



# Serbia

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



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Launched in October 2023 and coordinated by the Institute of Forestry, the **Serbian National Bioeconomy Hub (NBH)** introduced the then-unfamiliar bioeconomy concept into national dialogue. Stakeholders quickly recognised links to their existing work, and interest has been growing.

The Hub has since become a trusted cross-sector platform, bringing together academia, research institutions, public authorities, NGOs, and the private sector, and evolving into a “big family,” as the Hub coordinator describes it, united around the development of Serbia's bioeconomy.



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## Challenges

Early on, **the Serbian Hub found it difficult to identify NGOs working on bioeconomy.** But, new connections formed after the first workshop helped bring relevant organisations on board, **an important step for ensuring bottom-up engagement.** Recent political unrest, including the ongoing student and civil society protests, has also affected the Hub, likely contributing to a lowered ministry's participation in the third workshop.

Another challenge has been inconsistent attendance: **some stakeholders provide input between events but do not join in-person meetings, limiting peer exchange and transparency.** This remains an area for improvement.



## Key successes

The Serbian National Bioeconomy Hub has quickly **developed into a collaborative** and trusted platform, enabling stakeholders to jointly advance circular bioeconomy development in Serbia.

### Key successes include:



**Breakthrough in national policy:** Circular bioeconomy concepts were integrated into the new national Program for the Development of the Circular Economy, the first Serbian policy document to explicitly reference bioeconomy.



**Cross-sector mobilisation:** The hub has brought together stakeholders from academia, research institutions, public authorities, NGOs, and the private sector, expanding cooperation and strengthening Serbia's bioeconomy community.



**Inclusive and participatory engagement:** Workshops ensured broad involvement and strong gender balance, fostering open dialogue and transparent collaboration among stakeholders.



**Growing national momentum:** The increasing number of bioeconomy-related events and initiatives across Serbia demonstrates rising interest in the topic and highlights the hub's role in supporting this momentum.

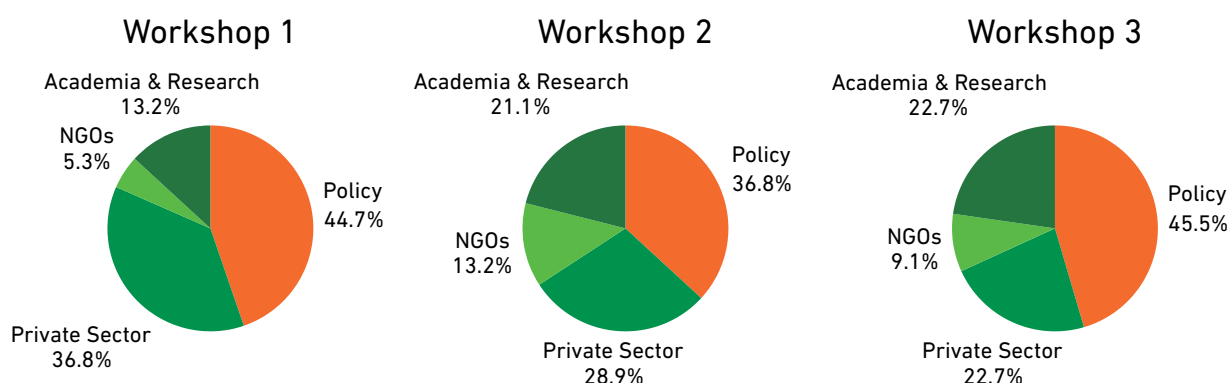
Together, these achievements position the Serbian National Bioeconomy Hub as an emerging driver of **collaboration, knowledge exchange, and policy development in Serbia's circular bioeconomy.**



## **Bottom-up stakeholder engagement**

**The Serbian Hub applies a gradual, relationship-driven engagement model,** expanding from existing contacts to a broad and diverse stakeholder community. Regular communication—particularly weekly email updates with event invitations, funding opportunities, and relevant news—has played a key role in sustaining interest and collaboration.

Three national workshops held in 2023, 2024 and 2025 served as the main anchor points for engagement. Hosted by the Chamber of Commerce and Industry of Serbia, they provided accessible spaces for open discussion, co-creation, and the exchange of expectations and challenges. While formal working groups have not yet been established, the hub anticipates creating such structures as stakeholder's familiarity with bioeconomy continues to grow.



A post-workshop survey in early 2025 showed strong satisfaction with the CEE2ACT workshops, with high approval for duration and content relevance (both 88%) as well as overall format (80%). Nearly half of participants (46%) said the hub significantly strengthened their network-building, and an overwhelming majority (96%) felt they had enough space to express expectations and goals. Engagement impacts were also positive: many reported improved communication and increased confidence in discussing bioeconomy, and 62% noted a significant rise in their knowledge of bioeconomy challenges and solutions. Importantly, 88% intend to continue collaborating with stakeholders they met through CEE2ACT.



**The development of the MoU marked a key step in strengthening collaboration** among Serbian bioeconomy stakeholders. It outlines shared principles for cooperation, supports joint action, and aligns with the national bioeconomy roadmap, with a strong emphasis on capacity building and knowledge transfer.



**On 26 September 2025, the Institute of Forestry successfully organised an MoU signing ceremony** at the Scientific Research Station “Lipovica,” bringing together key actors to formalise their commitment. A short video from the event is available here: <https://youtu.be/PBEtL5wfLIA>





## Sustainability and the Role of CEE2ACT

The Serbian Hub is committed to continuing its work beyond the CEE2ACT. The Institute of Forestry will remain the coordinator for at least two years after the project ends, with the aim of shaping a more formal hub structure and establishing a clear long-term governance.

The CEE2ACT arrived at a pivotal time for Serbia, aligning with growing national interest in the circular economy. **Key project outputs**—the MoU, National Roadmap, and National Bioeconomy Hub—**have been integrated into the national Programme for Circular Economy**. The Hub coordinator highlighted a strong and timely support, especially in establishing the Hub, structuring workshops, and identifying and engaging stakeholders. No major improvements were suggested. The project also strengthened the team's capacity, improving their confidence and skills in stakeholder engagement and outreach.



## Lessons Learned and a Way Forward

Key lessons from the Serbian Hub highlight the value of capacity building and knowledge transfer when introducing bioeconomy as a new concept. These efforts help create a shared understanding among diverse stakeholders.

Building on existing relationships while steadily expanding the network prove effective in increasing engagement, and regular communication helps maintain trust and continuity. Hosting events in central, accessible locations further support inclusive participation. Finally, keeping the MoU broad and flexible is seen as crucial for securing stakeholder buy-in and allowing new actors to join over time.



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