT

## Just energy transition

The implementation of the project showed that a just energy transition is possible and necessary

**In** the context of the transition to a sustainable energy system and the fight against climate change, the CEESEU-DIGIT project developed a model of a regional public initiative for a just energy transition of the sustainable energy union of Central and Eastern Europe. The initiative supports local and non-governmental regional development in the implementation of a just energy transition.

### ENERGY SECURITY

Funded by the EU LIFE program, the project started in December 2022 and will end in May 2025. The project, in addition to MNEA, brings together eleven partners who promote unique

solutions that respond to the needs of citizens involved from Central Estonia, the Czech Republic, Hungary, Slovakia, Latvia and Poland.

The main objective of the project is to support the energy security of local and regional authorities in preparing regional energy and climate plans and in finding appropriate solutions for energy projects that help in low-carbon development. The project itself goes a step further and puts equal emphasis on vulnerable groups such as low-income households, pensioners, social workers, residents of the northern part of the country. The project promotes a model of cooperation between public authorities, experts, educational institutions and NGOs, thus creating a sustainable network of knowledge and solidarity.

**CENTRAL EASTERN EUROPEAN SUSTAINABLE ENERGY NETWORK**



MEDIMUR ENERGY AGENCY d.o.o.

JUST TRANSITION

In Medimurje County, one of the pilot areas of the project, a Regional Energy and Climate Action Plan was adopted, which sets out a regional framework for a just energy transition with a focus on energy security and poverty, as well as climate change. Given that

The project implementation ends on May 31st, a final conference was held in Zagreb on May 7th, 2025, attracting

more than a hundred

participants from various countries and sectors. Additionally, as part of the final activities, a regional final conference and workshop on May 21st, 2025, in which the Regional Energy and Climate Action Plan for Medimurje County was presented to relevant stakeholders.

At the very end, you can

to say that the implementation of the project is not only possible, but also necessary, and its beginning

is the beginning of the consequences of climate and energy challenges every day.

The creation of the article was co-financed by the European Union.

The opinions expressed are those of the authors only and do not necessarily reflect

the views of the European Union or CINEA. Neither the European Union nor the grant-making body can be held responsible for them.

Co-financed by the European Union

MAY 26, 2025. MEDIMURJE

14

6 Home, warm home! 

MEDIMUR ENERGY AGENCY d.o.o. remains one of the country's more successful consulting companies

## How to save energy in everyday life in a simple way

**M**ost people are not aware of the potential for energy savings in their everyday lives. In fact, there are many simple ways to save energy and money without making major changes to your home or lifestyle. Here are some tips for saving energy in everyday life:

1. Use energy-efficient light bulbs. LED bulbs use less energy and last longer than incandescent bulbs.

2. Turn off lights when you leave a room.

3. Use a programmable thermostat to control your heating and cooling system.

4. Use energy-efficient appliances. Look for the Energy Star label when buying new appliances.

5. Use a clothesline instead of a dryer to dry laundry.

6. Use a broom instead of a vacuum cleaner to clean floors.

7. Use a power strip to control multiple electrical devices.

8. Use a programmable timer to control your water heater.

9. Use a programmable timer to control your air conditioning system.

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# Energy transition and energy poverty

Energy poverty occurs when a household is unable to secure the minimum level of energy consumption required to meet basic needs and participate effectively in society. Energy poverty is a multidimensional phenomenon that is believed to be caused by a combination of low income, high energy costs and poor energy efficiency of buildings.



## Indicators of household energy poverty

- Inappropriate indoor temperatures (too hot or too cold)
- Inadequate comfort and hygiene conditions, poor air quality, and exposure to harmful chemicals and materials
- Disproportionate energy costs that force the household to make undesirable decisions (e.g. dilemma "heating or food")
- Insecure access to energy (i.e. dependence on unstable and insecure supply)
- Significant psychological stress due to unpaid energy bills

## Statistical data



The transition towards a climate-neutral EU economy requires solving the problem of energy poverty and mitigating the social aspects of the transition to ensure affordable energy prices and social inclusion.

More than 41 million Europeans cannot heat their homes sufficiently.

Almost 7% of the European population is behind on paying their utility bills.

Almost 15% of the European population lives in houses that leak, have damp or rot.



## How to solve energy poverty?

### AND

Diagnosis  
is your municipality facing energy poverty?

Collection of relevant indicators

Mapping key stakeholders and organizing meetings to identify relevant energy poverty and the gap between higher-level policies (national governments, EU) and local communities

Defining energy poverty at the local level and communicating results

### B

Planning  
Setting a vision with a timeline

Creation of a list of possible measures to combat energy poverty, from emergency measures to long-term activities and selection of those that best suit the local context and citizens' needs

Development of a local social action plan

### C

Implementation  
Prioritization - selection of appropriate measures - matrix method

Awareness raising campaigns - consistent communication; clear messages; empathy towards the target audience

Visits to households in a vulnerable position while providing advice

One-stop shops - centralized centers where citizens can find information about various energy-related services. Supported by qualified staff, they offer services to the general population and vulnerable citizens: advice on electricity and gas bills; information and advice on obtaining funds for energy renovation and support in filling out applications; energy consumption estimates, energy sharing, etc. Energy renovation of houses and improvement of energy efficiency

## Effects of potential measures to address energy poverty

	Short-term time frame	Medium-term time frame	Long-term time frame
Low impact	Visits to households Awareness campaigns	Awareness campaigns	Changes in behavior
High impact	Subsidies Financial instruments	Integrating energy poverty into SECAPs Crowdfunding campaigns	One-stop shops Energy renovation of buildings

MEDIUMUR ENERGY AGENCY LLC

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Neither the European Union nor the granting body can be held liable.



## HOW TO SAVE ENERGY IN YOUR HOUSEHOLD

### WITHOUT MAJOR INVESTMENTS?

Leaflet prepared as part of the CEESEU-DIGIT project (Design and implementation of regional public initiatives for a just energy transition of the sustainable energy union of Central and Eastern Europe)

#### HEATING

- When maintaining higher air temperatures in the rooms during the heating season, avoid opening the windows to lower the room temperature. Thermal comfort is a matter of habit and personal perception of comfort, so use ordinary radiator valves for manual temperature regulation in the room, and thermostatic radiator valves for automatic temperature regulation in the rooms. The optimal temperature in the living space is 21°C
- If you reduce the temperature maintained in the room by only 1°C, you can save approximately 5% of heating energy annually.
- If you open a window for a long time, it is necessary to turn off the heating or cooling system.
- Clean radiators regularly to ensure that dirt does not prevent heat transfer.
- Regularly bleed radiators and entire installations to release trapped air that is created after the summer when draining and filling the central heating installation. You may need to repeat this process several times at the beginning of the heating season.
- By installing thermostatic radiator valves, you can save energy by up to 20% (depending on the type of thermostat and the speed of response).
- Installing a room thermostat can reduce heating costs by 7 to 15%. The thermostat is programmed to set the temperature to the lowest value during the night or when the house is not occupied. The room thermostat regulates the temperature in the room by turning on the central heating when the temperature in the room drops below a certain set value.
- Before the start of the heating season, it is necessary to call a service technician to check your gas or oil installations, and burner.
- Before the start of the heating season, it is necessary to call an authorized person to check the condition of the heat exchanger. In order to utilize the heat produced in the device, it is necessary to clean the heat exchangers from scale.



#### LIGHTING

- For room lighting purposes, use LED bulbs that reduce energy consumption by up to 90% compared to classic lighting solutions.
- Turn off the lights in rooms you are not in, and use natural light whenever possible.
- By installing motion sensors and devices for adjusting lighting time in hallways and stairwells where fewer people pass, electricity consumption can be reduced by up to 50%.
- Reduce the use of decorative lighting where possible because it does not significantly increase the brightness of the room and consumes additional electricity.



Designed by Freepik

#### HOUSEHOLD APPLIANCES

- Use the washing machine or dishwasher during the lower tariff period.
- Be energy efficient with dishwashers and choose short washing programs with low temperatures.
- Place refrigerators and freezers in the coolest possible place in the house (never near a stove, oven, radiator or water heater). Avoid exposing these devices to sunlight. A cooler space means greater energy savings, in this case each degree can reduce electricity consumption by up to 5%.
- The standard temperature for storing frozen food is -18°C, and if you set the temperature 1°C lower, energy consumption can increase by up to 5%. The optimal temperature of the refrigerator is around 6°C.
- Clean household appliances regularly, as this also reduces energy consumption (e.g. a 3 mm layer of ice in the freezer increases electricity consumption by about 30%) and turn them on when you need them.
- Open appliances that are in use, such as ovens or refrigerators, for as short a time as possible, as this will save energy and make the appliances last longer.
- Turn off electrical devices such as televisions, radios, and computers when you are not using them, as these devices consume energy even in stand-by mode. Also, unplug your cell phone and tablet chargers from the outlet after charging.
- Turn off electric computer screens as soon as you don't need them, as they usually consume about 50% of the energy needed to run the computer. You can also achieve this through settings on the computer itself.
- Set the temperature of the electric water heater to 55–60°C, and if you stay out of the room for more than 24 hours, it needs to be turned off.



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## 9. Results from the Self-Evaluation Tool

Developed by Climate Alliance during the preceding CEESEU project for SECAPs, the tool required only minor modification to be usable by municipalities engaging with partners on developing their ECAP+ documents. The tool was intended to provide a self-assessment instrument for municipalities to evaluate their compliance with their ECAP+. It was also designed to help municipalities identify improvement opportunities in the development and implementation of their ECAP+. Unfortunately, due to delays in other parts of implementation, most partners did not make full use of the tool to assess their own capabilities. One result from Croatia is shown below as representative of the kind of output the tool offers, and the summation of the seven Croatian respondents follows. Note that Google Translate faltered in that it translated “yes” as “that” and “no” as “not” in the first graphic.



The summation for all seven Croatian municipalities (below) that while one municipality in particular, the county capital Čakovec is well on the way to comply with their ECAP+ objectives, unsurprisingly others would benefit from additional guidance by the project partner. Realistically, this may not occur as very small municipalities do not have dedicated and knowledgeable staff tasked to focus on their ECAP, an assertion underpinned by the relative low performance scores for efficiency and sustainability, together with the low score for full compliance with administrative structures. Concomitantly, the “+” component of the ECAP+ refers *inter alia* to energy poverty, and it is clear that municipalities have significant opportunities to improve on serving energy-poor households from where matters now stand. In relation to overall scores, Čakovec scores highest with a 5, a “good” rating, but the maximum of 6 (“excellent”) is yet to be reached; meanwhile, 2 of the 7 municipalities score a 2, “unsatisfactory,” potentially indicating significant scope for improvements.



## 10. Alignment of the ECAPs+ with NECPs

Ideally, the development and subsequent implementation of each ECAP+ would be both systemic and systematic, and well-integrated with the NECPs of member states. However, regions in the CEE have been handed the responsibility to create their ECAPs, sometimes absent of directives on how to do so, with only rough guidelines on what should be in the plan. They also are unsure how to fund them, with the state allocating only modest (if any) funding for compiling the plans. DIGIT's Grant Agreement proposed to ensure the vertical integration of local ECAPs+ with NECPs, with the intention of bringing local priorities to the attention of national authorities that too often fail to consider local objectives when proposing their country's NECP.

In principle, DIGIT's ECAPs+ are regional strategic plans that serve to guide local municipalities' activities in renovating public sector buildings, supporting the retrofitting and renovation of private dwellings and businesses, develop climate mitigation measures and, overall, contribute directly to the fulfilment of NECPs goals. The capacitation of municipal and regional administrators (Section 7 of this report) undertaken by DIGIT partners is intended to build municipal/regional officers' confidence to be able to advocate, at national levels, for policy makers to attend to crucial local interests within NECPs and subsequent relevant legislation and funding streams.

Partners combed through their NECPs with two aspects in mind: first, the NECPs' strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats; second, how thoroughly, if at all, the NECPs contain sections focusing on energy poverty, energy communities, and the overall concept of a just transition. Examples of this output are shown in the two tables below. From the updates provided

for the Croatian NECP (the second table below), it can be understood that the NECPs are living documents subject to revision over time.

Climate Alliance, one of the DIGIT project partners, compiled a regional analytical report on the NECPs, dividing them into the three two-country clusters (Baltics, Visegrad, Western Balkans), deliverable D4.4. It summarizes the NECPs as follows: "Across the Baltics, Visegrad, and Balkans regions, significant strides are being made towards energy transition and climate resilience, but the pathways and challenges differ notably. A shared feature among all regions is a strong alignment with EU climate targets and strategies, reflected in their respective National Energy and Climate Plans (NECPs). However, local economic structures, administrative capacities, and demographic trends shape both opportunities and vulnerabilities in markedly different ways." In this report, we do not intend to recapitulate D4.4, instead we take a bird's-eye view of the integration of NECP intentions into the ECAPs+.

## Analysis of CEESEU-DIGIT Partner Countries NECPs

	Strengths	Weaknesses	Opportunities	Threats
<b>Latvia (VIDZEME)</b>	<p>1) National legislation and legal framework for energy communities.</p> <p>2) Renewable energy as one of the national priorities. Focus on new wind-farms' installation, no restricted areas defined in the national legislation, except border areas.</p> <p>3) Low potential heat sources and heat pumps mentioned as one of the directions in energetics.</p> <p>4) Set energy and CO2 reduction targets until 2030. Defined direction towards climate neutrality until 2050.</p> <p>5) Encouragement to switch from dirty and inefficient biomass based fuels and furnaces to cleaner sources. Tendency of defining territories where individual</p>	<p>1) Big concerns that wind farm development will cause nature degradation, influence valuable habitats and influence big areas of territory, since there are no max power goals set nationally (when do we stop building?) and there are no restricted areas defined in the national legislation, except border area. The evaluation of the wind farm effect and if they should be allowed in a certain area are put on the shoulders of experts in Environmental impact assessment. No legislation or legal possibilities to evaluate cumulative effects of the wind farms.</p> <p>2) National legislation is lacking clear goals and frameworks towards climate topics. Continuous biodiversity</p>	<p>1) Vidzeme region has good collaboration and has built relationships over the years with municipalities' representatives working in the energy and climate sector. This helps convey new ideas, exchange best practices, and encourage to make shifts.</p> <p>2) National legislation and priorities connected towards climate neutrality, renewables, energy efficiency and climate resilience helps local municipalities convince the policy makers and local people to make change towards these directions.</p> <p>3) European funds are available for energy and climate actions.</p> <p>4) A lot of information and best practices are available.</p> <p>5) Vidzeme doesn't have fossil fuel resources, thus there is lower impact from energy transition and</p>	<p>1) War threats and focus and budget going towards defense, not so much focus and interest in climate issues.</p> <p>2) Overall poverty and lack of resources in the region.</p> <p>3) Climate change, severe weather transitions =&gt; infrastructure and people not ready.</p> <p>4) Historically Latvia has not installed cooling systems in buildings and cities are not built with cooling properties in mind. Now, with summers becoming severely hotter, there is an acute need to transform the building sector, infrastructure and cities to adapt to these changes and avoid health issues and decreased working abilities.</p> <p>5) Lack of understanding about climate, energy,</p>

	<p>wood burning furnaces are not allowed (city-scale, municipal planning).</p> <p>6) Moving away from natural gas is defined as a priority.</p> <p>7) Decreasing emissions in the transport sector by increasing electric vehicle volume and reducing diesel-based cars. Harsher restrictions towards car emissions.</p> <p>8) Direction towards electrification. Strong and good quality electrical grid system, partly state owned biggest electrical grid operator. Historically high proportion of renewable energy production (heat + electricity). No coal, natural gas or other fossil fuel resources in the country.</p> <p>9) New legislation that allows multi-apartment unit building renovations with lower owner approval rates than previously - this might increase the speed of renovations. The</p>	<p>and bioindicator change data is missing.</p> <p>3) Lack of understanding and implementation of circular economy concepts. They are mentioned sometimes but there aren't clear goals and measures defined. The planned allocated financial resources are now debated to go towards defense.</p> <p>4) Lack of understanding and comprehensive definition of energy poverty, lack of data and measures to reduce it. No clear information on how many people fall into this category and in what kind of subcategories. Mostly this issue is looked at from the point of view of poverty in general.</p> <p>5) Lack of freely available data in the building sector (how many buildings? How many are renovated etc.). Lack of clear goals. Bureaucracy and legislation that was not supporting and</p>	<p>not so much concern about just transition.</p> <p>6) Strong and good quality electrical grid system, partly state owned biggest electrical grid operator. Historically high proportion of renewable energy production (heat + electricity).</p> <p>7) Lot of forests and green areas (Gauja national park, for example).</p> <p>8) Historically, people have quite a strong connection to nature, respect and understanding of natural successions, weather patterns and similar. Many still have gardens, live in the countryside or have countryside houses.</p> <p>9) Vidzeme comparably is rural with a few bigger centres, mostly having small towns and villages. The population density is low. This gives us a good opportunity to become fully self-sufficient, both energy and food wise.</p>	<p>circular economy, energy poverty and similar concepts in long term (and short term) policy planning documents. This can lead towards severe problems in the future, when the climate and energy situation in the region will change, but we will not be ready.</p> <p>6) Bureaucracy and lack of accountability in the ministries and among policy makers. Not taking into consideration NGOs opinions.</p> <p>7) Short term planning - kind of consequences of a political system where every few years politicians are being re-elected (or not).</p> <p>8) Lobby and businesses' influence on policy makers.</p>
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	problem though is that because of increased renovation rate, renovation crews and building materials are scarce and thus costs are increasing.	encouraging fast renovation process (almost all the building apartment owners needed to agree on renovation) until the end of 2024.		
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	Energy poverty		Energy communities		Just transition		Did consultations occur?
	good practice	bad practice	good practice	bad practice	good practice	bad practice	
HR	There are two measures dealing with energy poverty within CRO NECP – “UET-8 Implementation of the Programme for the reduction of energy poverty” and “UET-9 Implementation of the Programme for Combating Energy Poverty,	Although the measure for the development of a programme for the reduction of energy poverty existed in the original NECP, the named programme has not been developed on a national level. According to NECP this programme should be	OIE-7 energy sharing and energy communities: this is new and very relevant measure, intended to encourage energy sharing and establishment of energy communities. Identifies the necessity to improve	The problem with the described measure is that it is very vague and has no identified indicators with which the implementation could be monitored. Also, in the part of the funding possibilities and responsible organisations, several relevant options were left out. The barriers to establish energy communities and		There are several measures that indicate continuation of subsidies for fossil fuels and no strict date for coal or gas phase-out. Also Territorial Just Transition Plan for Istria is not aligned with NECP (linked to coal phase-out)	There was no initial public consultation before the draft NECP was sent to EC. The draft NECP was published in early June on the website of the responsible Ministry with the e-mail address where interested parties could send their input. DOOR sent input on the measures related to energy poverty and energy communities & energy sharing. Apart from this there were several workshops organised partly by regional energy

<p>which includes the use of renewable energy sources in residential buildings in assisted areas and areas of special state care for the period up to 2025". Both are inserted under dimension "The internal energy market".</p>	<p>adopted by the end of 2024. <b>We still have no definition nor criteria to identify energy poor households.</b> The second programme for energy poverty in the assisted areas and areas of special state care only identifies social housing buildings and those are currently being refurbished. <b>Energy poverty is exclusively defined by the income census: households with income levels below a certain level are considered energy poor (in principle, socially disadvantaged households) but</b></p>	<p>legislation and the need to raise capacities of a wider group of stakeholders.</p>	<p>share energy are still significant in Croatia and many legislative, administrative, funding and technical instruments need to be improved for this to finally function.</p>			<p>agency REGEA (NECPlatform project) and partly by the Ministry of economy and sustainable development (MINGOR) &amp; Energy institute (EIHP) who actually developed the document. DOOR actively participated at those workshops.</p> <p><b>UPDATE - Public consultations for final revised NECP were held from November to December 2024. It was performed through a governmental online platform and anyone could comment. They received over 200 comments which were not answered before the final NECP was adopted and published in April 2025.</b></p>
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	<p><b>practice shows that socially vulnerable households represent only a subset of energy vulnerable households and most often represent households with the most acute problem of energy poverty.</b></p> <p><b>UPDATE - The new energy poverty definition has been published in the amended Law on energy efficiency in March 2025.</b></p>					
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## 10.1 Baltic States

### 1. Estonia

- **Overall Goal Alignment:** The Ida-Viru County plan, as an "Energy and Climate Plan" (Energia- ja Kliimakava) but as explained previously, not created during DIGIT but by a consultancy prior to the commencement of the DIGIT project, inherently aligns with the overarching goals of the Estonian NECP, which aim for significant greenhouse gas (GHG) emission reductions and increased renewable energy share. Estonia's NECP 2030 (submitted in 2019 and updated) targets an 80% reduction in GHG emissions by 2050 (including 70% by 2030 compared to 1990 levels) and a 100% renewable electricity target by 2030. The regional plan would contribute to these national targets through local measures.
- **Sectoral Focus:** The regional plan's table of contents indicates a detailed analysis of key sectors such as "Kasvuhoonegaaside heide" (Greenhouse gas emissions), "Energeetika" (Energy), "Elektrienergia" (Electricity), and "Soojusvarustus" (Heat Supply). These are precisely the sectors addressed by the national NECP to achieve its emission reduction and energy transition goals. The national plan also provides sectoral guidelines for energy and industry, transportation, agriculture, and land-use.
- **Energy Poverty:** Estonian partners concede that it was impossible to convince the regional authority or the municipalities to specifically include energy poverty in the existing ECAP, which would then have the foundation to be labelled an ECAP+. Notably, Ida-Viru County is a carbon-intensive region with a historical reliance on fossil fuels and significant socio-economic challenges during the energy transition. It may be the case that regional and local administrations implicitly consider every household to be at risk of energy poverty.
- **Problem Analysis:** The regional plan's "Maakondlik Analüüs: Probleemid ja Lahendusvõimalused" (County Analysis: Problems and Solutions) identifies local challenges in energy and climate, which are often manifestations of larger national issues addressed in the NECP, such as reliance on oil shale or the need for energy efficiency. The national NECP aims to reduce primary energy consumption and enhance energy security, which are reflected in the regional strategies.
- **Measure Implementation:** The regional plan details specific measures and actions relevant to Ida-Viru County (such as those related to increasing carbon stocks in soils or promoting soil protection, as mentioned in the national climate policy documents for the LULUCF sector) that collectively contribute to the national targets. Hence the NECP serves as the overarching framework that the regional plan operationalizes at a local level.

### 2. Latvia

- **Policy Alignment and Goals:** The Vidzeme regional plan states its foundation on "European and national policy priorities" and "development planning documents," explicitly listing the "National Energy and Climate Plan 2021-2030" ("NEKP") as a core national-level climate policy document. This demonstrates a direct intent to align with the national strategic direction.
- **Decarbonization and GHG Emission Reduction:** Latvia's NECP has a primary objective to achieve a 65% reduction in total greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions by 2030 compared to 1990 levels, and aims for climate neutrality by 2050. The regional plan's focus on "Energy

and Climate Resilience" directly contributes to these national decarbonization efforts by proposing measures at the local level.

- **Renewable Energy and Energy Efficiency:** The Latvian NECP targets an increase in the utilization of renewable energy sources, with Latvia increasing its 2030 renewable energy target to 50%. It also emphasizes improving energy efficiency, particularly in buildings and transport. The Vidzeme plan, as a regional energy and climate strategy, includes initiatives to boost renewable energy adoption and enhance energy efficiency within the region, thereby supporting the national targets.
- **Energy Poverty:** The Vidzeme document contains a section titled *Enerģētiskā nabadzība un taisnīga pāreja* (energy poverty and just transition).and specifically highlights that the Latvian NECP 2030 has a goal to reduce energy poverty below the EU average (7.5%) by 2030. This clarifies that addressing energy poverty, a key social dimension of the energy transition, is a shared objective between the national and regional plans. There is, however, no comprehensive planning included that specifically targets households vulnerable to energy poverty.
- **National Goal Alignment:** It specifically highlights that the Latvian National Energy and Climate Plan 2030 has a goal to reduce energy poverty below the EU average (7.5%) by 2030. This frames the regional efforts within a clear national objective.
- **Comprehensive Dimensions:** Latvia's NECP addresses the five dimensions of the EU Energy Union: decarbonization, energy efficiency, energy security, internal energy markets, and research, innovation, and competitiveness. The Vidzeme regional plan, by focusing on a "Strategic Framework Towards Energy and Climate Resilience," covers these dimensions through its detailed actions and analyses relevant to the regional context.

## 10.2 Visegrad States

### 1. Poland

- **Alignment with National Decarbonization Goals:** Poland's NECP aims for a significant reduction in greenhouse gas emissions (i.e., 50.4% compared to 1990 by 2030 in the updated draft). The regional ECAP+ document, as a regional energy-climate plan, details local measures in sectors such as energy production, heating, transport, and waste management to contribute to these national emission reduction targets.
- **Renewable Energy Targets and Energy Efficiency:** The Polish NECP sets ambitious targets for increasing the share of Renewable Energy Sources (RES) in gross final energy consumption (32.6% by 2030) and electricity generation (56% by 2030), alongside a 23% reduction in primary energy consumption. The Mazovian plan's structure, including sections on energy sector analysis and climate change adaptation, indicates its focus on deploying local RES projects and implementing energy efficiency measures to support these national ambitions.
- **Comprehensive Energy Union Dimensions:** The Polish NECP is structured around the five dimensions of the Energy Union: decarbonization, energy efficiency, energy security, internal energy market, and research, innovation, and competitiveness. The ECAP+ document for Mazovia in addressing a "new approach to the energy-climate plan" covers these pillars at a regional level through its analysis of the current energy situation, proposed actions, and consideration of local socio-economic impacts.

- **Energy Poverty:** The Polish ECAP+ for Mazowieckie elaborates on the energy poverty component in significant depth, particularly in Section 8: *Ubóstwo energetyczne* (Energy Poverty). The ECAP+ notes energy poverty as being a complex phenomenon requiring an interdisciplinary approach that considers economic, health, social, and technical aspects related to building infrastructure. It also notes that in Poland, energy poverty was identified relatively late, with the term "vulnerable consumer" introduced into the Energy Law in 2013. In 2022, Article 5gb was added to the Energy Law, outlining a framework for identifying energy-poor households, though a uniform, official measurement indicator is still lacking. The ECAP+ formulates preventative and mitigating actions concerning energy poverty. The Energy Poverty Advisory Hub (EPAH) is highlighted as an EU expert body supporting local governments in analyzing and developing strategies for tackling energy poverty.
- **Just Transition Considerations:** The Polish NECP emphasizes a "just transition," particularly for coal-reliant regions. While Mazovia is not a primary coal region, its ECAP+ includes a focus on "just energy transition" principles. The regional plan incorporates social aspects of the energy transition, ensuring that the shift to a low-carbon economy benefits all segments of society, in line with national policy. The ECAP+'s detailed analysis and proposed actions on energy poverty directly support the Polish NECP's overarching goal of a just transition. By focusing on household income, energy expenditures, and building energy efficiency, the regional plan provides concrete measures to operationalize the national commitment to alleviating energy poverty and ensuring that no one is "left behind" in the process of transitioning to a low-emission economy. The ECAP+ emphasizes the need for consistent and integrated planning and implementation of actions, advocating for the elimination of structural barriers to achieve energy justice.
- **Context of EU and National Policy:** The document's title and its association with the CEESEU-DIGIT project funded by the EC's LIFE programme, confirms its role in operationalizing EU and national energy-climate policies at the regional level. This regional plan therefore serves as a reminder as well as a crucial instrument for the Mazowieckie Voivodeship to contribute to Poland's overall commitments under the NECP and broader EU climate targets.

## 2. Czech Republic

- **Overall Decarbonization Goals:** The Czech NECP sets ambitious targets, including increasing the share of renewable energy from 18% to over 30% by 2030, a coal phase-out by 2033, and a 55% reduction in greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions by 2030. As a regional action plan, the Broumovsko ECAP+'s core purpose is to define and implement measures at the local level that contribute to these national decarbonization and emission reduction efforts.
- **Emphasis on Renewables and Energy Efficiency:** The Czech NECP highlights renewable energy and nuclear power as the foundation of future electricity generation, with a target of 28% RES in electricity generation by 2030 and significant increases in solar and wind capacity. It also emphasizes energy savings and building renovation. The Broumovsko plan, as the regional energy strategy, details local initiatives for deploying renewable energy sources (e.g., solar, wind) and improving energy efficiency in buildings and other sectors within its geographical scope, directly supporting the national targets.
- **Energy Security and Independence:** The Czech NECP aims to reduce energy dependence on foreign imports from 40% to approximately 26% by 2050. The Broumovsko ECAP+

contributes to this by advocating for local energy production from diverse sources and promoting energy savings, thereby enhancing regional and national energy security.

- **Energy Poverty:** The issue of energetická chudoba (energy poverty) is addressed in the ECAP+ by proposing measures targeted at reducing it. It acknowledges that the small municipalities of the Broumovsko region face specific challenges, including a lack of administrative capacity and access to pre-financing, which can exacerbate energy poverty. The financing plan details how different funding instruments, both conventional and innovative, can be utilized to implement energy-saving and renewable energy projects that would alleviate energy poverty for households. It emphasizes supporting projects that directly benefit citizens, such as building renovations leading to lower energy bills. This is a clear linkage to a discussion on energy poverty in the Czech NECP, which addresses the social dimension of the energy transition, and which explicitly includes the assessment and mitigation of energy poverty. The NECP outlines policies and measures to protect vulnerable consumers and ensure a just transition, recognizing that increased energy prices or insufficient access to energy services can disproportionately affect certain households. Therefore, the Broumovsko ECAP+'s focus on identifying and financing measures to combat energy poverty directly supports and operationalizes this objective within the broader national energy and climate strategy.
- **Sectoral Focus:** The NECP outlines policies and measures across various sectors, including energy, buildings, transport, and industry. Broumovsko's ECAP+ concretely addresses these sectors with specific local context:
  - **Energy efficiency in buildings:** Measures such as replacing lighting with LED technology in municipal offices and post offices and upgrading windows in public buildings are detailed. These efforts directly contribute to the NECP's focus on energy savings and building renovation. For example, the replacement of windows in the municipal office in Bezděkov nad Metují is projected to result in an annual energy saving of 2.9 MWh and 0.6 tons of CO<sub>2</sub>.
  - **Renewable energy deployment:** The document highlights the installation of photovoltaic (FVE) systems on public buildings including municipal offices, cultural centers, and even waste collection yards. These projects directly contribute to the NECP's increased renewable energy targets, particularly for solar power. For instance, the installation of a fotovoltaická elektrárna system (PV system) at the Bezděkov nad Metují collection yard is estimated to save 27.6 MWh/year and 23.7 tons of CO<sub>2</sub>/year.
  - **Heating system modernization:** Initiatives such as replacing old boilers with more efficient condensing gas boilers or combining them with heat pumps in schools are outlined. This directly aids the NECP's objectives for reducing reliance on traditional heating sources and decreasing GHG emissions from heating.
  - **Targeted interventions:** Each measure card provides details like GPS coordinates, a description of the intervention, expected annual energy savings (e.g., MWh/year), annual emission reductions (e.g., tons of CO<sub>2</sub>/year), potential risks, implementation timelines, and estimated investment costs. This level of detail allows for a clear understanding of how local actions contribute to national energy and climate goals.
- **Investment and Implementation:** The Czech NECP estimates significant investments (CZK 2.8 trillion by 2030) are needed for its implementation. Regional plans like Broumovsko serve

as frameworks for identifying and attracting investments for specific projects within the region, thereby facilitating the overall national energy transition.

- **Addressing funding challenges for small municipalities:** It explicitly acknowledges the budget constraints, limited administrative capacities, and low access to pre-financing faced by small municipalities in the Broumovsko region.
- **Mapping funding instruments:** The document maps both conventional and innovative financing instruments available in the Czech Republic. These include traditional grants (e.g., Modernisation Fund, Operational Programme Environment - OPŽP, Integrated Regional Operational Programme - IROP), and loans from the National Development Bank. Newer models such as Energy Performance Contracting (EPC), community energy schemes, revolving funds, and crowdfunding are also detailed.
- **Categorization of measures for financing:** The plan classifies over 80 energy-related measures from the ECAP+, targeting the public sector, households, and local businesses. These measures are sorted based on their suitability for conventional financing (e.g., LED retrofits, minor renovations) or innovative financing (e.g., aggregated EPC projects, solar sharing, community-based PV investments). A decision-making framework helps municipalities assess the best financial model based on criteria like investment size, administrative complexity, and return on investment.
- **Project pipeline and roadmap:** The document includes a project pipeline (roadmap) outlining specific steps for moving from planning to financing and implementation. These steps encompass preparing technical documentation, securing external consultancy, applying for grants or assistance (e.g., ELENA), conducting public procurement, and establishing partnerships with ESCO providers. This roadmap is designed to be replicable and scalable to other municipalities.
- **Ensuring meaningful participation:** The Broumovsko ECAP+'s financial plan aims to accelerate the green transition in Central and Eastern Europe by ensuring that even smaller communities can play a meaningful role in achieving climate neutrality through well-planned and well-funded energy investments.

## 10.3 Western Balkan States

### 1. Slovenia

- **Alignment with National Targets:** The ECAP+ states that regions in Slovenia, including Podravje, follow energy and climate targets set at the national level. It notes that the updated NECP was adopted in December 2024 in accordance with EU Regulation 2018/1999 on the Governance of the Energy Union and Climate Action.
- **Shared Objectives and Pillars:** The document highlights that the Slovenian NECP for the period until 2030 (with a view to 2040) is an action-strategic document that sets goals, policies, and measures across five dimensions of the Energy Union: decarbonization, energy efficiency, energy security, internal market, and research, innovation, and competitiveness. The ECAP+ document for Podravje addresses these same dimensions and objectives throughout its structure, including sections on energy security, energy

poverty, addressing climate change, baseline emissions inventory, regional potential for renewable energy sources and energy efficiency, and financial assessment.

- **Energy Poverty:** The ECAP+ defines energy poverty as a situation where households lack access to basic energy services and products, impacting their quality of life. The ECAP+ goes into considerable depth in plans for tackling energy poverty:

- **Promoting the participation of vulnerable groups in renewable energy:** Supporting the participation of vulnerable individuals in the general use of renewable energy sources and facilitating their involvement in renewable energy communities through flexible membership rules.
- **Energy consulting:** Providing energy consulting services for socially vulnerable citizens in Podravje. This includes advice on energy renovation, considering financial constraints, and helping them access valid supports.
- **Awareness and motivation:** Raising awareness and motivating socially vulnerable citizens for energy efficiency and renewable energy measures, particularly in multi-apartment buildings.
- **Investments for vulnerable citizens:** Encouraging investments by socially vulnerable citizens in measures to improve the energy efficiency of single residential and multi-apartment buildings.
- **Targeted support:** Mention of specific responsible entities including the Slovenian partner itself, One World Network - Eco Fund, and Center for Social Work in implementing these measures. Sources of funding such as the Eco Fund are also identified.
- **Addressing health aspects:** The ECAP+ stresses the importance of including health aspects in energy poverty criteria due to a strong link between people with disabilities and energy poverty, as they often spend more energy on specialized medical equipment.

The ECAP+ explicitly states that Slovenia has begun mentioning energy poverty in strategic documents like the NEPN. The NEPN's implementation of social policy measures, general social policy measures, and targeted measures has been supplemented by the measure of establishing a supportive environment for alleviating energy poverty. This indicates a national commitment to tackling the issue, which the regional ECAP+ directly supports through its proposed actions.

- **Just Transition:** The ECAP+ emphasizes that energy poverty is a key aspect of a "just energy transition". The strong focus on vulnerable groups, energy poverty, and equitable access to energy aligns with the NECP's broader social dimension and commitment to a fair transition.
- **Specific National Targets Referenced:** The ECAP+ document for Podravje explicitly lists prominent national energy and climate targets that it aims to contribute to, such as a 33% share of RES in final energy consumption by 2030; at least a 55% share of RES in electricity production; reducing final energy use in buildings by 15% by 2030 compared to 2020; and a 35% to 45% reduction in greenhouse gas emissions by 2030, compared to 2005 levels.
- **Legal Framework and Policy Context:** The document references the Energy Act (EZ-2), which determines the country's energy policy and promotes the transition to non-fossil energy sources, renewable energy use, energy efficiency, and absorption of European funds. It also discusses the Act on the Promotion of the Use of Renewable Energy Sources (ZSROVE) and the Resolution on the National Energy Program (ReNEP) as key documents

guiding Slovenia's energy policy. These national-level legal and policy frameworks underpin the regional ECAP+ efforts.

## 2. Croatia

- **Comprehensive Approach:** The ECAP+ is designed as the "first document at the regional level that comprehensively addresses the challenges of a just transition, energy security, and energy poverty". This mirrors the NECP's integrated approach to addressing various energy and climate dimensions.
- **Emission Reduction and Energy Efficiency:** The ECAP+ sets concrete measures for reducing greenhouse gas emissions and increasing energy efficiency. For example, it identifies 24 mitigation measures aimed at achieving a 55.92% reduction in CO<sub>2</sub> emissions by 2030 across all consumption sectors, requiring over 1.57 billion EUR in investment. This aligns with the NECP's decarbonization targets and energy efficiency improvements.
- **Renewable Energy Sources:** The ECAP+ includes efforts to increase the share of renewable energy sources, supporting the national goal of a 36.4% share of renewable energy in gross final energy consumption by 2030, as outlined in the NECP. The NECP also envisions a significant engagement from the private sector and various funds to finance renewable energy projects.
- **Energy Security:** The ECAP+ addresses *Regionalna energetska sigurnost* (regional energy security), focusing on a secure, stable, and uninterrupted energy supply, diversification of energy sources, and critical infrastructure. This directly supports the NECP's key dimension of energy security.
- **Climate Change Adaptation:** Beyond mitigation, the ECAP+ also includes a focus on *Borba protiv klimatskih promjena* (combating climate change), addressing adaptation to extreme weather events and their impacts on various sectors. This complements the NECP's broader climate resilience objectives.
- **Legal and Policy Framework:** The ECAP+ explicitly references national legislation and policies, including the Energy Development Strategy of the Republic of Croatia until 2030 with a view to 2050. This ensures that the regional plan is consistent with and contributes to the overarching national energy and climate goals.
- **Funding Mechanisms:** The ECAP+ discusses financial instruments and opportunities for energy and climate projects. It highlights that the energy transition will be capital-intensive, relying on private sector engagement, financial institutions, and EU funds, aligning with the NECP's financial strategy.
- **Monitoring and Evaluation:** The ECAP+ details processes for implementation and monitoring, including monitoring CO<sub>2</sub> emissions and the state of energy poverty at the regional/local level. This is crucial for tracking progress towards both regional and national NECP targets.
- **Energy Poverty:** The ECAP+ dedicates a significant section to *Energetsko siromaštvo* (energy poverty). It recognizes energy poverty as a growing issue across EU member states, including Croatia. The document explicitly links energy poverty with the just transition, stating that the shift to renewable energy sources and reduced carbon emissions should not burden the most vulnerable social groups. It notes that many households consume very little energy not because they don't need it, but because they cannot afford greater consumption, often living in cold, damp spaces. The ECAP+ proposes both preventive measures and mitigation measures to combat energy poverty.

Specific details of the measures are extensive, and the document includes initiatives such as:

- **Simple energy efficiency measures:** Providing equipment like insulation strips, reflective foils for windows/walls, and power strips with switches to reduce electricity consumption.
- **Advice:** Alongside equipment, providing advice on how to save energy and assisting with installation.
- **Targeted support:** Reference is made to the project *FER rješenja za bolju zajednicu*, which successfully implemented similar measures in Zagreb, in cooperation with the Faculty of Electrical Engineering and Computing and social welfare offices.
- **Measures to reduce energy poverty:** The document lists additional specific measures aimed at reducing energy poverty.

The ECAP+ provides a detailed definition, indicators, and a framework for identification, reflecting the NECP's mandate for assessing energy poverty and protecting vulnerable consumers. It aligns with the NECP's strategies to reduce energy poverty through energy efficiency improvements in residential buildings and financial aid for vulnerable households, operationalizing national goals at the regional level. The ECAP+'s specific attention to *ranjive skupine* (vulnerable groups) in its energy poverty measures directly supports the NECP's broader objective of ensuring that the energy transition does not disproportionately burden the segments of the population most susceptible to energy poverty.

- **Just Transition:** The ECAP+ highlights *Ciljevi prema pravednoj tranziciji* (goals towards a just transition). It defines the just energy transition as a process that ensures energy security, combats climate change, and addresses energy poverty simultaneously. The ECAP+ emphasizes that a just transition has a key role in mitigating the negative consequences of energy transformation on society. Key aspects included are inclusivity, addressing socio-economic impacts, and striving to ensure stakeholder involvement. The ECAP+ emphasizes the *ključna uloga* (key role) of a just transition in mitigating negative impacts on society during the energy transformation. This resonates directly with the NECP's focus on ensuring that the shift to a climate-neutral economy is equitable, involving measures such as retraining programs, job creation in green sectors, and social safety nets. The ECAP+ also emphasizes the importance of involving stakeholders and citizens, including marginalized groups, in shaping energy policies and accessing support., which aligns with the NECP's commitment to inclusive governance and ensuring that all segments of society contribute to and benefit from the energy transition.

The six ECAP+ documents developed under the CEESEU-DIGIT project share fundamental similarities in their overarching goals and structure, while also exhibiting differences shaped by their unique national and regional contexts.

## 10.4 Similarities across the Plans

### ● Overarching Goal and Framework:

- Contribution to EU and national targets: All plans aim to support their respective national NECPs and contribute to the broader EU climate goals (Green Deal targets, Fit for 55 package, climate neutrality by 2050).

- ECAP+ concept: Five of the six (the exception being EE) adopt the "ECAP+" terminology, signaling their commitment to integrating social justice components into energy and climate planning, moving beyond purely technical considerations.
- Focus areas: All documents address the core dimensions of the EU Energy Union: decarbonization (GHG emission reduction), energy efficiency, renewable energy deployment, energy security, and often research, innovation, and competitiveness.
- Regional implementation: They serve as regional-level strategic frameworks to operationalize national and EU policies, translating broad objectives into local actions.
- **Just Transition:**
  - Core principle: Five of the six documents explicitly embrace the principle of a "just energy transition," emphasizing the need to "leave no one behind" in the shift to a low-carbon economy. This includes managing socio-economic impacts and ensuring equitable benefits. The EE ECAP does not, as it precedes the start of the DIGIT project, as noted previously.
  - Stakeholder Engagement: They typically highlight the importance of involving a wide range of stakeholders, including marginalized and vulnerable groups, in the planning and implementation processes.
- **Addressing Energy Poverty:**
  - Inclusion of the issue: All documents either explicitly dedicate sections to "energy poverty" or implicitly address it through measures aimed at improving household energy efficiency and access to affordable energy.
  - Preventive and mitigation measures: They often propose both preventive (e.g., promoting energy efficiency upgrades) and mitigating (e.g., direct support, advice) measures to alleviate energy poverty.
  - Vulnerable groups: There's a common focus on identifying and supporting vulnerable households and social groups disproportionately affected by energy costs or lack of access to adequate energy services.
- **Methodological Approach:**
  - Situational analysis: Each document typically begins with an analysis of the current energy and climate situation in the respective region, including emissions inventories and existing policy frameworks.
  - Vision and objectives: They outline a regional vision and specific objectives for energy and climate resilience.
  - Proposed measures: They propose concrete measures and actions (often in the form of "cards of measures" or similar detailed lists) across various sectors (buildings, transport, heating, industry).
  - Financing: They generally include discussions on financial mechanisms and opportunities for implementing the proposed measures.

## 10.5 Differences among the Plans

- **Depth and Explicitness of Energy Poverty/Just Transition:**
  - Explicit sections: Croatia and Poland have very detailed and extensive sections on "Energy Poverty" (Energetsko siromaštvo / Ubóstwo energetyczne) with specific definitions,

indicators, and types of measures. Slovenia also has a dedicated section with clear preventive and mitigation measures.

- Implicit integration: While Latvia explicitly links energy poverty to its national goals, and Estonia implicitly addresses it through overall just transition and energy efficiency goals, the specific detailed measures are less highlighted compared to the Croatian or Polish documents.

- **Regional Context and Challenges:**

- Specific industry focus: Ida-Viru County in Estonia, with its historical reliance on oil shale, faces unique just transition challenges related to phasing out carbon-intensive industries and reskilling the workforce.
- Geographical and demographic factors: The specific measures and priorities in the Czech ECAP+ for Broumovsko, a region with many small municipalities, differ from those in the Polish ECAP+ for Mazowieckie, a much larger and more urbanized voivodeship.
- Existing infrastructure: The starting point in terms of existing energy infrastructure (e.g., reliance on district heating vs. individual heating systems) influences the proposed measures in each region.

- **Human Rights:**

- Only the Western Balkan states (SI, HR) specifically include mention of human rights in their ECAPs+. The SI document explicitly references "European Pillar of Social Rights in 20 principles", which includes principles related to human rights. The HR ECAP+ covers this topic in greater depth. The document includes the term *ljudska prava* (human rights) in the context of the just transition and ensuring that the energy transformation respects social equity. A more direct reference is within the subsection *Prilagodba klimatskim promjenama i ljudska prava* (Climate Change Adaptation and Human Rights), which section explicitly discusses the link between climate change impacts, adaptation, and human rights.

- **Measure Specificity and Detail:**

- For the Czech Republic (Broumovsko), specific "Cards of Measures" are provided, detailing individual projects with estimated savings, costs, and timelines (e.g., LED lighting replacement, PV installations on public buildings). While other plans outline categories of measures, the level of granular detail for individual components vary.
- Prioritization: The emphasis on certain types of measures (e.g., public transport modernization, building renovation, community energy projects) differs based on the region's specific needs and potential.

- **Financial Strategies and Accessibility:**

- Local challenges: The Czech financial plan for Broumovsko explicitly noted the budget constraints, limited administrative capacities, and low access to pre-financing for small municipalities, and proposes tailored approaches.
- Diverse funding instruments: While all mention leveraging EU funds, the specific mix of national grants, loans, and innovative financing mechanisms (e.g., EPC, revolving funds, community energy schemes) vary based on national financial landscapes and regional capacity for implementation.

## 11. The CEESEU-DIGIT/CEESEN Final Conference

While elaborated upon in detail in D6.4, this section in the evaluation reports on the Google Form survey conference participants were requested to complete. To make accessing the Form easier for potential respondents, a QR code was created for them to scan. The request to complete the Form was made during the opening remarks, and partners were asked to encourage their guests to access the form during the conference's two days. Despite these efforts, only 19 responses were received, almost  $\frac{2}{3}$  of them from the host country, Croatia. LV, PL, CZ, and SI are represented by one response each, and EE by three responses. A little more than half (10/19) of the responses were from project partners, so it is far from relevant to assume that even these scant 19 responses are representative of an external audience. Of the remaining 9 responses, 7 were from municipalities, 2 from non-municipal public sectors; 8/9 of these were from HR, the 9th from EE.

Asked how well the conference met their expectations, all the public sector entities scored this either a 4 or the highest score, 5. Queried on what they expected to learn while attending, the answers included: acquire new information about the situation in different countries concerning the energy transition; understanding how to potentially update our SECAP; on how to advance support to vulnerable groups; to specifically learn about funding opportunities for SECAP updates; to learn about the latest trends and projects related to the green energy transition; to learn about the activities carried out as part of the project; to understand more about digital tools for energy planning and citizen engagement, as well as exchanging experiences with other stakeholders working on sustainable energy and climate action in the CEE; gain new insights into inclusive and sustainable energy planning while connecting with experts dedicated to a just energy transition in the CEE; and to learn from the experiences of others and gain new inspiration.

Asked how well the conference met their expectations, the public-sector respondents again scored this question as either a 4 or 5, with the same result for the topics scheduled on both days - the first day being conference presentations, the second participatory workshops. Regarding the Day 1 sessions which they found most useful, 4/9 of these public-sector respondents said it was NECPs and local/regional planning, 2/9 voted for Inclusion of vulnerable people and 2/9 for From plans to reality, and 1/9 chose Participatory budgeting.

Respondents were asked to state the one most important thing they learned at the conference. The public-sector respondents stated:

- How to get help in implementing and financing projects
- It is okay to question the goals of the Green Agenda
- Municipal administrations should take into account feedback from vulnerable groups of citizens
- New ideas for projects that could advance sustainability in our municipality
- Once again confirmation of how difficult it is to get from plans to the realization of those plans
- How digital platforms can effectively support municipalities in involving citizens in local energy and climate planning processes
- How essential it is to integrate social equity and energy poverty considerations into regional energy and climate action plans to ensure a truly just transition
- Although countries and regions are different, we face very similar challenges

- The implementation process must start from below with a regulated legal framework'

From among project partners, respondents stated:

- What is important is to maintain the sustainable energy transition
- Energy poverty and just transition actions need more attention.
- Green policy is important
- The way Paris dealt with car traffic
- The energy poverty approach
- Measures for sustainable energy and climate plans
- There is lot of work to do in the sector
- Trust is central
- That some countries are more successful in things such as setting up energy communities, than Slovenia
- It confirmed my opinion that working on energy poor people needs more resources (both financial and human)

Asked which part of the conference respondents found least enjoyable, 6 of 9 public sector people had no views on this; the other 3 stated: The more technical presentations that were difficult to follow without prior detailed knowledge, though they were still informative; the tightly packed schedule, which left little time for informal networking and deeper discussions between sessions; the presenters showed very little emotion proving that they believed in what they were doing.

Regarding changes/additions for future CEESEN conferences, only 6 of 9 public sector respondents offered an opinion: Maybe more presentations about solutions for small cities (solutions from Paris, Amsterdam and other bigger cities are inspirational but less practical for small cities); the workshops could perhaps be sequential, so interested parties could participate in more than one; including more hands-on workshops and case studies from local communities, as well as more time for networking and open discussion among participants; more hands-on workshops and interactive group activities to encourage practical learning and deeper collaboration, as well as providing more time for informal networking to strengthen connections between participants; it must be more emphasized that SECAP and other strategies are not things in themselves, but instruments that help improve our daily life; more operational panels and presentations.

To sum up these results, public-sector attendees consistently rated the conference highly, with key learnings achieved on practical implementation, funding for energy plans, and the crucial integration of social equity and energy poverty into regional initiatives; recommendations for future conferences include more hands-on workshops, appropriate case studies from small municipalities rather than large metropolitan areas, and more opportunities for networking.

## 12. Fulfilment of the Evaluation Plan

The Evaluation Plan was developed and submitted in M3 of the project, and a germane question is how thoroughly the partners' outputs at the end of the project in M30 hewed to what was envisaged in the evaluation plan, which itself was based on the Grant Agreement. This assessment is briefly elaborated in the table below.

What is being monitored (m) or evaluated (e)	Details, purpose	Result
(e) Use of self-evaluation tool	Partners to have both municipalities and regions use the tool 1x; lets us know if the tool can be useful for ECAPs, not only SECAPs; permits UTARTU to determine if fine-tuning is needed	The Croatian partner proved that the tool is usable for ECAP+. No fine-tuning is required.
(e) Gap analysis based on self-evaluation tool	The means to ascertain how target regions are progressing with their capabilities to design and implement ECAP+.	Not done as the self evaluation tool was not administered early in the project, refer to Section 9 of this report
(m, e) T3.4.2 Practical experience of developing ECAPS	Google sheet - updated at least every 3 months, allows for the management team to track progress and identify any issues that need resolution.	Refer to Section 4 of this report. But partners did not routinely update progress. Instead, progress was discussed at the SC meetings, and the file updated at the EoP.
(e) D 2.2 Training for public and private sector: 36 trainings (1-2 days) conducted in English and national languages for 1231 participants from public and private sector. invitation, agenda, signed presence list, report of the event, training material package, evaluation report, feedback report	Track progress of trainings, an Excel workbook in Sharepoint.	Completed beyond target, refer to Section 7 of this report, and to D2.2.
(m) D 2.1 Monitoring and evaluation of stakeholders' engagement	D2.1 completed early December:  Interviews with stakeholders via Google Forms that can be translated into local languages using Google Translate. Here,	Refer to D2.1, Stakeholder Maps.  Refer also to Sections 6-9 of this report.

What is being monitored (m) or evaluated (e)	Details, purpose	Result
(e) inclusion assessment in final evaluation via interviews	the focus should be their sense of being included in the energy transition, if their concerns are being addressed, and if they feel better or worse off now than a couple of years ago.	
(m) T.2.2.4: Identification of vulnerable groups  (m, e) T4.5.1/T4.5.2 on inclusion of vulnerable groups	<p>A list of vulnerable groups for partners to review - so just as with the stakeholders, we can see if there's anything obvious missing (e.g., Ukrainian refugees, Roma, other minorities)</p> <p>The salient point is to collect descriptive information on the political, social and environmental dimensions of the ECAP</p>	Refer to Section 8 of this report.
(m, e) Horizontal and vertical intergovernmental coordination meetings  T2.4.6 - encourage T3.1.4 - implementation  Targets stated in the grant agreement	<p>To ensure that targets are being met.</p> <p>Task states: "The process and results of these dialogues in each of the six regions will be documented."</p>	These meetings proved next-to-impossible to organise except for an occasional one-off event. Regrettably, the content of all stakeholder meetings were insufficiently documented, although the management team, several times, brought this to partners' attention.
(e) T 6.2 CEEEU-DIGIT conference	<p>Descriptions of attendees, divided by specific interests (from registration), presentations given, main ideas/issues raised, edited and uploaded to CEESEN.</p> <p>Feedback summary required</p>	<p>The conference was held in Zagreb, HR, in M30 of the project, refer to D6.4.</p> <p>An analysis of attendees' opinions is in Section 11 of this report.</p>
(e) T4.1.3 The evaluation and various reports will be augmented via interviews that will be carried out with key stakeholders to give context to the numerical	Interview each municipal and regional entity.	This was attempted, with limited success, as elaborated in Sections 6 and 7.2 of this report.

<b>What is being monitored (m) or evaluated (e)</b>	<b>Details, purpose</b>	<b>Result</b>
values as well as references to other data sources:		
(m, e) T3.2.6 consultations with <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> stakeholders	<p>2 things are needed here: (a) Identify stakeholder priorities - partners are to work with stakeholder groups to identify their priorities for future development in their community and the region, and (b) Partners are to document process and results of meetings, paying particular attention to any disputations or contentiousness and if/how these were overcome by the regional facilitators</p>	<p>Refer to D3.1.</p> <p>Sections 6 and 8 of this report discuss these issues. However, it must be said that the record of meeting processes and results failed to achieve the standard expected, in that none of the partners included information on discussions held, whether positive in support of the energy transition or contentious. It is also not evident, with the exception of EE, how much effort partners put into uncovering and reaching out to opponents of the Green Deal; e.g., PL submitted a list of stakeholders that initially contained zero opponents, which was remedied when returned to them with a request to dig further. It is therefore impossible to examine if, or how, disputations were overcome.</p>
(e) T3.2.4 key actions and objectives in ECAPs that reflect stakeholder interests	Reference must be made to the finalised ECAPs to determine if stakeholders' objectives have been included	It is not made explicit in any of the ECAP documents that stakeholder objectives were included, whether those of local governments or those of local citizenry. Implicitly, all ECAPs+ and the EE ECAP were developed in collaboration with local governments, thus it can be expected that at least some of these stakeholders' objectives have been included. The most salient example of this is CZ: its ECAP+ includes the statement "In cooperation with the Strategic

What is being monitored (m) or evaluated (e)	Details, purpose	Result
		Council of the Broumovsko region". The document then focuses on identifying and proposing measures for obecní majetek (municipal property), suggesting direct input from local governments in identifying relevant projects and opportunities. The "Cards of Measures" are specific projects likely derived from discussions with municipalities.

## 13. Delivery of DIGIT's Objectives

A review and discussion of the Specific Objectives is made in the final project report. This document considers and assesses only the six work package objectives.

Work Package 1 - Project Management and coordination

- O1.1 Establish effective project leadership that monitors critical indicators and takes corrective action if needed: achieved in full
- O1.2 Establish effective consortium communication and content management: achieved in full
- O1.3 Establish a monitoring system to coordinate, monitor and evaluate developments and outcomes in terms of delivery on time and in good quality: achieved partially, significant delays took place, and partners were not always willing to comply with data/information requests
- O1.4 Ensure the project is completed on time and within budget: a 6-month extension was granted, indicating that the original 24-month timeline was too optimistic for the complexity of the project's actions; the budget was neither exceeded nor underspent
- O1.5 Maintain close coordination with LIFE PO to ensure that project contributes to the EC's and the stakeholders' needs and overall EC and LIFE programme objectives: met in full

Work Package 2: Increase the capacity of public and private stakeholders to undertake Just Transitions

- O2.1 In each region, stakeholders concerned with municipal responsibility for adhering to their country's National Energy & Climate Plan (NECP) are confident of assistance for compiling their obligatory Energy and Climate Action Plan (ECAP) and receive guidance in applying for its funding: achieved in full, partners consistently met with municipal and regional stakeholders throughout the project's duration

- O2.2 Regional stakeholders (including the private sector) understand their rules and obligations under national policy for a just transition that also accounts for combating energy poverty among the municipality's populace, such that communities embrace the just transition concept: achieved in part, as there was little engagement with the private sector in any of the DIGIT regions, despite efforts made to engage them; energy poverty was included in all the ECAPs+, except for the pre-existing ECAP in EE, but there is insufficient evidence to state local governments' "embrace" of the just transition's concepts
- O2.3 Civil society interest and pressure groups in each region advocate for sustainable and just energy solutions, energy security, biodiversity protection, and integrated adaptive landscapes: not achieved, there is no evidence to indicate that CSOs/NGOs were capacitated or in any way stimulated by DIGIT partners in regard to advocating for these issues.
- O2.4 Groups/key individuals opposing the European Green Deal/energy transition mute their antagonism: because the stakeholder meetings were insufficiently documented as to disputation and resolutions, this cannot be said to have been met as the regions we targeted did not have coherent opposing groups.
- O2.5 Stakeholders form effective, non-confrontational collaborative groupings in each region with the aim of seeking consensus: it is likely that this was achieved in relation to local governments in each region, but not so much so when considering all potential stakeholders in a regional ECAP+

Work Package 3: Development of an integrated, holistic, cross-sectoral energy plan for the transition

- O3.1 Regional public sector actors have engaged in dialogue with their municipal governments concerning energy and climate adaptation planning: multi-level governance meetings were held with focus on connecting NECP and ECAPs, but it is the case that attendees participated with, often, some degree of reluctance as they feel disconnected from the multi-level connections.
- O3.2 Private sector stakeholders, among others, are included in energy planning in 6 targeted regions: private sector stakeholders were invited to participate in planning, but there is no evidence of significant inputs from them
- O3.3 National/regional energy and non-energy policies that affect plan development have been thoroughly mapped: achieved in full in relation to the NECP and socio-economic analyses made by each partner
- O3.4 Regional competency to create and compile an integrated and just energy & climate action plans is demonstrated in 6 partner regions: this is somewhat vague as it does not stipulate who is doing the creating/compilation; from partner assessments, except for LV where the partner is embedded in regional government, the five other regions' municipalities generally cannot operate independently in this regard and must continue to rely on external expertise of their regional energy agencies or some other actors

Work Package 4: Multi-Level Governance and Political Dimensions of Just Energy Planning

- O4.1 Increase capacity of local/regional actors (public administrators and civil society organizations) to advocate for national policy changes to support just energy transition:

most probably partially achieved inasmuch as some public administrators have gained confidence in energy and climate planning and can now lobby national governments as they now have a firmer knowledge base; no evidence has been collected that local CSOs have benefited in this way

- O4.2 Improve ability of local/regional actors to promote the interests of marginalized groups and just transition at the national level: in principle, achieved as partners were consistent in profiling the enhanced needs of marginalized groups and those contending with energy poverty with local administrators, but whether this results in promoting these groups' interests remains to be seen; insofar as working with marginalized people themselves, this was achieved in part as we engaged umbrella associations, also there is little evidence of consistency in this regard across the project's duration, nor of capacitating anyone to advocate on behalf of the group at national levels
- O4.3 Develop capacity of local/regional actors to communicate with external actors (such as political parties) to increase social and political support for just energy transition: we carried out advocacy trainings to local municipalities, however no evidence that they in turn approached political parties beyond their own membership (if any)
- O4.4 Promote sustainability of participatory policy models and planning instruments developed in WP2 and WP3: this is not possible to assess currently, only in the future if project partners and/or municipalities continue with participatory meetings that impact local or regional policies or regulations
- O4.5 Advocate for regional transition interests at the EU level – Presentation of findings to MEPs nationally in 6 member states and once in Brussels: achieved in part, DIGIT/CEESEN representatives travelled to Brussels and held information events at meetings there; there is no evidence, though, of specifically meeting with specific MEPs

#### Work Package 5: Financing and Sustainability of Just Energy Planning

- O5.1 Increase capacity of public (and private) sector actors in obtaining conventional financing for ECAP planning and just transition within each of the six selected regions: financing advisory services were provided to local governments by DIGIT partners, which in turn extended this knowledge to interested private sector actors
- O5.2. Identify promising innovative financing sources for just transition that are appropriate for CEE region and seek adoption of them throughout the targeted regions: achieved in full, refer to D5.3 and D5.4
- O5.3 Increase knowledge and awareness on financing sources for just transition projects via investment from outside of the targeted regions and assess their suitability: achieved in full, in particular as regards national funding and ELENA

#### Work Package 6: Lessons Learned, Dissemination and Replication

- O6.1 Develop a dissemination plan that lays out the visual identity, communication channels and engagement strategies to be used with each target audience. Special focus will be on communicating with vulnerable groups: achieved in part, but communication with vulnerable groups remained challenging; refer to D6.3
- O6.2 Host International conference related to just ECAP development in CEE region to bring together policy makers, public administrators and other relevant actors from CEE and Europe: achieved in full, refer to D6.4

- O6.3 Strengthen the Central and Eastern European Sustainable Energy Network (CEESEN) (formed within the previously funded H2020 PANEL2050 project) to act as both a voice for the region at the EU level and as a platform for connecting together public administrators, policy makers and other key actors working for just green transition in the CEE – with at least 2500 members: achieved in part, inasmuch as CEESEN is now the lead partner in another LIFE-funded project, and represents the region at EU level meetings, the network has little bit more than 3000 members; there is scant evidence that it is functional as a connection platform across the region for policy makers, public administrators, and other key actors, it is more of a communication and information exchange platform, not networking.
- O6.4 Publish CEE best practices for incorporating vulnerable groups into active support of municipal just transition planning and implementation, including two publications in peer-reviewed research journals: by the end of the project, no peer-reviewed publications currently exist, while D6.3 documents best practices.
- O6.5 Promote CEESEU-DIGIT results on local, national and EU levels: achieved in full.
- O6.6 Promote continued use of CEESEU-DIGIT approach in partner countries and rest of CEE after project ends: cannot presently be assessed in detail

## 14. Efficiency and Efficacy

The CEESEU-DIGIT project encountered several hurdles during its 2.5-year implementation, significantly impacting its overall efficiency. While the project aimed to build capacity in public administration for developing Energy and Climate Action Plans with a strong emphasis on the equities inherent in the just transition (ECAP+), challenges such as external changes in the operating landscape, personnel changes, loss of institutional memory, and competition for time and resources among partners hindered the smooth and timely execution of some activities. These issues necessitated a re-examination of intended outputs and made it difficult to gather required quantitative and qualitative information.

The efficacy of ECAP+ development, particularly concerning stakeholder input, also showed inefficiencies. Overall, the input from regions and municipalities into the ECAP+ documents was limited in most cases, with Latvia being the exception where the partner was embedded within the regional government. This limited direct input is identified as a threat to both current buy-in and the future durability of the plans. While the project aimed to foster inclusive stakeholder engagement, there is scant evidence of extensive effort from partners to uncover and engage opponents of the Green Deal.

Despite these challenges, the project did achieve many of its primary objectives, including the completion of five new ECAP+ documents and minor amendments to Estonia's pre-existing plan. However, as stated above, the efficiency of the project's activities was significantly hampered by systemic issues in data collection, partner compliance, political instability, and overly ambitious scope in certain regions, ultimately affecting the depth of capacity building and the robustness of the bottom-up approach envisioned.

## 14.1 Recommendations

Several recommendations can be made based on these issues.

1. Projects need a dedicated Monitoring and Evaluation Specialist within the management team, an individual who will travel to project partners and ensure, while there, that data and information are collected as required. Relying on partners' cooperation in this regard has proved to be an insufficiently robust strategy.
2. When a project involves non-technical aspects such as energy poverty, poverty of flexibility in energy choices, and the just transition in relation to human rights, technical partners are out of their depth despite efforts to capacitate them, as took place in DIGIT: Partners need to acknowledge that they lack capacity in the social sciences, and bring onboard a dedicated social scientist to lead their group in these vital areas. Training the partners centrally only increases their skills in general level but not in-depth as would be needed for high-level planning.
3. Project scopes need to be carefully calibrated to ensure feasibility and maximize impact. The experience from Estonia and Poland suggests that pre-existing regional plans or overly ambitious geographic coverage can significantly hinder efficiency. Future projects should consider more focused pilot implementations or phased approaches, allowing for deeper engagement and more trackable, meaningful results in specific areas, rather than a broad, untraceable reach.
4. While stakeholder inclusion is a core DIGIT tenet, it was not a well developed aspect of the ECAPs+. Future projects should reach out with more sophisticated strategies for engaging diverse groups, including those who may be resistant to the project's core objectives or to the Green Deal as a whole. The project should not only aim to gather input but also to explicitly demonstrate how this input is incorporated into the planning process, thereby ensuring genuine co-creation and stronger local ownership of the developed plans. That this is likely to remain a challenge in the CEE for reasons explained earlier, particularly the "democratic deficit", it is still worth attempting regardless of pre-perceptions of likely results.

## 15. Prospects for Sustainability and Replicability

The overall long-term viability of the ECAPs+ developed appears questionable due to limited evidence of their institutionalization and integration into existing regional planning processes. While five new ECAP+ documents were produced, the extent to which these plans will be actively used, updated, and implemented by local and regional authorities after the project concludes is uncertain. This is largely attributed to varying levels of buy-in and ownership across partner regions, with some displaying greater commitment and capacity than others - notably, it is likely that the Western Balkans will own the plans, but the other regions may be more reticent to consult and follow them over time. That national governments require a regional/municipal energy and climate plan to access funding may alter this assumption to one that is more positive, but only if this requirement exceeds merely being an item on a checklist.

A critical factor impacting sustainability is the inconsistent level of input from regions and municipalities during the ECAP+ development. In most cases, local and regional governmental

entities had only minor direct input into the content, which poses a significant threat to long-term adoption and durable implementation. This report highlights that only in Latvia was the partner directly embedded within the regional government, facilitating better integration. Without strong local ownership and genuine involvement from the outset, the voluntary ECAPs+ risk remaining theoretical documents rather than becoming actionable plans that drive tangible change in energy consumption, renewable energy deployment, and climate adaptation.

Regarding replicability, the project methodology for developing an ECAP+ is generally adaptable to other regions. However, successful replication would heavily depend on addressing the identified inefficiencies and challenges. This includes ensuring strong local governmental buy-in, providing adequate capacity-building tailored to specific regional needs, and overcoming hurdles in data collection and partner compliance. The unique socio-economic and political contexts of Central and Eastern European countries mean that a one-size-fits-all approach to replication would likely be ineffective, necessitating flexibility and sensitivity to local conditions.

## 15.1 Recommendations

Based on this assessment, the following recommendations are pertinent for future actions concerning the development of just-transition based ECAPs and similar energy and climate plans:

1. Future ECAP+ development initiatives should prioritize mechanisms that explicitly link stakeholder input from all levels - citizenry, local governments, and businesses - to the concrete content and implementation pathways of the plans. Documenting and then feeding back to concerned stakeholders how specific issues raised by these groups are adopted or addressed would not only enhance the efficacy of the plans but also ensure greater buy-in and sustainability of efforts beyond a project's lifespan
2. Future projects should prioritize embedding project activities and ECAP+ development directly within existing governmental structures at the regional and municipal levels from the very beginning. This includes securing formal commitments from local and regional authorities, assigning dedicated personnel, and integrating the ECAP+ into mandatory planning cycles. This approach, akin to the successful example in Latvia, will significantly enhance long-term sustainability and ensure the plans become living documents.
3. Instead of a standardized approach, future capacity-building efforts should be more demand-driven and tailored to the specific needs and existing capacities of each partner region. This involves thorough initial assessments to identify specific knowledge gaps and institutional weaknesses, followed by targeted training and continuous, hands-on support. Providing clearer guidance on data collection, monitoring, and reporting is also crucial to enable partners to effectively track and report on their progress.
4. For an ECAP+ to be sustainable, regions and municipalities need clear and realistic pathways for funding the proposed measures. As DIGIT did, future projects should dedicate significant effort to identifying specific funding opportunities (EU, national, private), assisting with proposal development, and showcasing successful implementation case studies. This practical focus on financial viability and project execution will incentivize greater adoption and active use of the ECAP+ documents beyond a project's lifetime.
5. Finally, but crucially, it must be acknowledged by all parties that seek to meet climate neutrality goals that small municipalities may never be capable of managing to develop,

implement, finance, and monitor energy and climate plans on their own. As suggested in the prior CEESEU project, it may be necessary to abandon capacitation efforts and instead place ECAPs+ in the hands of experts - that is, regional energy agencies, which will proceed with developing the plans in concert with local administrations and over the years assist them with funding applications and monitoring of actions as well as the ensuing reductions in emissions.