

EU coal regions exchange programme

# Exchange between Ida-Virumaa (EE), Sisak-Moslavina County (HR) and Western Macedonia (EL)

exchangeEU



## Study visit in Ida-Virumaa, Estonia

Ida-Virumaa in Estonia welcomed delegations from Western Macedonia (Greece) and the Sisak-Moslavina County (Croatia).

The delegations visited several sites, including the [Kiviõli Adventure Park](#), which was built on a reclaimed shale oil industrial waste ash hill. They also explored the [Estonian Mining Museum](#) and toured the **Estonian Energy power plants in Narva and Auvere**. At Estonian Energy, the company presented its plan for transitioning from **oil shale electricity generation** to achieving **carbon neutrality** and producing materials for the chemical industry. The delegates gained insights into **research activities** and **industry collaborations** at [Virumaa College](#). [NPM Silmet](#), the first company receiving **JTF financing** in the EU, showcased its activities in Ida-Virumaa. The importance of connecting research institutions with the industry, particularly in ICT and creative industries, was emphasized as a strategy to attract young people.

The **Estonian Unemployment Insurance Fund** and [Ida-Virumaa Vocational Education Centre](#) showcased their **re-upskilling programs** and collaboration with regional employees to develop training curricula. The delegations also visited [kood/Jõhvi](#), an **international coding school** that offers advanced education while supporting **local entrepreneurship** and **job creation** in the region.

In the discussion with representatives of [Ida-Viru Enterprise Centre](#) and Ida-Viru Investment Centre, the importance of active involvement by local and regional authorities in the **transition process** was emphasized. Their role was seen as crucial in mobilizing relevant **local and regional stakeholders**, communicating the process to communities, and attracting and facilitating investments.

Delegation in Ida-Virumaa (Kiviõli Adventure Park), photo by Airis Veski

### Ida-Virumaa, Estonia

<b>Roles</b>	Hosting region, Mentee
<b>Main actors involved</b>	Association of Local Authorities (IVOL), Ministry of Finance, Ida-Viru Enterprise Centre, Ida-Viru Investment Centre, Digi and Green Innovation Centre VIDRIK, kood/Jõhvi, NPM Silmet, Estonian Labour Department, Kiviõli Adventure Park, Estonian Energy

<b>Field of expertise</b>	Preparation and coordination of the TJTP, regional development, business development, research and higher education, vocational training
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### Sisak-Moslavina County, Croatia

<b>Roles</b>	Visiting region, Mentor
<b>Main actors involved</b>	Regional coordinator of Sisak-Moslavina County, Sisak-Moslavina County, Regional development agency SI-MO-RA

<b>Field of expertise</b>	Preparation of the TJTP, regional development, sustainable development, project development and implementation
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### Western Macedonia, Greece

<b>Roles</b>	Visiting region, Mentor
<b>Main actors involved</b>	Just Transition Institute Greece (JTIG), The Centre for Research and Technology Hellas (CERTH), City of Grevena, Association of Municipalities

<b>Field of expertise</b>	Support and promotion of JT activities, involvement of municipalities in JT process, regional development, energy transition
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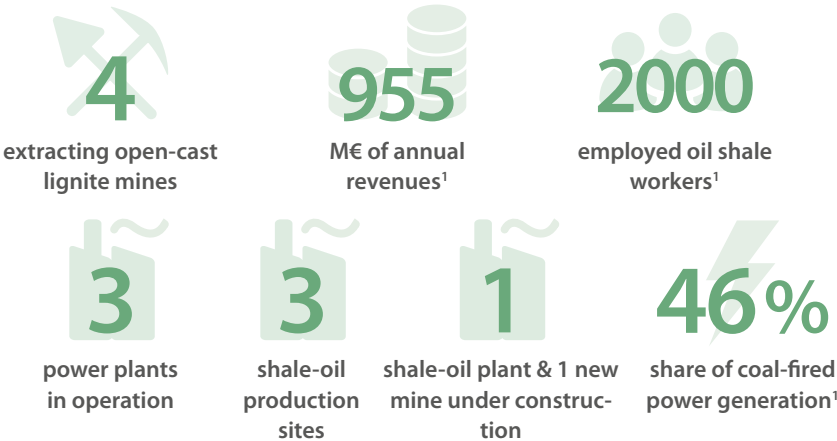
# Region profiles

## Towards a just transition away from coal

This match consisted of three European regions, Ida-Virumaa (EE), Sisak-Moslavina County (HR) and Western Macedonia (EL). Although each faces different technological, geographical and climatic conditions, all three regions share a common goal: a gradual transition away from energy production and energy-intensive industries based on fossil fuels.

### IDA-VIRUMAA, ESTONIA

**ONGOING** State of phasing out oil shaleshale



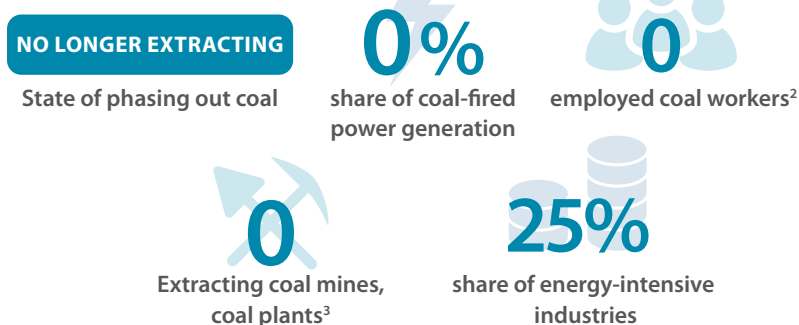
### State of Just Energy Transition

The Estonian oil shale sector is largely concentrated in the Ida-Virumaa region. As of 2021, this region was responsible for 64% of Estonia's total GHG emissions.

Estonia plans to phase out the use of oil shale in electricity production by 2035, and in energy production by 2040 at the latest.

<sup>1</sup> Reference year 2021.

### SISAK-MOSLAVINA COUNTY, CROATIA



### State of Just Energy Transition

Five energy-intensive operators in the county accounted for 25% of Croatia's total ETS emissions in 2019.

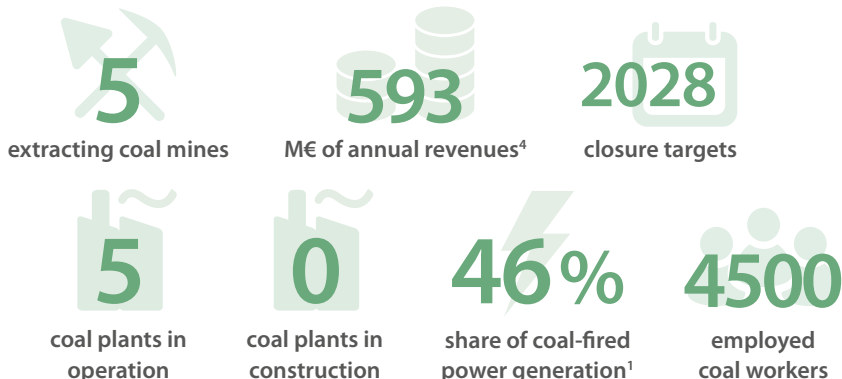
Croatia developed a scenario to achieve climate neutrality by 2050 with more ambitious goals compared to the current strategic documents. A new draft NECP will be drawn up in 2023, including more ambitious targets.

<sup>2</sup> 2325 people employed in energy-intensive industries using fossil fuels.

<sup>3</sup> One thermal power plant (TPP) using natural gas and fuel oil and an oil refinery plant.

### WESTERN MACEDONIA, GREECE

**ONGOING** State of phasing out oil shaleshale



### State of Just Energy Transition

The Greek lignite sector, mainly in Western Macedonia, has seen a decline in its contribution to national electricity production, dropping from approximately 50% in 2009 to 15% in 2022. Greece aims to achieve complete delignitisation by 2028 through the phased withdrawal of lignite-fired power plants as part of the NECP.

<sup>4</sup> Reference year 2019.

## Common challenges

- Declining fossil fuel industries lead to regional weaknesses: high unemployment, poverty, and depopulation;
- The unemployed population faces unfavourable qualifications and age distributions that do not align with the requirements of the labour market, particularly in the ICT and tourism sectors;
- Lack of economic activities and opportunities, making the regions unappealing for retaining or attracting people.

## Focus topics



### Economic diversification

Delegations showcased successful projects and plans in sectors like ICT, industry, tourism, and education. Site visits and presentations demonstrated economic diversification in tourism, energy, and industry. The delegations identified emphasizing ICT and creative industries as a promising strategy to attract young people and discussed how to strengthen the connection between research institutions and the economy.



### Reskilling and upskilling

Delegations exchanged experiences on establishing re/up-skilling and social programmes aimed at supporting workers from mining and carbon-intensive industries, as well as other educational initiatives to foster local economic development and attract new workers. The development of key competences, such as entrepreneurial and digital skills, was also highlighted.



### Involvement of municipalities in JT

It was emphasised that local and regional authorities should have an active role in planning the transition process because their involvement is vital in mobilising relevant local and regional stakeholders, communicating the process to communities and attracting and facilitating business opportunities and investments.

## Recommendations

- + Community involvement is vital for a successful transition process. A strategy for engaging stakeholders and mobilizing the public, along with effective communication, is essential to highlight the process's benefits;
- + Collaboratively develop a clear vision for just transition with stakeholders and citizens, and effectively communicate it to the public to prevent political deviations;
- + More flexible timeframes are needed in the just transition planning process to increase stakeholder involvement;
- + Simplify the JTF procedure and make it more compatible with other funding sources. New financing schemes and instruments could facilitate the implementation of projects;
- + Gather information, lessons learned, and best practices from coal regions. Use a platform to disseminate and exchange information with stakeholders and citizens. Employ continuous monitoring to enhance the transition process.



**“The visit to the Idu-Virumaa region provided us with new tools, many possible actions and gave us a new perspective.”**

**Tatjana Puskaric,**  
Regional coordinator of Sisak-Moslavina County, Sisak-Moslavina County



**“Transition [...] requires a vision for the future, the active role of local society and authorities, but also the achievement of small “victories” to show the way.”**

**Kostarellas Ioannis,**  
Just Transition Institute Greece (JTIG),  
Western Macedonia

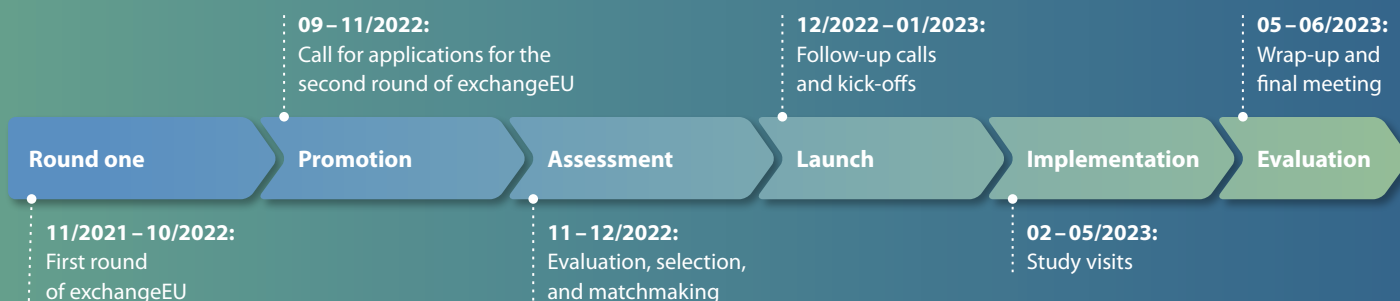
## Learnings

- ✓ Regions share transition challenges and learn from each other through networking. However, a just transition must be tailored to each region's circumstances, strengths, and opportunities;
- ✓ Local and regional actors and citizens must be involved in just transition development and implementation. Authorities play a vital role in engaging stakeholders and facilitating future investments;
- ✓ Collaboration among industries, SMEs, and education institutions is essential. Improve program availability and quality to meet regional market demands and to retain and attract young people. Focus on innovative and creative industries;
- ✓ It is essential not only to create new jobs but also to improve overall attractiveness of the regions and develop adequate social infrastructure.

# 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. 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



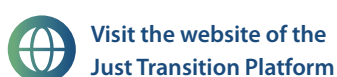
The matching process resulted in **9 exchanges**, including 5 region pairs and 4 region triangles



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



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