



# LIFE UNIFY LAYMAN'S REPORT

AUGUST 2022

BRINGING THE EU TOGETHER  
ON CLIMATE ACTION

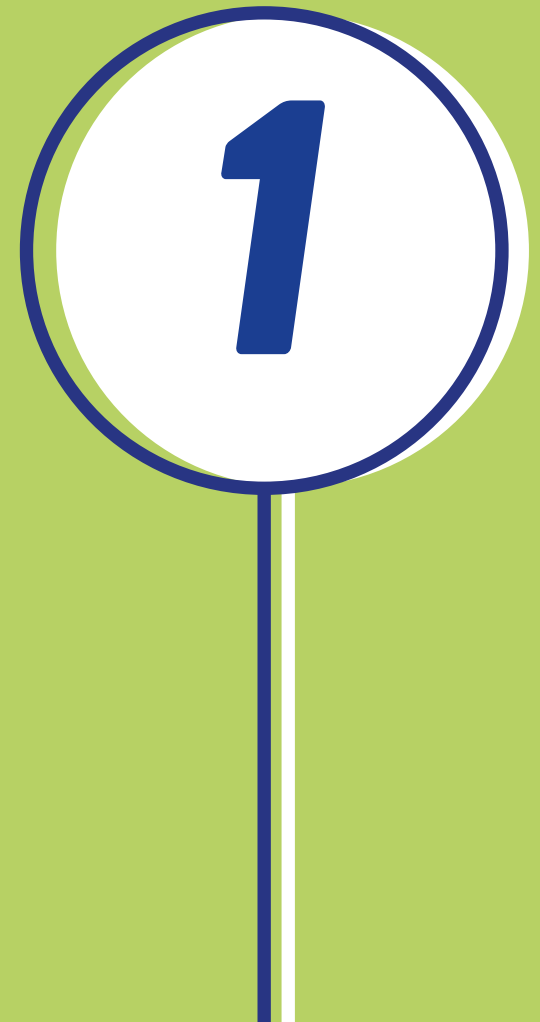


BRINGING THE EU TOGETHER  
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# WHAT IS THE UNIFY PROJECT ABOUT?



# CONTEXT & SCOPE

In 2018, the European Union adopted the Energy Union Governance Regulation.

As a consequence, two important opportunities arose to improve climate governance, allowing better coordination, implementation and monitoring of Member State's activities: the development of **National Energy and Climate Plans**, or NECPs, and of **national Long-Term Strategies**, or nLTS.

The Unify project started from the conviction that by developing ambitious NECPs and nLTS Member States can accelerate the transition towards a low-carbon and resilient economy in Europe and push the Union not only to meet its emissions reduction targets, but go beyond them, thereby bringing the EU-wide emission reduction trajectory closer to Paris Agreement commitments.



# MONITORING NECPS AND NLTS

## NATIONAL ENERGY AND CLIMATE PLANS

According to the Governance Regulation each NECPs has to include:

### NECP

- National emissions reduction target\*
  - National Renewable energy target
  - National energy savings target
  - The policies, plans and measures to achieve them
- ...for the period 2021 to 2030.

2021

2030

## NATIONAL LONG-TERM STRATEGIES

The Governance Regulation is more vague on nLTS. Each nLTS had to cover:

### nLTS

- Total emissions reductions (and removals by sinks)
  - Sectoral emissions reductions
  - Expected progress on the transition towards climate neutrality and its socio-economic effects
  - Links with other targets and plans, including NECPs
- ...at least until 2050

2021

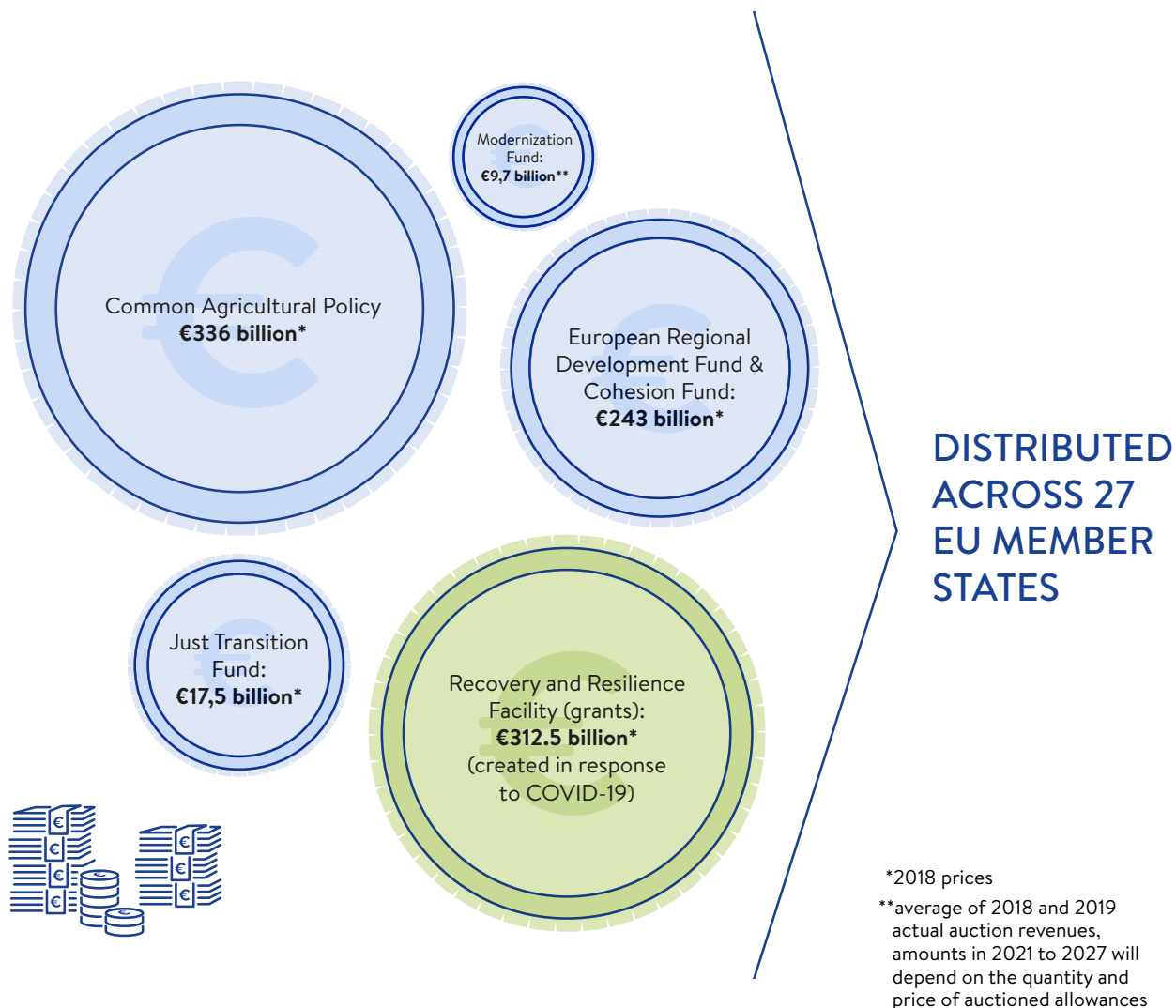
2050

\* This target includes the transport, buildings, agriculture, waste and small industry sectors. It does not include electricity and heat generation, energy-intensive industries and aviation, which are regulated by the EU Emissions Trading System

In the meantime, another important political process had begun at EU level: the programming of the EU budget - technically known as the Multiannual Financial Framework, or MFF - for the years 2021-2027.

This presented another opportunity: ensuring that **EU funds** - and specifically EU Regional Development and Cohesion funds, which have *ad hoc* climate and energy objectives - would align with Member States' NECPs, to catalyse their potential and contribute to achieve ambitious 2030 climate and energy targets at the national level.

## LIFE UNIFY MONITORED THE FOLLOWING EU FUNDS

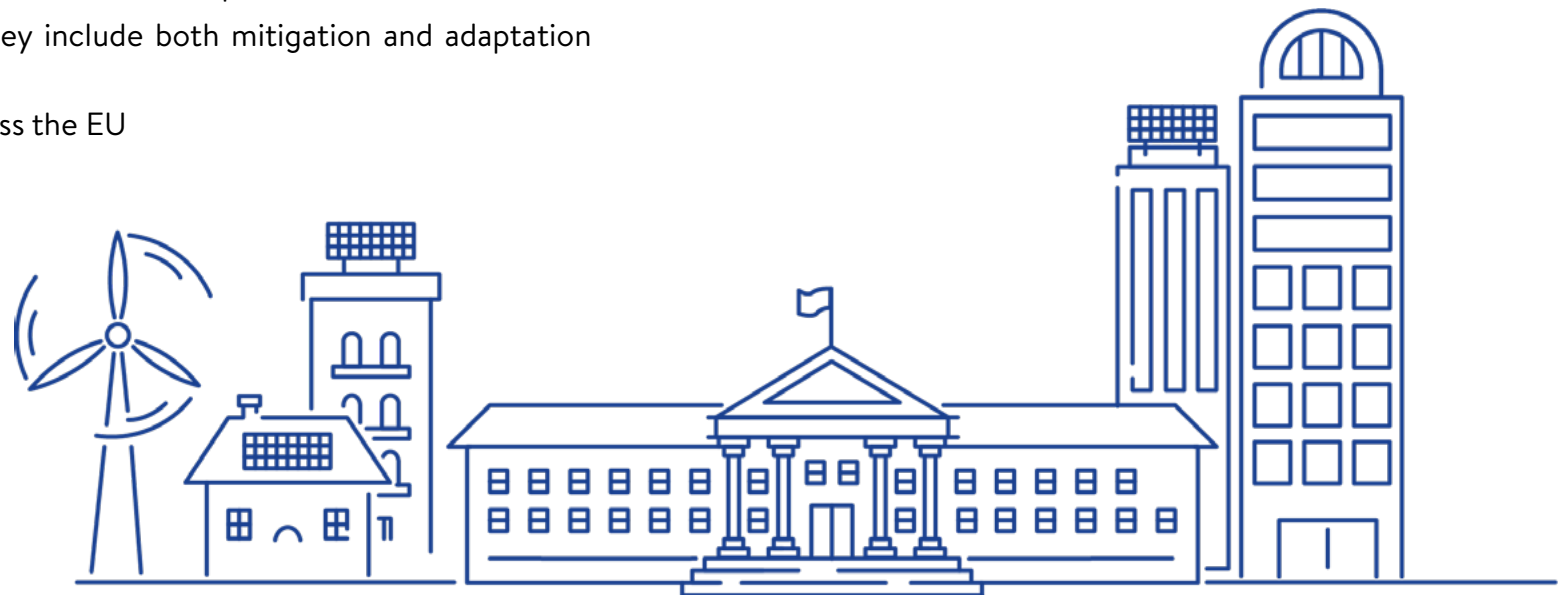


# SECAPS: CLIMATE ACTION AT THE LOCAL LEVEL

To further stress the importance of coherent climate action at different levels of governance, and the consistency in the use of EU funds, the Unify project also worked on **SECAPs\***, energy and climate action plans developed by regions or municipalities

Sustainable Energy and Climate Action Plans, or SECAPs, are the primary point of reference for EU municipalities engaged in climate action. They have been launched by the Covenant of Mayors for Climate & Energy initiative, with the goal of ensuring compliance with EU targets. In short, SECAPs are:

- A voluntary commitment from municipalities
- Broad in scope, as they include both mitigation and adaptation aspects
- More than 7000 across the EU





The goal of the Unify project, as it was originally designed, was therefore to bring together these three policy opportunities – the programming of NECPs, nLTS and the EU funds – as well as linking them with the local level through SECAPs.

Through its targeted activities in 10 Member States and at the EU level, the Unify project aimed to showcase that if these **policy processes are aligned, consistent, ambitious and in line with the Paris Agreement objectives**, they are crucial for all Member States to step up their climate action.



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## THE APPROACH:

## TO ACHIEVE ITS OBJECTIVES, THE UNIFY PROJECT

### ACTED AT TWO DIFFERENT LEVELS...

AT THE NATIONAL AND LOCAL LEVEL, WITH DETAILED ACTIONS DELIVERED IN 10 EU COUNTRIES

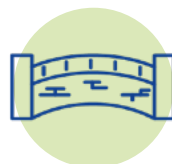


AT THE EU LEVEL, REPLICATING, AMPLIFYING AND TRANSFERRING RESULTS FROM THE NATIONAL LEVEL TO THE WHOLE EU.

### ... AND UNDERTOOK DIFFERENT TYPES OF ACTION:



*Building knowledge & capacity across the consortium, i.e. by conducting research, developing the tools for effective qualitative and quantitative analysis*



*Building bridges, enhancing capacity and disseminating project findings across a wide range of civil society stakeholders at the national and EU level, via events, meetings and workshops*



*Advocating for more ambition during the relevant legislative and political processes, through the dissemination of project findings and tools to the media and to decision makers at national and EU level, but also via high-level events and EU-wide campaigns*



*Once adopted, monitoring the implementation of policies and measures laid out in EU funds and climate action plans at the national level*

## ADAPTING TO A CHANGING CONTEXT



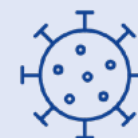
*The Unify project's unique approach and objectives remained the same throughout the duration of the project. However, **the context in which the project operates changed considerably in the last three years**, which brought the Unify project to further expand its scope of action.*



**Higher EU-wide climate targets** – With the adoption of the European Climate Law, the EU increased its climate ambition targets – 55% emissions reduction by 2030, and climate neutrality by 2050 – which led the Unify consortium to call for revised, more ambitious NECPs and nLTS that could (at least) be in line with the EU's increased ambition.



**The 'Fit for 55' package** – The EU also published the 'Fit for 55' package, which contains the legislative files aiming to turn this renewed (albeit still insufficient) climate ambition into reality. In light of this, Unify partners started to monitor the legislative process, and particularly those files that could directly impact on NECPs and nLTS.



**Covid-19** – In response to the global pandemic, the EU put in place a Recovery plan worth €750 billion – in addition to those already allocated in the MFF – and a Recovery and Resilience Facility (where 30% of investments should be allocated for the green transition). The Consortium monitored the setting up of this Facility, as well as the drafting of national Recovery & Resilience plans.



**The war in Ukraine and 'REPowerEU'** – In May 2022, as a consequence of Russia's invasion of Ukraine, the European Commission released the 'REPowerEU' package, with the objective of weaning off the EU's reliance on energy imports from Russia and keeping energy prices under control. Although this happened during the project's last months, the consortium started to reflect upon the consequences of the package at the EU as well as at the national level.

# WHERE DID THE UNIFY PROJECT TAKE PLACE?



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The Unify project lasted from September 2019 to August 2022. In these three years, the project has been active in 10 countries across the EU: Croatia, Czechia, Denmark, Estonia, France, Germany, Poland, Portugal, Slovenia, Spain.

The project was coordinated from Brussels by Climate Action Network (CAN) Europe, ensuring EU level coordination and replication of the project.

Founded in 1991, **Germanwatch** is an independent, non-profit organisation promoting global equity, the respect of human rights and livelihood preservation, with a focus on the politics and economics of the Global North and their world-wide consequences.

[www.germanwatch.org](http://www.germanwatch.org)

With over 170 member organisations active in 38 European countries, and representing over 47 million citizens, CAN Europe is Europe's leading NGO coalition fighting dangerous climate change.

[www.caneurope.org/](http://www.caneurope.org/)

Founded in 1996, **Réseau Action Climat** – France is an association working on climate change. As the French representative of CAN International, it is a federation of NGOs fighting and raising awareness on dangerous climate change from the local to the international level.

[www.reseauactionclimat.org](http://www.reseauactionclimat.org)

**ZERO** is a Portuguese environmental NGO working on a broad range of issues, including Climate Change, Energy and Mobility. Although founded only 6 years ago, ZERO runs several national and/or European environmental projects, focusing its action on advocacy work.

[www.zero.org](http://www.zero.org)

**SEO/BirdLife** represents BirdLife International in Spain. Founded in 1954, it promotes the study, conservation and enjoyment of birds and nature through, among others, legal action, political advocacy and partnerships with the government and business sectors.

[www.seo.org](http://www.seo.org)



The **Estonian Fund for Nature (ELF)** is an environmental non-governmental organisation. Since 2015, it also works on climate – notably on Just Transition and oil shale, climate & energy policies, and coordination with NGOs & stakeholders in Estonia and in Europe.

[www.elfond.ee/en](http://www.elfond.ee/en)

[www.kliimamuutused.ee/en](http://www.kliimamuutused.ee/en)



The **Institute for Sustainable Development Foundation (ISD)** works on sustainable development and climate policies at the national, regional & local level in Poland. It currently mostly focuses on advocacy, education campaigns and public consultations.

[www.pine.org.pl](http://www.pine.org.pl)

[www.chronmyklimat.pl](http://www.chronmyklimat.pl)



The **Centre for Transport and Energy (CDE)** is a Czech non-profit non-governmental organisation founded in 1998 which focuses on the environmental impacts of transportation and energy production, especially those on the Earth's climate.

[www.cde-org.cz/en](http://www.cde-org.cz/en)



The **Society for the Design of Sustainable Development (DOOR)** promotes sustainable development principles in all segments of society – local, regional and national – primarily in the field of energy (energy poverty, energy savings, renewables and energy communities).

<https://door.hr/english>

**Focus** – Association for Sustainable Development is an independent, non-governmental, non-profit and apolitical association promoting (via research, advocacy, awareness-raising) comprehensive socioeconomic changes towards a decent life within planetary boundaries.

[www.focus.si](http://www.focus.si)

WHAT HAS THE  
UNIFY PROJECT  
ACHIEVED?

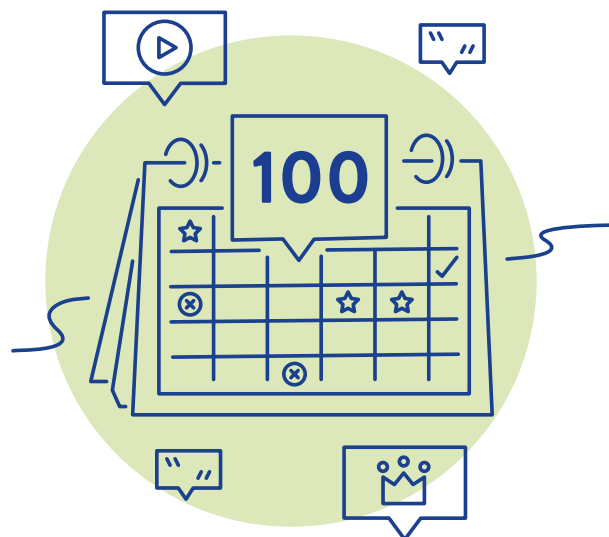
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# WHAT HAS THE UNIFY PROJECT ACHIEVED?

**>40** PUBLICATIONS,  
REPORTS AND  
BRIEFINGS



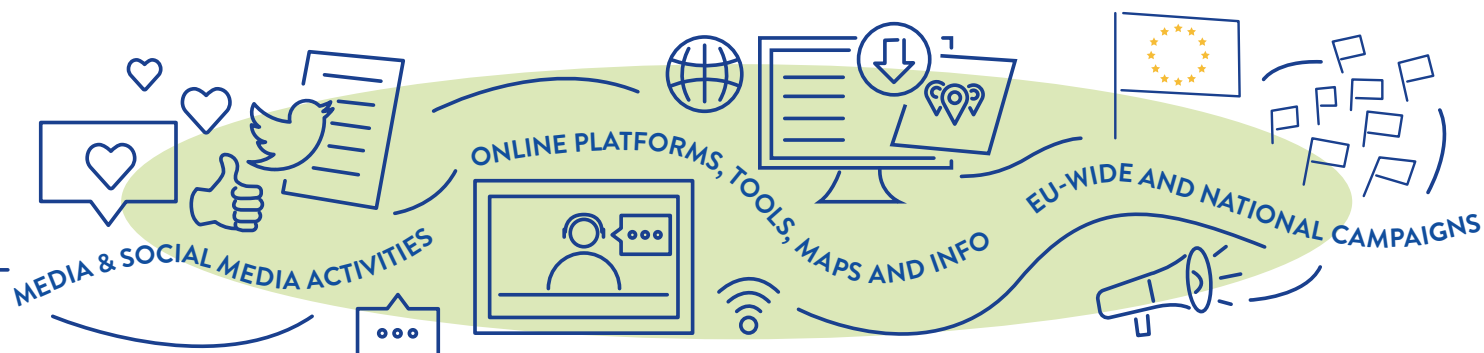
**>100** EVENTS, WEBINARS,  
WORKSHOPS  
AND MEETINGS



**24** EU COUNTRIES  
INVOLVED



**AND MANY MORE**





### >40 PUBLICATIONS, REPORTS AND BRIEFINGS

reporting on the project's key processes – NECPs drafting and implementation, nLTS development, EU funds negotiations and use, relevance of SECAPs – as well as monitoring a constantly changing socio-economic and political context – Covid-19 and the Recovery Funds, the 'Fit for 55' legislative package but also the growing number of national climate laws.

### >100 EVENTS, WEBINARS, WORKSHOPS AND MEETINGS

with relevant stakeholders – national Ministries and citizens' platforms, EU agencies and local authorities, Parliaments and other environmental NGOs, businesses and trade unions.

**24 EU COUNTRIES** were included overall across our reports, analyses and recommendations, ensuring and guaranteeing the development of tools and assessments that are relevant across all of the EU – at the national as well as at the EU level.



This wide range of activities generated a tangible impact, not only on climate and energy policy processes. LIFE Unify was ultimately able to build:

- **An enhanced knowledge-base** and set of tools to influence key policy processes at EU, national and local level, as well as to monitor their practical implementation
- **Greater recognition** of some national partners towards EU and national institutions and other relevant stakeholders, and thereby their greater relevance in political processes
- **The expansion of partner's areas of work** and expertise, allowing them to increase their relevance in a larger number of decision-making processes
- **Closer and strengthened collaboration** across climate NGOs, thereby delivering a stronger climate movement.
- **The building of bridges** between NGOs and other relevant stakeholders across civil society, from businesses to trade unions, thereby allowing for more participative solutions to accelerate climate action and the energy transition at all levels.

# NECPs HIGHLIGHTS

The LIFE Unify consortium was widely active during the NECPs drafting process, but also in their first years of implementation, both at national and EU level. It has done so via participation in public consultations, the development of qualitative NECPs guidelines and landmark reports, the participation in the public and institutional debate and the organisation of multi-stakeholder events, workshops and webinars.

The **NECP Tracker**, an intuitive, user-friendly tool comparing the most recently released data with NECP targets and trajectories – to visualise where EU countries are in the implementation of their plans.

- Widely used and sincerely appreciated at the EU and national level during meetings and events with national Parliaments, European Commission directorates and agencies, and many other relevant stakeholders
- Replicated with national and regional indicators in France and Spain!

A **focus** on **energy poverty, transport and agriculture**. LIFE Unify sub-groups have worked on these NECP-related issues. Notably, the Consortium's cross-country assessment of Common Agricultural Policy Strategic Plans made it possible to effectively engage with national civil servants and politicians and put under the spotlight the climate relevance of these plans.

*“The LIFE Unify project helped us to engage in the German NECP drafting process and in the monitoring of its implementation. UNIFY findings from final NECP assessments were echoed by the European Commission and the NECP tracker tool has helped national stakeholders understand the misalignment between national climate objectives and pathways being proposed to meet the objectives.”*

AUDREY MATHIEU, GERMANWATCH



# nLTS HIGHLIGHTS

The nLTS process was less transparent than the NECPs process – by mid-2022 several EU countries still need to draft their own. Nonetheless, the LIFE Unify consortium was able to develop relevant qualitative assessment tools, assess challenges and opportunities connected to long-term climate planning and, where possible, conduct advocacy work around national public consultations.

The recommendations to the EU and its Member States laid out in our landmark **report** “*Getting the long-term planning right: the role of national long-term strategies in achieving climate neutrality in Europe*” were echoed in the European Commission’s assessments of nLTS, which were published soon afterwards.



“For us, the biggest value of the project is a collaboration with other organisations on the EU level and the exchange of knowledge and good practices among organisations. For example, the insights on the current process regarding nLTS development, implementation, and monitoring in other member states’ programming processes are immeasurable.”

MILJENKA KUCHAR, DOOR

# EU FUNDS HIGHLIGHTS

The LIFE Unify project was key in building processes and capacity to monitor and influence the programming of EU funds – providing targeted inputs at the regional, national, and sub-national level – to ensure that Cohesion and Just Transition Fund (and later, the Recovery & Resilience Fund) were coherent with NECPs at the national level and SECAPs at the municipal level.

The **EU Cash Awards** was a EU-wide social media campaign organised by the LIFE Unify consortium. We took a closer look at where EU money was expected to flow and whether it was used to tackle the climate emergency or keeps fueling dangerous climate change. The campaign identified good, bad and ugly spending measures in 16 EU countries' spending plans, and managed to take some of them out of their final versions.



***“At the beginning of the UNIFY project, the concept of Just Transition was not known in Estonia. ELF, with its partner NGOs, was the first one initiating discussions on Just Transition in the oil shale region of Ida-Virumaa. By now, local authorities and ministries have taken over the lead, but our action at the right time set a positive and constructive tone in discussing transition towards climate-neutrality.”***

PIRET VÄINSALU, ELF

***“The connections established at EU level through the UNIFY project have enabled ZERO to have a stronger actor in the national context as well as a stronger influence on the national policies, most notably on the Recovery and Resilience Plan.”***

BÁRBARA MAURÍCIO, ZERO

# SECAPs HIGHLIGHTS

Some of the LIFE Unify national partners – in Croatia, Czechia, France, Poland, Portugal, Slovenia and Spain – worked at the local level to reinforce the link between national and local climate action planning.

The work unfolded in the form of capacity-building workshops, participation to public platforms, meetings with municipalities and authorities, the development of surveys and engagement guidelines, capacity-building and cross-fertilization workshops as well as direct provision of expertise to specific municipalities in the actual drafting of SECAPs. The main **lessons learned have been enshrined in a final briefing** which constitutes the basis for the partner's future work at the local level.

**As the LIFE Unify project adapted to changing scenarios**, we have delivered influential reports and analyses and beyond initial the project scope. Some highlights include:

- A detailed assessment of National Climate Laws, whose number is growing across Europe, which constitute a key instrument to achieve carbon neutrality – which will be continued in the years to come
- A collection of recommendations and lessons learned on the implementation of the Effort-Sharing Regulation at the national level – widely distributed across decision-makers during the negotiations on the revision of the ESR.
- In-depth analyses of Recovery and Resilience Plans, including one focusing on problematic measures to be addressed in draft plans – which were echoed in presentations and meetings by the European Commission





Being part of the LIFE Unify project has allowed the consortium partners to have direct impacts on national policy-making, to build bridges with relevant stakeholders and to create stronger climate coalitions. Here are a few highlights!

**Thanks to LIFE Unify:**

## CDE (CZECHIA)



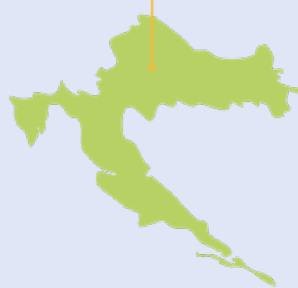
- Established itself as the leading Czech NGO focusing on EU climate policy & their financing mechanisms
- Increased its influence across the media, but also with policy-makers and businesses – thanks to useful tools such as the NECP Tracker, which got the interest of Czech politicians willing to address the lack of climate ambition in the country
- Acted as a bridge between Czech and international climate NGOs, sharing information and expertise both ways and initiating activities focused on NECP, nLTS, EU funds and the 'Fit for 55' package among Czech environmental groups

## THE DANISH92 GROUP (DENMARK)



- Significantly increased ability to work on EU climate policy and its links with national policy-making
- Substantially improved capacity to call for meaningful stakeholders' involvement in the drafting of NECPs, nLTS, RRP and CAP Strategic Plans, and improved the expertise to effectively and meaningfully take part in those processes
- This included a Parliamentary interrogation to the Danish agriculture minister, who had to answer questions resulting from our work on the Danish CAP Strategic Plan – exposing the vastly understated effect of Danish agriculture on climate

## DOOR (CROATIA)



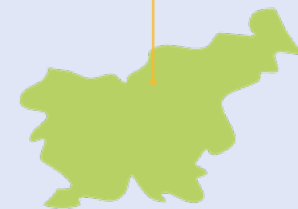
- Strengthened ties and collaboration with other organisations active across the EU and at the EU level, allowing for vital cross-fertilization of knowledge and best practices
- This includes insights of immeasurable value on nLTS and NECP development, implementation, and monitoring processes in other EU Member States
- Enhanced capacity to engage in the national and EU policy dialogues, most notably in the NECP process and in the EU funds programming process

## ELF (ESTONIA)



- Steered change in the Estonian region of Ida-Virumaa, initiating vital stakeholders' discussions around the concept of Just Transition and shale oil phaseout in the region
- The local government & ministries have now taken the lead, but ELF's action at the right time was crucial to set a positive and constructive tone in discussing the region's transition towards climate neutrality
- Sharing good practices, inviting experts, conducting analyses and organising roundtable discussions – via Unify's support group – were all vital for the success of the initiative

## FOCUS (SLOVENIA)



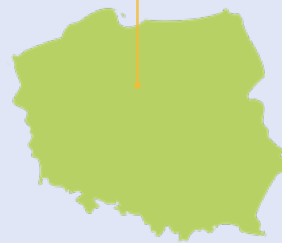
- Established a regular and trustful connection of state and non-state actors through UNIFY's support group – on key broader topics such as the development and implementation of NECPs and ambitious nLTSs, but also on more detailed issues such as the tapping into Slovenia's solar potential
- The support group includes representatives from the Ministries of Environment & Infrastructure, trade unions, NGOs, businesses and local municipalities – and invites external experts for insightful discussions on problems, opportunities and solutions

## GERMANWATCH (GERMANY)



- Was able to substantially engage in the German NECP process, its implementation and its monitoring, as well as monitor the use of Recovery Funds money
- Used the NECP tracker tool to let national stakeholders understand the misalignment between national climate objectives and the pathways being proposed to meet the objectives
- Substantially deepened its engagement in the CAN Europe network and collaboration with other consortium partners, and more generally expanded its engagement in the EU policy dialogue

## ISD (POLAND)



- Created a solid, proactive and diverse UNIFY Support Group – composed of representatives of business, trade unions, NGOs, local and regional authorities and other relevant decision-makers
- The group had thorough and fruitful discussions for all participants (despite the pandemic), which delivered strong outcomes such as the recommendations for the Polish government on 'Fit for 55' and the powerful interventions pushing for an opening of consultations about the new Polish Energy Policy

## RAC FRANCE (FRANCE)



- Significantly strengthened ties and connections with other NGOs as well as with the institutions, governments and parliaments – both in France and in Brussels
- Expanded its areas of expertise and its advocacy outreach potential by tackling new issues – from heavy industry to just transition and jobs
- Both of which led to some hard-earned victories during the French Climate law process or the 'Fit for 55' negotiations under the French Presidency of the Council of the EU.

## SEO/BIRDLIFE (SPAIN)



- Created the innovative Climate Observatory, a visual monitoring tool offering regularly updated information on how Spain is leading its transformation towards a low-carbon economy and society by 2030
- To cover the reality of Spanish heterogeneous territory, the tool includes interactive maps of Spain's autonomous regions to illustrate, in an accessible, comparable and intuitive format, progress in the approval and development of regional laws, strategies and plans related to climate and energy

## ZERO (PORTUGAL)



- Became a stronger actor in the national context to the point of influencing certain national policy instruments, most notably the Portuguese Recovery and Resilience Plan (some measures were withdrawn after the EU Cash Awards campaign)
- Strengthened ties and connections at the national level – with national media and decision-makers – as well as beyond the Portuguese borders, with partner NGOs and with EU decision-makers



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#### Disclaimer:

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