SMEnergy Project Newsletter

SMEnergy Connect: Empowering SMEs Towards a Sustainable Future

The **SMEnergy Connect Conference**, held on 13 March 2025 in Liberec, Czech Republic, brought together top experts, innovators, and entrepreneurs to discuss the future of energy efficiency in the Danube region. Organised by the **DEX Innovation Centre (DEX IC)** within the Interreg Danube SMEnergy Project, the event focused on supporting SMEs in their transition to green energy.

Attendees joined SMEnergy Connect to gain practical insights, discover funding strategies, and hear real-world success stories aimed at helping SMEs thrive in the evolving energy landscape. The conference highlighted actionable steps to enhance energy efficiency, stay ahead of the curve with sustainable innovations, and connect with like-minded professionals. Speakers shared valuable knowledge on energy solutions, crowdfunding for sustainable projects, and innovative technologies improving energy efficiency, reinforcing the message that the future of SMEs in the Danube region is green, efficient, and innovation-driven. Participants learned actionable steps to improve energy efficiency, explored funding opportunities, and connected with experts.

The agenda included presentations on energy transformation and best practices shared through SME success stories, followed by a networking lunch for further collaboration. Thanks to the hybrid format, the event was inclusive and reached participants both onsite and online.

A huge thank you to DEX IC, the conference speakers, and everyone who contributed to making this event a success!For more information about the event, visit our **website**.

WHAT'S INSIDE?

Introduction.....1
SMEnergy Connect.....1
Regional Highlights.....2-5
Best Practices.....2
What are GEKOS?.....3
Transnational Pilot.....4
Next Partner Meeting....3
Project Background.....6
SMEnergy Platform.....7
Partnership.....7
Contact.....7

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

SMEnergy

@Interreg Danube SMEnergy Project

Interreg Danube SMEnergy Project

www.interreg-danube.eu/smenergy

INSTITUTIONAL BEST PRACTICES

SMEnergy partners are actively gathering and sharing good practices that support SMEs in transitioning to renewable energy. These range from tailored support mechanisms to practical implementation models across the Danube region.

The SMEnergy project highlights examples such as the “RES Contact Point” in Slovenia and Axis Bentonit’s sustainable solutions in Hungary. These and other case studies are feeding into a transnational guide under development, aimed at showcasing actionable solutions for both SMEs and institutions.

Read all about these good practices **here** on our website.

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 Local Energy Agency Spodnje Podravje (LEASP), lead partner of the SMEnergy project, is driving efforts to support SMEs in Slovenia’s green transition. Despite having support structures in place—including a one-stop-shop for renewable energy—many SMEs still face key obstacles in adopting clean energy.

LEASP has identified three major barriers: complex administrative procedures, unclear subsidy guidelines, and low awareness of existing support mechanisms such as photovoltaics. These insights are informing the project’s next phase.

In 2025, LEASP will launch a pilot to test solutions tailored to SMEs. Selected companies will receive improved advisory services and support to connect with reliable energy suppliers. The pilot aims to reduce complexity and accelerate renewable energy uptake.

Alongside this, SMEnergy will boost promotion of current support schemes, helping SMEs access subsidies more easily and adopt clean technologies more smoothly. By addressing these challenges head-on, SMEnergy supports a more inclusive and effective energy transition in Slovenia.

Hungary

Between January and March 2025, the SMEnergy project has taken significant strides forward in Hungary, thanks to partners **PC-Trend** & **Energiaklub**, with the aim of accelerating the transition of Hungarian SMEs to renewable energy. PC-Trend has conducted a series of strategic consultations with key national stakeholders. These included energy experts, the Regional Centre for Energy Policy Research (REKK), the Hungarian Renewable Energy Association (Magyar Megújuló Energia Szövetség), the Hungarian Heat Pump Association (Magyar Hőszivattyú Szövetség), several sustainability clubs within regional chambers of commerce, and the Energy Efficiency Department of the Hungarian Ministry of Energy. These activities are part of a broader effort to support Hungarian SMEs in their green transition.

Tomáš Svoboda and the PC-Trend team at SMENergy Connect in May 2025 in Liberec

Hungarian policymakers have also begun exploring how to more effectively assist SMEs in this transition. One promising idea under consideration is the creation of a dedicated one-stop-shop support network. In this context, international platforms such as Sustainova are proving to be valuable benchmarks. Elements of these models may be adapted to shape the Hungarian renewable energy support ecosystem within the SMEnergy framework.

A key moment this year was SMEnergy Connect held in Liberec, Czech Republic, where the Hungarian delegation had the opportunity to meet Tomáš Svoboda, founder of Sustainova and a leading sustainability advocate in Central Europe. His work continues to inspire efforts across borders.

These joint actions significantly contribute to the SMEnergy project's mission of building a more resilient, sustainable future for Hungarian SMEs.

Austria

Forschung & Innovation Burgenland (FIB) is collaborating with a regional best practice SME to develop an innovative use for harvested reed from Lake Neusiedl. The aim is to convert

this biogenic material into high-quality biochar through a pyrolysis process (*pictured below*) – with potential applications in agriculture, soil enhancement, and long-term carbon sequestration.

This initiative addresses key challenges faced by energy-intensive SMEs, allowing access to alternative energy sources, the development of regional material cycles, and the reduction of external energy dependencies. In addition to technical implementation, initial application scenarios are currently being evaluated in terms of energy efficiency and material valorisation.

Building on these initial evaluations, a feasibility study for a pilot facility is currently underway. The facility would focus on processing reed and similar organic residues to assess the viability of the concept under real-life conditions. The collaboration with the SME partner is being further strengthened and strategically expanded – including the involvement of additional regional stakeholders and research institutions to explore broader applications of bio-based material and energy use.

Czech Republic

The SMEnergy initiative has reached a major milestone with the finalisation of its core methodology, developed under the leadership of **DEX Innovation Centre (DEX IC)** in close collaboration with project partners. This comprehensive framework is now ready to support SMEs in their transition to renewable energy and improved energy efficiency, offering practical tools and clear guidelines to facilitate the process effectively.

Built on the consortium's strong collaborative foundation, the methodology integrates insights from extensive research and partner contributions. At its heart is the establishment of Green Energy Knowledge, Operation, and Service Hubs (GEKOS) across the Danube Region. These hubs will equip SMEs with expert knowledge, technological solutions, and financial guidance to support their green energy transitions.

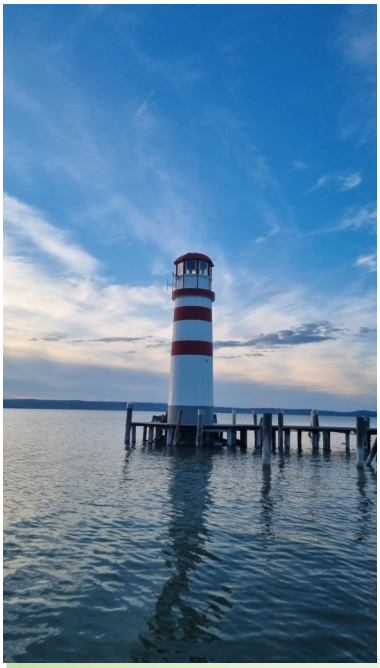
With the methodology now ready for real-world pilot testing, the project is poised to deliver a scalable and impactful approach—paving the way for meaningful and lasting change in the energy practices of SMEs across the region.

Slovakia

The **Slovak Business Agency (SBA)** is partnering with the **Slovak Innovation and Energy Agency (SIEA)** to ensure the sustainability of the SMEnergy project by exploring synergies with the CREDIT4CE project. The focus is on supporting Slovak SMEs in improving energy efficiency and decarbonisation by connecting them with innovative solutions through the SMEnergy platform and the Decarbonisation Hub from CREDIT4CE. This collaboration ensures that knowledge, tools, and support are aligned for SMEs navigating the green transition.

SMEnergy partners & associated partners representing Slovakia at SMEnergy Connect

SBA will host a national stakeholder meeting in May 2025, building on discussions from the recent SMEnergy partner meeting in Liberex. They also participated in two expert workshops on energy communities in Slovakia—one hosted by SIEA, discussing energy-



WHAT ARE GEKOS?

The SMEnergy **Green Energy Knowledge, Operation, and Service Hubs (GEKOS)** network are being developed 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:

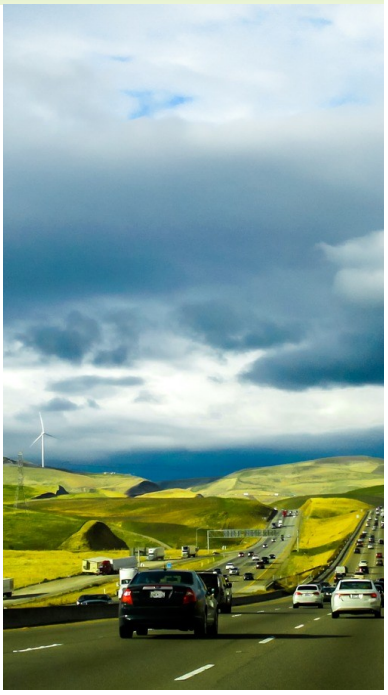
⇒ **Financial support;**

⇒ **Support in overcoming the administrative burden:** understanding the legislation;

⇒ **Capacity building:** trainings, seminars, awareness raising ;

⇒**Access to a qualified supplier & energy expert database.**

SMENERGY ACROSS THE DANUBE REGION



TRANSNATIONAL PILOT UNDERWAY

SMEnergy has launched its transnational pilot to test key tools that support the green energy transition of SMEs across the Danube Region: The Energy Transition Roadmap, a Green Energy Database and Marketplace, and regional "GEKOS" (Green Energy Knowledge, Operational & Support) hubs. Over 30 SMEs will test the roadmap, while the database and marketplace are being populated with good practices & green energy suppliers. Partners are now working closely with stakeholders through workshops, trainings, and regular feedback sessions to fine-tune the tools and shape the SMEnergy model & GEKOS operation guidelines, making them scalable & ready for long-term impact.

sharing opportunities, and another by the Slovak Association of Sustainable Energy (SAPI), which introduced a national handbook for establishing energy communities based on Czech and Slovak experiences.

On 26 March 2025, the SMEnergy project was presented by the Slovak Business Agency (SBA) during a Site Visit hosted as part of the Interreg Capitalisation Workshop. The event brought together key stakeholders from across the Danube Region to explore best practices in implementing circular economy initiatives. SBA showcased its strategic journey, from early international cooperation in the MOVECO project to becoming Slovakia's national contact point for the circular economy. Within this broader context, SMEnergy was highlighted as a key project promoting sustainability and energy transformation among SMEs.

SBA's SMEnergy presentation focused on the project's role in supporting small and medium-sized enterprises in adopting renewable energy sources and improving energy efficiency. Participants had the opportunity to learn about pilot activities, tools, and upcoming opportunities for engagement. The presentation concluded with a call to action, inviting interested organisations to collaborate and support SMEs on their green transition journey.

SBA on a site visit, where partners presented SMEnergy to numerous energy actors & SMEs

Republic of Srpska

On 6 February 2025, the **Development Agency of the Republic of Srpska (RARS)** held an online info day for the second EENergy 2 call, in cooperation with the Chamber of Commerce and the European Network of Entrepreneurship (EEN). The initiative supports SMEs in their green transition and energy efficiency improvements.Participants learned about SMEnergy, which

Representatives of RARS presenting SMEnergy to participants of the EENergy 2 Call info day

aligns with the objectives of the call. They could also select an EEN advisor to support their application. Fourteen SMEs from the Republic of Srpska applied, with results expected by mid-2025.

RARS also promoted a separate public call launched on 1 March 2025 by the Ministry of Economy and Entrepreneurship, offering investment grants for SMEs previously involved in SMEnergy. Supported areas include:

- Green energy transition (e.g. solar panels)
- Technological upgrades (e.g. new equipment)
- Combined green and technological improvements

RARS will continue to support local SMEs through SMEnergy by promoting renewable energy adoption via existing programmes.´

Bulgaria

On 23 January 2025, the **Business Support Centre for Small and Medium Enterprises - Ruse (BSC SME)** organised the information event "New Opportunities in Support of SMEs' Green Transition in Bulgaria" at Ruse University. The event, part of the SMEnergy Project, showcased the latest trends in

Presentation and discussion on the GEKOS center concept at a SMEnergy stakeholder event at Ruse university, Bulgaria

SMENERGY ACROSS THE DANUBE REGION

SMEnergy at the "Ausblick 25" regional energy trade fair in Bavaria, Germany

renewable energy solutions (RES) and the upcoming GEKOS centre in Bulgaria, offering SMEs valuable services to support their green transition.

Attendees also learned about current financing opportunities to reduce energy costs through the EENergy procedure, explained by RES Cluster, and explored the Digital Energy Systems 4.0 lab at Ruse University, focusing on RES integration in both industry and everyday life. Expert speakers shared practical strategies and advice to help SMEs implement green energy solutions, inspiring future projects and innovations.

⇒ Watch the event videos on BSC SME's YouTube channel

Germany

From 4–6 April, the "Ausblick 25" trade fair in Ruhstorf brought together over 140 exhibitors and thousands of visitors. Organised by the Ruhstorf Economic Development Association, this 20th edition of the event once again proved to be the most important platform for business, innovation, and regional networking in the Passau region.

The **Technology Centre for Energy (TZE)** used this dynamic setting to showcase the SMEnergy project. With a dedicated booth, TZE engaged regional businesses, service providers, and the wider public, raising awareness about the benefits of SMEnergy for small and medium-sized enterprises. The model was well received, with visitors showing strong interest in practical solutions that boost energy independence and long-term sustainability.

By participating in "Ausblick 25," TZE not only strengthened local connections but also demonstrated how SMEnergy can support SMEs in navigating the energy transition with innovative, hands-on approaches.

SMEnergy Connect Video

Want to learn more about the SMEnergy conference in Liberec?

In March 2025, partners and SMEs from across the region gathered in Liberec, Czech Republic, for SMEnergy Connect. On-site & online, the event brought together experts, entrepreneurs, innovators, and changemakers from across the Danube region to explore practical strategies and real-world solutions for decarbonising the SME sector. From cutting-edge technologies to innovative funding models, the conference served as a platform for dialogue, collaboration, and inspiration.

Watch our video to relive the highlights and see how the SMEnergy community is shaping the future of sustainable energy.

NEXT PARTNER MEETING IN SLOVAKIA

The next transnational project meeting for the SMEnergy initiative will take place in Slovakia in November 2025, hosted by the **Slovak Business Agency (SBA).** This key gathering will unite project partners & stakeholders from across the region for two days of focused discussions on shared goals for sustainable energy innovation.

The agenda will concentrate on advancing pilot activities, improving the SMEnergy platform, and strengthening the implementation of core project concepts. Emphasis will also be placed on exchanging lessons learned and integrating stakeholder input collected throughout the project's earlier stages.

ABOUT THE PROJECT

Issues addressed

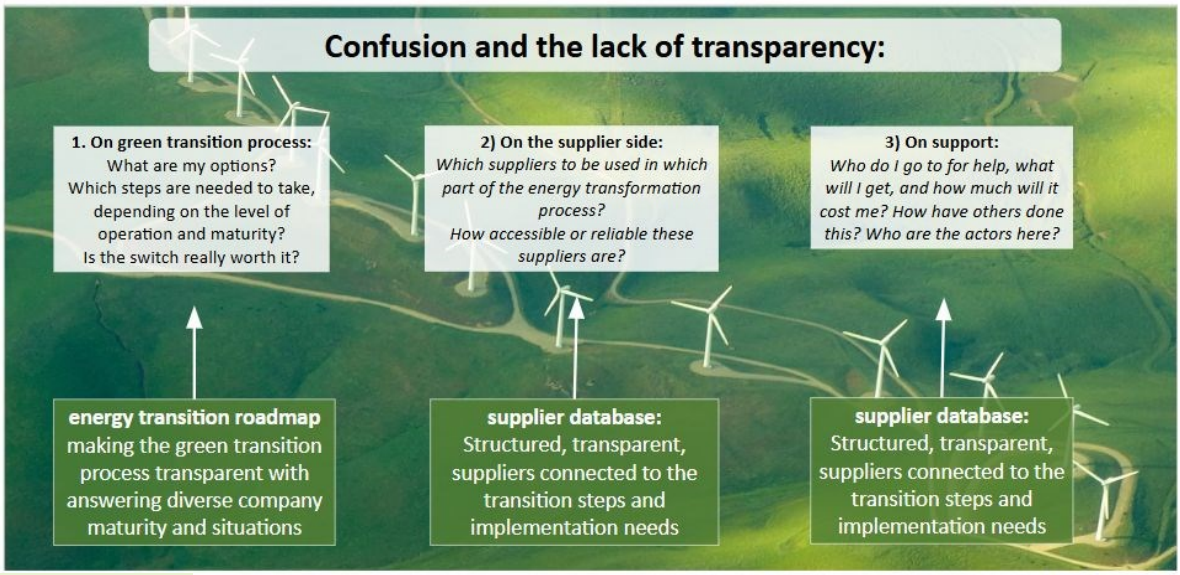
SMEs make up 99% of all businesses in Europe, accounting for around 25 million enterprises. Many of these businesses lack the resources to fully explore opportunities for improving energy efficiency and adopting renewable energy solutions. To promote economic resilience in the EU and achieve the ambitious 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, visit our website.

The main logic of the project



Source: Krisztina Horváth-Karip (PC-TREND)

Interreg Danube Region
Co-funded by the European Union
SMEnergy
@Interreg Danube SMEnergy Project
Interreg Danube SMEnergy Project
www.interreg-danube.eu/smenergy

JOIN THE GREEN ENERGY MARKETPLACE & DATABASE

The SMEnergy is building a dynamic online platform — the Green Energy Marketplace and Database — to connect energy suppliers, experts, and financial consultants across Europe. The overall goal is to support SMEs in their energy transition by providing access to trusted professionals and services.

The platform is approaching its final development phase, overseen by **Energiaklub** in Hungary. The platform will offer more than just listings – it will function as a knowledge-sharing space where users can exchange **good practices**, country-specific **regulatory insights,** and **technical information** relevant to their region. One of its flagship features a self-assessment tool, enabling energy-intensive SMEs to evaluate their current status and explore tailored energy efficiency and green transition opportunities.

Be part of the energy transition – join our SMEnergy platform!

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)

Contact Information

Tea Potočnik

SMEnergy Lead Partner

tea.potocnik@lea-ptuj.si

Interreg Danube Region

Co-funded by the European Union

SMEnergy

@Interreg Danube SMEnergy Project

Interreg Danube SMEnergy Project

www.interreg-danube.eu/smenergy