



EU coal regions exchange programme

Exchange between Saxony-Anhalt (DE) and Ida-Virumaa (EE)

exchangeEU

About the exchangeEU programme

exchangeEU is the exchange programme for coal, lignite, peat, and oil shale (coal+) regions in transition in the European Union (EU). The programme is part of the Coal Regions in Transition (CRiT) initiative and implemented by the European Commission.

Recognising the need for accelerating a just and low-carbon energy transition in Europe, exchangeEU facilitates cooperation and peer-to-peer learning amongst EU coal+ regions to foster the implementation of Just Energy Transition strategies. The key objective is to support EU coal+ regions to decarbonise their energy systems while protecting workers and communities through economic diversification and technological innovation.

During the programme, participating regions share experiences and work together on overcoming current challenges they face in their Just Transition processes. As such, exchangeEU opens the way for building a broad network of practitioners.



18 coal+ regions in transition have been selected to participate



The matching process resulted in **8 exchanges**, including 4 pairs of regions and 4 triangles of regions



The participating regions represent a total of **12 EU Member States**: Bulgaria, Czech Republic, Estonia, Germany, Greece, Hungary, Ireland, Poland, Romania, Slovakia, Slovenia, and Spain

Exchange cornerstones



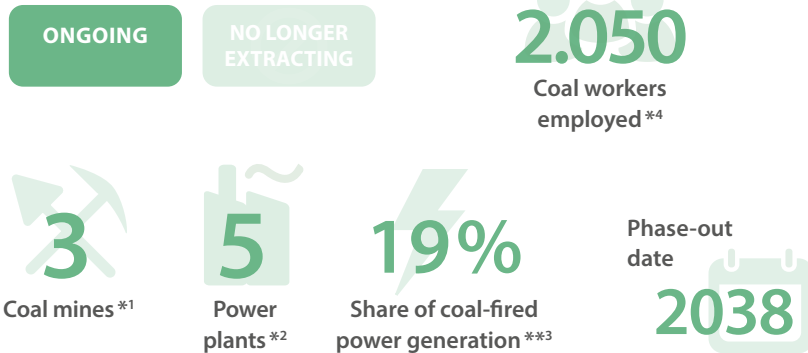
Region profiles

Towards a just transition away from coal+

This match consists of two Eastern European regions which face different technological and geographical conditions: Ida-Virumaa (Estonia) extracts oil shale, Saxony-Anhalt (Germany) lignite. Both regions plan to phase-out coal and oil shale respectively in power generation in the 2030s.

SAXONY-ANHALT (DE)

State of phasing out brown coal (lignite)



* The figures refer to the entire Central German coalfield. Two of the three coal mines and three of the five power plants of the Central German coalfield are located in the Federal State of Saxony-Anhalt, the others belong to the federal state of Saxony. The number of jobs cannot be broken down by federal state.

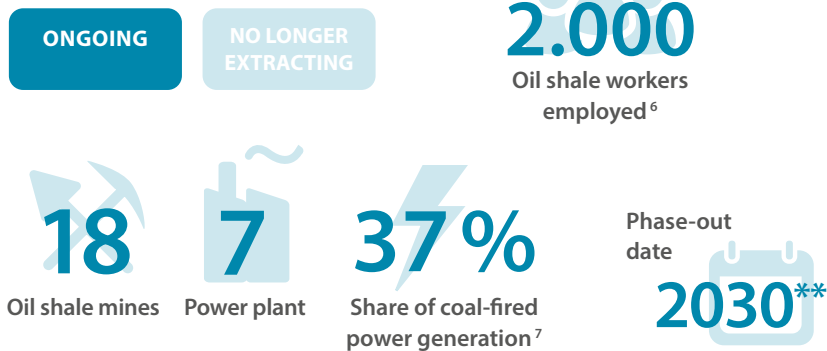
** The number refers to the amount of coal fired electricity generation in the Federal State of Saxony-Anhalt.

State of Just Energy Transition

The State of Saxony-Anhalt is home to parts of the Central German coalfield, which is the smallest of the three active German lignite mining areas. In 2020, the Federal Government decided to phase out lignite production in Germany by 2038 at the latest. The current government plans a phase-out by 2030. In order to govern the structural change in the Central German coalfield, Saxony-Anhalt, Saxony and Thuringia have founded the „Innovation Region Central Germany“ which develops new strategies and projects for structural change in the region.

IDA-VIRUMAA (EE)

State of phasing out oil shale*



* All information provided by the representatives of the regions.

** power generation; feedstock for chemical industry past 2040 possible

State of Just Energy Transition

Ida-Virumaa is home of Estonia's oil shale sector. In 2019, oil shale related companies located in the region accounted for over 50% of Estonia's total GHG emissions.

By 2030, Estonia will phase out oil shale in regular power generation. However, it does not rule out the use of oil shale past 2040 as feedstock for the chemical industry.

Main challenges

- How to ensure that the local community can actively shape the transformation and support its targets as well as measures taken.
- How to diversify and decarbonise the local economy.
- How to make the regions attractive, especially for young people, since the population is ageing and decreasing.
- How to decouple district heating from coal and oil shale respectively.

Focus topics



Economic diversification and regional development

One of the main topics identified in this exchange was how to plan and implement a just transition in regions with shrinking populations. In both regions the population is rapidly ageing and decreasing. In addition, many people moved away from both Saxony-Anhalt (after the German reunification) and Ida-Virumaa (following the restoration of Estonia's independence), so that even today - 30 years later - in some towns entire streets are still empty.



Social fabric and community

In both regions, the local communities have not yet fully recovered from the identity crisis and emotional trauma following the collapse of industry with the fall of the Soviet Union and the German reunification. Against this background a central question of the exchange was how people can be empowered to actively shape the regional just energy transition and to take ownership in today's processes.

Study visit in Saxony-Anhalt, Germany – agenda and on-site highlights

In October 2022, delegates from Ida-Virumaa visited Saxony-Anhalt. In addition to the two regions, one representative from the municipality from Velenje (Slovenia) enriched the exchange with insights about a coal region that committed to become climate-neutral until 2030.

A guided tour through the district Halle-Neustadt, that was originally built for the workers of the nearby chemical plants, showed the delegates one of the biggest challenges the region is facing: Due to the industrial downfall after the German reunion, half the city's population moved elsewhere. Even today, the region has not yet fully recovered - which shows how long regional structural change processes take. In addition, the delegations visited the City of Zeitz. Here, it became obvious that a just transition is about more than jobs. Culture, art, local events and public meeting places are also important to avoid the feeling of being disconnected from the world.

In the second half of the exchange, the delegations actively participated in the conference "Postfossil futures: Shaping structural change together" organised by the University of Halle. Here, they were able to match their empirical study visit impressions with conceptual knowledge about the question of how to implement a Just Transition. In an interactive exhibition, participants had the possibility to meet various stakeholders of the energy transition and structural change process in the central German lignite region (e.g., mining companies, the competence Centre for Municipal Heat Transition, environmental organisations).

The participants looked for possible ways to maintain and deepen the relationship between their regions. They suggested to hold regular online meetings about the implementation of their Territorial Just Transition Plan and an exchange of youth organisations of trade unions.

SAXONY-ANHALT (DE)

Status	Visiting region	Hosting region
Main Actors		Municipality of Saxony-Anhalt, University of Halle, German Trade Union Confederation, Chamber of Commerce and Industry Halle-Dessau
Shared insights		Coordinating just transition processes, preparation of the Territorial Just Transition Plan, cultural-historical perspective on structural change, workers and employees perspective on just transition

IDA-VIRUMAA (EE)

Status	Visiting region	Hosting region
Main Actors		Estonian Ministry of Finance, University of Tartu, Estonian Trade Union Confederation, Ida-Viru Enterprise Center
Shared insights		Coordinating just transition processes, preparation of the Territorial Just Transition Plan, monitoring just transition processes, tailor-made support for small and medium enterprises, workers and employees perspective on just transition

Delegation in Halle (in front of Museum Moritzburg), photo by Timon Wehnert, Wuppertal Institute



Learnings

- ✓ An interregional exchange between fossil fuel regions in transition helps to look at your regional challenges from different angles and to find new solutions.
- ✓ Even though regions may have different economical and geographical conditions to shape their just energy transition, they face similar difficulties during the transition process and can learn from each other.
- ✓ In order to make the best possible use of the experience and knowledge gained during the exchange, it was helpful that people participated in the exchange who will continue to work together afterwards.
- ✓ One characteristic of this exchange was its peer-to-peer approach: The delegations were selected in a way that from each region one person from administration, academia, trade unions and business participated. The program explicitly included time for peer reflection. This enabled the delegation members to directly exchange in the fields most relevant to them.

Hands-on recommendations

- + Do not only concentrate on job creation but also on **providing attractive local infrastructure and community services** (e.g. culture, education, childcare) to increase the quality of life in shrinking regions.
- + **Put people at the centre of the transition** and establish governance mechanisms that allow meaningful participation. Make sure to include different societal groups especially those often neglected, e.g. women and young people.
- + **Find out what jobs are really attractive for young people** to make your region attractive for them (for example: more creative jobs or industrial jobs).
- + Ensure that investments in **efficiency and incentives and awareness-rising for economical use of heat** are one important pillar of your just energy transition in the heat sector. In a fossil fuel system, heat was a waste product of electricity generation in coal/oil shale power plants. Therefore, there were hardly any incentives for economical and efficient use of heat.



“The exchangeEU programme helps to change the perspective. Even though scale, economy and cultural background may differ, cooperating with other transition regions shows that the challenges that we face are often the same.”

Matthias Diehm
State Chancellery of Saxony-Anhalt,
Saxony-Anhalt, Germany



“Participating in the exchangeEU programm gives you a sense of community, a sense that your region is not alone. The transition away from fossil fuels is an all European thing and altogether we can make this transition a success.”

Ivan Sergejev
Estonian Ministry of Finance,
Ida-Virumaa, Estonia

¹ <https://globalenergymonitor.org/projects/global-coal-mine-tracker/tracker-map/>

² <https://globalenergymonitor.org/projects/global-coal-plant-tracker/tracker/>

³ Reference year is 2019, source: <https://statistik.sachsen-anhalt.de/themen/wirtschaftsbereiche/energie-und-wasserversorgung/tabellen-stromerzeugung-insgesamt/>

⁴ Reference year is 2021, source: <https://kohlenstatistik.de/daten-fakten/>

⁵ Reference year is 2020

⁶ Reference year is 2021



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