

Unlocking JTF funds: the power of clear criteria and regional collaboration

exchangeEU: Three regions exchange in Ústí nad Labem, Czech-Republic

In April, the Ústí region hosted delegations from Asturias, Spain and Upper Nitra, Slovakia as part of the exchangeEU programme. This collaborative study visit focused on sharing best practices and addressing challenges in preparing projects under the Just Transition Fund and scaling up the green hydrogen economy in the regions. The participating regions aimed to learn from each other's experiences since the approval of their Territorial Just Transition Plans (TJTPs), identifying barriers and success strategies for implementation.

Main challenges identified:

- Tight timelines: approximately 60% of the JTF allocation must be contracted by the end of 2023 and those projects need to be implemented spent by the end of 2026
- Adapting to new regulations: Developing calls for proposals according to new regulations and rules associated with the JTF is time consuming and there is little examples to base the documents on, also region-specific interpretation of the regulation is needed
- Defining the eligibility criteria: Regions faced difficulties in determining the criteria for fund eligibility and ensuring that there is no overlap with other funding sources
- Procedural barriers: Coordination with multiple regulation entities at local, national and EU levels are causing project delays

Key learnings:

- Direct communication with the European Commission helps to speed up the criteria development and the calls for proposals.
- Establishing regional green hydrogen associations, such as the Czech platform or Asturian H2 roundtable, proved vital for scaling up projects and working collectively on proposals to meet regional hydrogen demands
- It is key to address the full value chain of hydrogen and develop integrated hydrogen projects (energy, production, transportation and end use)

Exploring alternative funding tools like the JTF, Innovation Fund, and European Hydrogen Bank is advisable for capital-intensive projects like green hydrogen

The exchange among these regions provided fresh ideas, inspiration, and the determination to persist in implementing green hydrogen projects, despite encountering numerous bottlenecks.