



D5.4 Report on the sustainable energy mentoring programme (First)

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NAME			ORGANISATION		
AUTHOR	Diana Pati		Startups.be		
CONTRIBUTOR(S)	Marleen Heyndrickx		Startups.be		
	Valentina Ponomariova		Startups.be		
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1. Introduction

The startup energy mentoring activities are integral part of WP5 of START2ACT and interact closely with the related work packages. The goal is to engage young, innovative companies at an early stage, so they would understand the importance of energy efficiency while growing their businesses. The format of the energy mentoring activities has been presented by Startups.be and discussed among all partners at the Training of Trainers event in March 2017.

As this format of consultancy, energy advises to young startup companies, is a novelty in the consultancy domain, Startups.be has been developing a strategy that will be rolled out by the SATRT2CACT partners in the countries BE, BG, CZ, HR, HU, PL, RO, SK, UK. Advise on energy efficiency tailored to the needs and interests of startups will be delivered to startups in the partner countries. An online questionnaire, developed in the frame of WP2 by CentERdata, will be delivered to each participant of the mentoring session in order to monitor progress and obtain feedback from the participants.

With this report, we are also aiming at building up the sustainability of the START2ACT approach after the project. By publicly describing the progress of this novel format of consultancies to European startups, this report may be used as a 'case study' in order to engage other companies in adopting this strategy and replicating the START2ACT approach in other regions.

2. Overall progress and findings

To gather individual feedback for the deliverable, the WP5 leader collected answers and insights via personal talks scheduled on Skype or phone.

Background of partners:

By evaluating the startup activities, it is vital to mention that most organisations are not part of the startup ecosystem per se. Their expertise lies in energy-related services, and by default their outreach is closest to the SME community. To bridge the gap, in WP5 the mentoring activity handbook includes an introduction to the startup field, explanation to the most used methodologies and terms. During the 3-day Training of Trainers and progress meeting in March partners discussed their perception of startups and strategies were exchanged how to reach the startup support organisations.

Outreach:

Most partners involved in WP5 used their contacts to reach startup support organisations – incubators, accelerators, co-working spaces-, to introduce the project. Besides the existing relationships, the WP5 lead, Startups.be also suggested startup contacts from the region. As far it appears that co-working spaces are the most open to the extra programme of startup mentoring. It is practical because they have event space and they can brand the mentoring activities as an extra service in their portfolio. So far, the biggest challenge is to maintain the interest, which is at first always positive, but in the holiday season such contacts can be prioritised on a lower level. Follow-ups are planned for the first months of autumn. Not only the usual suspects, but event organisers are a relevant target group as well.

Timing:

According to the project's Gantt chart, in the examined period the emphasis was put on the business breakfasts and SME outreach. Also, since it fell in the summer vacations period, it was harder than usual to reach external



organisations and establish new partnership. Nevertheless, partners did a great job in reaching out and finding collaborations. Most startup activities are scheduled for the second half of 2017, starting from September.

Survey:

By default, it is difficult to engage any companies to participate in online questionnaires. There is quite some noise already and many organisations are trying to reach startups/SMEs asking them to fill in surveys. This challenge is acknowledged, and partners are encouraged to share best practices in the consortium how they achieve more responses. One practice – which is less environmentally friendly – could be to print out the questionnaire and ask the participants to fill on on-site, which then would be typed in by the START2ACT partner. It is time-consuming, yet the level of engagement is usually quite high at events when there is personal connection, so we can expect a higher response rate. Another idea is to send extra educational material or promotional code together with the survey link to the participants, strengthening the notion that they gain something extra when they dedicate their time filling in the questionnaire. To sum it up, it will be a challenge to get more engagement for an activity which is not popular at any industry, so experimentation and feedback along the way would help to achieve the expected results.



3. Summary reports by local partners

3.1 Bulgaria - SOFENA

SOFENA is a non-governmental organisation and non-profit legal entity established in 2001 to assist Sofia Municipality in developing a sustainable energy policy. It provides assessments of energy consumption and of the potential of energy efficiency and renewable energy sources.

In Bulgaria, it proved to be a good practice to invite startup companies as well to the business breakfasts. Of course, it would not replace the mentoring, yet it is a great complementary way to reach the target. If they follow this practice, it is important to differentiate between the feedback forms and divide them into 3 groups: young SME/startup/normal SMEs.

SOFENA (Sofia Energy Agency) organised 4 business breakfasts together with their partner organisations in order to facilitate a higher attendance rate. Around 80 people participated during the four business breakfasts, out of them a quarter identified themselves as startups or young SMEs.

In terms of reaching out, contacts were established with local accelerators and startup organisations which moves slower than expected. At first contact, there is interest and willingness, yet to get to practical, organisational steps it takes time and effort. To gain some more traction, SOFENA was advised to contact the Bulgarian Business Forum which could be a good partner for dissemination and startup contacts.

As a best practice, they also send extra information about the project along with the registration form before the events.

Suggestions for the future: inviting energy startups to talk about their business/products and views on the future of energy could enrich the agenda and increase the participation in the mentoring.

Planning for the upcoming months:

- Collaboration with startup events – **Bulgarian Business Forum** (startup event in Varna [Innowave 2017 Business & Startup Conference](#), 20-21 October)
- Co-working spaces and incubators as co-organisers for the mentoring in the upcoming months

3.2 Czech Republic - ENVIROS

After an intensive Spring period with business breakfast, the startup activity planning started in June and has been going on for two months with emphasis on the planning.

Enviros contacted startup organisations like the Prague Startup Center, incubators of universities (Ostrava, Prague), and Impact Hub with the goal of establishing collaboration with other event organisers to increase the number of participants (experiment).

The work package originally recommended 5 Breakfast events with 30 participants at each, however according to Enviros experience and expertise, they prefer to experiment with smaller groups which might work better in their situation. In this case it would result in smaller number of participants, but can yield higher degree of engagement, thus impact. Since they are in the beginning of the activities, such experimentation is encouraged as long as it will not derive significantly from the work plan and planned KPIs.

According to their experience so far, startups are busy, which makes it hard to schedule sessions/events with them. Startups prefer to hear more about the practical aspect: how much they can save; therefore, a discussion style is recommended for the mentoring.

First mentoring session took place in collaboration with the Prague Startup Centre. Overall 41 participants, out of which 16 startups (Pitch Night by Prague Startup Center) participated in the event. It was divided in two parts: first part was a presentation about the START2ACT (online energy saving platform), the other was about startups pitching their businesses.

Feedback: good participant turnout, yet the problem was that if you do it in collaboration with other events, not all participants are interested in energy efficiency, therefore you need to calculate with a smaller number of survey respondents.

Challenges identified were mostly regarding the online survey, e.g.: how to make a difference between young SMEs and startups and how to engage companies to fill in the feedback form. They tried to hand out paper copies, however it proved to be quite long according to the first feedbacks. June, the month before summer holidays was also difficult in terms of setting up meetings and reaching out, thus in autumn the activities will continue.

For the upcoming months, private sessions on energy efficiency are in the making in collaboration with Impact Hub (Ostrava/Prague) with lots of individual questions like a workshop of practical cases.

3.3 Romania - ENERO

ENERO is an independent non-profit technical consultancy and research centre active in the energy field in Romania. Their primary focus is energy services and they work mostly with SMEs. Currently they are – similarly to most partners – busy organising and implementing the business breakfasts. They also opened it up for startups, thus far 2 startups participated in the events. They plan to continue this practice as it adds up to the total reach besides the standalone mentoring, and it is also an efficient way to work with the most interested startups.

In order to dive in to the startup sphere, they contacted by phone and/or by email startup hubs and co-working spaces across the country. Fortunately, the Romanian startup ecosystem does not concentrate only to Bucharest, but smaller cities like Cluj play an important role as well. For example, a meeting was scheduled with Impact Hub Bucharest who showed interest, but concrete steps are to be defined in the next months.

So far, the Cluj Hub connection (via Geonardo) yielded the best results as they were open to co-create a session within their biggest tech event, TechFest. Such occasions can prove cost-efficient to reach a high number of startups at the same time, so it is worth exploring similar collaboration opportunities with startup event organisers.

Biggest difficulty has been so far to find a topic or event which attract the incubators/co-working spaces. From first experience and contacts, it seems that energy efficiency as a standalone topic did not cut through the noise and made the external partners interested. To solve that, WP lead suggested to combine the mentoring with educational and inspirational activities (such as TechFest) where participants can learn about the energy topic more in-depth in combination with “hot” topics.

For the upcoming months, ENERO is planning the workshop with the startups hosted at Cluj Hub and potentially other workshops within Technology Festivals organised by them in Timisoara, Cluj si Iasi (www.techfest.ro). Proposals of issues were sent to be discussed within the various workshops.

3.4 Poland - KAPE

KAPE was created by an Act of the Polish government, and is promoting and implementing world class standards and practices in the fields of Energy Efficiency and Sustainable Development, on the basis of creating optimal energy efficiency solutions for their customers.

In the first half of the year, KAPE was also busy realising the business breakfasts. They are currently starting the implementation of the mentoring activities. To prepare for that, they contacted local incubators and co-working spaces, namely: Sobusy Biurco and the Talents Incubator who all showed interest in collaboration and organising events together.

As first event, Talents Incubator - Płońsk, invited KAPE to the launch an event of electric vehicles as the first public transport in Płońsk. The event will feature meetings with residents, authorities, local companies, and also startups. KAPE plans to insert a track about the START2ACT project and its services.

Also, academic incubators were contacted, yet most of them were on holidays. First physical meetings are scheduled for October. After contacting some incubators, KAPE's feedback is that some of them are interested in cooperating if they receive a fee or honorarium. This issue did not come up yet and will be a topic for discussion with the consortium. Besides academia, a contact was established with the Foundation for Enterprise Development and its "Your Start-up" programme.

The WP lead also connected KAPE to Startup Poland, a central startup association in the country. After the first discussions, it turns out that they are better partner for dissemination, than organizing events together.

As a general feedback, since most institutions are in "holiday mode", the majority of meetings and activities were rescheduled starting from September.

3.5 Hungary - GEO

The Hungarian partner, Geonardo slowly started to roll out the startup mentoring activities. Thanks to previous European projects and good partnerships in the community they start the outreach from an advantageous position. Mostly they contacted co-working spaces and incubators to entice them joining the project. Business breakfast invitation were also shared with these partners to increase the dissemination effort and spread the word.

Most promising collaboration partners so far are the Budapest Chamber of Commerce and Climate-KIC Budapest. In general, startups are not the primary focus of Geonardo's activities, therefore it poses a challenge but thanks to the well-established industry connections, they have a head start. For instance, they also plan to experiment with a collaboration with InnoEnergy's workshops, and potentially will contribute to their planned roadshow by inserting energy mentoring.

They got in touch also with the Budapest Enterprise Agency, and constantly monitor the startup/entrepreneurship-related events taking place in Budapest.

According to Geonardo's experience so far, smaller workshops with a specific audience can also work better besides the bigger mentoring sessions, so they will continue planning and exploring such opportunities.

3.6 Croatia - EHIP

The Croatian partner, The Energy Institute Hrvoje Požar's (EIH) is not only well-versed in the energy field, but also built an impressive network of entrepreneurship support organisations both in Croatia and in Europe. Given that background, EIH possesses good outreach capacity to companies, and used so far, their personal connections to spread the word.

At first, they would like to finish the organisation and implementation of business breakfasts, and then focus on the startup activities.

So far, they have contacted most of the big incubators in Croatia through direct contacts, personal connection and explained to these partners what EIH and START2ACT aims to achieve. EIH has a well-established contact with the **Croatian Chamber of Economy**. With the help of the chamber's startup unit, it is expected to be beneficial to connect EIH to the startup scene and engage Croatian startups with the START2ACT project.

In the planning for the upcoming months, energy startup mentoring programmes are planned to start in October, mostly as a combination of existing events, trainings and collaboration with local incubators/co-working spaces and event organisers.

3.7 Slovakia - SIEA

The Slovak Innovation and Energy Agency was mainly busy with organising the business breakfasts and on-site visits, combined with energy audits performed. As for startup mentoring activities, after desk research and understanding the local ecosystem, they concluded that for WP5 Bratislava is the most relevant city to carry out the mentoring activities and events. The Slovakian startup ecosystem is relatively small, in a phase where it is developing quickly, yet still concentrated in the capital.

So far contacts were established with the National Energy Cluster and Innogy, a well-known company offering innovative energy services, in fields of storage technologies, electromobility and energy efficiency. According to SIEA's plan, they will be able to organise events together in the upcoming months,

The challenges SIEA faced are similar to those of the other partners: contacts are hard to establish in the startup field as most their regular activities are targeting a different audience; thus, more personal relations are at hand. Best practices and further contacts from the local startup ecosystem are sought and will be in the focus of the startup activities.

As a recommendation, they also see the need of better branding for START2ACT's offer for startups as these young, starting companies are usually short of time and sensitive to practical offers where they see the return on their invested time. SIEA already has a great event venue, so a potential conference-like event can be planned and organised to attract more participants.

3.8 Belgium – SBE

Startups.be contacted a number of energy startups and experts to engage them in the project. Outreach moves ahead slower than expected which might be the result of the summer holidays schedule

Contacts were made with local energy startups like Opinum, YouKnowWatt, with green incubators like GreenBiz Brussels and also with energy experts from PXL (Hasselt). Belgium is thankfully buzzing currently with startup hype, and there are more and more startup support programmes focusing on green energy. Meetings with Ghent Watt

Factory (smart city accelerator), GreenVille (cleantech center) and EnergyVille (an association of the Flemish research institutes KU Leuven, VITO, imec and UHasselt in the field of sustainable energy and intelligent energy systems) are planned for the autumn months.

The team experimented to insert a short mentoring session in an existing event which did not meet the expectations as the interest of the participants did not necessarily intersect with energy efficiency. Lesson learned is that it might work better to organise smaller-scale, standalone events with the participation of startup companies and experts around interesting, trending topics in the energy domain.

Planning for the upcoming months:

- Events at accelerators and co-working spaces in the coming months
- Meetings with local green technology focused incubators/accelerators
- 6 September: large [matchmaking event](#) for companies and organisations active or interested in energy

3.9 United Kingdom - Carbon Trust

During the initial few months of the startup mentoring activity, the Carbon Trust has taken two approaches towards recruitment. Firstly, we contacted 40 incubator and accelerator organisations based in the UK to offer them the opportunity to host an energy efficiency mentoring session for their startups. We received a positive response from many of the organisations that we approached, which was a good proportion considering the timing just before the summer holidays. We have organised our first startup mentoring event for 26 September, hosted at Cockpit Arts in London.

Secondly, a few startups have contacted the Carbon Trust directly to request support through the START2ACT contact form on our website. Whilst all mentoring activities were originally planned to take place face-to-face and in group mentoring situations, we agreed with the project coordinators that if startups had approached us with specific enquiries it would be beneficial to set up one-to-one remote mentoring calls with them. We have found that this one-to-one approach allows startups to receive advice tailored to their individual businesses and needs, and have therefore received positive feedback so far. Five startups have participated in this manner to date, and each one of these has filled in the survey afterwards to allow the mentoring activity to be monitored.

Preparing for the startup mentoring activity has been a challenge, as Carbon Trust anticipates that each group of startups that they mentor will have a different set of needs and interests. To overcome this challenge, the Carbon Trust has created a presentation of 10 different topics that could be of interest to startups, including greening products and services, green marketing and choosing energy efficient premises. The Carbon Trust plans to then extract the relevant sections and add new content when preparing for each individual event once they know their target audience. Carbon Trust aims to keep this content as flexible as possible and take into account requests from their incubator/accelerator hosts. For example, Carbon Trust's first mentoring host, Cockpit Arts, supports art and design startups that have limited control over energy use in their building, so have they asked the Carbon Trust to focus on personal footprints (at work and at home) and greening the supply chain of arts materials.

For the remote mentoring, the team at the Carbon Trust is more easily able to tailor the content for the recipients, as they shape the calls around the particular questions that each startup has on greening their business. Before each call they determine which sector the startup is operating in, so that they can ensure that the most relevant Carbon Trust consultant can be assigned to each startup. If certain resources have been referred to during the call, Carbon Trust follows up with an email pinpointing further information that is relevant to the startup, so that they can continue to gather information about energy efficiency.



Going forward, the Carbon Trust plans to create a pipeline of mentoring events hosted in combination with incubators and accelerators across the UK. They will also re-engage with their START2ACT stakeholders that have a large number of startup contact, to gauge whether they also have an interest in co-hosting. This engagement will begin again in September once the summer holidays have finished. They also anticipate that further startups will approach Carbon Trust directly throughout the next 1.5 years, and will continue to offer remote mentoring to these organisations.

4. Planning for the upcoming months

Steps to make the next period count!

The individual interviews and knowledge sharing paved the way for the collaborative effort the consortium is set out to do in the upcoming months to accomplish the project goals. Exchange of best practices will be facilitated while the partners go ahead with their mentoring programmes. The consortium is already engaged with the local stakeholders, established relationships with startup support organisations like incubators, accelerators and co-working spaces. Co-creation of events, meaningful collaboration and standalone sessions will help reach as many startups as possible in the participating countries.

In most countries, the startup ecosystems are rapidly evolving creating more and more headlines and articles in the local media. Capitals are in general the breeding ground of startups, however incubators, accelerators and co-working spaces are popping up all over Europe. National **startup associations** like Startups.be, Austrian Startups, Startup Estonia or the German Startup Association collect information and showcase them in centralised platforms and maps. Not only at national level, but in many cases the most important cities also launch startup programmes like Startup Amsterdam or Startup Lisboa. More information about the European startup ecosystem players can be found here: www.europeanstartupnetwork.eu, a network which was co-founded by Startups.be

Startups typically work in co-working spaces, offices provided by incubators or accelerators, or simply from home or public spaces. Usually when they achieve product-market fit and start generating revenue or acquired a round of financing is the moment when they start to consider owning an office. Use cases differ as there is no one-size-fits-all scenario, therefore it is better to ask startups in which stage of development they are for the moment, whether they participate in incubation or acceleration programme, and how many employees are working on the project. Startup events will also play an important role in WP5 activities as their reach will greatly contribute to spread the message to as many young companies as possible.

As WP lead, Startups.be is committed to keep close contact with the partners to monitor the progress of the workplan. By acknowledging the challenging nature of the task, ongoing assistance to the partners will be provided.

Ideally, more and more blog posts and articles by the partners or engaged energy startup companies are expected to be published once the startup activities of the project intensify. More appealing, curated content directed to new forms of energy and energy efficiency methods should be in the focus. As the experience of the partners show, the last months were about planning and establishing the first contact with the local startup scene. In the current phase of the project these steps are satisfactory and point towards the right direction. During the progress meeting to be held in Warsaw, end of September 2017, partners will define strategic steps in person which will also be expected to have a positive impact on the work package 5. Energy efficiency is clearly the topic of the future, yet it tends to be difficult to argue when startups are busy accomplishing their short-term objectives. The challenge is to find a message which resonates with this specific audience, and therefore this is going to be the main priority for the upcoming months: communication strategy, defining key messages and channels.