SMEnergy Project Newsletter

Wrapping up 2024 with the SMEnergy project

In this second edition of the Interreg Danube SMEnergy project newsletter, we're excited to share updates from our recent "Service Centres and Transformation Path for Increased Renewable Energy Use in SMEs" conference and second partner meeting in Podersdorf, Austria. Learn about the progress made in identifying institutional best practices to support SMEs, as well as the development of a wireframe for the project's database and network. These efforts aim to empower SMEs across the region, enabling them to tackle energy challenges and contribute to a greener, more sustainable future.

The SMEnergy project consortium and invited stakeholders in Podersdorf, Austria for their hybrid conference event & second project meeting (September 2024)

SMEnergy Hybrid Conference in Podersdorf

On the 25th September 2024, the SMEnergy project invited SMEs, energy experts, and policymakers to explore how SMEs can transition to renewable energy at the project's conference on **"Service Centres and Transformation Path for Increased Renewable Energy Use in SMEs"**. The conference was hosted as a hybrid event by Wirtschaftsagentur Burgenland Forschungs- und Innovations GmbH (FIB) in Podersdorf, Austria, with the opportunity for external stakeholders to join online, to provide a platform to discuss best practices, energy solutions, and challenges for SMEs. As a highlight, Tomaš Vondra from the Czech Republic's Ministry of Industry and Trade shared insights into the EU's renewable energy strategy for SMEs in the Danube region. The SMEnergy conference also featured project findings, an interactive workshop on renewable energy services, and networking opportunities, including a boat trip on Lake Neusiedl and a project dinner.

For more information about the event, visit our website.

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PROJECT DETAILS

Period: 01 January 2024 - 30 June 2026

Budget: € 2,065,115

Interreg Funds: 80%

Interreg Danube Region

Co-funded by the European Union

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SUMMARY REPORT

The SMEnergy ***Transnational Analysis of SMEs' Energy Behaviour and Situation*** report is nearing completion and will be available on our website and social media in the new year. This comprehensive report delves into the energy practices and challenges faced by SMEs across the Danube region, focusing on renewable energy adoption and identifying areas for improvement. Drawing on over 100 interviews, detailed research, and partner collaboration, it highlights the barriers and opportunities SMEs encounter in transitioning to greener energy. The findings will guide policy recommendations and foster strategies to help SMEs achieve regional renewable energy goals.

SMENERGY ACROSS THE DANUBE REGION

The transnational SMEnergy project consortium consists of 10 partners and 8 associated partners from across the Danube region. For the next two-and-a-half years, the transnational pilot project aims to support energy-intensive SMEs in accelerating the transition to adopting renewable energies. *Read on for updates from each partner region.*

Slovenia

The lead partner of the SMEnergy project, Local Energy Agency Spodnje Podravje (LEASP), is based in Ptuj, Slovenia and serves as the energy manager for over 20 municipalities in the Podravje region. As part of the SMEnergy project, LEA Spodnje Podravje (LEASP) recently visited three small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) in the Ptuj area, representing the CNC production, metallurgy, and electrical installation sectors. These visits, conducted in November 2024, aimed to explore how these businesses could enhance their use of renewable energy and improve energy efficiency. Each company, already equipped with solar panels, demonstrated a strong commitment to sustainability, yet discussions revealed opportunities to further integrate energy-saving technologies and maximise the benefits of their solar installations.

Solar panel installation on the roof of one of the SMEs in Ptuj, Slovenia

The site visits provided LEASP with firsthand insights into the energy challenges and opportunities unique to each SME. During interviews with company representatives, the focus was on identifying practical steps for expanding renewable energy usage, such as increasing solar capacity and adopting energy-efficient practices in production processes. LEASP shared tailored recommendations to help these companies reduce energy costs, improve operational efficiency, and enhance their environmental impact.

Hungary

PC-Trend Kft., in collaboration with Energiaklub, has synthesised research findings from across partner countries to identify the primary needs of SMEs regarding renewable energy use. These include reducing administrative burdens, ensuring transparent legislation, raising awareness, providing access to independent and credible information, establishing a database of qualified suppliers and energy experts, offering financial support, delivering single-channel services, and disseminating good practices.

Capacity building session with the Chamber of Commerce of Pécs-Baranya

Building on these findings, the partner countries are planning pilot activities, scheduled to launch in February 2025. These pilots draw on results from other EU and international projects, such as REKK's energy sampling study in Hungarian bakeries and the newly launched Sustainability Club of the Pécs-Baranya Chamber of Commerce and Industry, further enhancing the capitalisation of past project outcomes.

A company visit to Axis Betonit Kft. was organised in October. The visit showcased the company's renewable energy investments over the past two years and their positive impact on performance.

Insights from Axis Betonit Kft. will soon be highlighted as a good practice on the project's platforms, contributing to the solid methodological foundation PC-Trend is establishing for the project, including pilot definitions, good practice curation, database design criteria, and business model development. *More information on institutional best practices highlighted through SMEnergy* *on page 3.*

SMENERGY ACROSS THE DANUBE REGION

SMEnergy study visit to Axis Betonit Kft.

Austria

As part of the regional program "UmweltFit Burgenland," the state of Burgenland, in cooperation with the federal government (currently the Climate and Energy Fund), supports consultancy services related to obtaining the Austrian Ecolabel. The Austrian Ecolabel promotes the circular economy by encouraging producers to generate less waste and CO2. It is awarded to products or services, including tourism, certifying the entire company. In the Burgenland region, these companies are mostly SMEs.

Forschung & Innovation Burgenland (FIB), a partner in the SMEnergy project, acts as a cooperation partner for this new funding program, which provides non-repayable grants of up to 80% of consultancy costs (up to a maximum of €3,200). These consultancy services can further drive the green transformation of SMEs, as supported by SMEnergy. They represent another "piece of the puzzle" to promote the sustainable development of regional businesses.

Czech Republic

Significant progress is underway in shaping the core methodology driving the SMEnergy initiative, led by DEX Innovation Centre (DEX IC) with the collective expertise of project partners. This comprehensive framework is designed to support SMEs in their transition to renewable energy and improved energy efficiency, offering practical tools and clear guidelines to guide the process effectively.

The methodology builds on the consortium's collaborative foundation, incorporating insights from extensive research and partner contributions. Central to its application is the establishment of Green Energy Knowledge, Operation, and Service Hubs (GEKOS) across the Danube Region. These hubs will provide SMEs with expert knowledge, technological solutions, and financial guidance for their green energy transitions.

"I am very much looking forward to finally testing the idea live. We have collected so much input, interviewed so many different people, heard various opinions, and now we will see it working—the most exciting part is ahead of all of us," said Adam Červenka, Project Manager at DEX IC.

With the methodology soon to be tested in real-world pilots, the project is poised to deliver a scalable and impactful approach, paving the way for a greener future, one SME at a time.

Slovakia

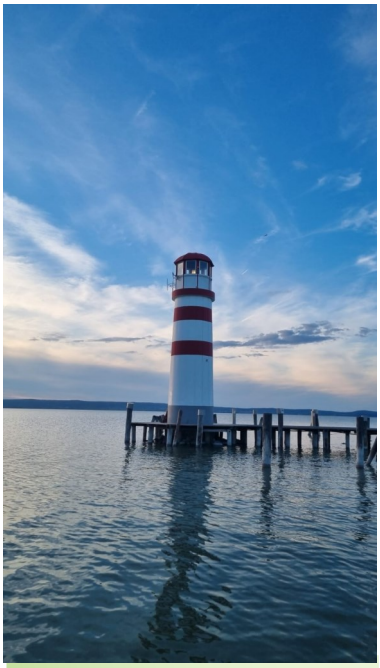
On 28 November 2024, Slovak Business Agency (SBA) held the second Slovak stakeholders´ meeting in Bratislava. Focused on showcasing the SMEnergy model, it brought together representatives from Slovak Innovation and Energy Agency (SIEA), clusters, energy service providers, and SMEs to discuss advancements in renewable energy use for SMEs in the Danube region. Participants also reviewed the outcomes of stakeholder interviews and comparative analyses conducted earlier this year.

The Green Energy Knowledge and Operational Services (GEKOS) platform, designed to provide tailored solutions and practical resources to SMEs transitioning to renewable energy, was introduced to the Slovak stakeholders, who shared insights on regional needs, financing challenges, and improving public communication regarding energy solutions. The event reinforced stakeholders' strong commitment to the project, setting a collaborative tone for future activities.

Second Slovak stakeholders´ meeting

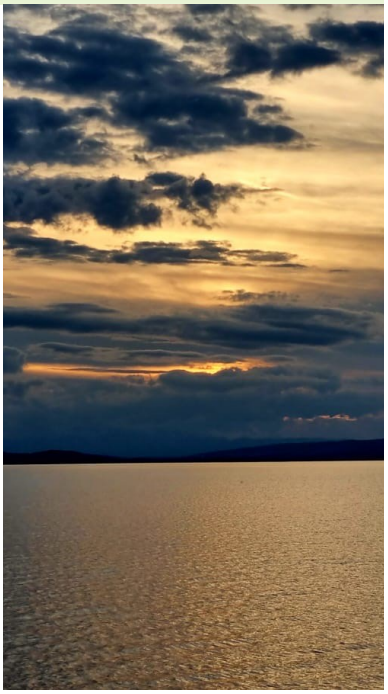
Republic of Srpska

In November 2024, the Development Agency of the Republic of Srpska (RARS) held a productive meeting with the



INSTITUTIONAL BEST PRACTICES

By identifying best practices for support mechanisms, methodologies, etc. for SMEs to transition to renewables in their regions, partners are working to establish a robust database of examples for SMEs and institutions to follow. Some best practices identified already in the project include the "RES Contact Point" in Slovenia, or practices of Axis Bentonit in Hungary. Over the past months, SMEnergy partners have been gathering these transnational best practices to develop a guide for SMEs and institutions to demonstrate use-cases and provide examples of how others are successfully adapting to the green energy transition



ELABORATION AND PILOTING THE SMENERGY PROGRAMME

One of the goals of the SMEnergy project is to establish and pilot the "SMEnergy model" and its elements by 8 energy systems (SI, HU, AT, CZ, SK, BiH, BG, DE) across the Danube Region. This translates into the unified testing of jointly elaborated:

a) Energy Transition Roadmap for SMEs; b) Green Energy Database & Marketplace; c) The operation model of Green Energy Knowledge, Operation & Service Hubs (GEKOS) and their networks.

Based on the pilots, the consortium intends the elaboration on a viable integrated solution supporting green energy transition at SMEs.

SMENERGY ACROSS THE DANUBE REGION

Fund for Environmental Protection and Energy Efficiency of the Republic of Srpska to review SMEnergy project progress and discuss next steps. Key outcomes included plans to establish a database of suppliers and experts for e-platforms to support SMEs and the development of the digital GEKOS platform, consolidating information on renewable energy and energy efficiency in one place.

Looking ahead, RARS and its partners will organise workshops on topics such as renewable energy feasibility, energy consumption monitoring, and project financing. These workshops aim to enhance the knowledge and skills of SME managers while preparing for pilot energy audits. RARS will work with the Eco Fund to identify 3–5 SMEs for these audits, providing valuable insights and examples of best practices to inspire others.

RARS continues to collaborate closely with the Ministry of Industry and Energy of the Republic of Srpska, maintaining regular communication and aligning efforts to achieve SMEnergy's goals.

Representatives of RARS & the Fund for Environmental Protection and Energy Efficiency of Republika Srpska

Bulgaria

In December 2024, the Business Support Centre for SMEs (BSC SME) in Ruse, Bulgaria, held a meeting with Prof. Nikolay Mihaylov at the premises of BSC SME to discuss the viable possibilities and options for the future services of the Green Energy Knowledge, Operation and Service Hub (GEKOS) to be established in Bulgaria.

BSC SME looks forward to implementing the GEKOS hubs in Bulgaria, as this will support especially energy-intensive SMEs by providing them with single-channel service, equipped with a cross-border green energy database and a marketplace fostering their green energy transitions. In Bulgaria, Prof. Mihaylov will support the organisation of a stakeholder workshop in January 2025 for a further discussion on the GEKOS hub services concept and their pilot testing among energy intensive SMEs.

Representatives of BSC SME accompanied by Prof. Nikolay Mihaylov from Ruse University

Germany

On 9-19 October 9-10, the Technology Center for Energy (TZE), representing the SMEnergy project, participated in a study visit to Vilnius, Lithuania, organised by the EU-funded EAGER project. Hosted by the Lithuanian National Paying Agency and the Lithuanian Innovation Center, the visit highlighted the innovative solutions being developed by the EAGER project consortium to increase the adoption of agrivoltaics (APV) in Europe. The event showcased the key obstacles to APV adoption, such as regulatory challenges, financial barriers, and public acceptance issues. The study visit also included site visits to SMEs in the manufacturing and food processing sectors to observe efforts in expanding renewable energy use and improving energy efficiency. At the visit, the SMEnergy model was presented to the EAGER project consortium.

TZE representing the SMEnergy project at a study visit arranged by the EU-project, EAGER

SMENERGY ACROSS THE DANUBE REGION

TZE representing SMEnergy at the EAGER study visit in Lithuania

What is APV? APV offers a promising solution to the growing land-use conflict between the agricultural and renewable energy sectors. By allowing simultaneous food and electricity generation on the same parcel of land, APV can green food supply chains, provide farmers with a stable income, and enhance food security. In Lower Bavaria alone, approximately 15,000 farmers contribute around €2 billion in gross value added annually. But many industries depend on agriculture's success—15,000 people work in food processing, while tens of thousands are employed in sectors like agricultural machinery manufacturing and the supply of feed, seed, and fertilizers. APV strengthens farmers' financial stability and fosters sustainable growth across these interconnected industries. Additionally, APV can supply clean, renewable energy directly to high-energy consumers like the food processing sector, thereby reducing carbon emissions and promoting more sustainable food chains.

Looking ahead, the EAGER project will host a workshop at the planned SMEnergy symposium, scheduled for September 2025. This event will offer a platform for SMEs and government authorities to exchange knowledge, tools, and strategies that address the unique energy transition challenges and opportunities in Lower Bavaria.

What are GEKOS?

The Green Energy Knowledge, Operation, and Service Hubs (GEKOS) hubs network to be created within the SMEnergy project aims to provide a single-channel service to SMEs, especially to energy intensive ones, equipped with a cross-border green energy database and a marketplace supporting and fostering the SMEs green energy transition in the Danube region. Services include:

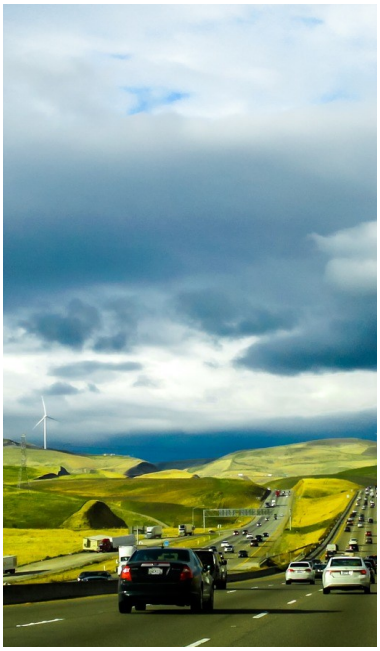
⇒**Financial support** – this service aims at easier access to more funds/ programmes/ schemes for SMEs. The GEKOS with be providing information on existing funding opportunities;

⇒**Support in overcoming the administrative burden,** understanding of legislation - Signposting SMEs to relevant energy experts and consultants;

⇒**Capacity building –** this service will include organisation of trainings and seminars on RES topics, also, awareness raising by providing credible information, as most of the SMEs do not have the necessary experience and knowledge for planning and forecasting their energy production, consumption, and trading.

⇒**Access to a qualified supplier and energy expert database** - this is important as SMEs lack information on qualified, independent, and trusted suppliers and energy experts for advice and services, the available funding resources, guidelines on RES investments in terms of planning, return, level of development.

⇒**Publications, newsletters, promotional materials** on RES topics.



HAPPY NEW YEAR TO SMENERGY

The year 2024 for the SMEnergy project has been marked by notable progress in promoting the adoption of renewable energy sources (RES) among SMEs. Key accomplishments include the creation of a comprehensive transnational analysis of SMEs' energy behaviour and circumstances, alongside the development of SMEnergy model elements that leverage proven best practices and solutions. The results, at the regional, national, and transnational levels, lay the groundwork for the project's next steps, further supporting SMEs in adopting sustainable energy practices across the region — in 2025 and beyond.

ABOUT THE PROJECT

Issues addressed

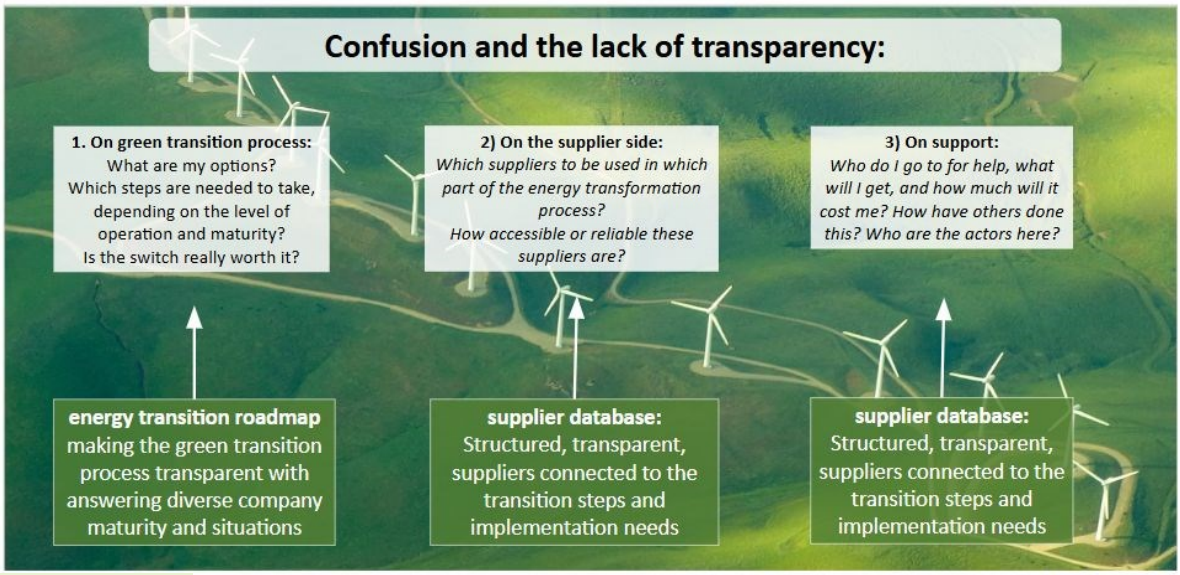
SMEs make up 99% of all businesses in Europe, accounting for around 25 million enterprises. Many of these businesses lack the resources to fully explore opportunities for improving energy efficiency and adopting renewable energy solutions. To promote economic resilience in the EU and achieve the ambitious targets set out in the EU Green Deal, it is crucial to have mechanisms in place that support SMEs. By offering tailored and transparent solutions, we can create the enabling conditions necessary to accelerate the energy transition and promote sustainable growth among SMEs.

The Interreg Danube SMEnergy Project

Over the course of 30 months, the Interreg Danube SMEnergy project aims to create a **pilot network** of regional/countrywide service centers in order to support energy-intensive SMEs in accelerating the transition to adopting renewable energies. Corresponding outputs can be achieved only through transnational collaboration: an **energy transition roadmap** providing answers to diverse company maturity & situations, as well as the model operation of ***Green Energy Knowledge, Operation and Service Hubs (GEKOS),*** assuring single-channel service, equipped with a cross-border green energy database and marketplace. Due to scalability, we must meet the needs of SMEs that are only just considering their energy transition, but also those that are already at the forefront of this. The final aim of the project is to create both national and transnational strategies/toolkits on how the diverse SME segments can be better supported in the increased use of renewables.

The SMEnergy project is aligned with the Interreg Danube Region Programme 2021-2027 priority, **"A greener, low-carbon Danube Region"**, and directly contributes to the Programme Specific Objective 2.1, **"Support greening the energy and transport sectors in the Danube Region by enhancing the integration of renewable energy sources.** For more information on how to get involved, fill out our **SMEnergy contact form.**

The main logic of the project



Source: Krisztina Horváth-Karip (PC-TREND)

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THIRD TRANSNATIONAL PARTNER MEETNG & WORKSHOP

The next transnational project meeting for the SMEnergy initiative, hosted by DEX-IC, will take place in Liberec, Czech Republic, on 12–13 March 2025. This event will bring together project partners from across the region for focused discussions and collaborative work. The agenda will prioritise advancing pilot activities, refining project concepts, and ensuring the effective implementation of shared ideas.

An international workshop for project partners and SMEs will also be organised as part of the meeting. This workshop will address project-relevant topics, such as strategies to enhance pilot activities and expand project outreach. SMEnergy topic experts, SMEs from partner countries, and local stakeholders will participate, providing valuable feedback on the initial components of the pilot to strengthen its impact. In the beautiful city of Liberec, partners aim to foster meaningful exchanges and progress towards the success of SMEnergy across partner regions.

PROJECT PARTNERS

Local Energy Agency Spodnje Podravje – LEASP (Slovenia)

Energiaklub (Hungary)

Business Agency Burgenland Research and Innovation Ltd. – FIB (Austria)

PC-Trend Ltd. (Hungary)

DEX Innovation Centre – DEX IC (Czech Republic)

Slovak Business Agency – SBA (Slovakia)

Development Agency of the Republic of Srpska – RARS (Republic of Srpska/Bosnia and Herzegovina)

Business Support Centre for Small and Medium Enterprises - Ruse – BSC SME Ruse (Bulgaria)

European Institute for Innovation-Technology (Germany)

Landshut University of Applied Sciences – TZE (Germany)

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