

## **EUKI Academy Web Seminar Report: The Green Rural Deal Project: How Rural Regions in the Western Balkans Fight for a Zero-Carbon Economy | 28<sup>th</sup> March 2022**

For the EU's mission to be carbon neutral by 2050 to be successful, constructive involvement of Europe's rural regions is crucial. This is the aim of the Green Rural Deal EUKI project, which seeks to empower rural residents of Greece, Kosovo, and Serbia to create projects, tools, and instruments that support the sustainable development of their regions. In doing so, the project partners recognise commonalities such as the ageing population, high unemployment, high levels of outmigration, and the decline of energy-intensive industries while remaining sensitive to each region's particular needs. Katja Witte from the [Wuppertal Institute for Climate, Environment and Energy](#), Rinora Gojani from the [Balkan Green Foundation](#), Tanja Popovicki from the [RES Foundation](#), and Lefteris Topaloglou from [LGA Western Macedonia](#) provided insights into the successes, challenges, and experiences of the project.

### **Regional Perspectives**

#### **Kamenica (Kosovo)**

- In the Kamenica region, the project aims to raise awareness of the region's potential, such as its great suitability for the installation of solar and wind energy.
- Crucial steps in this are the gathering of relevant data, the diagnosis of development concerns, supporting the local level in drawing-up suitable policies, and providing support in the assessment and planning processes.
- The focus on targeting strategic documents, capacity-building and knowledge-sharing, as well as clearly defining areas of intervention proved to be particularly useful.

#### **Priboj (Serbia)**

- In Priboj, Serbia, the Green Rural Deal project serves as an extension of the energy transition process.
- Crucial activities include the conversion of the public heating system to biomass, a process in which particularly young people were heavily involved thus increasing their motivation to stay in Priboj. The close cooperation between the public sector and civil society proved so successful that Priboj not only serves as a national example of best practice but now also looks to expand its activities to the solar sector.

#### **Western Macedonia (Greece)**

- With the Greek government's planned phase-out of lignite mining in 2028, Western Macedonia, whose economy has been dominated by energy production from lignite mining for decades, faces a significant economic challenge.
- Hence, Western Macedonia now needs to ensure that it repositions itself in the national and global economy to become attractive to alternative businesses and industries, while taking strategic measures such as reskilling its workforce, completing important infrastructure projects, and securing national and EU funding – all of which the Green Rural Deal project intends to assist the region in.

## Lessons Learnt?

- All experts agreed that projects need to be tailored to the local context and the stakeholders involved. Understanding the local needs and perspectives of all stakeholders involved helps to build trust and reliable relationships, both of which are crucial for project success. While good practices from other projects can serve as useful guidance, local solutions need to be place-based and create a sense of ownership in the target communities. This can increase the project's sustainability and ensure the continuation of the transformation process beyond the three years of funding.
- The speakers also agreed that close cooperation of project partners is a key condition for success, and that project partners play a crucial role as intermediaries between civil society and local government officials. The resulting multi-level governance promises to foster innovative environments amenable to a profound transformation of rural communities.
- Building a solid fundament of broad participation, close relationships, mutual understanding, and a 360° view of sustainability promises to enable the necessary change.
- In the final analysis, project partners also agreed that while the current war situation in the Ukraine poses a unique challenge and risks national governments falling back into fossil fuel dependence, it can also serve to highlight the importance of renewable energy sources from both a sustainability and energy independence perspective.

### General Information - The Green Rural Deal Project:

The partners and implementing organisations of the Green Rural Deal Project: the Balkan Green Foundation (BGF), Germanwatch e.V., the Regional Association of Local Government of Western Macedonia, the RES Foundation and the Wuppertal Institute for Climate Environment and Energy.

### **For further information please feel free to contact:**

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