

Work Plan 2023-25

Action Group 9 - Energy

Interreg
Alpine Space



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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The geographic and structural characteristics of the Alps provide good potentials for renewable energies and enhanced energy efficiency to make the Alpine region a European “**Model region for renewable energies and energy efficiency**”. Macro regional policy planning helps the Alpine region to tackle the challenge to meet energy demand sustainably, securely and affordably. The crisis in Ukraine led to a rise in the price of fossil fuels and electricity, to which the European Commission responded with the REPowerEU plan, to get out of dependence on energy imported from Russia (mainly gas and oil products). Faced with this sharp rise in energy costs, governments, local authorities and citizens must reorganize themselves to consume less energy, increase energy efficiency and develop renewable energies at a faster pace than in recent years.

The Action Group is keen to support a significant reduction of energy consumption in the Alps thereby contributing to the reduction of carbon emissions and energy dependency from non-EU states. The policy framework of the activities of the Action Group is provided by, inter alia, the European Union's energy directives, the EU goals for 2020 and 2030, and the Energy Union Package, the aforementioned REPowerEU plan as well as national and regional policies. The AG is a network of regions and states to **foster good public policy making based on scientific evidence and piloting activities**. The group is determined to foster well-informed dialogue and decision-making following a **multi-level energy policy approach** in the Alps. The goal of the group is to undertake concerted actions through commonly developed activities and projects. To overcome the challenge of renewable energy scarcity and to make the region a good practice example for the rational use of energy, **EUSALP Action Group 9 focuses on energy data management, production and use of green hydrogen, promotion of energy communities and smart communities, energy efficiency in enterprises (esp. SMEs) and the building sector**. Furthermore, it will develop activities in the field of **CO₂-compensation**, as well as awareness-raising and communication activities to promote energy policy related issues.

Last but not least, since energy policy planning has interfaces with many regulatory areas, such as spatial planning, resource management, economic development, and environmental and nature conservation, AG9 works in a fundamentally cross-sectoral manner. In the work plan period 2023-25, Action Group 9 will continue to foster the cross-sectoral dialogue with other Action Groups to **further develop the five common main topics relevant for the strategy** as approved by the General Assembly on 24 November 2022 in Trento.

TARGETS AND COMPOSITION

1. Mission statement of the Action Group

Action Group 9 has the mission to “make the Alpine region a model region for energy efficiency and renewable energy”. The Action Group is set up of thematic sub-groups that focus on the following specific issues:

- Energy observatory for collection of energy data in the EUSALP
- Use and production of green/low-carbon hydrogen in the EUSALP
- Promotion of energy communities and smart communities in the EUSALP
- Energy efficiency in small and medium enterprises and the building sector
- CO₂-compensation tools and projects in the EUSALP
- Awareness-raising and communication activities to promote energy policy related issues in particular and the work of the EUSALP in general

Since 2019, EUSALP Action Group 9 is co-led by the Energy Agency South Tyrol - CasaClima and the Energy and Environment Agency Auvergne Rhône-Alpes. The Action Group consists of members with decision making capacity from Austria, France, Germany, Italy. Also, experts from research and university as well as interest groups from the economic and the non-governmental sector are represented in the AG. The work of the AG is regularly followed by DG Regio, DG Ener, the Alpine Space Programme the Alpine Convention and supported by the EUSALP TSS.

Emphasis of the work of the Action Group lays on gathering information and expertise that support the above-mentioned thematic subgroups in the development of their activities and implementation of their work plan. Studies, experts' workshops and input presentations accompany the implementation and decision-making of the AG. In the current work plan period 2023-2025, Action Group 9 will foster the dialogue with other Action Groups (esp. AG2, AG4, AG6, AG7 and AG8) to further develop the five common main topics relevant for the strategy as approved by the General Assembly on 24 November 2022 in Trento.

2. Composition and sub-groups

As of 31.12.2022, there are 16 (sixteen) AG 9 members nominated by states and regions of the EUSALP, including the two Action Group leaders. They come from the five Alpine Countries Austria, France, Germany, Italy, and Slovenia. In addition, the Action Group includes stakeholders from different sectors in the role of observers, including:

- The European Commission, DG Regio and DG Ener (2)
- Research and science institutions (2)
- EU funding programmes (1)
- Chambers of commerce (1)

- Transnational and non-governmental organisations (2)
- The Technical Support Structure

AG9 members regularly invite stakeholders and experts as guests to their closed Action Group meetings. All Alpine countries except Liechtenstein are represented in the AG 9 as members or observers.

The Action Group is organised into the following sub-groups:

1. Energy Observatory for energy data collection in the EUSALP

Leader: EURAC Research, Institute for Renewable Energy

Partners: Cervino project partners and observers

Goal: At present, there are no aggregated energy data sets available for the EUSALP area. The activity will create a data tool that will enable the optimal collection, processing, visualization and use of energy data at macro-regional level. The tool will support decision-making processes on energy matters across the Alps.

2. Use and production of green hydrogen in the EUSALP territory

(Cross-sectoral activity together with Action Group 2)

Leader: Auvergne-Rhone Alpes Energy and Environment Agency

Partners: AMETHyST project partners, members of the LOI signature regions

Goal: To strengthen cooperation between Alpine regions in order to foster investment in H2 infrastructure and applications in the Alps. To transfer good practices and create pilot cases and create know-how on funding opportunities among public authorities.

3. Energy communities and smart communities in the EUSALP

Leader: Energy Agency Friuli Venezia Giulia and Energy and Environment Agency Lower Austria

Goal: To capitalize and disseminate project results, to develop common project proposals in cross-border and transnational programmes, to showcase good practices and pilots in the field of energy communities and smart communities. AG 9 leads activities on energy communities, while AG 5 has the lead on smart communities. Both AGs collaborate through the ASP SmartCommUnity project and the cross-sectoral priority “Promoting digitalisation for local communities and economic players in the Alpine Region”. Synergies emerge from this cooperation and ensure cross-fertilization in the respective AGs.

4. Energy efficiency in enterprises and the building sector

Leader: Energy Agency South Tyrol - CasaClima

Partners: Energy Agency Friuli-Venezia Giulia; Action Group 2

Goals: To map relevant projects and instruments, to develop checklists and policy recommendations, and to improve awareness among stakeholder through a public event.

5. CO₂-compensation schemes to support sustainable development in the Alps

Leader: Energy Agency South Tyrol – CasaClima

Goals: To assess the feasibility for the setting-up CO₂ compensation mechanisms that allow to compensate emissions coming from private and public actors with the goal to support local sustainability projects.

3. Involvement of the stakeholders

The AG proactively engages with stakeholders, experts and the interested public. Besides the organization of experts' workshops, the Action Group organizes the **EUSALP Energy Conference** on a yearly basis. The goal of the conference is to deepen the dialogue between experts and policy makers on issues that regard the energy transition in the Alps. The conference contributes to the implementation of the Action Plan and promotes the MRS as a policy forum through which common challenges in the Alpine energy sector are addressed. In order to raise public attention and political interest, **AG Leaders are keen to promote the organization of the event under the patronage of EUSALP presidencies.**

Various stakeholders collaborate with Action Group 9. After approval from Action Group members, they can participate in the official Action Group meetings as guests and are invited to participate to all workshops and conferences that are organized by EUSALP Action Group 9.

In 2023-2025, AG leaders will proactively reach out to actors to join the AG in order to better capture the geographical representation in the AG.

Stakeholder	Involvement in AG 9 activities
Sectoral Energy agencies	Involvement in the planning and implementation of specific projects and initiatives
Local, regional and national public authorities	Involved in the organisation of events and in the planning and implementation of specific initiatives; policy makers targeted on specific topics such as e.g. hydrogen cooperation
Infrastructure and public service providers	Involved in the organisation of events and in the planning and implementation of specific initiatives
International organisations	Involved in the coordination of activities and to find synergies. One example is the ACB of the Alpine Convention
Universities and research institutes	Involved as (external) experts where technical discussions and external studies are foreseen
General public	Targeted via general communication online and through public events

4. The role of the Youth Council

The AG aims to strengthen the cooperation with the EUSALP Youth Council to transfer knowledge and capacities with a focus on sustainable development and the role of renewable energy and energy efficiency measures. **In coordination with the TSS, Action Group 9**

offers Youth Council members to participate in selected AG activities, including in particular, visiting of local good practices accompanied by energy experts (e.g. field trips realised in the framework of cooperation projects such as **AMETHyST and Smart Villages**). In addition, the EUSALP AG9 invites the Youth Council to **act as a member of the EUSALP Energy Award jury** to evaluate projects and select the winners of the competition.

KEY ACHIEVEMENTS 2020-2022

Project incubation

During the last work phase 2020-2022, AG9 incubated projects of relevance for the implementation of the work plan. Worth mentioning in this respect are the project development of the ASP projects AMETHyST "A MultipurposE and Trans sectorial HYdrogen Support for decarbonized alpine Territories" and CERVINO "Creating an EneRgy data exchange and VIsualization toOL for the alps" as well as the ARPAF project CAESAR 2 "ClimAte & Energy Solutions for small Alpine enterpRises". Furthermore, AG9 was project partner of the cross-sectoral project Rediafor "Multifunctional FOReSt in the Alps Reinforcing DIAlogue" as well as the ASP projects "Smart Villages" and "Smart communities".

Fostering political commitment and policy advise

AG9 has continuously contributed to the deepening of cross-sectoral cooperation with other AGs and MRS. The cross-AG cooperation in the field of hydrogen, was manifested with a **letter of intent from 10 Regions from the EUSALP demonstrating their political commitment to engage in a coordinated manner to explore the potential of green hydrogen to become a relevant energy vector in their territories.**

Within the framework of the AlpGov II project, EUSALP **AG9 developed policy recommendations for decision makers** in the energy policy field.

The Action Group leaders contributed to improve the visibility of the Strategy and the thematic focus areas by participation to European initiatives such as the **EU MRS week and the European Union Sustainable Energy Week (EUSEW).**

Communication: Energy Conference and the EUSALP Energy Award

The AG organises on an annual basis the EUSALP Energy Conference. In the previous years, **the conference regularly attracted more than 100 participants and stakeholders.** In 2022, and under the umbrella of the Italian presidency, the **AG9 initiated the EUSALP Energy Award.** The EUSALP Energy Award recognizes best practices that are contributing to the implementation of the energy transition in the Alpine area through the roll-out of renewable energy and energy efficiency measures. The award edition 2022 « Citizen activation and participation in the energy transition » honoured activities and projects of citizens, municipalities, start-ups, established companies, research institutions and NGOs

that are exemplary for citizens' involvement in the energy transition. **Of the 23 initiatives received from all over the Alps, seven were selected by an international jury of experts.**

PRIORITIES 2023-2025

1. Key issues and activities

Action Group 9 will focus its activities in the perspective of the current needs and policy objectives on European, national and regional level. The AG will actively reach out to relevant projects funded under different programmes.

a. Promote Smart Villages/Smart communities and digitalization of the energy sector

The goal of this activity is to promote a network of smart rural areas with a common smarter and greener vision for their communities. The activities in the period 2023-25 include:

- 2023-2025: Regular updates on the results of the Alpine Space SmartCommUnity project and support to the AG5 concerning the refinement of the smart community concept in the cross-cutting priority "Promoting digitalisation for local communities and economic players in the Alpine Region" led by AG5.
- 2024: Based in the project results best practices will be identified and knowledge transfer will be intensified.
- 2024-2025: Promotion of a traveling exhibition on climate action of smart communities, e.g. during the EUSALP Energy Conferences 2024 and 2025 (October) or during the Annual Fora.

b. Enhance energy efficiency in enterprises and the building sector

Enabled by the ARPAF project CAESAR 2, which pursues the goal to support SMEs to address their energy efficiency and carbon footprint, the period 2023-2025 will see the following activities:

- 2023: Mapping of relevant tools and projects which enable implementation of energy efficiency analysis and carbon footprinting;
- 2023: Development of checklists for energy and carbon footprint analysis for key economic sectors;
- Organisation of a final transnational workshop in autumn 2023, probably during the EUSALP Annual Forum, with the involvement of AGs 2 and 9 and the development of policy recommendations.
- 2024-2025: Screening of funding programmes and opportunities.

The Action Group will further create connections to ongoing projects, such as EnTrainer (LIFE), and capitalize on their activities.

c. Evaluate a CO2 compensation scheme

The aim of the activity is to assess the feasibility for the setting-up a compensation mechanism that allows to compensate CO2 emissions coming from private and public actors with the goal to support local sustainability projects (e.g. reforestation activities, climate change adaptation, roll-out of renewable energies in the Alps, etc.).

Roadmap for implementation

2024-25: Development of a small-scale project to pilot the implementation of a regional CO2 compensation scheme within the ASP Call 2024 e.g. in the governance pillar.

- Goal: develop, implement and test CO2 compensation mechanisms at regional level
 - CO2 assessment methodology for private and public actors
 - Definition of a methodology to screen local projects for CO2-emission
 - Networking and pooling of already existing local/regional CO2 compensation projects in the Alpine area to foster knowledge transfer

d. Participation to the Task Force Multifunctional Forest and Sustainable Use of Timber

The AG9 will participate to the work and events organized by the TF MFSUT.

As forests products (Timber for construction, biomass for renewable heating...) are important for the energy transition, AG9 will participate to TF MFSUT annual workplan, mainly concerning communication activities:

- Promotion of the LinkedIn account
- Participation to shape the new TF MFSUT organizational model
- Transfer of information between TF MFSUT and AG9 members
- Participation to events

2. Strategic flagship initiatives

a) Energy Observatory for data collection in the EUSALP

Access to reliable energy data is the basis for decision-makers to formulate, implement and verify the coherence of energy policies and measures. Public authorities engaged in sustainable energy planning, require access to territorial, aggregated and accurate energy

data. To the same token, energy data will be needed at macro-regional level to support EUSALP consortium in defining and implementing a long-term energy strategy for the Alpine territory.

Action Group 9, together with the European CERVINO project, will collect energy data from the EUSALP regions and make them accessible via a dynamic data visualization platform. Data entry and processing of the management tool will be facilitated and a roadmap will ensure regular surveys on energy data. This platform will update and make available the energy data of the Alpine regions, allow comparison between regions and aggregation at EUSALP level.

Timeline

Collection of regional energy data (2023)

Integration of the CERVINO EUSALP energy data platform in the EUSALP website (2024)

Roadmap for the establishment of a EUSALP energy observatory (2024)

2024: Online data visualization platform

2025: Decision on improvements to the platform and integration of additional (e.g. adaptation to climate change)

b) Energy Communities

Renewable energy communities in the alpine region can reduce carbon emissions and help combat climate change by replacing fossil fuels with clean and sustainable energy sources. These communities can also enhance energy security and resilience by reducing dependence on non-renewable energy imports and strengthening local energy production. The use of renewable energy in alpine communities can also provide economic benefits by creating local jobs and stimulating sustainable economic development.

Additionally, the development of renewable energy projects in the alpine region can help preserve the natural environment by reducing the need for destructive fossil fuel extraction methods and promoting sustainable land use practices.

Finally, the use of renewable energy in alpine communities can also promote social cohesion and community engagement by fostering local ownership and participation in energy production and decision-making processes.

During the previous budget period 2014-21, Alpine Space projects have addressed this topic, in particular the Smartvillage and Alpgrids projects.

Activities in the Work Plan period 2022-2025 will include:

- Capitalization and dissemination of AlpGrids, Smart village results, and ongoing projects such as SmartCommUnity
- Common project development in cross-border programmes (France-Switzerland, Alcotra (France-Italy), ...)
- Showcasing of good practices and pilots through the EUSALP Energy Award 2024 that could be organized under the umbrella of the Slovenian Presidency
- Development of policy recommendations 2024 and presentation during the EUSALP Energy Award 2024

3. Cross-cutting priority: Fast-tracking Energy Transition for a Carbon Neutral Alpine Region

The current energy crisis has given new dynamics and urgency to the energy transition from fossil fuels to renewable sources. The priority will focus on:

a) fast-tracking the adoption of green and low carbon Hydrogen in the Alpine region, in accordance with the REPowerEU strategy that “recognizes the role of the MRS in promoting cooperation in investments in hydrogen infrastructure”. Alpine regions are very dynamic and proactive in the development of the hydrogen sector, in the production, storage, transport, distribution and uses for mobility and industries. Many regional initiatives exist, and this cross-cutting priorities will focus on

- Strengthening the process of embedding hydrogen in regional policies
- Exchanging on strategies for mobilizing European funds to implement tomorrow's hydrogen infrastructures, supporting each other in the dedicated EU calls, so that a maximum number of regions can invest and thus ensure the continuity of hydrogen infrastructures in the Alps
- Increase the skills of local authorities and local stakeholders to understand the challenges of hydrogen and to initiate local projects in pilot areas

b) facilitating the decarbonization of the transport sector, which has been lagging behind in promoting the use of renewable energy sources. Oil-derived fuels account for 95% of energy consumption in transport. Measures to decarbonize transport should follow the „avoid-shift-improve” approach (reduce demand; modal shift from road to rail and soft modes; alternative propulsion systems).

Objectives of the cross-cutting priority

The first objective is to foster investments in hydrogen infrastructure, relying on the Alpine hydrogen value chain and its many innovative companies producing fuel cells, electrolysis, hydrogen refueling stations and new or retrofitted hydrogen vehicles. The EUSALP H2 focus

group, established with a letter of intent of cooperation signed by 10 Alpine regions aims to reach the goal of the EU H2 strategy for 2030. It will explore available funding opportunities, connect regional initiatives such as Hydrogen valleys to each other and draft an EUSALP hydrogen roadmap.

The second objective is to work at local level to bring out new concrete H2 projects, in mountain and urban areas. 2 projects, AMETHyST and H2MA, are currently funded by the Alpine Space Programme until 2025 and aim at increasing capacities of local public authorities and connect them with hydrogen private developers and companies. Study visits, public events, technical studies, tools, results and outputs will be capitalized and widely disseminated in the Alpine area.

The third objective is to connect the EUSALP H2 initiatives with other EU H2 initiatives such as Hydrogen Europe and the Clean Hydrogen partnership, giving visibility, building networks, and connect with other macro-regional strategies.

The final objective is to accelerate the energy transition in the transport sector, by collaborating across sectors, identifying best practices, streamlining policies and incubating new projects.

Indicators to evaluate the implementation of the priority:

The following indicators will be used:

- Establishment of an EUSALP H2 roadmap
- Number of H2 focus group meetings per year: the target is 3 per year
- Number of responses to EU calls to finance hydrogen development (Interreg, AFIF, Hydrogen Valleys...) in the Alps
- Number of participations to public events
- 1 political declaration on energy transition in the transport system
- 1 High-level policy event with all four MRS in Brussels on energy transition in the transport system
- 4 public events / workshops
- 10 selected best practices published on the EUSALP website for Transport and Mobility

Coordinators & involved Action Groups

The overall coordination will be done by Action group 9 “Energy” co-leaders, Etienne Viénot (AURA-EE), Maren Meyer and Benjamin Auer (Casaclima).

Action group 9 will be also in charge of the Implementation of AMETHyST project, capitalization and transfer of results and outputs (concerning also H2MA project), with the creation of an EUSALP H2 online platform as a knowledge resource center. AG 9 will be in charge of the connection with other EU initiatives, such as Hydrogen Europe, European Hydrogen week, CHJU. AG9 will organize, promote and participate to public events to promote H2 alpine initiatives.

Action group 2 “Economic development”, Sylvain Guetaz (AURA Region) and Massimo Lapolla (Piemonte Region), will organize 3 EUSALP H2 focus group meetings per year and prepare an EUSALP H2 roadmap.

Action group 4 “Mobility”, Patrick Skonieczki (Europaregion Tirol-Südtirol-Trentino) and Michael Bürger (Tyrol region) will collect and detail data on energy consumption in the transport sector. AG2 will also identify innovative approaches to accelerate decarbonisation of transport, considering new players in a cross-sectoral perspective and supporting existing policy measures, financial incentives and cooperation structures.

Action group 5 “Connectivity and accessibility”, Marco Tomasi (Trentino Digitale SpA) will collaborate with the local territorial excellences (<https://energy.fbk.eu/>, <https://www.autobrennero.it/en/sustainability/>) to investigate the relationship between decarbonisation and digitalisation, highlighting how the latter can represent a fundamental lever for decarbonising not only energy systems, but also business processes, contributing to the achievement of the European objectives which envisage a 55% reduction in emissions by 2030 and climate neutrality to 2050.

COMMUNICATION

1. Dissemination and communication activities

Action Group 9 shares information about the group’s activities through direct contact with stakeholders, and via the online communication channels available to the leaders/members. The EUSALP web portal is used to communicate all news and events to the wider public. The Action Group, through its leaders and/or members, participates to initiatives and events organised by stakeholders and institutional partners. Particular emphasis shall be given here to the initiatives organised by the European Commission.

To ensure synergies and effectiveness of the actions, AG 9 actively seeks exchange with other relevant projects and with the Managing Authorities of the main funding programmes.

The EUSALP website will be one of the main recipients of communication activities:

- Integration of the EUSALP energy data platform in the EUSALP website
- In EUSALP website, links toward the online platform developed by AMETHyST partners
- Communication on events
- EUSALP Energy Conference every year
- Energy Award on bi annual basis

2. Events

- Annual EUSALP Energy conference 2023, 2024, 2025 (always in autumn)
- EUSALP Energy Award 2024 (autumn, organized together with the EUSALP Energy Conference)
- Participation to Macro-Regional Strategies Week every year in Bruxelles
- Participation to EUSALP annual forum every year
- Participation and organisation of workshop during the European Hydrogen week and European Sustainable week
- Participation to EUSALP presidencies events related to the topics of AG9
- Possible events in collaboration with other AGs

WORK PLAN OUTPUTS AND RESULTS

Indicators	Target
n. joint political declarations	1
Energy Transition in the Alps (focus to be defined with other AGs and EB) 2025	
n. cross-border/transnational events	10
2-3 EUSALP Energy Conference, 1 EUSALP Energy Award centred on the issue of renewable energy communities, Public events AMETHyST, 3 participations to MRS week, 3 Annual Forum, and various events organized by projects related to AG9	
n. joint policy recommendation	2
Hydrogen (2025) and Energy Communities (2024)	
n. project to be submitted on the Alpine Space Programme (incubated in the Action Group)	1
Pilot on CO2 compensation mechanism for sustainable development projects	
n. project to be submitted on others European Programmes (incubated in the Action Group)	1
Energy communities	
n. of papers / research works to be published	0
Currently not planned.	
budget to be raised with European funding	
The AG continuously screens EU funding programmes for potential opportunities for transnational cooperation within the Alpine Region.	
other:	

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