

Sharing of experiences and knowledge in Ida-Virumaa

exchangeEU: final study visit implemented in Ida-Virumaa (Estonia)

On May 3-4, 2023, Ida-Virumaa in Estonia welcomed delegations from Western Macedonia (Greece) and Sisak-Moslavina County (Croatia). The visit was part of the exchangeEU programme and focused on economic diversification, reskilling and upskilling activities and involvement of municipalities in JT process.

Each delegation presented the current situation in their regions and activities related to the development and implementation of TJTP. The delegations shared information about development opportunities and priorities, as well as regions' visions. Challenges faced by regions were discussed and it was concluded that many of them are common to all three regions, such as the decline of large industries, unemployment and depopulation, lack of economic activities and attractiveness to keep or attract people.

Economic diversification

During the exchange, the delegations visited the Kiviõli Adventure Park, Estonian Mining Museum, and Estonian Energy power plants. They learned about the park's various attractions, Estonian Energy's transition plan towards carbon neutrality, and explored research at Virumaa College. Raivo Vasnu, director of NPM Silmet, joined the exchange and discussed the company's production of rare-earth metals. Successful projects in tourism, energy, and industry sectors were presented, highlighting the need to connect research institutions with the industry, particularly in ICT and creative industries to attract young talent

Reskilling and upskilling

Representatives of the Estonian Labour Department discussed the employment situation in the Ida-Virumaa region and highlighted initiatives by the Estonian Unemployment Insurance Fund and Ida-Virumaa Vocational Education Centre. These initiatives included the labour market training card, labour market training procurement, degree study allowance, and collaboration with regional employees to develop curricula. The delegations also visited kood/Jõhvi, an international coding school aiming to address the shortage of software engineers, enhance the educational system, and stimulate local entrepreneurship. Discussions revolved around establishing re/up-skilling and social programs for workers in carbon-intensive industries, promoting key competences, and supporting continuous education for economic growth and workforce development.

Involvement of municipalities in JT

Together with representatives of the Ida-Viru Enterprise Centre and Ida-Viru Investment Centre, the delegates discussed the role of local and regional authorities in the just transition process and presented their own activities. For example, Estonian TJTP includes two interventions *Local government investments in JTF-eligible areas* (aimed primarily at improving the energy efficiency of municipal buildings and updating social infrastructure) and *Empowering people's wellbeing in Ida-Virumaa* (aimed at activities that complement the general national efforts to update the Estonian welfare system and improve the social and health care system of Ida-Virumaa). During the discussion, it was emphasised that local and regional authorities should play an active role in planning the transition process. Their role is also important in mobilising relevant local and regional stakeholders, communicating the process to communities, and attracting and facilitating investment.

Future opportunities for collaboration

Despite of the many challenges identified during the exchange, the participants took the opportunity to learn from each other's experiences and to lay the foundation for future collaboration which should include cooperation between experts - exchange of know-how and practices; institutional cooperation; cooperation on joint activities. In addition, the city of Grevena will soon meet Ida Virumaa for a second focused exchange.