



EU coal regions exchange programme

# Exchange between Lusatia (DE) and Zgorzelec (PL)

exchangeEU

## Study visit in Lusatia, Germany

The delegations from Lusatia (Germany) and Zgorzelec (ZKlaster, Poland) came together to share best practices and develop new ideas and tangible projects of how to overcome prevailing challenges on their just transition pathway, particularly concerning the lack of **sustainable infrastructure for renewable energies** and the **recultivation of closed coal mines**. Representatives from Zklaster shared their experiences on building energy communities to provide clean and safe energy supply for Polish citizens. Based on the Polish experience, the participants brainstormed tangible ideas for sustainable infrastructure projects that can be jointly implemented. For example, one project idea is to establish energy communities in Weißwasser (Germany), following the Polish model.

A study visit to Weißwasser’s Communication and Nature Conservation Centre “Turm am schweren Berg”, led by a recultivation specialist from the regional mining company LEAG, provided the participants with insights on ongoing nature rehabilitation efforts, like converting part of the mine into a landscape-garden which features erratic mountain boulders and a variety of blooming plant species.

A workshop session with additional regional actors, such as representatives from the Saxony State Ministry or the German Nature and Biodiversity Conservation Union (NABU), allowed to further discuss the initially developed project ideas with a wider audience and take their perspectives into consideration. This exchange laid the foundation for a fruitful collaboration in the future. Since Lusatia and Zklaster are neighbouring regions, the exchange was being capitalised to develop concrete project ideas to be implemented in the nearer future and to intensify the cross-regional cooperation.

### LUSATIA, GERMANY

<b>Roles</b>	Hosting region	Mentor in respective fields of expertise
<b>Main actors involved</b>	UNU Flores, City of Weißwasser, City of Boxberg	
<b>Field of expertise</b>	Recultivation and revitalisation of mining areas, regional and societal perspectives	

### ZGORZELEC, POLAND

<b>Roles</b>	Visiting region	Mentor in respective fields of expertise
<b>Main actors involved</b>	ZKlaster Association of Development of Energy and Innovation	
<b>Field of expertise</b>	Renewable energy infrastructure, energy communities	

Participants visiting the recultivated Boulders Park in Nochten with the coal power plant Boxberg in the background. Photographer: Maximilian Zoll



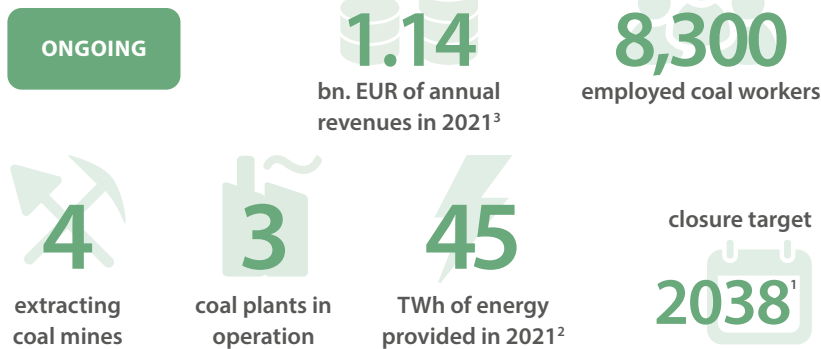
# Region profiles

## Towards a just transition away from coal

This exchange brought together two Central European regions, one of whom, Lusatia, is quite advanced in its transition towards a just and low-carbon future, and the other, Zgorzelec, which is beginning its just transition process. Lusatia plans to phase-out coal by the end of 2038 in line with the German coal phase-out plan. Coal extraction in the Turów mine, located in Zgorzelec instead, is planned to cease in 2044.

### LUSATIA, GERMANY

#### State of phasing out coal<sup>1</sup>



<sup>1</sup> Territorialer Übergangsplan für das Braunkohlerevier Lausitz (Brandenburg), 2021-2027.  
<sup>2</sup> LEAG.

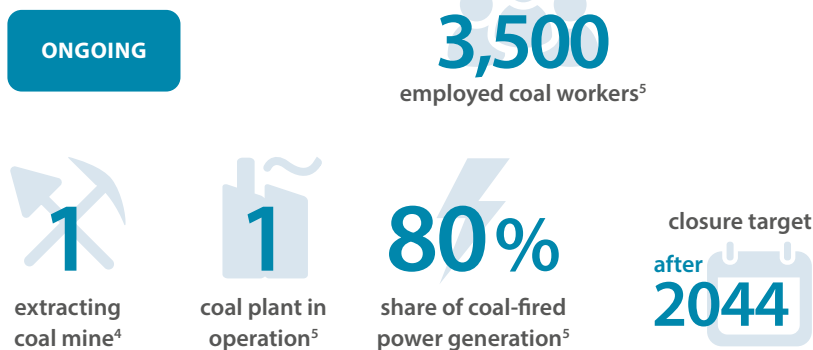
<sup>3</sup> Lausitzer Rundschau (2023), 03.01.2023.

#### State of Just Energy Transition

The Lusatia region is a cross-border energy and industrial region and one of the three focal areas in Germany that are the most affected by the coal phase-out. Mainly impacted by exiting coal are the manufacturing and the service sectors. Lusatia's Territorial Just Transition Plan (TJTP) focuses on establishing a future-proof energy region, restoring landscapes, securing skilled workers and supporting SMEs and start-ups.

### ZGORZELEC/TURÓW, POLAND

#### State of phasing out coal



<sup>4</sup> World Bank (2022): Towards a Just Coal Transition: Labor market challenges and people's perspectives from Lower Silesia.  
<sup>5</sup> Territorial Just Transition Plan 2021 - 2030 – Zgorzelec County.

#### State of Just Energy Transition

The just transition process in Poland is characterized by heterogeneity across regions and their specific local and regional factors. With a closure target of 2044, Turów currently does not receive funding under the Just Transition Fund (JTF). Phase-out of Turów's combined heat and power plants could result in major emissions savings, with estimations of nearly 50% CO<sub>2</sub> reduction from electricity generation in the region.

## Common challenges

Both regions are facing common challenges:

- to create effective strategies for diversifying the regions' energy mixes. A necessary condition is to increase public acceptance for renewable energies since in both regions, the public's mindset is still centred around coal, resulting in scepticism towards renewable energies. Consequently, there is a need for wholesome awareness-raising measures;
- to make use of abandoned coal mining areas for renewable energies: free land is needed to build upon renewable energy systems. Former coal mining areas offer significant land potential to this purpose. However, many rehabilitation plans do not include the option to reuse the land for renewable energy deployment;
- to fight unemployment and 'brain drain': due to mine closures, limited re-skilling offerings for young people, and little new employment opportunities, both regions are characterized by high unemployment rates and migration rates, especially from young people<sup>6</sup>.

<sup>6</sup> In consequence, the number of inhabitants in the city of Weißwasser decreased from around 40,000 in 1990 to 15,000 in 2023. Similarly, in Zgorzelec the decline consists of 6,000 inhabitants between 2004 and 2019.

## Focus topics

The participants of this exchange identified sustainable energy infrastructure and the recultivation of former mining areas as the two focus topics of the exchange.



### Sustainable infrastructure

Deploying infrastructure for renewable energies to ensure affordable and clean energy supply is a major challenge in the just transition process in both regions. During the exchange, the participants explored possibilities for joint projects: The delegation from Zgorzelec offered to support the City of Weißwasser in establishing small-scale energy community projects to guarantee social returns to local citizens. A first implementation step will be organising a meeting between ZKlaster, the municipality of Weißwasser, UNU Flores and interested citizens to specify the project idea.



### Recultivation of old coal mining areas

Currently, former coal mining areas are predominantly used to create nature protection areas or repurposed for military training. During the exchange, alternative use cases were suggested, such as building hiking and adventure trails connecting both regions while displaying the mining history of the region on boards along the trails.

## Recommendations

- + Build and foster transregional cooperation for knowledge sharing and mutual learning
- + Develop joint and cross-border infrastructure projects to facilitate the roll-out of renewable energies on former mining sites
- + Foster high-level stakeholder engagement, e.g. through organization of meetings and dialogues with the municipal decision-makers to align on common projects and approaches, and promotion of public participation



“I am pleased that we got to meet and begun to generate impulses to work more closely together in the future.”

**Franziska Stoelzel**  
UNU Flores, Lusatia



“The event allowed participants to present their experiences and best practices. The main takeaway is a concrete project idea we plan to implement in the near future.”

**Agnieszka Spirydowicz**  
ZKlaster, Zgorzelec

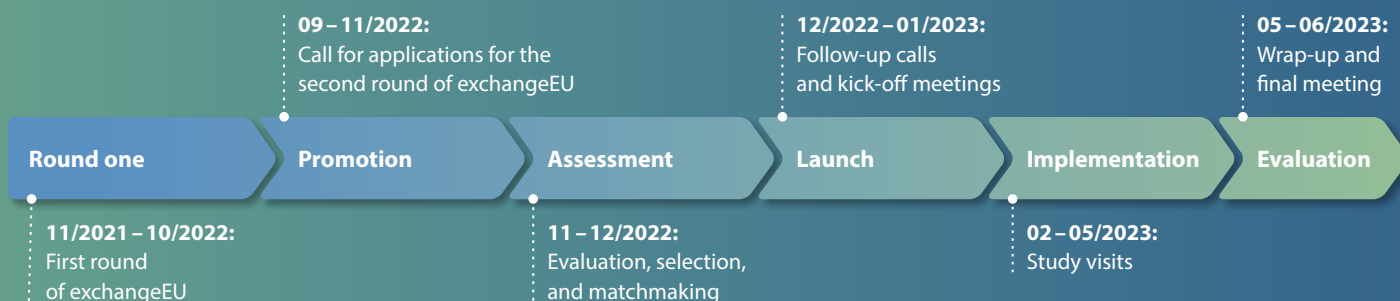
## Learnings

- ✓ Cross border cooperation is needed to address common challenges more effectively, particularly through the implementation of joint projects;
- ✓ Weißwasser benefits from the Polish experience in rolling out energy communities;
- ✓ Including local authorities and communities in the transition and decision-making process is necessary to cater people's interests and needs from the start. There is a need for engaging people who share a sustainable vision for the future and connect those with like-minded stakeholders.

# 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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