



EU coal regions exchange programme

# Exchange between Northern Hungary (HU) and Zasavje (SI)

exchangeEU

## Study visit in Northern Hungary, Hungary

This exchange consisted of a reverse job-shadowing format, in which Zasavje (Slovenia) shared their experiences with **issuing project calls** and **starting the implementation phase** of the Slovenian Territorial Just Transition Plans (TJTPs). Zasavje also offered expert council on the Northern Hungarian plans to recultivate the Mátra Power Plant and create associated economic development opportunities. The Mátra Power Plant is Hungary's only power plant fuelled with domestic lignite.

Part of the job-shadowing also consisted of delegates from Zasavje visiting Visonta and Bükkábrány, the two villages in Northern Hungary around the power plant where lignite mines are currently active, to meet with the communities' political leaders to share best practices. Zasavje explained how through its transition process it has focused on **developing other industries** to support regional development and diminish brain drain. Potential cooperation was identified between the Mayor of Bükkábrány and Zasavje to discuss Bükkábrány's recultivation and economic development plans for former mining areas. Zasavje also visited the Mátra Power Plant and presented specific projects being developed in Zasavje using just transition funding as well as other financial resources:

- an energy community solar park established on a former mining site;
- a National Chemical Center built on a former mining area to develop it into a demonstration hub and training centre for the development of renewable energy technologies, particularly magnesium batteries;
- The City of Acrobats, a concept to build a new city on a degraded mining area, for which plans have already been approved.

Zasavje also highlighted the importance of having **local and regional human capacity** in place to coordinate the just transition process as well as write and manage project calls for just transition funds. Zasavje has hired a just transition coordinator whose role will be to oversee the project call process.

### NORTHERN HUNGARY, HUNGARY

<b>Roles</b>	Hosting region	Mentee
<b>Main actors involved</b>	Dr. Zsuzsa Piskóti-Kovács, Head of Coal Commission Secretariat, Hungary	
<b>Field of expertise</b>	Stakeholder engagement processes for just transition	

### ZASAVJE, SLOVENIA

<b>Roles</b>	Visiting region	Mentor
<b>Main actors involved</b>	Andraž Malovrh, Project Manager Regional Development Agency Zasavje	
<b>Field of expertise</b>	Just transition project development and implementation	

# Region profiles

## Towards a just transition away from coal

This exchange brought together two Eastern European regions at different phases in their just energy transition. Zasavje has phased-out coal in 2014 while in Northern Hungary lignite is still being extracted until 2025.

### NORTHERN HUNGARY, HUNGARY

State of phasing out coal

**ONGOING**

**197**  
mio. EUR of annual revenues

**2,000**  
employed coal workers

**2**  
extracting coal mines

**1**  
coal plants in operation

**15%**  
share of coal-fired power generation

closure target  
**950 MW by 2025**

State of Just Energy Transition

Northern Hungary is working to prepare project calls for projects aligned with key topics identified in the country's two TJTPs. The plans are focused on the lignite mining regions Heves and Borsod Abauj Zemplen.

### ZASAVJE, SLOVENIA

State of phasing out coal

**NO LONGER EXTRACTING**

**52.3**  
mio. EUR of annual revenues

**3,000**  
former coal workers

**3**  
closed coal mines

**1**  
closed coal power plant

**0%**  
share of coal-fired power generation

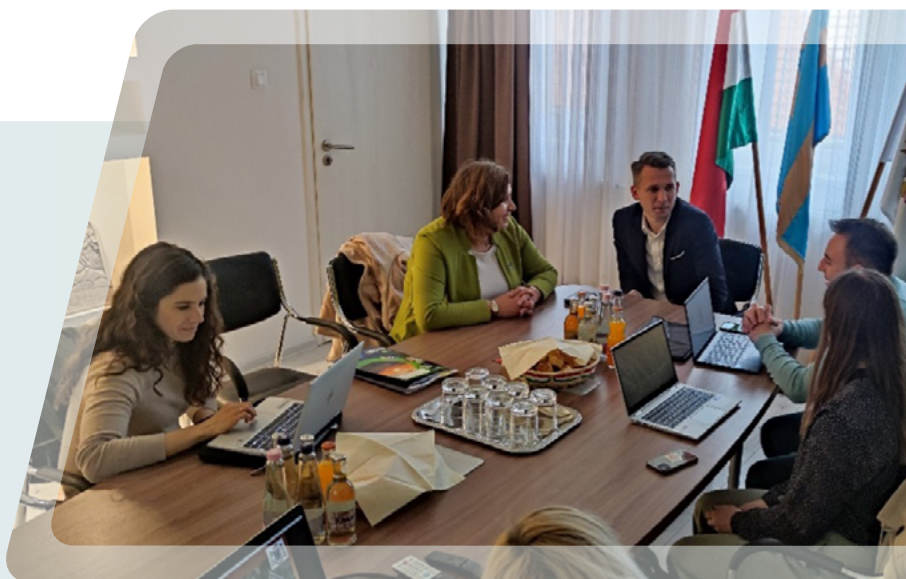
closure target  
**188 MW after 2014**

State of Just Energy Transition

Zasavje phased out coal very quickly, closing both the last mine and power plant in 2014. They are now working to promote the region as a centre of industrial opportunity and have established a Just Transition Center for training, development, and demonstrations of zero-carbon technologies. The centre will be constructed on a former mining area.

## Common challenges

- Depopulation due to diminishing manufacturing industries and the closure of coal mines and coal-fired power plants;
- Limited national capacity to support the development of recultivation projects and upskilling programmes;
- Threat of decline of regional GDP per capita if Mátra Power Plant will be shut down.



Meeting between representatives from the Zasavje Regional Development Agency, the Hungarian Coal Commission Secretariat, and the Mayor of Bükkábrány; Photo taken by Balazs Hegyi, Hungarian Coal Commission Secretariat

## Focus topics

This exchange served as an opportunity for the Northern Hungarian delegation to gain strategic input on plans to create new economic opportunities for the region through recultivating the lignite fired Mátra Power Plant and the associated industrial park. Given Zasavje is further along with its transition away from coal and issuing project calls to access just transition funding, Zasavje provided Northern Hungary with valuable insights on how to effectively develop and implement such project calls.



### Economic diversification through infrastructure development

Focus on turning former mining and power plant areas into recultivated areas, whether for building renewable energy plants and energy communities, or for green industrial projects.



### Implementing just transition projects

Focus on how to develop a successful just transition plan to access EU funds for projects supporting the region in moving towards climate neutrality and reaching social inclusiveness.

## Recommendations

- + Establish regional human and financial capacities to support the design and main issue of project calls for just transition funds;
- + Recultivation projects should be established before the coal mine and coal-fired power plant actually close;
- + Having an example of a political leader who is committed to the transition and can convince other key political leaders is key to creating the willingness to transition together.



**“I find it really important to have cooperation across coal+ regions, so we don’t repeat mistakes and learn what has been effective in other European regions facing similar challenges”**

**Dr. Zsuzsa Piskóti-Kovacs**, Head of Coal Commission Secretariat, Northern Hungary, Hungary



**“Exchanging and discussing offers a good opportunity to learn from each other and support each other through the just transition process”**

**Andraz Malovrh**, Project Manager, Regional Development Agency, Zasavje, Slovenia

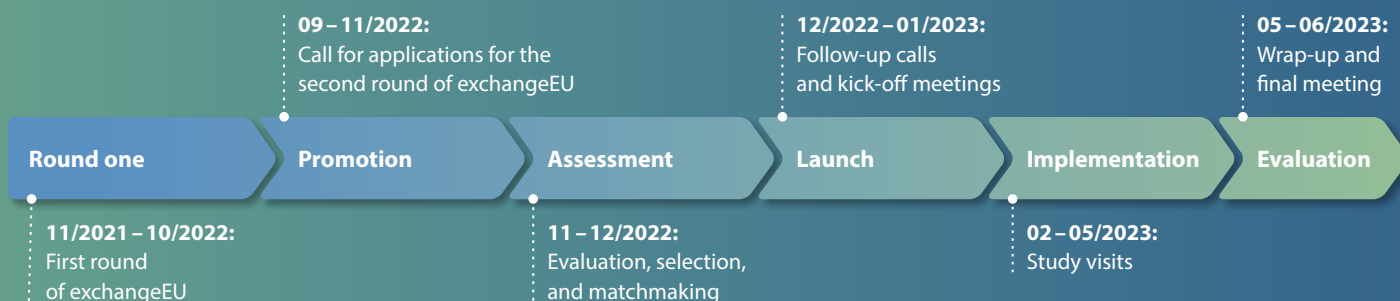
## Learnings

- ✓ It is a marathon, not a sprint. Just transition is a long process, takes time, patience, capacity, and engagement from all levels of government and the economy;
- ✓ It is important to think about recultivation and project development from a regional, systemic perspective to create a wholesome strategy, as opposed to thinking in silos from the perspectives of individual entities;
- ✓ Look at the first implementation phase of the TJTPs as a ‘trial phase’ to see what works and what doesn’t, as well as leverage good practices and lessons learned from other EU coal regions.

# Programme development

exchangeEU consists of two exchange rounds, spanning from November 2021 to June 2023. The first round took place from November 2021 until October 2022, the second round launched in November 2022. In each round, candidate regions are fittingly paired according to their Just Transition and coal phase-out trajectories.

Subsequently, the matched regions collaborate closely on developing a study visit to one of the regions based on their own needs and topic interests. Assigned exchange facilitators support them throughout the process.



## About exchangeEU

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.

## Outcomes of second application round



In total **17 coal+ regions** in transition have been selected to participate



The matching process resulted in **9 exchanges**, including 5 region pairs and 4 region triangles



The participating regions represent a total of **11 EU Member States**: Bulgaria, Czech Republic, Croatia, Estonia, Germany, Greece, Hungary, Poland, Slovakia, Slovenia, and Spain



Visit our website



Visit the website of the Just Transition Platform



Subscribe to our newsletter



Visit our social media channels

exchangeEU is part of the [Initiative for Coal Regions in Transition \(CRiT\)](#)