Project idea form - small projects

Version 2.1

Registration no. (filled in by MA/JS only) _____

Project Idea Form

Date of submission 05/06/2025

1. Project idea identification

Project idea name	TOGETHER4HEAT: Collective and Inclusive Energy Futures for Rural Areas
Short name of the project	TOGETHER4HEAT
Previous calls	yes ◉ no ○
Short name of the previous project	Warm up!
Seed money support	yes ○ no ◉

2. Programme priority

	3. Climate-neutral societies

3. Programme objective

	3.2. Energy transition

4. Potential lead applicant

Name of the organisation (original)	Heinrich-Böll-Stiftung Schleswig-Holstein
Name of the organisation (English)	Heinrich-Böll-Foundation Schleswig-Holstein
Website	https://www.boell-sh.de/de

Country	DE
Type of Partner	NGO
	Non-governmental organisations, such as Greenpeace, WWF, etc.
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Which organisation(s) in the planned partnership take part in a project within the Interreg Baltic Sea Region Programme for the first time? Please list the respective partners.

– Latvian Rural Forum (LV);
– Municipality of Kamienna Gora (PL)

5.1 Specific challenge to be adressed

The project aims to enable small municipalities to manage the heat transition by facilitating the engagement of citizens in decarbonising heating/cooling (H/C) systems and developing collective, inclusive and non-commercial solutions in rural regions. While public authorities and energy providers in large or medium-sized municipalities are advanced in heat planning and may receive financial/ technical assistance to fulfil the requirements of the Energy Efficiency Directive, small and rural communities are often left to themselves.

With lower population densities, less financial resources and inhouse know-how for heat planning, it is challenging for such municipalities to identify, develop and implement viable and affordable H/C solutions. Often, district heating (DH) is not considered to be a viable option due to low heat load densities, and households have to find individual solutions. This is particularly difficult for low-income

households, who lack the resources to switch to renewable heating, living in buildings with poor energy performance. This means that small, rural communities are not only behind in decarbonising the H/C sector, but their inhabitants are also more likely to be affected by energy poverty, fluctuating energy prices as well as dependency on fossil fuel imports. Emissions trading in the building and transport sectors from 2027 is likely to exacerbate social distortions if no measures are taken to strengthen the resilience of rural households.

Community H/C initiatives have the potential to address many challenges in an integrated way. Grid based communities where citizens and other actors jointly operate RE facilities or small scale local DH grids can be seen as a promising complement to the public provision of DH, as such initiatives target small scale solutions and niches that are not attractive for DH utilities. Community offgrid solutions including contracting may offer cost advantages due the non-for-profit structures and focus on social/ environmental benefits. Collective investments in decentral heat supply of buildings, building blocks or neighbourhoods, or collective technology procurement can help to reduce the product/installation prices by creating large-scale demand for H/C equipment (e.g. heat pumps). However, authorities, citizen interest groups and NGOs in small municipalities rarely have the necessary economic, legal, organisational and technological know-how to develop and implement community H/C initiatives.

5.2 Focus of the call

The project aims to enable small municipalities to manage the heat transition by facilitating the engagement of citizens in decarbonising H/C systems and developing collective, inclusive and non-commercial solutions in rural regions of the BSR. The focus will be primarily on rural municipalities/ communities with up to 20,000 inhabitants. The project facilitates the creation, consolidation, transfer and dissemination of collective grid-based and off-grid H/C solutions which have the potential to strengthen energy security, stabilize energy prices, alleviate energy poverty, increase social cohesion and resilience against future price volatilities.

The project provides mentoring, capacity development, guidance and training, tailored to the specific needs of public authorities and collective initiatives in rural communities. It also aims to facilitate transfer and replication of promising initiatives. A special concern of the project is to examine/create/ disseminate solutions empowering vulnerable groups particularly affected by energy poverty to participate directly or indirectly in the initiatives. The following groups have been identified as particularly relevant for the proposed project: owner-occupiers of single-family buildings with low income and poor energy performance of buildings (particularly elderly people), low-income households/tenants in multi-family buildings with poor energy performance (e.g., single parents, elderly people).

6. Transnational relevance

The project will contribute to the implementation of the Action Plan of the EUSBSR, Action 4, item: "Engage in sharing more best practice on renewable energy communities and renewable self-consumption, the integration of renewables in the building, industry, DH/C sector". Hence, the project is of high transnational relevance. To accelerate the decarbonisation of the H/C sector, it is of vital

importance to enable actors to learn from each other. Pursuant to the Energy Efficiency Directive, Member States shall ensure that local authorities prepare local heating and cooling plans in municipalities with a population > 45,000. Member States shall also provide financial and technical assistance. However, smaller municipalities were not directly addressed, although there is at least partly a potential for efficient and socially inclusive solutions including DH/C systems operated by energy communities.

Local authorities, citizens, and other stakeholders in rural areas lack capacities and resources. Technical assistance and financial support is scarce, as are visible examples of successful community projects in the H/C sector. Legal and financial barriers prevail. These barriers make collective action based on non-commercial rationales and cooperations of local authorities, citizens and local stakeholders including NGOs particularly appealing.

The partner countries are in various stages of the transformation (two of the partner countries, DE and DK, are characterised as “high uptake countries” by the European Energy Communities Facility, while the other two, LV and PL, are considered “low uptake countries”, allowing those just starting to avoid pitfalls that frontrunner countries have experienced. Thus, the transnational cooperation and exchange will benefit all partners in their efforts to enable smaller municipalities to develop new or strengthen existing initiatives for the H/C transition and create economically and socially inclusive business models.

7. Specific aims to be adressed

Building trust that could lead to further cooperation initiatives

There is no tradition of community-based cooperation in the H/C sector in the majority of rural and small municipalities of the BSR. Investment decisions are often taken individually by homeowners, without involvement of or support from local public authorities and without coordination with neighbouring households. Even though there are successful examples of such cooperation, they are not visible enough. Taking collective investment decisions, be it on-grid or off-grid, takes mutual trust in each other and in the business model. The project aims to provide new good practices and showcase them, so that more local public authorities, NGOs and citizen initiatives have the courage to try out community H/C initiatives themselves.

Initiating and keeping networks that are important for the BSR

Several community energy initiatives and networks are existing in the electricity sector (e.g., PV4All). Other European initiatives and networks address the field of sustainable district heating and cooling (e. g., INTERREG projects DISCO, HeatNet NWE, REHEATEAST) or community heating and cooling in urban areas (GREEN4Heat, CONNECTHEAT). Several initiatives/networks are targeting actors in the field of municipal heat planning (e.g., ENERCRACY, PLANHEAT). However, to our knowledge, there are no dedicated networks addressing the specific needs of rural communities and initiatives where local authorities, citizens, NGOs and other community stakeholders join forces to develop collective H/C projects and address the blank spots in heat planning. Hence, the proposed project may serve as a crystallization point for a future BSR wide network specifically targeting the H/C sector rural areas.

Bringing the Programme closer to the citizens
Collective and inclusive H/C initiatives which build the focus of the project envisage active citizen involvement in the heat energy transition. Examples are energy cooperatives operating renewable energy facilities and/or DH grids supplying their members with heat or engaging in other collective actions enabling citizens to actively participate in the energy transition. With their democratic model and non-commercial orientation cooperatives ensure that every voice is heard. Profits remain locally and are invested in new projects. Energy cooperatives and similar collectives thus enhance acceptance of the energy transition and its implementation. Through various mentoring, capacity development, and training activities addressing local authorities, citizens, civil society and citizen energy initiatives the project is expected to bring citizens closer to the programme. The proposed action also aims to assess, co-create and transfer ways and solutions to integrate vulnerable households.

Allowing a swift response to unpredictable and urgent challenges
The energy price crisis of 2022/2023 has clearly shown that the attractiveness of creating energy communities and other collective actions for local authorities, citizens, civil society and SMEs has gained strong impetus. This can be illustrated by the case of Germany where 88 energy cooperatives were founded in 2023, which is the highest number in the past 10 years. Around half of the newly founded energy cooperatives aim to implement and operate a heating network. In the third quarter of 2023 alone, 28 new energy cooperatives were established, mainly in the heating sector. Of the existing energy cooperatives, only 28 per cent are currently active in the heating sector. This illustrates that collective initiatives are perceived as vehicles that can ensure safeguards against fluctuating energy prices and strengthening social resilience of local communities.

8. Target groups

The core target groups of the project are:
– Local public authorities in small and rural municipalities of up to 20.000 inhabitants, especially those departments that work with buildings, energy and heat planning. Depending on the local context, social/welfare services will be addressed as well.Beyond that, the project addresses smaller municipalities in the involved partner countries and the BSR at large, particularly rural areas, as well as associations of local government.

– NGOs that operate locally, regionally and in some cases nationally and pursue objectives in the fields of energy transition, sustainable (rural) development and citizen engagement.

– Interest groups in the pilot communities, including local citizen initiatives (e.g. for climate protection or renewable energy) or groups of home or apartment owners. Not all of these interest groups are legally established and can therefore be represented as PPs or AOs in the project.

– SME insofar as already legally established energy cooperatives that are involved in the pilot communities are considered SME.

– Sectoral agencies as multipliers of knowledge who are addressed by / involved in the train-the-

trainers activities and transfer workshops.

	Please use the drop-down list to define up to five target groups that you will involve through your project's activities.	Please define a field of responsibility or an economic sector of the selected target group	Specify the countries and regions that the representatives of this target group come from.
1.	Interest group	Local citizen initiatives, local associations, housing associations resp. cooperatives, home or apartment owners. Interest groups are included as recipients of capacity building measures & multipliers	Interest groups are partly involved as AO (LV: Housing association in Musa)
2.	Local public authority	Departments responsible for heat planning/infrastructure, buildings (and only where relevant social/ welfare services. Associations of local governments.	2 municipalities are represented as partners (DK: Middelfaart, PL: Kamienna Gora). In the other cases, municipalities will be involved as AOs (DE: Kirchbarkau, Klinkrade, LV: Bauska (Musa parish)
3.	NGO	NGOs play a key role in organizing/performing capacity building measures, transferring and disseminating project results, developing policy recommendations	Two NGOs are represented in the consortium: DE: Heinrich Böll Foundation SH LV: Latvian Rural Forum

4. Sectoral agency	Energy and rural development agencies will partly provide input to capacity building measures and particularly for transferring and disseminating project results.	DE: Energy Agency/ IBSH, Competence centre for municipal heat transition (KWW) as AOs LV: selected regional energy agencies (Zemgale, Vidzeme)
5. Small and medium enterprise	If we consider energy cooperatives as SMEs. Together with local authorities, energy cooperatives and their associations are the most important target group.	DE: Energy cooperatives Klinkrade and Barkauer Land, Association of cooperatives (DGRV) as potential AO DK: DK Assoc. of Energy Communities as partner/AO PL: Energy cooperative in Kamienna Gora as AO

9. Contribution to the EU Strategy for the Baltic Sea Region

Please indicate if your project idea has the potential to contribute to the implementation of the Action Plan of the EU Strategy for the Baltic Sea Region (https://eusbsr.eu/implementation/).

yes ◉ no ◯

Please select which policy area(s) of the EUSBSR your project idea contributes to most.

PA Energy
PA Spatial Planning

The MA/JS may share your project idea form with the respective policy area coordinator(s) of the EUSBSR. You can find contacts of PACs at the EUSBSR website (https://eusbsr.eu/contact-us/).

☐ If you disagree, please tick here.

10. Partnership

The following organisations have confirmed their participation in the proposed project:
- Heinrich-Böll-Stiftung SH, DE (LP)
- Middelfart Municipality, DK
- Latvian Rural Forum, LV
- Municipality of Kamienna Gora, PL

The partner structure is focusing on local public authorities and NGOs.
Local authorities play a key role in supporting the development of community energy. They may be members of those initiatives, offer public land/space for RE production, final consumers of the generated heat, provide an enabling framework, facilitate networking, act as leaders by example and build trust among citizens. They also bear responsibility for social services.
HBS SH has extensive experience in the coordination of a regional network of (mostly rural) energy community initiatives in the H/C sector. LRF is the leading network promoting sustainable rural development, coordinating Local Action Groups under LEADER and rural energy communities.
The project aims to work with 4 existing/emerging collective initiatives in the H/C sector including grid-based (Middelfaart/DK, Kamienna Gora/PL) and off-grid initiatives (Kirchbarkau, Klinkrade/DE, Musa/ LV).

The partner countries represent different stages of community energy development (DE and DK as “high uptake countries”, LV and PL as “low uptake countries”, see section 6) which increases the added value of the project for the BSR.

HBS SH will be responsible for capacity development measures for max. 2 pilot communities, coordinate the development of the roadmaps and national transfer activities, prepare the roadmap for DE, co-lead the preparation of the Guidance Document and international transfer activities in cooperation with Middelfaart Municipality.

Middelfart Municipality (DK) will be responsible for capacity development for 1 pilot community in cooperation with the Danish Association of Energy Communities. It will coordinate the roadmap for DK. The association will be responsible for the national transfer activities.

LRF (LV) will be responsible for capacity development for 1 rural pilot community. It will coordinate the roadmap in LV, contribute to the Guidance document and be responsible for the national transfer activities.

Kamienna Gora (PL) will be responsible for capacity development for the pilot community in cooperation with the local energy cooperative. Both will prepare the roadmap in PL, contribute to the Guidance Document and be responsible for the national transfer activities.

11. Workplan

The overall objective of the project is to enable small municipalities to manage the heat transition by facilitating the engagement of citizens in decarbonising H/C systems and developing collective,

inclusive and non-commercial solutions in rural regions of the BSR.
The focus will be on a) grid based initiatives and b) off-grid initiatives. The project offers mentoring, guidance, and capacity development, tailored to the needs of 4-6 existing/emerging initiatives in 4 BSR countries. It also aims to strengthen the capacities of small municipalities being partners and others that will be engaged through transfer workshops. The action will transfer lessons to other rural communities in the partner countries and BSR. A special concern is to examine/create/disseminate inclusive solutions empowering vulnerable households to participate in the initiatives.

Planned activities and outputs:
1. Setting up mentoring teams in the pilot communities consisting of project partners, local authorities, local community energy initiatives (including cooperatives) and where possible external mentors.
2. Capacity-building workshops tailored to the needs of each pilot community. These include at least 3 workshops in each partner country targeting the relevant local authorities and energy community initiatives, addressing:
– Relevant showcases from other communities
– Cooperation models of local authorities and energy cooperatives
– Citizen mobilisation strategies/participation models, with particular focus on vulnerable households
– Tailored legal, organisational & financing support
– Technical and socio-economic feasibility support
– Policy measures for socially inclusive heating in rural areas
3. Co-creation of a Collective Action Roadmap for each pilot community by partners, municipalities, and community energy initiatives based on the capacity development activities, formulating SMART goals and tailored business models.
4. Co-creation of an Online Guide for socially inclusive community H/C in rural areas providing transnational lessons from 2. and 3. including guidance on organisational, financing, regulatory, planning/policy, technology questions, and replication of the showcases (to be used by other actors in the partner countries and the BSR)
5. Lesson Drawing and Transfer
– Web-based 'logbook' of all 4-6 showcases
– 4-6 Transfer workshops through existing networks of the project partners (DK: Danish Energy Community Association, LV/PL: LEADER network, regional energy agencies DE: bewirk/networks of municipalities)
– Feeding lessons into the next EU funding period (particularly national LEADER programmes) via 2 policy briefs
– 1 Transfer workshop during the EUSBSR Annual Forum in 2028, preferably in close cooperation with PAC Energy and PAC Spatial Planning.
– 1-2 Transfer workshops in cooperation with other multipliers in the BSR or Europe (e.g. Eurocities, UBC, REScoop.eu, Associations of local governments in BSR countries and with LEADER regions).

12. Planned budget

ERDF budget (planned expenditure of partners from the EU)	EUR 499,000.00
Norwegian budget (planned expenditure of partners from Norway)	*EUR XXX*
Total budget (including preparatory costs)	**EUR 499,000.00**

13. Project consultation

Please indicate if you wish to have a consultation (online meeting) with the MA/JS to discuss your project idea

yes ◉ no ◯

14. Questions to the MA/JS

Questions related to the content of the planned project	Is the partner structure adequate from the perspective of the MA/JS (2 NGOs/2 municipalities)? Are requirements for target groups the same as for core projects, i.e. do we have to "prove" that target groups use our outputs in their daily work? And do they all need to be represented as partners, considering the lower number of partners overall and smaller budget?
Questions related to budgeting and expenditure	*(max.1.000 characters incl. spaces)*
Any other questions	Are energy cooperatives considered as SMEs or interest groups?

15. Additional information

(max. 1.000 characters incl. spaces)

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https://interreg-baltic.eu/gateway/bamos-account