

Zagreb tesla solar roof

Solarization in 10 Croatian cities will create up to 8,000 green jobs annually, through community-led energy transition. The aim of the SOL4ALL project, funded by the European Institute of Innovation and Technology (EIT) Climate KIC Cities Accelerator Programme, is to accelerate regeneration after the pandemic by delivering 1,000 solar photovoltaic systems to urban households.

As European countries plan their recovery from the coronacrisis, the programme helps citizens build back better in a resilient way. EIT Climate-KIC selected a total of 11 projects across Europe to receive funding through the Pandemic Response Projects, which (along the Venture Support Instrument) are part of the EUR60 million EIT Crisis Response Initiative launched in May.

"We learned from this crisis that we cannot afford to go back to business-as-usual. That's why climate action through innovation is at the heart of the European recovery plan," EIT Climate-KIC's CEO Kirsten Dunlop said. "I was very impressed by the quality of the submissions we received and I am convinced that the successful projects have a great potential to not only mitigate the socio-economic impact of COVID-19 by supporting job creation, but also to unlock opportunities to help create systems resilience in the European Union and advance the green recovery."

The total budget for SOL4ALL amounts to EUR121.000, of which 85% was covered by EIT. Construction works started in July and installing panels with a 300 KW capacity will take approximately six months.

"We have started community activation and mobilization activities, identifying stakeholders to be involved in the project like households, unemployed people, solar entrepreneurs and companies," explains Melani Furlan, community energy specialist and project manager at ZEZ.

"The business model for community-led solarization, has local solar cooperatives as a key element. Cooperatives can act as community energy hubs, connecting private households willing to invest in rooftop solar with local entrepreneurs in the field of solar energy. These local hubs can be utilized to build local resilience in the long run."

By the end of the year, ZEZ hopes to engage at least 1,000 citizens, train 30 new installers and solar ambassadors, establish two solar cooperatives and involve two neighbouring countries. To do so, a national campaign for solar energy will be delivered during the project span and connected with the National Fund Call.

About 25,000 people in Croatia had lost their jobs because of the pandemic by May 2020 and 160,000 more are expected to do the same in the next months. Forecasts indicate a peak unemployment rate of 26% in 2021, in addition to a significant emigration rate of young, educated people.

Rooftops are under-utilized, while the country's largest solar PV manufacturer SOLVIS produces mostly for export. In fact, Croatia has one of the lowest shares of photovoltaic in its electricity mix among EU member states.

"I think the biggest issues would have been to demonstrate Croatia and Slovenia are the ideal candidates for effectively selling solar power to the utility company that could then sell energy to the customers, and also to find the partner organizations needed for pulling off the project, in terms of finance, engagement, social support and political expertise," Thomas Osdoba, senior advisor at EIT Climate-KIC, says.

"One of the things that we are trying to show here is that in the Balkan region, particularly in Croatia and Slovenia, communities have the ability to move fast and they can embrace the innovation that many cities are still struggling to take on. They can aggregate and work together through a cooperative structure and it's meant to be a demonstration of how to go faster and get renewable energy more deeply into the mix of electricity. Everybody needs a boost in that, even real leaders like Germany or Portugal."

"We want to move the 2050 target closer to the present and stimulate cities and citizens to participate and support the 2,700 MW target much sooner than 2050," Furlan adds. "Anticipated investment is in the range of EUR600-900. This would create between 3,000 and 8,000 green jobs annually."

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