**Pivotal role of the local authorities in addressing energy efficiency**

Energy Efficiency is Europe's biggest energy resource. Nearly 40% of the EU-wide energy consumption is caused by the building sector. The EU building stock is about 163 million units, while the present yearly rate of construction of new buildings is only about 2%. These figures show that energy efficiency measures in the existing building stock are crucial for reducing energy consumption in the building sector. On this background all efforts need to be mobilized to improve the energy efficiency in the existing building stock.

*Image*

**Strengthening role of the local authorities**

The Interreg Act Now ! project addressed the challenge of energy efficiency in the building stock. As cities and municipalities play a key role in the implementation of climate protection targets the project stressed the importance of engagement of local authorities operating in climate protection and energy saving. Working close to the civil society cities and municipalities have the potential to take the leading role and showcase a good example in this field. A growing number of municipalities developed strategic energy action plans (SEAPs) or concepts for climate protection including Energy Efficiency measures in the building stock.

However, the local authorities have a potential to be more effective on their way to turn their plans and strategies into action. Especially smaller ones lack sufficient capacities related to resources, structures and knowledge.

The project identified the main gaps:

* Insufficient information about the most effective measures due to poor monitoring data and undeveloped energy management systems,
* Shortage of knowledge and capacities in initiating and planning investments,
* Inadequate awareness and workflows jeopardizing the realization of smart energy efficiency measures,
* Poor financial resources and competences for raising the funding for investments,
* Limited competences and experiences to convince with private facility owners to enhance the energy efficiency of their buildings.

**Tangible results and their distribution**

The identified gaps have been tackled by the project focusing on **strengthening the capacities of municipalities** in the field of energy management, definition and funding of investment projects and addressing private investors like housing companies and landlords to stimulate their investments in energy efficiency.

Thanks to a close dialogue to the citizens, municipalities can make an important contribution to climate protection. The precondition is though that the skills of local actors and capacity of local structures are sufficient and climate targeted. With the focus on energy efficiency in buildings, the project **developed and tested an approach**, which is geared towards a systematic improvement in the capacity of the municipalities.

Municipalities from the entire Programme area jointly developed and implemented the Act Now ! concept as a twinning with coaching expert partners such as higher education institutions, energy agencies or consultancies. Based on the experiences with the municipalities involved in the project the concept was generalized and made available to other municipalities beyond the Programme area.

A starting point was the development of a methodology for analysing the existing capacity. Based on the experience, the approach was further developed and complemented by a capacity self-assessment tool available on the project website. The outputs were made accessible to all municipalities showing interest in the project developments. **Engagement of stakeholders**

A decisive factor for developing skills for energy-efficient action is the comprehensive involvement of municipal stakeholders. For this purpose, in each involved municipality the project set up “Local Energy Efficiency Groups” (LEEG) which were involved in testing the methodology and in planning projects to improve municipal energy efficiency in the building sector. The stakeholders involved in the LEEGs were accompanied by the coaching expert partners and could upscale their skills through on-the-job training. As a result, each LEEG developed follow-up projects, for which feasibility studies and also funding applications or tenders for energy service company participation were carried out.

An essential component of the capacity to increase energy efficiency is up-to-date energy monitoring. With the funds for investments included in the project budget, technical solutions for energy monitoring were installed in Gdynia (PL), Silute (LIT), Elva (EST), Gulbene (LAT), Kaliningrad (RU) and Sievi (FI).

The project partners made sure that the Act Now concept would be spread further on. The projects results were incorporated and made accessible via a web-based learning tool. The outputs are: • Manual “From SEAP to investment”

• Guideline “Financing of Energy Efficiency Measures”

• Guideline "Cooperation of public authorities with private investors"

• Guideline "Energy Efficiency Strategy for Buildings"

• Guideline "Financing of Investments".

Besides the elaborated documents the project organised discussions in order to spread the project idea and a selection of inspiring elaborations to stakeholders from other municipalities.