



EU coal regions exchange programme

Exchange between Savinjsko-Šaleška Region (SI) and Silesia (PL)

exchangeEU

Study visit in Silesia, Poland

Delegates from Savinjsko-Šaleška Region (Slovenia) and Silesia (Poland) met in Bytom, Europe’s largest coal region, to discuss industry **diversification, revitalisation** and **clean energy** transition strategies.

Both regions face the challenge of diversifying their business landscapes and **attracting new industries**. Discussions focused on improving infrastructural conditions, including highway connections, housing options for young people and economic prerequisites. **Katowice Special Economic Zone (KSSE)** showcased their model of incentivizing companies and SMEs to relocate to Silesia with tax exemptions. Additionally, Velenje representatives presented plans for the **Future Center**, aimed at attracting talent, creating new jobs, fostering innovation, and revitalising an old power plant.

Renovating the existing district heating system and diversifying the energy supply with renewable sources were identified as shared challenges. Delegates emphasized the need to renovate buildings for energy efficiency and raise citizen awareness.

During the exchange, participants visited the revitalized **Szombierki heat and power station**, currently undergoing complex revitalisation by private investor group **ARCHE**. The site will have multifunctional spaces, including offices, a hotel with swimming area, and an event space. The **Skarpa Sports Center** was also highlighted as a successful project implemented by a private investor. The former buildings of the **Rozbark coal mine** have been now renovated and transformed into Poland’s largest climbing facility with a gym, hotel and sauna, attracting about 100,000 annual visitors. The visit also included a revitalised post-mining area with a golf club, the former steelworkers’ district, football pitches, and the **Silesian Museum of Katowice**.

Delegates in front of the outdoor climbing wall of the Skarpa Sports Club in Bytom. Foto by Wiktoria Beckmann

Savinjsko-Šaleška Region, Slovenia

Roles	Visiting region
Main actors involved	Green Transition Incentives Office of the Ministry of Environment, Climate and Energy; Municipality of Velenje
Field of expertise	District heating systems, EU funds, diversifying energy supply

Silesia, Poland

Roles	Hosting region
Main actors involved	City of Bytom, Transformation Unit in Development and Region’s Transformation of Marshall Office
Field of expertise	Business acceleration, project development, attracting private investments, revitalisation of post-mining and post-industrial land and infrastructure



Region profiles

This match consists of the Eastern Cohesion Region and Silesia, both transitioning away from coal. Silesia will continue to extract coal until 2049 with no fixed phase-out commitment, while the Eastern Cohesion Region aims to exit coal by 2033. The municipality of Velenje in Savinjsko-Saleska is even committed to achieving climate neutrality by 2030.

SAVINJSKO-ŠALEŠKA REGION, SLOVENIA

ONGOING

State of phasing out coal¹

State of Just Energy Transition

Velenje was awarded the title "European Green City Leaf 2024" and has committed to become climate neutral by 2030.

The region's main projects included in the TJTP relate to solutions on district heating and mining, revitalisation of former power plant sites and the development of new business areas.

¹ Explanation of reference year 2023.



1
extracting
coal mine

~103.4
million EUR
of annual revenues

1,154
employed coal
workers



1
coal plant in
operation



0
coal plants in
construction

35%
share of coal-fired
power generation



2033
closure target

SILESIA, POLAND

ONGOING

State of phasing out coal¹

State of Just Energy Transition

Silesia has the largest hard coal mining in the EU and is undertaking a gradual transition away from coal extraction and combustion.

TJTP was approved in December 2022, which is based on national Just Transition Plan (JTP) and the region's strategy, 'Green Silesia for 2030' – which aims to create a modern, competitive region with development opportunities and a high quality of life in a clean environment.

15% of the planned investments in Just Transition programmes and projects are designed for reskilling and education.

² Including one private, 16 in Silesia.

³ Over 20 coal plants in Silesia.



2
extracting coal mines
in Bytom²

62.000
employed coal
workers

2049
closure target



0
coal plants in
operation in Bytom³



0
coal plants in
construction

75%
share of coal-fired
power generation

Common challenges

- Economic dependence on large companies necessitates diversification and attracting investors;
- Low energy costs historically led to neglecting energy efficiency measures in both regions, resulting in a lack of citizen awareness regarding energy-saving, housing renovations, and pipeline system upgrades;
- Need for infrastructure to attract new industries, such as high-way connections, low prices and prepared land;
- District heating systems need to be transformed and adapted to renewable energy sources, requiring building renovations and uncertain choices regarding renewable energy focus.

Focus topics

Both regions have started implementing their recently approved Territorial Just Transition Plans. The exchange served as an opportunity to share best practices in clean energy transition strategies and diversifying industry and revitalisation options.

Clean energy transition

The decarbonisation of district heating systems (DHS) poses a major challenge in both regions. Given the historical reliance on inexpensive fossil energy supply, the participants discussed the need to enhance energy efficiency and to renovate the DHS. Future plans to diversify the energy supply with small hydro power plants, including the use of mine water and hydrogen, were analysed.

Diversifying industry & revitalisation

Delegates focused on strategies for diversifying industries and the revitalisation of mining areas. The participants shared challenging experiences in attracting new industries and businesses due to the regions' heavy reliance on a few large companies. Additionally, new solutions to enhance revitalisation of former coal mining areas were observed in site visits and presented by stakeholders from research institutes.

Recommendations

- + Careful financial planning is essential for collecting funds to sustain the operation of revitalized facilities, as projects without planned revenue streams have proven unsuccessful;
- + Deploy the ESCO (energy savings company) model to speed up the renovation of individual apartments (Energy companies guarantee savings and offer efficiency solutions, with costs covered by the achieved savings);
- + Special Economic Zones can be very effective in attracting investors to the region by offering tax incentives for incoming businesses;
- + Regions and cities should have a greater role in determining their priority projects. Therefore, there should be a big focus on places that have remote systems to ensure the creation of environmentally friendly and carbon-neutral regions;
- + Cyclical exchanges of experiences and mutual learning between the coal regions are crucial for the effective transition process.



“The Exchange programme is very beneficial because we have the opportunity to meet regions that are dealing with the same problems and challenges, and at the same time it allows us to learn from each other.”

Karla Sitar,
Municipality of Velenje, Savinjsko-Šaleška Region



“The process of the energy transition is a long and interesting journey which sometimes is more important than its goal.”

Tomasz Janik,
City of Bytom, Silesia

Learnings

- ✓ Good housing options to retain young people and families in the region;
- ✓ Even with available funds for investment, it is crucial to secure funding sources for ongoing maintenance;
- ✓ Mining-related industries and workers require the utmost support during the transition, particularly because workers will eventually retire from their jobs;
- ✓ Enabling greater local community influence and opportunities in managing finances and incentives from the Just Transition Fund (JTF) is a highly commendable decision as this acknowledges their expertise in understanding and efficiently addressing the region's specific needs;
- ✓ Gaining insights from different perspectives on similar problems facilitates a gradual adjustment of the transition process.

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 \(CRiT\)](#)