

A person wearing an orange safety helmet and a watch, holding a piece of coal. The background is dark, and the person's face is partially visible through the helmet's visor.

SUPPORTING

THE IMPLEMENTATION

OF JUST TRANSITIONS

IN COAL REGIONS

**HOW EU POLICYMAKERS CAN FACILITATE
CITIZEN PARTICIPATION, ADDRESS TRANSITION
IMPACTS, TACKLE ENERGY POVERTY, AND
CONTRIBUTE TO NEW SOCIO-CULTURAL
IDENTITIES.**

Nine European research institutes and energy agencies share evidence on how to make the transition just for all citizens.

SUMMARY OF RECOMMENDATIONS



Promote bottom-up approaches to policy design and implementation that support active citizen participation.

Creating the conditions for citizens to shape transitions will ensure that transition processes are inclusive, effective, and sustainable, thereby maximising their positive impact on communities.



Support territories to manage and monitor the positive and negative impacts of transitions away from coal.

To ensure just outcomes, it is essential to monitor transitions and enable the implementation of measures that minimise negative impacts and capitalise on positive ones.



Encourage Member States to sufficiently address energy poverty in the implementation of just transitions.

This requires that public funds are specifically targeted at the energy poor and enable the implementation of renewable energy and energy efficiency measures in housing to ensure that all communities, especially the most vulnerable, benefit from the transition.



Enable investments in social and cultural just transition projects to "reshape" identity and create cohesion.

European Union funding should not only facilitate the development of large-scale projects, but also support actions that address social vulnerabilities and contribute to the social and demographic fabric of societies.



INTRODUCTION

This policy brief is aimed at European Union (EU) policymakers and decision-makers and provides key recommendations for the rigorous implementation and monitoring of the Just Transition Mechanism (JTM).

POLICY CONTEXT

The EU's commitment to achieve climate neutrality by 2050, as articulated in the European Green Deal, requires a concerted effort to transition away from fossil fuels. Among these fuels, coal is of particular importance as it has the highest carbon dioxide emission factor [1]. The EU has made significant progress in establishing a comprehensive and robust policy framework to support coal regions that have relied on coal to power their economies. At the heart of this framework is the Just Transition Mechanism (JTM) with its three pillars: the Just Transition Fund (JTF), the InvestEU programme and the Public Sector Loan Facility. The Energy Efficiency Directive (EED), the recently updated Energy Performance of Buildings Directive (EPBD), the Renewable Energy Directive (RED), the National Energy and Climate Plan (NECP) mechanism and the Social Climate Fund Regulation are also key to addressing the complex challenges of phasing out coal.

WHY THE URGENCY?

As coal regions in transition enter the implementation phase of their Territorial Just Transition Plans (TJTPs), this can be a timely window of opportunity for EU policymakers to ensure that coal phase-out processes are inclusive, equitable, and deliver tangible and just outcomes for all affected communities, especially vulnerable ones. There are several risks for citizens in coal regions if timely actions are not taken. First, the costs and benefits of the transition may not be shared equitably, potentially widening the gap between different socio-economic groups. Not only are marginalised communities at risk of increased energy poverty, but they are also at risk of becoming even more energy poor if specific measures to address energy poverty are not implemented, exacerbating existing inequalities and hardships.



WHY THE URGENCY?

In addition, without active citizen participation, there may be resistance and lack of buy-in from local communities, undermining the success and sustainability of transition efforts. Moreover, insufficient action in coal regions puts regions at risk of falling short of the goal of leaving no one behind. Climate degradation will continue unless forward-looking strategies are adopted that take into account not only environmental, but also social, cultural and demographic considerations. Poor or partial implementation by EU Member States, due to a lack of adequate technical guidance and oversight, can lead to sub-optimal outcomes, wasted resources and the replication of exclusionary and unfair outcomes. Ultimately, the lack of a holistic approach that promotes justice in transition processes may hamper progress towards the EU's climate neutrality targets and jeopardise the overarching objectives of the European Green Deal.

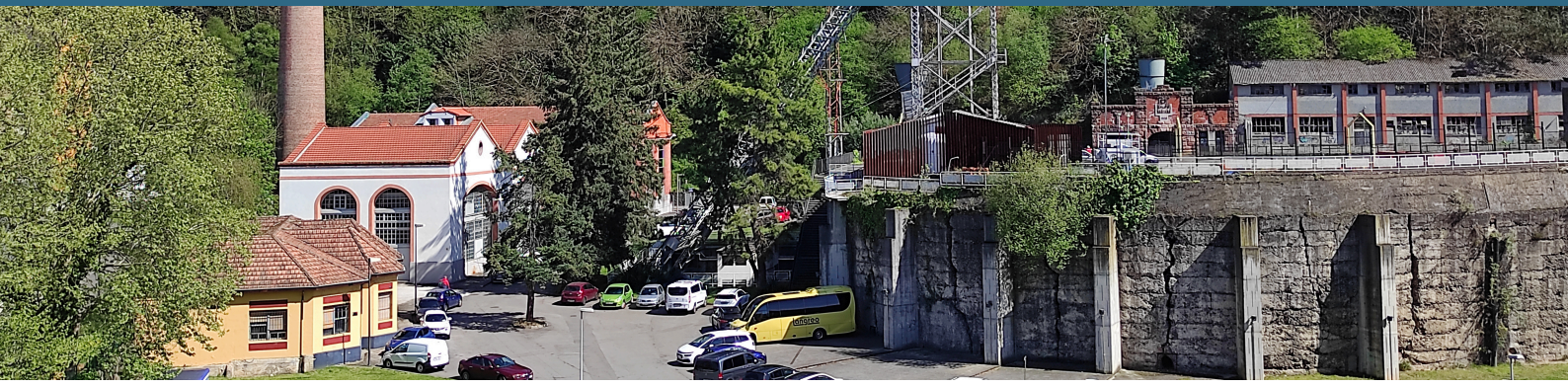
Next year will be critical as national governments have to develop their plans to benefit from the Social Climate Fund, including new national building renovation plans to renovate the worst performing buildings, and integrating measures to tackle energy poverty into these plans. There is a risk that emission reduction targets will dominate considerations and that social justice will not receive sufficient national policy attention, with the risk that money will not reach the most vulnerable people in the transition. There is also a risk that the national implementation of several EU policies will not be coordinated across different governmental levels.



EVIDENCE BASE

The policy brief is based on research on the status quo of the just transition process in six coal regions, on analyses of energy poverty and transition impacts, as well as on the results and conclusions of the region-to-region learning workshop*, 15 citizens' workshops, over 500 surveyed citizens and over 50 citizen interviews conducted in Stara Zagora (Bulgaria), Istria (Croatia), Western Macedonia (Greece), Silesia (Poland), Jiu Valley (Romania) and Asturias (Spain). The findings have been developed within the framework of the LIFE project JJust Transitions and EMpowerment against energy poverty (JUSTEM), supported by its nine project partners. The JUSTEM consortium now calls on EU policymakers to take several key actions to ensure effective and inclusive implementation of just transitions and maximise their positive impacts.

*The region-to-region workshop brought together experts and stakeholders from multiple just transition regions to enable an exchange and learning across regional contexts.



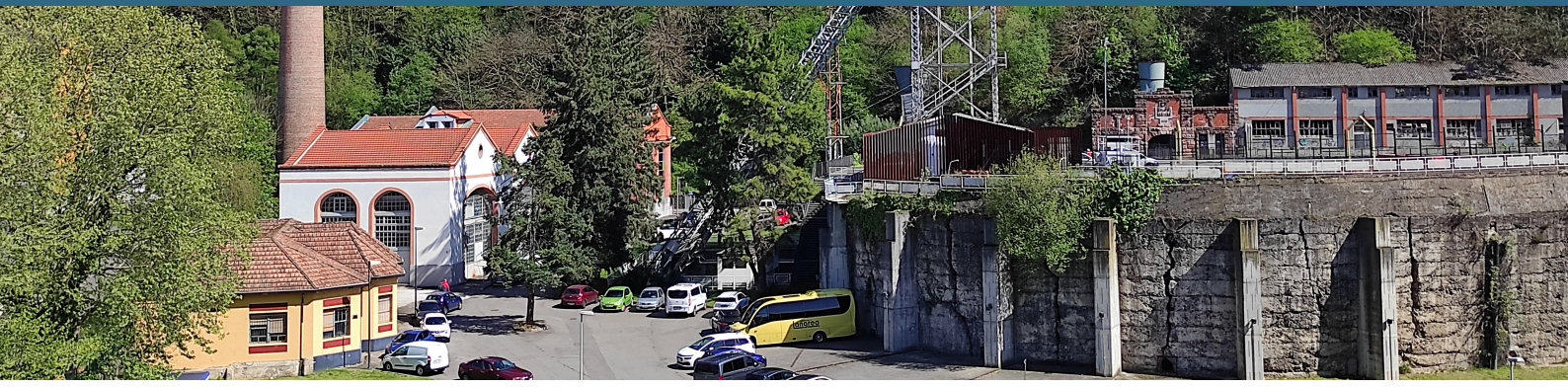
RECOMMENDATIONS

1. Coal regions in transition need to be encouraged to adopt bottom-up approaches to policy design and implementation that support active citizen participation.

The citizens' workshops in the JUSTEM project [2] showed that citizens have little or no knowledge about a just transition and/or a possible vision for their region. As a result, citizens, especially young people, often feel excluded from the transition process, that their voice is not heard, or that there is not even a clear way for them to contribute to the decision-making process. This may be one of the reasons why the JUSTEM experience shows that people can be reluctant to participate in workshops, but when they do, they are very engaged. Therefore, the European Commission should proactively encourage bottom-up approaches to engage different stakeholders in the implementation of the JTM and related policies, including RED. The Commission should also emphasise the right of citizens to be able to individually or collectively own small- to medium-scale renewable energy projects

and to become energy self-sufficient. Novel communication and engagement strategies and tools are needed to ensure that citizens are empowered in the transition process and that citizens' needs are reflected in the implementation of transitions. An example of such a tool is APOLLO-Live [3], which has been further developed in the context of JUSTEM. In order to provide citizens with comprehensive and transparent information, we suggest using the one-stop-shops, to be established under the EPBD, also for just transition communication. Best practices could be shared between Member States through appropriate platforms such as the Just Transition Platform. Empowering citizens to shape transitions will ensure that transition processes are inclusive, effective, and sustainable, thereby maximising their positive impact on communities.

2. Territories need support to manage and monitor the positive and negative impacts of the transition away from coal.



The analysis of six TJTPs [4] showed that transition processes are complex and have multiple impacts. The economic and environmental impacts of transitions are understandably a clear priority and much better understood than the social and demographic impacts that will challenge the social fabric of communities. However, it is important that territories are supported in understanding all impacts in order to develop targeted and tailored policies that effectively address negative regional impacts, while capitalising on positive environmental and economic benefits for regions and people, to enable a truly just transition. EU policymakers should support the monitoring of the just transition implementation and track the impacts of measures pursued to ensure that transitions lead to just outcomes. We propose to encourage Member States to use monitoring and impact assessment tools and to promote cross-sectoral policy dialogues between regional actors to certify that all dimensions of regional development are addressed in the implementation of transition. This will ensure that transition processes overall and the

implemented projects are sustainable and truly transformative.

3. Member States need to be encouraged to take adequate account of energy poverty when implementing just transitions

Energy poverty remains a challenging issue in the EU today, particularly in coal-dependent regions where vulnerability is linked to several aspects, including inadequate housing and lack of economic alternatives. The JUSTEM analysis of six coal regions showed that not all countries have adopted a definition of energy poverty, leading to inconsistent approaches and inadequate measures [2]. While most of the TJTPs analysed recognise energy poverty as having a major negative impact for coal transition areas, they often fail to define sufficient measures to protect the most vulnerable populations from becoming more energy poor [4]. As the EU's transition to cleaner energy sources progresses, there is a risk that Regional Transition Plans (RTPs) will exacerbate existing energy poverty if they do not adequately address local factors and the needs of vulnerable groups.



Therefore, to alleviate energy poverty, public funding, but also funding through public-private partnerships (e.g. on-bill or on-tariff financing), must be used to adequately support households in implementing energy efficiency measures, replacing fossil fuel heating systems and installing renewable energy systems. We consider it crucial that policies and support schemes specifically target the energy poor and provide tailored solutions for both tenants and owners, including in multi-family dwellings. EU policymakers should empower Member States to prioritise energy poverty measures in their TJTPs and all related national implementations of EU policies, including the preparation and implementation of national building renovation plans in line with the updated EPBD, the Social Climate Fund and NECPs, to ensure that the most vulnerable people in society are protected and empowered to shape the transformation of coal regions.

4. Investments in social and cultural just transition projects must be enabled to "reshape" identity and create cohesion

EU funding should not only enable the development of large-scale projects, but also support actions that contribute to the social and demographic fabric of societies. This is crucial as coal regions have spent decades building an energy identity based on coal. However, JUSTEM's citizens' workshops have shown that there is no alternative identity in sight, especially for younger people who might have imagined working in the coal industry. A new identity should be 'transitional', with an emphasis on regional traditions and the preservation of cultural values from a mining activity that has been carried out for many generations. This requires strong public policies that facilitate the reconstruction and diversification of the economy, stabilise the population and attract young people to new green employment opportunities.



EU policymakers should encourage projects that can contribute to identity and community building, including energy community projects. In addition, we found that citizens want better public infrastructure and more socio-cultural projects in the just transition regions, but little funding is directed to these areas [5]. Therefore, Just Transition projects need to go beyond energy production and support cultural and entrepreneurial activities, including arts and co-working, improved health systems (hospitals) and sustainable mobility. It is important to design policies that include systemically marginalised groups. EU policy should therefore channel more money into areas that contribute to a new regional identity and vision, social cohesion and attractive living conditions. This issue should also receive more attention in the debates on the future of the JTM, and especially the design of the funding schemes.



CONCLUSIONS

The JTM under the European Green Deal is a key tool to ensure that no person or region is left behind in the transition away from coal. JUSTEM has conducted citizens' workshops, surveys, and interviews in six European coal regions, as well as a region-to-region learning workshop, and conducted research on the status quo of transitions, energy poverty and the expected impacts of transitions. Based on the findings of the project, we conclude that it is crucial that actions implemented during this phase reflect citizens' needs, ensure a fair distribution of costs and benefits associated with the transition, and effectively address historical socio-economic, spatial and environmental injustices and ongoing risks faced by the most vulnerable and underrepresented groups. To this end, EU policymakers should actively support the territories in:

- Involving different stakeholders, including citizens, in just transition policymaking to avoid resistance and to promote citizens' opportunities and willingness to participate in the transition, both socially and financially;
- Implementing diverse just transition projects that address citizens' needs and empower citizens to become part of the transition; and
- Monitoring the impacts of ongoing transition processes to ensure that transitions are transformative and just for everyone.

Only if EU policymakers step up their efforts in the ways outlined above can just transition processes be well managed, effectively implemented and inclusive of all stakeholders and citizens.

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ABOUT

The JUSTEM project aims to build regional capacity and involve citizens in the development and implementation of their region's energy and climate plans to adapt them to their needs. The JUSTEM project will address a wide range of transition-related issues that go beyond the purely technical aspects and include health, structural development, re-training of workers, and new economic opportunities.

Project website

<https://ieecp.org/projects/justem/>

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