A common methodology for the GEAR@SME project: The Handbook

The GEAR@SME project addresses the challenge of scaling up energy efficiency and renewable energy in SMEs. The core idea of the project is that support will be coordinated to groups of SMEs, for example, linked to industrial areas or business parks, and provided through an organization or actor that is already known and trusted by the SMEs.

This handbook describes the common methodology developed within the GEAR@SME project from the principles of activating (motivating SMEs to take action to increase energy efficiency), organizing (creating networks and opportunities for common action), enabling (providing knowledge, support and tools) and embedding (acting within existing structures to maximize the efficiency). A starting point for the methodology is the hypothesis that SMEs can benefit from energy efficiency actions but have limited time and resources to implement them.

For the methodology and throughout this handbook, the following key concepts, are vital:

- A collective approach – a cluster of SMEs are offered the same coordinated services and activities and supported to exchange experience and increase networking;
- A local SME energy collective – the group of SMEs that are addressed by the Trusted Partner. It can be a local industrial area, a business park, the SMEs in a municipality, or any other geographically defined area.
- The Trusted Partner – a neutral actor, trusted by the SMEs, that drives the development of the energy collective and supports the SMEs in tasks related to energy efficiency;
- Energy Service Suppliers – energy consultants, ESCOs, grid operators and technology suppliers, that provide energy expertise and services for the local SME energy collective;
- Multiplier Organizations – generally non-profit organizations with a large potential to support and reach SMEs on the regional or national level, who play an important role for establishment and scale-up of local SME energy collectives.
- The 'Energy Efficient SME' portal – an online portal dedicated to the project, which provides support material, and tools linked to the methodology (www.energyefficientsme.eu).

The methodology is based on literature and experiences from successful energy efficiency initiatives in Germany, Italy, the Netherlands, Romania, and Sweden. For a detailed description of such initiatives, see Deliverable 2.1 from the GEAR@SME project.

The methodology has been tested and validated in four use cases in industrial areas in Germany, Italy, the Netherlands, and Romania, before upscaling to a larger group of local/regional clusters and roll-out activities across Europe. To further support the methodology and roll-out, a toolset has been developed that can be accessed through the 'Energy Efficient SME' portal. The toolset includes a database on best practices for energy efficiency measures, analysis and calculation tools, contracting support tools, and training materials.