

EU coal regions exchange programme

Exchange between Małopolska (PL), Aragón (ES), Ústí (CZ)

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

November – December 2021
Call for applications and virtual pre-matchmaking sessions

Promotion

February – March 2022
Evaluation, selection and matchmaking

Assessment

May – July 2022
Co-creating the agenda and organisation

Scheduling

July – October 2022
Evaluation and reflections on lessons learnt

Follow-up

January 2022
Submission of individual or joint applications

Application

April 2022
Follow-up calls and kick-offs

Launch

June – October 2022
Study visits

Implementation

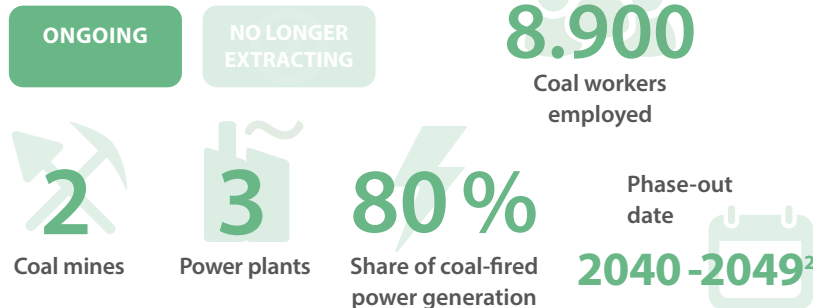
Region profiles

Towards a just transition away from coal+

The regions of Małopolska, Aragón and Ústí are at different stages in their Just Transition processes. In Małopolska and Ústí, coal extraction is still ongoing. In Aragón, coal extraction ended in 2018 with mine sites currently being rehabilitated and revitalised.

MAŁOPOLSKA (PL)

State of phasing out hard coal (anthracite)¹

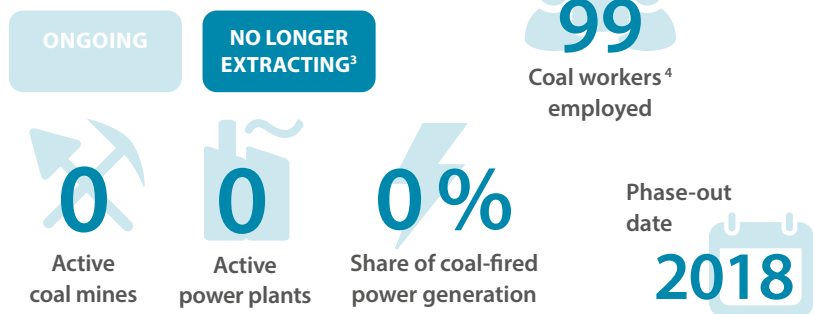


State of Just Energy Transition

The Małopolska region drafted a Territorial Just Transition Plan for implementing the Just Transition Mechanism. Its main objective is to mitigate the social, economic and environmental impacts of the low-carbon transition in Western Małopolska. The region also adopted the Regional Action Plan for Climate and Energy in 2020 and a solid fuel ban in the town of Krakow in September 2019.

ARAGÓN (ES)

State of phasing out brown coal (lignite)¹

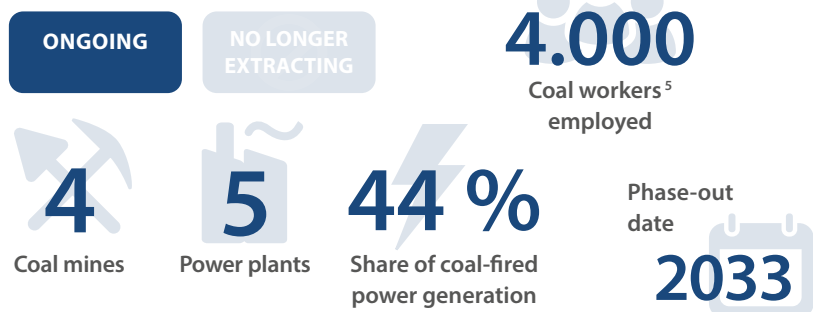


State of Just Energy Transition

The Aragón region established a Just Transition Agreement in coordination with the Government of Spain to manage the funding by the Just Transition Fund. The Just Transition Agreement is embedded in national law as well as in the country's Just Transition strategy. It aims to maintain employment rates high by stimulating economic activity in the municipalities affected by mine closures.

ÚSTÍ (CZ)

State of phasing out brown coal (lignite)¹



State of Just Energy Transition

The Ústí region has created a Territorial Just Transition Plan for implementing the Just Transition Mechanism. It involves four pillars:

- 1) Economy diversification
- 2) Training and re-training of workforce
- 3) Clean energy resources
- 4) Used phase-out mine and power station sites.

¹ All information provided by the representatives of the regions.
² The closure of Brzeszcze is scheduled for 2040 and the 'Janina' mine for 2049.
³ Last three coal mines closed in 2018.

⁴ Coal workers employed in restoration projects.
⁵ 4,000 are directly employed. Indirectly employed workers amount to around 20,000.

Main challenges

- The mining sector offers limited employment opportunities and a low job profile to locals.
- Project developers from local and regional authorities lack the ability to attract and deploy finance to deliver on their Just Transition strategies.
- Legal uncertainties and limited administrative capacities of municipalities hinder reclamation processes from being implemented in a timely and effective manner.
- The mining and energy industries are dominated by men. Therefore, women are discouraged from seeking employment in this highly masculine oriented working environment.

Focus topics



Infrastructure and site sustainability

Since coal mining has a great impact on the environment and local land use, once mining operations stop, polluted areas need to be reclaimed and restored. The disused pits can be utilised in different ways, e.g. recreation, agriculture, cattle grazing, forestry or building new industries such as deployment of renewable energy sources. Thus, main discussion points during this exchange were management requirements and potential uses for post-mining areas.



Social fabric and community

Former mining communities struggle after pits close. Immediate job losses are followed by deeper economic, social and political hazards. Considering the above, during the exchange, some solutions to overcome those challenges, like rolling out renewable energies or investing in local infrastructure and community services were presented.

Study visit in Małopolska, Poland – agenda and on-site highlights

In line with the focus topics, delegates from Małopolska, Aragón and Ústí shared best practices and lighthouse projects currently in the making.

Małopolska organized two site visits to illustrate their current Just Transition efforts. The first visit took the delegates to the disused Brzeszcze East Coal Mine where they gained insights into the mine's historical heritage and its ambitious revitalization project. The second visit led to the municipality of Libiąż where the visiting regions were introduced to a newly constructed water park as well as the 'Recovery' project on the post-industrial dump of the nearby 'Janina' coal mine. The latter project is concerned with sustainable ways to accelerate the recovery of degraded ecosystems.

Aragón presented a variety of Just Transition approaches. To decarbonise the region's energy system and diversify its economy, Aragón opted for rolling out wind and solar energy. This resulted in Aragón being the leading region in Spain in windfarm installation. Another project presented focusses on repurposing a former coal mine in the municipality of Ariño to produce organic fertilizers. The SAMCA group invested 45 million Euros to build the production plant which will provide 35 to 62 new local jobs. Currently it produces 50 thousand tonnes of organic-mineral fertilizer per year. Lastly, to provide most affected municipalities with additional support, 23 smaller community projects are in the making.

Ústí highlighted two development pathways the region is planning to pursue in coming years. The first consists of revitalizing and 're-socializing' former open mine pits by reclaiming the land and building infrastructure for a year-round use of artificial lakes and their natural surroundings. One lighthouse project is related to the closure of the ČSA's surface mine in 2025. Its revitalization approach includes the construction of a floating solar power plant, a smart industrial park as well as Research and Innovation facilities.

The second strategy focusses on scaling up hydrogen use in the region. First steps involve creating a research centre at the Ústí University and commissioning hydrogen buses in Ústí's capital.

MAŁOPOLSKA (PL)

Status	Visiting region	Hosting region
Main Actors	Representatives from municipalities, regional public authorities	
Shared insights	Preparation of the Territorial Just Transition Plan, stakeholder governance	

ARAGÓN (ES)

Status	Visiting region	Hosting region
Main Actors	Representatives from regional authorities	
Shared insights	Renewable energy roll-out, state funding schemes, mine revitalisation	

ÚSTÍ (CZ)

Status	Visiting region	Hosting region
Main Actors	Representatives from regional authority	
Shared insights	Coordination and communication of the transition process at the regional level	

*Site visit at Brzeszcze East Coal Mine in Małopolska.
Photo by Justyna Mazurkiewicz.*



Learnings

- ✓ **The Just Transition Fund is not a silver bullet:** Just Transition projects are ambitious, big in scale and consist of multiple sub-projects. Therefore, diverse sources of finance – both public and private – need to be mobilised, deployed and secured over longer periods.
- ✓ **Multi-level governance deserves more attention:** Myriad types of actors have stakes in the Just Transition journey. Key to its success is amplifying and strengthening cooperation and dialogue between actors of different government levels and sectors.
- ✓ **Blending the old with the new attracts people and new businesses:** There are successful ways for coal regions to preserve their mining heritage and head towards innovation, sustainability and economic welfare. Industrial heritage like the coal mines can be transformed into cultural hubs, museums and educational centers.

Hands-on recommendations

- + **Identify financing opportunities for on-the-ground projects** early in the project development cycle to perfectly align lending, investment, and funding actions towards a Just Transition. A preliminary step for developing such a finance roadmap is to undertake an inventory of (unutilised) sources of finance with the potential to increase financial flows for future endeavours.
 - + **Take time for developing a thorough implementation plan**, including the diagnosis of needs and feasibility studies.
- Nevertheless, keep flexible to changes and unforeseen externalities. Therefore, base your plan on experimenting and iterative learning approaches and incorporate regular evaluation loops.
- + **Be inclusive from the beginning.** Include a wide range of stakeholders and facilitate mutual dialogue via a collaborative platform to define a common strategy and specific engagement objectives for the Just Transition process.



“exchangeEU was a valuable experience for me. I really enjoyed the openness of the participants and the high professional level of both the organizers and the members of the exchange”

Magdalena Kozak, Municipality of Libiąż, Małopolska, Poland



“The opportunity to personally meet experts from other regions and see how they approach the same challenges we have was invaluable. Thus, do not hesitate to exchange”

Jiří Nehyba, Ústí Regional Authority, Czech Republic



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