

Climate and Energy Model Regions An Austrian blueprint for a successful bottom-up approach in the field of climate change and energy

The Climate and Energy Fund was founded in 2007 by the Austrian Federal Government to develop new, innovative ways of climate protection and sustainable development. Climate protection and energy projects in the fields of research, mobility and market penetration are financed by the Climate and Energy Fund, whose actions are based on two pillars – sustainability and efficiency.

One of the most successful Austrian initiatives of the recent years is the programme “Climate and Energy Model Regions”.

With this initiative, the Climate and Energy Fund supports regions that have made **“becoming independent of fossil fuels”** their prime target. This target is fulfilled by drawing on the regions’ own resources and by meeting energy demand with a smart mix of renewable energy generation, enhanced energy efficiency and smart controls.

For many years Austria has been acting as precursor in the field of energy regions. One of the most prominent examples is Güssing, Burgenland. Together with local pioneers in this matter, the Climate and Energy Fund has developed its strategy in a stakeholder process.

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Success factors

Three factors were identified for a successful implementation:

- 1) **An implementation concept:** The concept describes the status quo, sets goals and benchmarks, identifies potentials and sets out concrete actions. It is important to limit the region in terms of size – a maximum number of 60,000 inhabitants has proven to be ideal.
- 2) **A driving force on location:** The success of a model region often depends on a single person driving the implementation of projects of the action plan. This person also acts as contact person for the stakeholders of the region. Without such a person the implementation concept cannot be successful.
- 3) **Integration of the region into the development process:** By cooperation with stakeholders, local economy, local policy makers and citizens awareness for the project and its development can be increased and anchored within the region. Co-financing by local communities is a crucial factor.

The programme “Climate and Energy Model Regions” is divided into three phases:

Phase 1: Development of an implementation concept with predefined requirements with involvement of essential stakeholders.

Phase 2: A model region manager receives funding and support for the acquisition of know-how for a period of 2 years. The manager is in charge of the implementation of projects and of awareness-raising in the region.

Phase 3: The Climate and Energy Fund supports the Climate and Energy Model Regions with exclusive investment grants for projects in the fields of photovoltaics, wood heating systems, solar thermal energy, electric vehicles (in combination with photovoltaics) and the refurbishment of buildings.

Pursuing existing Climate and Energy Model Regions

The experiences of the first years show that the awareness-building process and networking activities in the Climate and Energy Model Regions need a long-term commitment in order to unfold their full effect. After a two-year implementation phase the Climate and Energy Fund offers the Regions the possibility to continue their activities during a three-year continuation phase. The purpose of the continuation phase is to further develop and strengthen existing networks and activities towards reaching their climate and energy policy goals.

The maximum amount of funding for the continuation phase is € 231,000. Regional co-financing is required for the continuation phase.

Quality management in the continuation phase

In order to support the Model Region managers in planning and executing the continuation phase in the best way possible, the implementation of a quality management system is required since 2014. The Regions receive support in the form of continuous on-site assistance and feedback in the form of an audit. Thereby, the Model Region managers are supported in increasing the quality of their energy policy-related work in the Climate and Energy Model Regions, in securing realised achievements and in furthering climate protection on a regional level by bundling forces even more.

The quality management in the Climate and Energy Regions is based on a methodology developed by e5 and is internationally referred to as European Energy Award (EEA). It resembles an assessment scheme for communities which has been adapted and expanded to fit the requirements of the Climate and Energy Model Regions.

Pilot projects

The existing Climate and Energy Model Regions are currently experiencing a dynamic within numerous relevant fields of activities. Many unforeseen project ideas are generated due to the prolific environment of a Model Region. Promising new project ideas can be supported within the scope of the Climate and Energy Model Region Programme. These projects shall then be put into practice in the form of flagship projects and shall motivate other regions to implement pilot projects of their own.

Supporting activities

Networking and training: At least two times per year the Austrian model region managers meet for a two-day training and networking event. The managers are educated in relevant topics, but also focus on disseminating their know-how.

Energy monitoring: Every region is obliged to undertake monitoring activities of certain key data (consumption and production). This obligation implies great awareness for the problem and is necessary to directly illustrate the project's success.

Efficient climate protection needs profound, structural changes. The approach followed by the Climate and Energy Model Regions may be but one brick, but it is a supporting brick. The programme has by now developed a great dynamic in Austria, and has created **124 Climate and Energy Model Regions, including 2 tourism focus regions and one bioeconomy and circular economy focus region** with **1134 participating communities**. Together, these regions inhabit about **3.26 million citizens**. The project's dynamic can be seen by looking at the increased number of projects implied and the participation of many important stakeholders.

Climate and Energy Fund

Bernd Vogl, General Manager | bernd.vogl@klimafonds.gv.at

Nicole Kirchberger, Programme Manager | nicole.kirchberger@klimafonds.gv.at

Miriam Schönbrunn, Referentin | miriam.schoenbrunn@klimafonds.gv.at

Leopold-Ungar-Platz 2 | Stiege 1 | Top 142

1190 Vienna, Austria

Tel.: (+43 1) 585 03 90-0

www.klimafonds.gv.at and www.klimaundenergiemodellregionen.at

Last update: September 2023