

CASE STUDY

A Youth Climate Assembly in Ida-Viru

Aiming to empower young people to proactively shape the future of their region, the Ida-Viru Youth Climate Assembly is a powerful example of how to give youth a voice in the transition process and integrate their recommendations into official policy development work streams. The assembly brought together a group of 40 people between 16–29 years old, who actively learned about the challenges and opportunities of the transition, and developed a set of proposals – most of which were included in the national Just Transition Plan.

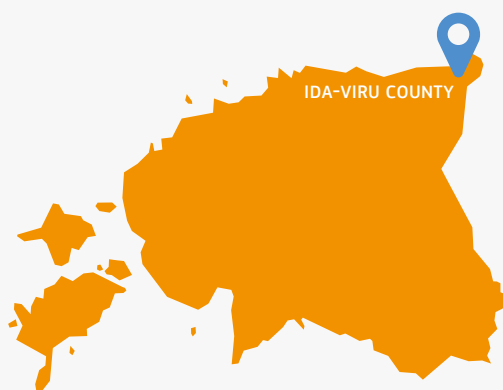
DESCRIPTION

Location: Ida-Viru County, North-Eastern Estonia

Type of action: Youth Climate Assembly

Actors: Government representatives, local government and municipalities, young people, local NGOs

Financing conditions: EU funding



KEY POINTS



APPROACH

Providing a platform for young people to support actively engaging youth in just transition planning process.



CHALLENGES

Overcoming scepticism of youth participants regarding the possible impact of the assembly; ensuring a representative group of participants.



ENABLING CONDITIONS

Eligible funding; good timing that enabled linkages to official planning transition processes; close partnership with and support by people at the national ministry level.



ACHIEVEMENTS

Development of 26 proposals that were handed to public administration, most of which were included in the national Just Transition Plan; founding of a new youth organisation that focuses on raising climate awareness; youth representatives invited to the national Just Transition Steering Committee.



Photo by Sergei Gushev

BRIDGING THE GAP

The Estonian government established several opportunities for stakeholder and citizen participation in the preparation of Territorial Just Transition Plans and the development of a country-wide just transition plan. To address gaps in youth representation, the Ida-Viru Youth Climate Assembly was held in autumn 2021, led and organised by the Estonian Fund for Nature and the [Rohetiiger initiative](#).

Introduction

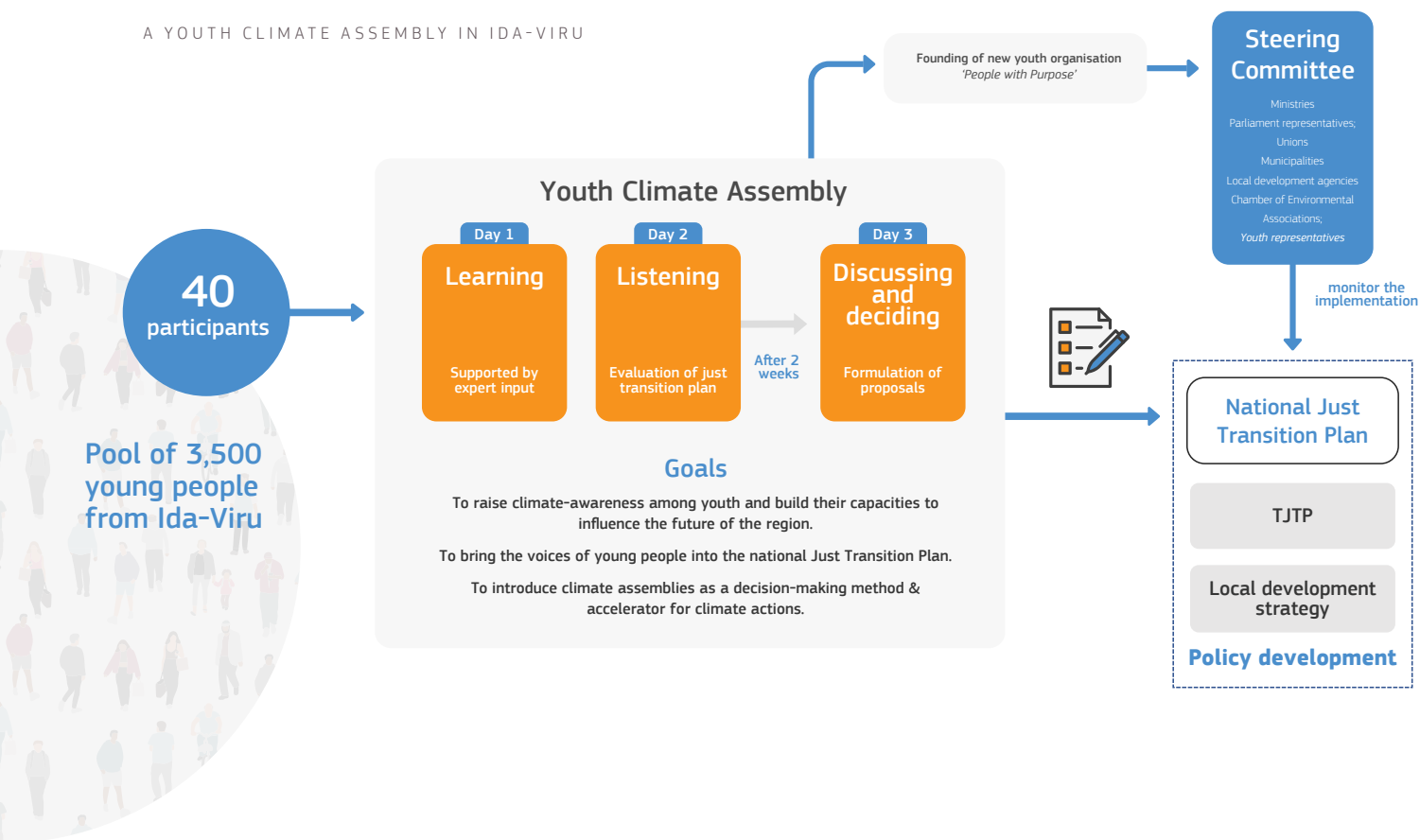
The county of Ida-Viru in north-eastern Estonia has been heavily dependent on the oil shale industry for decades, with many locals directly and indirectly involved in oil shale mining. As Estonia began its work to fulfil international climate targets, Ida-Viru, like many other regions, started to develop a just transition plan to transform into a green and diversified economy, while at the same time ensuring that the necessary changes do not negatively impact local communities. With lower income levels, higher unemployment rates, and cultural differences between the mostly Russian-speaking county of Ida-Viru and the western part of the country, it was clear that this would not be easy. However, the Estonian government worked to address these challenges throughout the preparation of the Territorial Just Transition Plans and the aim to develop a country-wide just transition plan, including through the establishment of several opportunities for stakeholder and citizen participation.

As a typically underrepresented group, young people were not part of the process initially. To address this gap, the Ida-Viru Youth Climate Assembly was held in autumn 2021. It was led and organised by the [Estonian Fund for Nature](#) and the [Rohetiiger](#) initiative, as part of the “Climate action by European citizens for development” project implemented by 20 European NGOs and funded by the European Union. The assembly’s goals were to raise awareness among young people between 16–29 years old about climate change and to empower them to influence the future of their region. The youth assembly also sought to bring the voice of young people into the national Just Transition Plan and introduce climate assemblies as a decision-making method for climate action.

All of the approximately 3,500 young people from Ida-Viru County were invited to complete an online application form, after which 40 were selected to participate in the assembly. The selection of participants was supported by the use of an algorithm that aimed to accurately represent the profile of the county’s youth. Eight participants were additionally selected as ‘climate ambassadors’ to spread the word about the work of the assembly and to raise awareness at the local level about climate topics, mostly through social media, but also in [traditional media](#).

Due to COVID-19, the assembly took place virtually over the course of three days. The first day was dedicated to information gathering on the goals of climate neutrality, just transition and possible future development pathways for the Ida-Viru region. Several experts gave short presentations, followed by a Q&A session. On the second day, representatives from the government, industries, and environmental associations were invited to present their views on the Just Transition Plans. A few weeks later, participants gathered again to discuss and formulate a set of proposals for the national Just Transition Plan.

In the end, 26 proposals were adopted after a final voting session. These proposals were then submitted to the Estonian ministries and the union of local municipalities of Ida-Viru to take them into account in the national just transition and regional strategy planning processes. Furthermore, a new youth organisation called ‘People with Purpose’ was founded to continue to uplift youth voices; the organisation was invited to join a Steering Committee to monitor the implementation of the national Just Transition Plan.



SCHEME OF THE YOUTH CLIMATE ASSEMBLY PROCESS IN IDA-VIRU AND LINKAGES TO POLICY DEVELOPMENT PROCESSES

Key challenges

Participant selection is a crucial component of the organisation of a climate assembly. By definition, the selection process should aim to replicate the composition of a society (or a particular group within the society), including people from different social and economic backgrounds. For the Youth Climate Assembly, the organisers used the data from the national register to reach out to all Estonian people aged 16–29 years old in Ida-Viru. While this should, in theory, ensure a representative sample of applicants, it remained a challenge to ensure that all groups were represented, including those that do not otherwise engage in politics.

During the first day of the assembly, some participants raised concerns regarding their potential impact on the transition process. The participants described a lack of trust in political processes, and mentioned that they felt left-behind compared to other regions – a narrative that is also common (and hard to combat!) in other EU coal+ regions.

Due to COVID-19, main parts of the Ida-Viru Youth Climate Assembly were held virtually, which posed additional challenges regarding the quality of discussions and organisational aspects. Furthermore, most youth participants' native language was Russian, which presented a language barrier during group discussions and with external speakers who presented in Estonian. Finally, participants had vastly different levels of prior knowledge of climate-related topics, which had to be accommodated.

Enabling conditions

Appropriate funding was a precondition for setting up the Youth Climate Assembly. The assembly was funded by the European Union in the amount of 40,000 EUR as part of a project called "Climate Action by European citizens delivers for development", which was implemented by a consortium of 20 NGOs coordinated by Oxfam Novib.

Well-considered timing was crucial to achieving the relatively high impact of the youth assembly on the political level. The national Just Transition Plan was in the process of being drafted by the responsible ministry and was open for consultation to the public when the assembly took place. As a result, proposals from the Youth Climate Assembly could still be added to the Just Transition Plan. This was also made possible due to national political and public support, culminating in the recommendations from the Youth Climate Assembly being handed to the Minister of Public Administration (as well as later to the President of Estonia) in person.

Yet, even more important was the direct support of stakeholders who shared their input during the climate assembly, as well as practical support from staff within the Ministry of Finance following the assembly. When some of the participants were invited to join the official steering committee of the national Just Transition Plan, it was crucial for the youth representatives to have someone to whom to ask questions regarding, for example, how to prepare for the meetings.



YOUTH ASSEMBLY PARTICIPANTS DISCUSSING AND HANDING OVER THE RECOMMENDATIONS OF THE ASSEMBLY TO THE MINISTER OF PUBLIC ADMINISTRATION IN NARVA, DECEMBER 2021.

Achievements

The Youth Climate Assembly is an example of how young people can be successfully empowered to develop their own visions and understandings of a just transition, and of how to channel the voices of young people such that their priorities can be integrated into just transition planning processes.

The final recommendations that were adopted by the assembly focus on education, small business support, community investment, and the creation of new jobs. A significant portion of the climate assembly's proposals relate to education and training opportunities. The young delegates emphasised the necessity of a green transition, the need to improve the quality of education at the local level, and the importance of continuing to seek local young people's opinions on educational choices.

The Ministry of Finance responded to the proposals with overall positive feedback, and most of the recommendations were considered in the new draft version of the national Just Transition Plan.

Additionally, and stemming from the newly gained motivation and overall support during the assembly, some of the participants formed a new organisation called 'People with Purpose', aiming to raise climate-awareness among youth in Ida-Viru. The minister invited the newly formed NGO to the steering group of the Just Transition, which is responsible for monitoring the allocation of the European Just Transition funds in the coming eight years.

EXAMPLE OF OUTCOMES OF THE YOUTH CLIMATE ASSEMBLY: EVALUATION CRITERIA FOR A JUST TRANSITION

In the process of drafting the proposals, the participants of the Youth Climate Assembly agreed on evaluation criteria that shall ensure both the transition plan and the climate assembly proposals will support the transition into a fair and climate friendly future:

1. Will people's economic livelihoods be maintained?
2. Are the interests of all groups living in the area taken into account?
3. Have natural resources been conserved?
4. Will the benefits outweigh the harm?
5. Is there a safety net for those most affected by the change?
6. Will the education system catch up?
7. Will people's well-being and happiness increase?
8. Do solutions favour localism?

Further reading

🔗 [Kliimakogu Website \(in Estonian\)](#)

🔗 [Guidance on how to organise a climate assembly](#)

Contacts

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Initiative for coal regions in transition

The Initiative for coal regions in transition is led by the European Commission.

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