CENTRAL EASTERN EUROPEAN
SUSTAINABLE ENERGY NETWORK

CEESEU-DIGIT

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

D4.5 Training materials for Public and Political Engagement

2025

Created by: WWF Hungary

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About the CEESEU-DIGIT project

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

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

Drawing municipalities into energy regions will help cross-pollinate ideas, share knowledge and tasks, and apply for financing. Public-sector capacity building (WP2, WP3) will help (a) formulate a holistic ECAP with energy provisions and carbon footprint reduction while improving climate-sensitive social goods - mobility, parks, playgrounds, clean air and water, biodiversity conservation; (b) address energy poverty - heating/cooling, adequate ventilation/lighting, domestic hot water, cooking; (c), attend to constituents and act on behalf of their needs; (d) understand financing options and how to apply for these; and (e) work with the private sector to mute

opposition to the CET and to encourage and incorporate funding of ECAP initiatives by business (WP5). A just Clean Energy Transition (CET) needs to maximize support, minimize opposition, and overcome apathy, requiring social science/social psychology theory to be applied (WP3). Non-public sector stakeholders (key players, context setters, the crowd, and subjects) will each be targeted by specific social and conventional media outreach (WP6).

Dissemination will be (a) upward to national levels, the CoM, and the EU for use in energy transition planning (WP5, WP6); (b) across a broader CEE geography via the Central and Eastern Europeans Sustainable Energy Union (CEESEN), an 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).

Public and Political Engagement

In an era saturated with messages and media consumption, effective public and political engagement has become both a challenge and a necessity. A workshop held in Estonia in May 2024 by WWF Hungary, illuminated strategies for enhancing public involvement and political cooperation in the context of just energy transition. The workshop focused on building communication frameworks that local municipalities can adopt to better connect with various stakeholders and promote sustainable development initiatives.

The document presents the content of the workshop, which can be a useful tool for the partners as a support material for campaign planning. But we recommend the following tools for anyone who needs to engage with different target groups.
The focus of the workshop was just energy transition aligned with the main communication goals of the project, but the topic can be replaced for anything, it doesn't influence the methodology.
The training materials are primarily created and recommended for municipalities and local NGOs.

The workshop emphasizes that successful public and political engagement needs' research and finetuned communication campaigns. By recognizing the roles and needs of different stakeholders and communicating through appropriate channels, municipalities can foster a sense of ownership and collaboration in energy transition efforts. This approach not only enhances policy effectiveness but also ensures that the transition is just and equitable for all.

In the LIFE CEESEU-DIGIT project the involvement of the stakeholders are a key task and goal. The following reports present and contain more information about the strategies and research results of the project:

The communication landscape

Today's citizens are bombarded with approximately 10,000 messages daily, spending up to 12 hours consuming media and nearly 5 hours on social media platforms. Mobile usage exceeds six hours daily, and 85% of media consumption involves multitasking across different screens. This hyper-connected environment underscores the importance of clear, targeted, and inclusive communication strategies, particularly when attempting to engage citizens in complex issues like energy transition.

Stakeholder Mapping and Strategic Communication Planning

At the heart of the workshop in 2024 was the concept of stakeholder mapping. Municipalities must recognize and understand the different stakeholder groups in their communities, each with distinct capabilities, needs, and interests. Through a series of exercises, participants explored how to tailor communication to these groups effectively. Inspiration was drawn from CEESEU-DIGIT stakeholder maps that are compiled in 2023, and updated regularly.

One such exercise involved a **SWOT analysis**, inviting participants to assume the role of a municipality trying to support its citizens in a just transition. Four stakeholder groups were examined: *local youth, green NGOs, vulnerable populations, and local economic operators.* Each group presented unique strengths and weaknesses. For example, youth may have the enthusiasm and digital fluency to drive innovation but often lack influence or resources. Green NGOs offer expertise and motivation but may struggle to connect with broader segments of the population. Vulnerable groups require targeted support and may be hard to reach due to economic or educational barriers, while economic operators hold financial resources but often lack awareness of sustainable investment options.

Understanding these dynamics allows municipalities to strategize how best to connect stakeholders. For instance, linking economic operators with NGOs can channel funds into impactful, well-designed projects. Similarly, empowering youth through inclusive city planning initiatives can retain their talent locally and harness their energy for long-term development.

WORKSHOP EXERCISE EXAMPLE FOR TRAINERS

Goal:
Train the trainer - exercise for the project partners on how they can reach out to municipalities to communicate better

Exercise:
Let's divide in 4 groups (4-5 ppl/group)
Every group represents the municipality of a smaller city, who wants to support their people in need in the just transition. However, different stakeholder groups have different characteristics. Some possess the problems: energy poverty, lack of information. And other stakeholder groups have the financial resources, but they don't necessarily know how to spend their money well. Still others, like green NGO-s have the professional background and the interest in changes. The goal of this exercise is to analyze the given stakeholder groups, and then discuss in the summary round, which roles they could have in the energy transition based on their parameters. Are they the ones who need support? Who should be connected with whom?

Every group gets a description of a stakeholder group they need to analyze.

The trainees can see a table, similar to a SWOT analysis, with the same boxes, but now they have to think with the head of the municipality. From its point of view, which can be the strengths, opportunities, weaknesses and threats of each, when they think about collaborating with them? Undoubtedly, they are all needed in the energy transition in the end, but it does matter how they can work together - this is why we would like to know them better.

Group 1: local youth
Group 2: local green NGO
Group 3: Vulnerable group
Group 4: Local economic operators

List of necessary things:
Group descriptions printed,
4 big papers with the SWOT table,
sticky notes,
Pens

Time:
25 minutes for group work
4-5 minutes/groups for presentations
10 minutes for discussion
~1 hour in total

Group 1: local youth - 17-18 years old high school students. They live at home with their parents, either in town or they commute every morning from nearby. The school provides environmental education, but the students are not highly interested in

general - however there are certain individuals who have a real green mindset. Most of them would like to proceed further studies after high school. They usually organize programmes in town together and frequently use several social media platforms.

STRENGTHS	WEAKNESSES
They have some knowledge in the topic from school *They have some really dedicated individuals in the team* *They are open-minded, they can adapt, more likely to change habits easily* *They have strong communication and interpersonal skills*	*They don't have financial resources right now* *They tend to be very lazy and less likely to be involved in issues persistently* *Lack of experience and maturity, poor decision-making*
OPPORTUNITIES	THREATS
They can be reached through all online platforms *Their opinions can be shaped* *Their future will be strongly affected → it is easy to make them interested*	*It is very hard to wake up their real interest* *They face so much information each day that they might lose focus*

Group 2: local green NGO - (~10 employees) highly interested in and dedicated to environmental protection and just transition, as well as having the professional background and knowledge to deal with these problems, however they suffer from the lack of financial resources and have little extra capacity due to general overload.

STRENGTHS	WEAKNESSES
They have strong professional environmental background, they understand the problem clearly *They absolutely have interest in acting* *They have good communication and interpersonal skills* *They have experience in dealing with vulnerable groups and general public*	*They don't have financial resources* *The coworkers are usually underpaid and overloaded*

OPPORTUNITIES	THREATS
• *They can be the connection between the higher organs and society* • *They usually have online platforms already beside the printed media*	• *Burnout can be a threat* • *They only think in terms of environmental / social aspects → they have difficulty in understanding the economic motivation behind actions*

Group 3: Vulnerable group - family with multiple children in an inefficient family house - parents at around the age of 30-40 with high level of social media use. A full-time mother and a father who commutes to the next town to work. They have financial capacity only to run the family, but do not have surplus money to renovate the dwelling with high maintenance costs. Lack of information regarding energy transition and the importance of environmental issues.

STRENGTHS	WEAKNESSES
• *They are highly interested in energy efficiency actions because of the high utility costs* • *They have their own property over which they have control → no mutual consent needed to renovate*	• *They don't have financial resources* • *Lack of knowledge in the topic → they do not understand the whole picture yet* • *Children take away the focus*
OPPORTUNITIES	THREATS
• *They can be reached through all online platforms* • *There are certain aspects along which it is possible to make them interested immediately* • *Building energy renovation will get high focus in the near future → new support schemes to open*	• *It is very hard to wake up their real interest, because they have so much bigger problems than just transition* • *If the support is not in form of non-refundable grant, they might have difficulties in paying loan repayments*

Group 4: Local economic operator - the local branch of a larger company in the industrial district near the settlement. Many people come here to work from the neighbourhood. They have financial resources and willingness to invest; however they do not really have any information about the energy transition, therefore they are

currently not interested in the topic. The management usually takes part in the local cultural life and financially supports the local Village Day.

STRENGTHS	WEAKNESSES
Financial resources *Willingness to invest and looking for possibilities to spend money on → prestige* *Actively participating in local life → their opinion matters, they have respect and attention*	*No personal / emotional connection to the problem* *Lack of professional knowledge in the topic → they do not understand the whole picture* *A lot of other business which takes away the focus*
OPPORTUNITIES	THREATS
They can be reached through all online platforms *Regulation will encourage them anyway to take part in some sustainability related investment and CSR projects → they want to appear in a good light* *It is enough to convince one member in the management to join the cause*	*Decision-making along economic interests only* *It is very hard to wake up their real interest → they might choose another business / affair to invest in which is not necessarily an important common issue* *They might use the cause for greenwashing purposes and appearing in a good light rather than real action*

Tailoring Messages and Channels

The second activity focused on defining communication tools and crafting messages for specific personas: *Anna (17), Peter (42), Sara (32), and Tomas (51)*. These fictional characters represented diverse demographics with varying communication preferences and motivational triggers.

The goal was to create customized **communication strategies**.

WORKSHOP ELEMENT EXAMPLE FOR TRAINERS

Goal:
To define messages and communication channels towards different stakeholders
Exercise:
The same groups work together as in the SWOT exercise.
Each group gets a description of their user persona.
The groups represent the municipality of a smaller city, who would like to communicate for the person described below.
The municipality would like to promote the advantages of C&E plans of the city for these target groups. Define the followings:

- **Objectives of involvement** *(e.g. Youth - we want them to stay in the city, we need to convince them about the development of the city)*
- **Messages** *(e.g. Youth - "You can form the future together with the city leaders")*
- **Channels** *(e.g. Youth - Local events, Social Media)*

Persona 1: Anna, 17
Persona 2: Peter, 42
Persona 3: Sara, 32
Persona 4: Tomas, 51

List of necessary tools:
Target group/user persona descriptions printed
4 big papers,
Pens

Time:
25 minutes for group work
4-5 minutes/groups for presentations
10 minutes for discussion
~1 hour in total

Persona 1:
Anna, 17
Lives in the suburbs of the city.
Student at the local high school, she plays the piano at the local community centre.
She plans to continue her studies on Tourism and Catering BA with traveling abroad, most probably to The Netherlands or Belgium.

She is concerned about climate change; therefore she's trying to cut off her meat consumption, but doesn't know what else she could do.
She nearly never watches television but uses all the major SM platforms daily. She also gathers most of the news from the shared contents.

Persona 2:
Peter, 42
Lives in the city centre with his family. He has two teenage children.
He studied environmental sciences but works as an accountant at a local small business. However he volunteers at a small local green NGO, which is trying to do as much as they can for their city. Mostly they organize garbage collecting and environmental education for the local elementary school.
He likes to have pizza and beers with his friends in the local pub or hiking with the family.

Persona 3:
Sara, 32
She is a full-time mother with 3 kids under 10, living in an old house inherited from her husband's grandparents.
After graduating from secondary school, she was working in the local grocery store till the first child was born.
As only her husband is working right now, she tries to manage the budget of the family smartly, looking for discounts and exchanging clothes and children's toys with friends having kids in similar ages. She spends a lot of time on social media.

Persona 4:
Tomas, 51
He is a leading manager at a local branch of a larger company in the industrial district near the city, originally an engineer.
He moved to a residential park next to the city a few years ago. He is divorced with two kids who are in college in the capital of the country.
He often needs to have meetings and negotiations with the municipality and the local farmers and agricultural companies.
In his free time, he likes to visit tropical islands.

Summary

Retrieving the necessary information about the target group and analysing them will help a lot in communication planning. Based on the outcomes it will be easy to plan proper communication materials and share the information on the adequate platforms for each target groups. The result will also help to decide how much energy and work should be invested in a target group as the interest rate will be clear.

A good and sustainable communication strategy also needs regular updates and adjustments to ensure that the messages and the platforms are on the right track.