



EU coal regions exchange programme

Exchange between Western Macedonia (EL), Moravia-Silesia (CZ) and Ida-Virumaa (EE)

exchangeEU

Study visit in Western Macedonia, Greece

Youth representatives from Western Macedonia (Greece), Moravia-Silesia (Czech Republic) and Ida-Virumaa (Estonia) gathered in Florina, Greece to discuss how to effectively engage young people in the just transition process. The three regions presented case studies and provided insights into the [EUTeens4Green](#) projects. In Ida-Virumaa, Estonia, a successful climate assembly gathered youth feedback, resulting in 26 proposals presented to the Minister and President that contribute to national plans and regional strategies. Besides, Moravian-Silesia's Governor engaged with students to discuss the region's transformation. Western Macedonia made strides through cross-border [Citizens' Dialogue](#) on the EU Green Deal, an [educational center](#), and a Youth Conference on Just Transition. These efforts inspire other regions, showcasing a commitment to involving young people in achieving a sustainable and fair future.

Under EUTeens4Green, regions implement projects with a €10,000 budget each over nearly two years, aiming to **foster youth participation in the just transition**. Projects include an environmental hero course for schoolchildren, emphasizing the project's history and waste management in Ida-Virumaa. Western Macedonia's three projects comprise an Escape Room, sustainability related puzzles and a living library in Kozani, connecting young people with sustainable practices.

During the exchange, the young people had a fruitful dialogue with the Vice-Governor of [Just Developmental Transition](#), the former Mayor of Kozani and the current President of Energy Communities on the challenges of the implementation of the Territorial Just Transition Plan (TJTP) and the citizen involvement in the process. Participants highlighted the significance of a bottom-up approach, re-skilling strategies, participatory governance, and collaboration with local entrepreneurs and citizens for a successful transition.

WESTERN MACEDONIA, GREECE

Roles	Hosting region	Mentor
Main actors involved	Association of Active Youths of Florina (OENEF) Europe Direct Center of Western Macedonia	
Field of expertise	Promotion of youth participation and voluntarism	

MORAVIA-SILESIA, CZECH REPUBLIC

Roles	Visiting region	Mentee
Main actors involved	University of Ostrava, Ostrava Expat Centrum, Gymnazium Třinec	
Field of expertise	Youth engagement, participation, just transition	

IDA-VIRUMAA, ESTONIA

Roles	Visiting region	Mentee
Main actors involved	People With Purpose (PWP) Liit	
Field of expertise	Participation, citizen assembly, youth engagement	

Stakeholder meeting with Vice Governor of Just Developmental Transition, Grigoris Tsioumaris; Photographer: Association of Active Youths of Florina (OENEF)



Region profiles

Towards a just transition away from coal

Last year, the European Commission provided significant funding for TJTPs away from coal. The three regions are now in the early stages of implementing them.

WESTERN MACEDONIA, GREECE

State of phasing out coal¹

ONGOING

4,000
employed coal workers

closure target

2028

3
extracting coal mines

3
coal plants in operation

20-30%
share of coal-fired power generation

¹ As of 2023.

State of Just Energy Transition

The European Commission officially approved the Greek Just Transition Plan in June 2022, making it the first approval. In Western Macedonia, coal mines and coal-fired power plants contribute to over 75% of Greece's energy, establishing the region as the largest lignite area in Greece and the primary focus of the Just Transition Fund (JTF), which will provide 63% of the funding. The plan proposes the establishment of an "innovation zone" to support infrastructure development and innovative entrepreneurship activities, thus facilitating the transition away from coal. Furthermore, there are plans to implement large-scale urban use of hydrogen as part of the transition.

MORAVIA-SILESIA, CZECH REPUBLIC

State of phasing out coal

ONGOING

5,000
employed coal workers

closure target

2024

2
extracting coal mines

0
coal plants in operation

16%
share of coal-fired power generation

State of Just Energy Transition

In September, the European Commission approved the Czech TJTPs, granting the Czech Republic access to EUR 1.64 billion of JTF grants for three coal mining regions. Among these regions, Moravia-Silesia, as the largest coal mining region in the Czech Republic, is facing numerous environmental challenges, including air pollution and groundwater contamination resulting from industrial activities. To address these issues, the JTF will invest in decontamination projects, while also allocating funds towards energy storage and research.

IDA-VIRUMAA, ESTONIA

State of phasing out oil shale

ONGOING

2,000
employed coal workers

closure target

2040²

18
Extracting oil shale mines

7
coal plants in operation

37%
share of coal-fired power generation

State of Just Energy Transition

In October 2022, the European Commission approved Estonia's TJTP, which will invest EUR 354 million in JTF grants to execute a socially just green transition in Ida-Virumaa, Estonia's most carbon-intensive mining region. The TJTP aims to create more than 1,000 jobs, provide financial aid, and offer carefully designed re-skilling programmes to support workers during the transition. Additionally, the plan includes investments in green energy production and the development of a diversified economy.

² Estonia has set the objectives to cease electricity production from oil shale by 2035, to phase out oil shale in energy production by 2040 and to reach climate neutrality by 2050.

Common challenges

- The regions face structural weaknesses such as brain drain due to a lack of employment opportunities and limited attractiveness for young people;
- Young people face a significant barrier to active participation in just transition, especially is due to a lack of knowledge and understanding of the just transition process;
- Fewer opportunities to express opinions and participate in just transition. This challenge results from various factors including age discrimination, lack of representation and limited access to decision-making processes.

Focus topics

The transition to a low-carbon economy requires the engagement and support of local communities. Young people have a crucial role to play in this process as the transition directly affects their future. Thus, their perspectives, concerns and aspirations are vital for the dialogue on the transition to a more sustainable economy.



Youth engagement in the just transition process

The exchange focused on effectively involving young people in the just transition process. Proposed activities include: local authorities employing young people, improving their image, organising competitions for youth projects and between schools, providing support through mentors, creating more co-working spaces, using social media as the main news channel, using gamification approaches to communicate about just transition.



Project Implementation

Youth representatives discussed the role of young people in project implementation and needed skills. Effective communication, future labour market knowledge and problem-solving skills were identified as crucial. To contribute effectively, young people need information about the transition process, available opportunities and relevant research resources. Understanding regional needs, developing critical thinking, and a positive attitude were emphasized. Knowledge empowers and plays a key role in achieving multiple objectives.

Recommendations

- + Utilise online platforms, communication tools, and gamification to involve young people in the just transition. Their familiarity with digital technology makes it easier to reach, inform, and involve them effectively;
- + Establish an inclusive system with greater youth involvement, such as improved representation in decision-making, increased mentorship, more co-working spaces, and engagement in TV programmes and debates;
- + Create study programmes, reskilling opportunities, and cultural exchanges to equip young individuals for the modern work-

- force. Encouraging talented professionals to stay in their home countries fosters local economic growth and prosperity;
- + Understand and address youth needs: policymakers and community leaders must proactively support local talent development, attract promising industries, and foster an entrepreneurial ecosystem to meet young people's aspirations. Representation in decision-making processes can help identify and address these needs;
- + Create an environment that supports young people's growth and well-being, providing resources, social opportunities, and support. This prevents brain drain and builds a sustainable future for future generations in coal regions.



“We had a unique opportunity to learn how other countries approach the transformation. Our region can therefore further implement the knowledge gained in its own development.”

Vojtěch Meier, VSB-Technical University of Ostrava, Moravia-Silesia



“The exchange has been a great educational experience for all participants and has inspired many fresh ideas that we can implement in our home countries.”

Julia Policheva, People With Purpose Liit board member, Estonia, Ida-Virumaa

Learnings

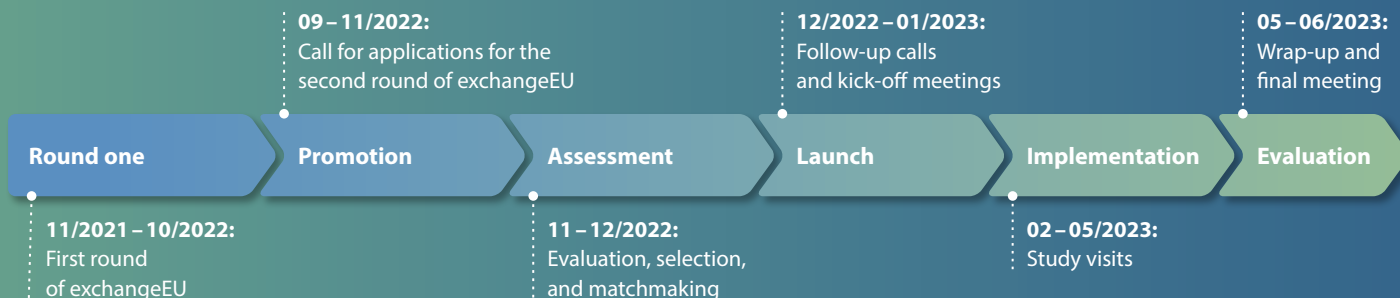
- ✓ The current system is not designed to meet the needs of young people, which could lead to their exclusion and disengagement;
- ✓ Young people may be more inclined to participate in just transition initiatives when they are led by inspiring role models who serve as advocates;

- ✓ Information on just transition is not easily accessible and often not presented in an understandable way;
- ✓ To make the transition successful, the governance structure needs to be more participatory. Investments in local businesses, energy communities, people's skills and motivation are necessary.

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



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