Accelerating energy efficiency investments: co-designing a public-private knowledge sharing platform for regions.

In the context of the debate on the next Multiannual Financial Framework, which is reshaping how EU funds reach territories, the workshops focused on the critical role of Regions in planning and delivering the energy transition and in particular energy efficiency projects. The shift towards a more nationally centralised funding process creates new challenges for Regions and require them to rethink their role in planning, implementation and management.

This is why MIRA Network, the European Alliance to Save Energy (EU-ASE) and CEE Bankwatch Network organised a workshop to jointly co-design a public-private knowledge sharing platform, aimed at connecting Italian Regions with industrial stakeholders and experts to help them make more effective use of EU funds for energy efficiency. Such platform could be replicated in other regions in Europe. During the event this idea was presented alongside existing models, such as the European platform Cohesion4Transition (C4T) and regional experiences, giving voice to institutions, civil society and industry.

The workshop focused on how EU cohesion funds can and currently support energy efficiency projects. The main message was that funding alone is insufficient: stronger administrative capacity, coordination and project quality are needed to translate spending into concrete energy savings, jobs, electrification and much more.
The funding landscape to support energy efficiency projects across the EU is fragmented across various national and regional programmes. Uncertainty about future regional allocations and a short planning window further complicate implementation.

C4T: shared learning with practical support

The discussion stressed that delivery, rather than the availability of funds, is often the main obstacle. For 2021–2027, €129 billion was allocated to energy, climate and environmental investment under Policy Objective 2, including €94 billion from the EU budget. Challenges to implementation include capacity shortages, gaps in knowledge, departmental silos and legal challenges. Member states, regions and cities needed support to speed up implementation and improve the quality of projects.
The C4T Community of Practice, which involves 20 Member States, combines tailored technical assistance (C4T Groundwork), working groups and academic input. Its outputs include a checklist for better energy efficiency project selection. The C4T Community of Practice experience suggests that knowledge exchange and cooperation initiatives in this areas should: 1) give all community participants ownership; 2) meet regularly and in person; 3) be clear on why, who and how; 4) aim to produce concrete outputs; 5) pair knowledge exchange with practical support; 6) and share what was learnt.

Piedmont: learning from a regional community of practice supporting clean air projects

Limited technical and administrative capacity, fragmented internal governance, public resistance to changes in parking and street layout, few available data, and ERDF procedures and requirements being perceived as unclear, affected local projects in Piedmont, an Italian region. A 2023 active mobility call funded only 40 local projects (with 8.3M euros of national funds); their analysis showed the need for a strategy for Improvement. The analysis of the 40 projects carried out by a University was followed up by a C4T Groundwork TA that focused on listening to municipalities..

C4T assistance helped establish a regional community of practice and turn feedback into funding rules. A subsequent €30 million urban regeneration measure for clean air attracted applications from 57 municipalities in the subsequent three months. Now requests stand at twice the budget. The C4T Groundwork also delivered evidence behind the call, a method for the measurement of impact, and recommendations that turned into rules, on top of a regional community of practice.
Lessons to be learnt include listening before writing the call, evaluating the last call before the next, cover cost incurred for co-design activity, combine different partners (EU, university, consultancy, etc.), monitor to learn together, combine works, communication and co-creation, start simple and visible, test with temporary pilots, strengthen collaboration and share indicators to track progress.

A national platform for connecting regions and industry

In alignment with the C4T and Piedmont region experiences, it was presented a regions-industry partnership aimed to improve the quality and the quantity (optimise cohesion funds' use) of energy efficiency projects across buildings, industrial processes and transport. The partnership, initially designed to focus on Italian regions, is meant to be transferred to other regions across the EU. The partnership would help regions and industrial actors to cooperate, exchange good practices and know how and build capacity.

Next step

The idea was supported by colleagues from DG REGIO and DG ENER and by the industry and regional representatives that took part to the workshop. A follow up meeting will be organised to finalise the platform scope and modus operandi and pilot will be launched with a core group of regions and industry players.

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