

## NEWSLETTER NO.4

January 2026



**refinee**



Co-funded by  
the European Union

### ***Introduction***

Welcome to the fourth edition of the REFINEE project newsletter!

This issue comes at a particularly dynamic moment for our consortium, as several important activities are now well underway.

At the end of November, partners gathered in Ljubljana for the third consortium meeting, where we reviewed progress, aligned on upcoming milestones, and deepened collaboration across work packages. The meeting provided an excellent opportunity to exchange insights and ensure strong coordination as the project enters its next phase.

Meanwhile, interviews with key stakeholders are progressing in Italy and Croatia. Our team is engaging key stakeholders through a series of in-depth interviews, capturing valuable insights that are already shaping the project's direction.

We are also pleased to announce that the project's best-practice videos have now been selected. This materials will contribute to raising awareness of successful approaches in the field and will serve as an important resource for dissemination and stakeholder engagement.

In this edition, we're excited to introduce you to our project partner AbiLab. You'll get an inside look at their core activities, areas of expertise, and the key roles they play within the REFINEE project.

We will also share one of the project's key moments in Ljubljana: our dialogue with Slovenian stakeholders, which provided valuable insights and strengthened collaboration on the ground.

Thank you for following our journey. We look forward to sharing more developments as REFINEE continues to advance its goals.

### ***Your REFINEE Team***

## **Highlights**

*This edition captures the energy of our recent activities: from the successful consortium meeting in Ljubljana, where partners reviewed progress and discussed the latest KPI updates, to ongoing stakeholder interviews that included a valuable conversation with a Slovenian stakeholder during the event.*

*We also unveil the new guidelines for the upcoming multi-stakeholder workshops, beginning with the first session in Milan, Italy, in April 2026, followed by events in Croatia and Slovenia. We look forward to engaging with stakeholders across these workshops.*

*Finally, the selection of the project's best-practice videos, which play an important role in sharing effective approaches in energy efficiency and renewable energy, marks an important milestone for our communication and dissemination efforts.*

*Together, these achievements confirm that REFINEE is accelerating forward with clear direction and growing impact.*

### ***REFINEE Consortium gathers in Ljubljana for productive meeting***



*The third REFINEE consortium meeting took place in Ljubljana, Slovenia, on 25–26 November, bringing together partners for two days full of discussions, updates, and planning for the next phase of the project.*

*During the meeting, partners shared the latest updates from across the REFINEE work packages, reflecting on progress so far and making sure everyone is aligned on the next steps. The discussions helped coordinate efforts and keep the project moving forward smoothly.*

*REFINEE is actively supporting SMEs in Slovenia, Croatia, and Italy to adopt energy-efficient solutions and reduce their environmental footprint. A key focus of the meeting was on financial instruments that make it easier for SMEs to invest in sustainable solutions. FVG Plus presented updated financing schemes, including portfolio guarantees that help reduce barriers for SMEs, while the Istria Region and IRENA shared updates on local plans for launching the hybrid financial instrument. Participants also discussed regulatory challenges, particularly those related to energy communities in Croatia, highlighting areas where support and guidance are needed.*

*A standout moment was the dialogue with Slovenian stakeholders, offering valuable insights into local perspectives. This exchange strengthened cooperation between the consortium and local actors, highlighting practical challenges such as administrative complexity, verification requirements, and limited internal capacity within SMEs and financial institutions.*

*The meeting also celebrated some of REFINEE's tangible impacts: six SMEs were selected for promotional videos to showcase best practices in energy efficiency. These videos highlight the strategies, technologies, and results achieved, including energy and cost savings and reduced CO<sub>2</sub> emissions. Importantly, partners are also exploring the human side of these changes, focusing on the role of owners, technicians, and production managers in driving energy-efficient transformations.*

*The Investor Confidence Assessment (ICA) tool was introduced and will be demonstrated online in January 2026. This tool will help the consortium evaluate selected projects both before and after implementation.*

*Finally, partners reviewed the next project milestone, agreeing on objectives, expected outputs, and timelines. Clear responsibilities were defined to ensure continued progress and smooth collaboration.*

*All in all, the Ljubljana meeting reinforced teamwork and confirmed the consortium's shared commitment to advancing REFINEE in the coming months.*

### **ABI Lab**

*ABI Lab is the Italian Research and Innovation centre for the banking sector, promoted by the Italian Banking Association (ABI). It works through dedicated Observatories that cover key research areas, including Sustainable Transition, Digital Transformation & Fintech, Cybersecurity, Information Governance & AI, and IT Architectures, supporting the banking industry with applied research, market insight, and collaborative initiatives. Within this framework, the Sustainable Transition research area supports banks in accelerating the shift toward a low-carbon economy by connecting financial actors with companies, especially SMEs, and with the broader ecosystem of solution providers and institutions. ABI Lab acts as a bridge between sustainability goals and implementation, addressing common barriers such as limited technical capacity, fragmented information, and uncertainty around funding options for energy efficiency investments.*

*In REFINEE, ABI Lab brings a strong financial-sector perspective, leveraging its expertise and networks to strengthen the link between energy transition investments and the financing solutions that enable them in the real economy, while supporting dissemination and knowledge-sharing to foster broader uptake.*

### **What does ABI Lab do within the project?**

*ABI Lab is mainly engaged in two complementary streams of work designed to improve both market understanding and stakeholder alignment.*

#### **1) Convening key stakeholders through a dedicated focus group**

*ABI Lab is going to organize one focus group bringing together stakeholders across the energy efficiency value chain to discuss needs, constraints, and opportunities connected to SMEs' transition investments. A core element of this activity is ensuring the active involvement of banks, so that financing solutions, risk perceptions, and eligibility requirements are discussed alongside the operational realities of SMEs and solution providers—enabling a concrete, informed dialogue with SMEs and other reference actors.*

#### **2) Mapping Italian financing solutions for SMEs' energy efficiency**

*ABI Lab has already delivered a structured overview of Italian financing products supporting SMEs' energy efficiency initiatives. Together with ABI, ABI Lab conducted a targeted survey among banks and produced an analysis that:*

- *highlights how banks are already supporting companies in their energy transition;*
- *makes financing opportunities more visible and understandable for SMEs;*
- *Identifies barriers and improvement of levers in the bank–SME dialogue, also showcasing what banks are doing to overcome these obstacles.*

*The evidence collected through this activity will help inform discussions and comparisons with SMEs and key stakeholders, increasing awareness of the opportunities linked to energy efficiency investments—also in connection with the innovative financing schemes launched by REFINEE. While the schemes have a territorial focus, ABI Lab supports the dissemination of results to facilitate replicability at the national level.*

### **Public discussion with key Slovenian stakeholders**

*As part of the Refinee project's ongoing commitment to stakeholder engagement and knowledge exchange, a public discussion with key Slovenian stakeholders was successfully held in Ljubljana. The event brought together representatives from finance, industry, and business development sectors to exchange perspectives on innovation, sustainability, and future-oriented solutions.*

*The discussion featured distinguished stakeholders from SID Banka, Robotina, Kisik, OTP Banka, and BTC, each contributing valuable insights from their respective fields. The diversity of participants enabled a multidisciplinary dialogue, reflecting the interconnected nature of financial mechanisms, technological innovation, and sustainable business models.*

*The discussion provided valuable insights into the current situation in Slovenia regarding SME energy efficiency investments, including the practical limitations companies face and the regulatory conditions influencing their decisions*

*Financial institutions explained how verification requirements, energy audits and administrative obligations shape loan offerings, while SMEs highlighted capacity constraints and the complexity of available support schemes. KISIK's overview of national legislation and energy communities further clarified the opportunities and challenges within the Slovenian policy environment. Overall, the*

exchange helped the consortium better understand the Slovenian context and assess which financial instruments or support models could realistically be replicated or adapted in the future.

The public discussion encouraged open dialogue, allowing participants to reflect on current challenges, identify opportunities for collaboration, and explore pathways for future engagement within the Refinee project. Audience interaction further enriched the exchange, reinforcing the value of inclusive stakeholder participation.



REgional-based FINancing schemes to pool private investments in tailored  
Energy Efficiency plans for SMEs of strategic value chains

**DESCRIPTION**

REFINEE will improve the energy efficiency of SMEs in Friuli Venezia Giulia and Istria, helping companies to invest in sustainable solutions and reduce their environmental impact by promoting the transition towards a greener and more resilient economy

**PROJECT DURATION**

1 st October 2024 - 30 th September 2027



**PROJECT BUDGET**



1.572.328,63 €  
(with co-financing of the LIFE-CET program of 95%)



CONTACT [irena@irena-istra.hr](mailto:irena@irena-istra.hr) [www.irena-istra.hr](http://www.irena-istra.hr)