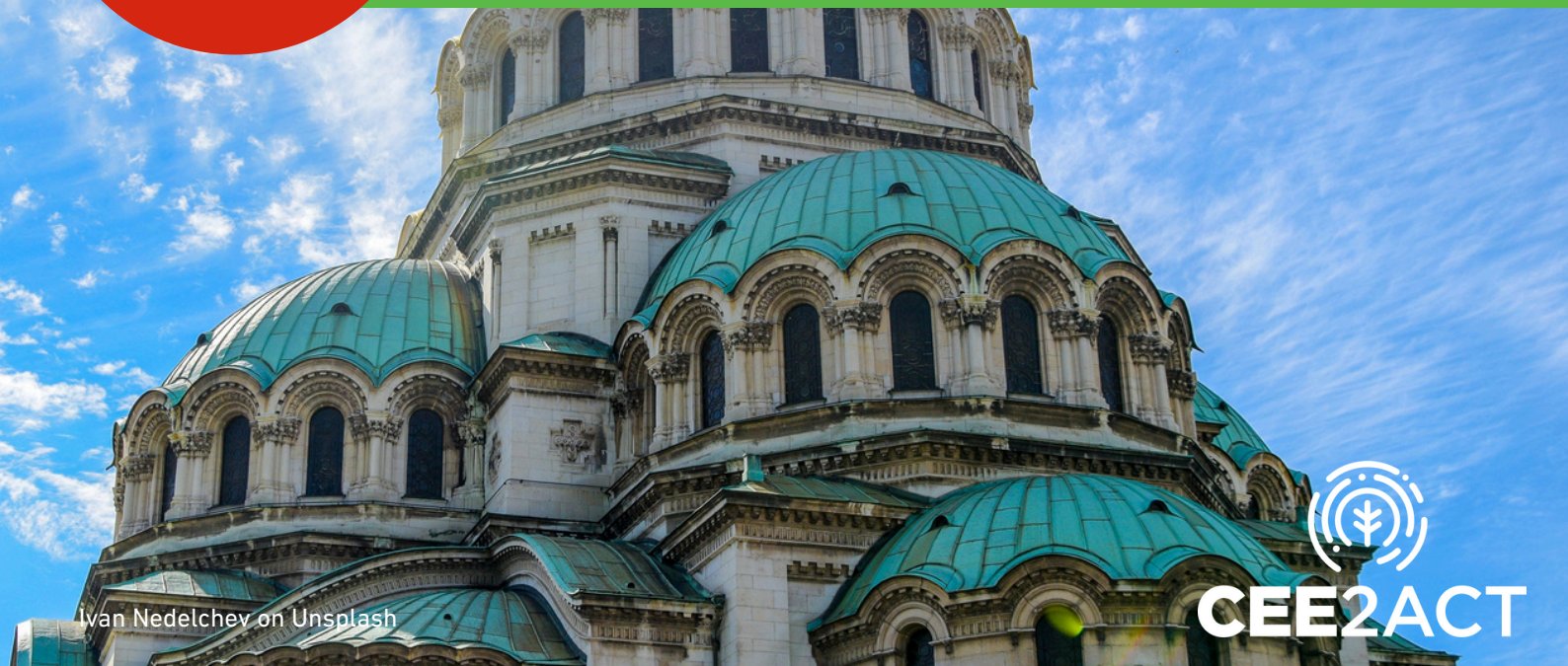




# Bulgaria

Empowering the Central and Eastern European Countries to Develop Bioeconomy Strategies and Action Plans



CEE2ACT

**Bulgaria's bioeconomy is shaped by a variety of separate strategies and policy frameworks on sectors** such as agriculture, forestry, innovation and waste management. Despite the growing awareness and political interest of the country in bioeconomy, a unified national strategy is still missing.

Amid a slow political progress and shifting leadership, the Bulgarian National Bioeconomy Hub (NBH) was launched in June 2023 under the leadership of the Executive Forest Agency (EFA). The Hub has emerged as key driver in bringing bioeconomy into the national agenda. It works to connect different ministries relevant to circular bioeconomy, foster cross-sectoral cooperation, and prepare the ground for the development of a national bioeconomy strategy.



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## Challenges

The Bulgarian Hub faced challenges in building local, bottom-up stakeholder engagement. Small and medium-sized enterprises' (SMEs) participation remains low despite the Hub's active outreach. This is due to the challenging economic situations and lack of clear incentives due to the absence of a national bioeconomy strategy, insufficient experience with bioeconomy, and lack of funding instruments. While larger companies, especially in timber processing sector, showed interest and attended hub workshops, most SMEs remained disengaged.

Accordingly, **the hub coordinator stressed the need to involve SMEs and to better understand their challenges and aspirations for bioeconomy development.** Finally, lack of visibility and clarity of the hub's purpose made it harder to sustain stakeholder motivation, highlighting the need for continuous communication, while offering tangible values for participants, for example through access to training materials and networking opportunities. Logistical barriers also limited regional involvement, concentrating the Hub's activities in the country's capital, Sofia.



## Key Successes

The Bulgarian Hub achieved **notable successes despite the aforementioned challenges.** Its greatest accomplishment was in uniting a wide range of stakeholders in the fragmented bioeconomy landscape, creating valuable opportunities for cross-sector dialogues. Credibility was further strengthened by the Deputy Minister of Agriculture's endorsement, which signaled political commitment and reassured participants. Academia and research institutions also played a key role, contributing expertise, project experience, and input to the Memorandum of Understanding (MoU).

### Key successes include:



**High-level political support:** Visible backing from the Deputy Minister of Agriculture set an important precedent for government engagement.



**Active role of academia and research:** Institutions such as the Agricultural University of Plovdiv, the Bulgarian Forest University, and the Bulgarian Agricultural Academy enriched discussions with expertise and project results.



**Use of CEE2ACT tools:** Resources like the e-learning platform, B2B instruments, and international video case studies were highly valued for capacity building and showcasing practical strategies.



**Collaboration with other initiatives:** Partnerships with projects such as BIOEAST created synergies and strengthened the national bioeconomy ecosystem.



**Sustained engagement:** The working group was renewed with fresh participants when some members withdrew, maintaining momentum and continuity.

Overall, the Hub has laid a solid foundation for future development of bioeconomy. The hub coordinator, Executive Forest Agency (EFA), perceived the progress made as positive, confirming the hub's value as a platform for collaboration, knowledge exchange, and political visibility in advancing the bioeconomy.

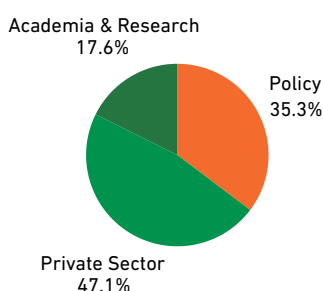


## Bottom-up Stakeholder Engagement

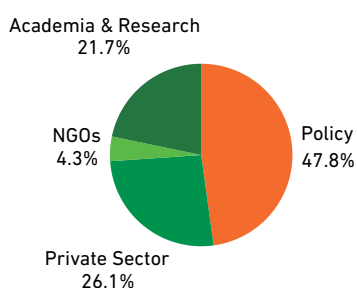
The Bulgarian Hub found that **face-to-face workshops were the most effective form of stakeholder engagement**. Across three workshops, representatives from government, academia, and industry exchanged ideas, learned from international experts, and developed proposals for a national roadmap. These meetings enabled mutual learning across sectors that are not usually involved in bioeconomy discussions, such as the food industry.

Participation trends showed a gradual improvement in gender balance (from 77% male to 63% male by the third workshop), though this was not the result of a targeted strategy. Surveys revealed that many participants already had experience with bioeconomy initiatives, but awareness levels varied, underlining the importance of capacity-building.

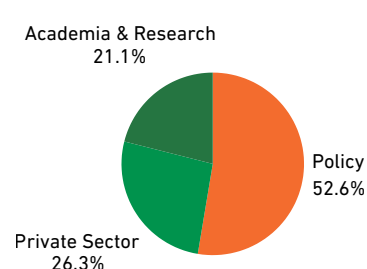
### Workshop 1



### Workshop 2



### Workshop 3



**The received feedback was mixed: while some participants expressed high satisfaction, others were critical of aspects like duration and format.** Still, 85% felt they had opportunities to voice their expectations, and most participants reported an increased knowledge (63%) and confidence (55%) in communicating about bioeconomy. Communication among stakeholders also improved slightly, though results were uneven.

Stakeholder collaboration was advancing through the development of an MoU, drafted by EFA and reviewed by ministries and academic institutions. The MoU aimed to improve communication, seek joint funding, and promote capacity-building, and included a contact list of signatories to facilitate direct exchanges. While **the MoU was considered a key success**, EFA noted the need to translate commitments into concrete joint activities and establish a formal structure to sustain collaboration.



**The MoU development also catalyzed deeper engagement among hub members**, prompting discussions on priorities, challenges, and expectations across sectors. Stakeholders emphasized the need for better communication between government, academia, and industry to facilitate shared positions and joint funding applications. **The MoU was successfully signed in March 2025.**



A longer-term goal in the MoU is to establish a non-profit legal entity as **the Hub's institutional home, allowing membership fees, formal policy representation, and participation in European initiatives**. This will require careful coordination, as EFA cannot set up such an entity alone, so other actors will be involved as legal founders while maintaining ties to public authorities.





## Sustainability and the Role of CEE2ACT

Ensuring the Hub's sustainability beyond the project lifetime is essential. **Hub's stakeholders seek to transition it into a permanent structure to continue promoting the bioeconomy and coordinating national efforts.** After the MoU has been signed, the Hub can formalize itself as a non-profit organisation, enabling joint funding applications, training programs, and policy advocacy. **A consortium of stakeholders may also be formed to pool resources,** while ongoing support from the Ministry of Agriculture and other public institutions will remain crucial for credibility and alignment with national strategies.

The CEE2ACT project was central to establishing and supporting the Bulgarian Hub, providing structured materials, knowledge resources, meetings for experience exchange, and tools like the e-learning platform and B2B services. These resources strengthened both the Hub as well as individual and institutional capacities. EFA noted that more informal exchanges among hub members could further enhance the peer learning. Overall, **the CEE2ACT's support was considered timely, collaborative, and instrumental in the Hub's progress.**



## Lessons Learned and a Way Forward

The Bulgarian Hub shows that bottom-up stakeholder engagement can effectively build a shared interest and capacity for the bioeconomy even in the absence of a national strategy. Success relies on high-level political support, a clear cooperation framework (MoU), and practical capacity-building tools. Challenges remain in engaging SMEs, maintaining participation, and translating commitment into sustained action. Formalizing the Hub as a legal entity and securing dedicated funding are seen as crucial next steps to consolidate and expand its achievements.



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