

December 2023

Layman's report

LIFE19 GIC/CZ/001333



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'The RegENERate project has received funding from the LIFE Programme of the European Union.'

Project details:

Date: 01/01/2021 to 31/12/2023

LIFE project name: RegENERate: Mobilising Regions for Energetic Redevelopment and Transformative NECPs

Project acronym: RegENERate

Project duration: 01/01/2021 to 31/12/2023

Bulgaria – Ekologichno sdruzhenie “Za Zemiata” (**ZZ**) / Friends of the Earth Bulgaria

Estonia – MTÜ Eesti Roheline Liikumine / Estonian Green Movement (**EGM**)

Hungary – Magyar Természetvédők Szövetsége / National Society of Conservationists - Friends of the Earth Hungary (**NSC-FoE HU**)

Latvia – Zaļā brīvība / Green Liberty (**GL**)

Poland – Związek Stowarzyszeń Polska Zielona Sieć / The Polish Green Network (**PGN**)

Romania – Asociația Bankwatch România / Bankwatch Romania Association (**BW RO**)

Slovakia – Priatelia Zeme-CEPA / Friends of the Earth-CEPA (**FoE-CEPA**)

Introduction – objective of the project

Main project findings

The main aim of the project Mobilising Regions for Energetic Redevelopment and Transformative NECPs is to support the contribution of central and eastern European countries to the European Union’s efforts towards a net-zero emissions future. The project has contributed to more ambitious and effective climate and energy policies in central and eastern Europe, backed by a long-term commitment to phasing out fossil fuels, improving energy efficiency and promoting renewable energy. The project has focused on regions which are in transition from a fossil fuel-based economy, coal, and shale oil, as well as less developed regions that are disadvantaged in terms of their socio-economic situations and environmental problems. Furthermore, the project has contributed to aligning financing flows, such as national budgets and EU budgets, with climate and energy targets at the key moment of the EU Cohesion Fund programming.

The specific project objectives were as follows:

- 1) to step up the multilevel dialogue on climate and energy transition in targeted central and eastern European countries and enable increases in the countries’ climate ambitions in the national energy and climate plan revisions for 2023;
- 2) to advance the progress of local redevelopment strategies and their compliance with the EU climate objectives, especially in the regions that are moving away from a fossil fuel-based economy;
- 3) to develop a transnational exchange platform for the creation of a knowledge base for low-carbon energy transition at regional and local levels.

Through the project, we were able to target eight transitioning regions that had and still have several disadvantages holding them back from taking all the available opportunities to move towards low-carbon economies, namely Bulgaria (Pernik – coal region), Poland (Upper Silesia and Eastern Wielkopolska – coal regions), Slovakia (Upper Nitra – coal region), Romania (Jiu Valley – coal region), Hungary (BAZ – coal region), Latvia (Vidzeme – less developed, peat extraction region), and Estonia (Ida-Virumaa – shale oil extraction region).



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Main project findings: climate problem targeted

Without the central and eastern European Member States and support from the LIFE programme, the EU's climate and energy targets would have been hard to reach in this part of Europe. Climate policy has traditionally been difficult to implement in the central and eastern regions of Europe, and many central and eastern Member States of the European Union have acted to weaken EU climate ambitions in recent years. The 2020 to 2023 period provided other opportunities for advancing discussions on the targeted countries' climate ambitions and for improving the national energy and climate plans. Through the project, we wanted to focus on the formation and implementation of regional redevelopment plans (ultimately, these came in the form of the Territorial Just Transition Plans) and the development of new national energy and climate plans, thus laying the groundwork for the crucial update of climate ambitions in the final national energy and climate plans, scheduled for 2023 and 2024. We already see that the just transition approach has the potential to overcome entrenched positions by engaging affected groups in a constructive dialogue centred on solutions. The key role of civil society organisations like us is to support these groups in pushing for policy changes at both the national and the EU levels. Such support is made conditional on accepting climate-compatible transition pathways, moving the debate away from 'whether' to phase out coal and other fossil fuels to 'how' and 'when' to conduct this phase-out.

What we wanted to achieve

The overall result we wanted to achieve was to change the official positions of the targeted central and eastern European Member States, those which largely persistently defend coal-dominated energy systems. We worked to change their underlying understanding of how the energy system works (that the coal phase out is threatening already vulnerable regions and the sovereignty of economies) and how it could be managed in the future. This was done by changing the public narrative of the discussion (among the media, experts, industries and active citizens), showing both the risks of taking no action and the potential benefits to society which could result from taking good measures.

The additional results we wanted to achieve are listed below.

- 1) Adoption of a strategy for redevelopment of coal mining/shale/less developed regions in at least four of the nine targeted regions; the process for redevelopment strategies has already begun in the rest of the targeted regions and in at least three new ones, and the implementation of the redevelopment strategy has improved in at least one country.
- 2) Effective pool of transformation experts/industries working at the national level that is able to participate in policy and legislative debate on the national level in all seven countries targeted by the project. The final national energy and climate plan revision was prepared in multi-level dialogue as required by Article 11 of the Governance Regulation.
- 3) Governments considering financial schemes for supporting energy efficiency in households and renewable energy – at least 15 per cent from the national cohesion funds/European Investment Bank investments are allocated to energy-transformative investments and just transition and/or public financial support improved to reflect regional conditions.

- 4) Coal phase-out was accelerated and a number of unsustainable solutions for coal/shale oil/gas phase-out were abandoned, resulting in a reduction of greenhouse gas emissions and of ecological footprint.
- 5) Energy efficiency/renewable energy sources and fossil fuel phase-out targets were improved in the proposals for the final drafts of the national energy and climate plans in all seven countries.
- 6) More than three million people were reached through media and outreach activities as part of the project.



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What we achieved: key long-term achievements

- Impacting key EU legislation: Just Transition Fund regulation and Staff Working Document (SWD) excludes investments in fossil fuels

One of the most significant achievements of our work came in the first year of the project with the establishment of the Just Transition Fund (JTF), which set up a clear framework for just transition planning and funding, excluding any fossil fuel investments. The main legislative act we impacted was the Regulation of the European Parliament and of the Council of 24 June 2021, establishing the JTF. The regulation states in Article 9d that ‘the JTF shall not support: d) investment related to the production, processing, transport, distribution, storage or combustion of fossil fuels’. See [Regulation \(EU\) 2021/1056 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 24 June 2021](#).

- Improving the just transition process

During the project, the national governments in the countries in which we work – Romania, Bulgaria, Slovakia, Poland, Hungary, Latvia and Estonia – prepared their Territorial Just Transition Plans and related recovery and resilience programmes and went through the approval process during the summer and

autumn of 2022. The quality of the final drafts of the Territorial Just Transition Plans in at least five regions substantially improved due to our comments. More than 60 per cent of our recommendations in Romania and Poland were taken on board for the Territorial Just Transition Plans in Eastern Wielkopolska (PL), Gorj (RO) and the Jiu Valley (RO).

We prepared regular updates on the status of the Territorial Just Transition Plans in central and eastern Europe, which provided unique and timely comparisons of the seven countries that are part of the project with regard to the quality of the plans and of local stakeholder engagement in the regions affected by coal, peat (Latvia), or oil shale (Estonia) phase-out. The updates helped many Member State authorities and local actors involved in this process to improve their practices through lessons learnt from implementation in other countries. Through these updates, we pushed for the introduction of innovative elements to the just transition planning, e.g. giving a voice to youth and gender groups and setting new practices for public participation. Furthermore, we also managed to draw attention to specific discrepancies in the proposed Territorial Just Transition Plans and called for these to be addressed in requests for amendments – for example, more ambitious phase-out dates or the inclusion of projects linked to a circular economy or to the environment.

- Approval of Territorial Just Transition Plans

The lengthy process of drafting Territorial Just Transition Plans over the course of almost two years was finalised at the end of 2022. Six countries that we work with received approval, encompassing four regions in Poland, three in Slovakia, four in Latvia, one in Estonia, three in Hungary and six in Romania. Only Bulgaria still lags behind, as months of political turmoil and a complete lack of vision for how to conduct an ambitious and fully transparent transformation have already resulted in a loss of EUR 100 million from the Just Transition Fund, which is crucial for this heavily coal-dependent country. Still, we continue to push for its submission in 2023 in hopes that Bulgaria will receive allocated EU funding. Our consortium members were key actors participating in the preparation, consultation, and amendments of the Territorial Just Transition Plans in all the countries in which we work.

- Improving technical assistance and access to it: Exchange EU, START and JT Groundwork

A significant focus of our just transition work in the first two years of the RegENERate – at the European, national and regional levels – has been on improving the quality and quantity of the technical assistance available to transitioning regions and building the capacity for transformation among local and regional stakeholders. This objective was the highlight of a separate briefing co-authored by us and the Europe Beyond Coal (Beyond Fossil Fuels) network, titled '[How can we assist you?](#)' We also dedicated numerous advocacy meetings with the European Commission to this topic. We have supported regions in applying for various technical assistance instruments, providing them with information on what suitable programmes they can apply for and encouraging them to do so. Our effectiveness in this area is evidenced by the significant number of regions we collaborate with in different technical assistance programmes. For instance, in 2023, four of our regions received support from [JTP Groundwork](#), five regions received [START technical assistance](#) and numerous representatives from our regions have benefitted from [exchangeEU technical assistance](#).

- Achieving the status of experts on the just transition process

Our international and country-level campaigners have come to be perceived as high-level experts on the just transition process in central and eastern Europe. We are regularly invited to participate as panellists and experts on just transition in webinars, at conferences, in meetings and in working groups, including in high-level political dialogues, the Just Transition Platform, and others. We also cooperate with various universities and research centres, provide information for journalists and reporters, and participate in exchanges with managing authorities on all levels. One of our main focus areas for such activities is the organisation of advocacy meetings with various representatives of the European Commission, including different DGs, commissioner cabinet representatives, and the EC Vice-President.

- Improving access to information about just transition: the just transition info portal

In terms of the dissemination of our work, we created the www.just-transition.info portal, which was launched by CEE Bankwatch Network in 2017 (not part of the project, but upgraded thanks to LIFE RegENERate), as a multi-language platform where stakeholders from coal regions can find resources related to just transition. In the first year of the project, we further developed the portal to increase its visibility and audience engagement. We added a call for contributions with the aim of increasing the number of contributors writing about just transition or about communities transitioning away from fossil fuels. In addition, participants can sign up for our quarterly newsletter, which contains major developments related to just transition, particularly in central and eastern Europe. Furthermore, we have a social media section where participants can follow us on Twitter/X and Facebook, where we regularly share our just transition updates from the region. Over the years, the audience has steadily grown, along with content in different languages.

- Civil society organisations' participation in the monitoring process

We also participate in monitoring how resources from the Just Transition Fund are implemented, with representatives of civil society organisations active in monitoring committees that are responsible for the Just Transition Fund for all the countries in which we are active. In recent months, a briefing was published that provides concrete recommendations on project selection criteria, the project selection process, project evaluation, and monitoring. Just like the checklist publication, this briefing is to be used extensively to place pressure on all decision-making levels in order to ensure that the projects are in line with our understanding of just transition and are as transformative as possible.

Key publications

Throughout the duration of the project, we have produced many publications. The key ones are the regular status updates on the Territorial Just Transition Plans, which have not only become unique and timely comparisons of the seven countries, but have also helped many Member State authorities and local actors to improve their practices through lessons learnt. More information can be found at this [link](#).

- [Status of the Territorial Just Transition Plans in central and eastern Europe](#), March 2021
- [Status of the Territorial Just Transition Plans in central and eastern Europe](#), July 2021

- [Territorial Just Transition Plans for Polish Coal Regions](#), October 2021
- [Status of the Territorial Just Transition Plans in central and eastern Europe: December 2021 update](#), December 2021
- [Status of the Territorial Just Transition Plans in central and eastern Europe: December 2021 update – Annex: Slovakia](#), March 2022
- [The state of youth engagement in the implementation of the EU’s Just Transition Mechanism](#), May 2022
- [The state of youth engagement in the implementation of the EU Just Transition Mechanism – July/September 2022 \(just-transition.info\)](#), October 2022
- [What is the current state of the just transition processes in Bulgaria?](#), January 2023
- [Assessment of Latvia’s Territorial Just Transition Plan](#), February 2023
- [The second and third pillars of the Just Transition Mechanism](#), March 2023
- [Mapping the road to a just transition in central and eastern Europe: an analysis of Territorial Just Transition Plans in 7 countries](#), September 2023
- [Planning for social justice in Territorial Just Transition Plans in central and eastern Europe](#), September 2023
- [Guidelines for selecting just transition projects](#), October 2023

Key video

[Participarea femeilor în procesul de tranziție justă](#)



The interview reveals how the Jiu Valley lacks basic services for family support such as kindergartens with extended hours, after-school programmes, nurseries, and school integration programmes. Women also complain about the lack of medical services, even those dedicated to the birth and care of children, as well as those for older people in the area.

In the end, we see how women’s problems affect the whole society, which causes migration abroad or to other more economically stable areas.

Key events

In order to engage audiences and get their input, a series of key events were held. Further details and videos about the events that were held can be found on the following website: <https://bankwatch.org/regenerate-mobilising-regions-for-energetic-re-development-and-transformative-necps>

- Baltic event

Energy transformation of the Baltic states – challenges and opportunities

This was an all-day, high-level event held on 13 September 2022 in Riga, Latvia. The event was held in hybrid form, both online and in person. More than 50 participants followed the discussions and listened to the expert opinions of the speakers on how to create a new energy regime, especially in a high-inflation environment, and what states do to protect vulnerable households in the short-term while ensuring investments in housing energy efficiency.



- Stakeholder meeting

Territorial Just Transition Plans – Stakeholder meeting

On 30 November 2022, we co-hosted and participated in a closed-door event organised by the Foundation for European Progressive Studies (FEPS). The event brought together experts, campaigners, civil society members, and decision-makers at the local and EU levels who are working on the Territorial Just Transition

Plans. As the plans are entering the implementation phase, the event provided a platform for sharing information and experiences within thematic clusters such as transparency, inclusiveness, capacity-building and strategy.

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- Webinars

Throughout 2023, we organised a series of monthly webinars under the title ‘[Navigating the just transition](#)’. These monthly webinars focused on various aspects of just transition, including youth in just transition regions, energy communities, and just transition in the Western Balkans and Ukraine. The following examples are some of the webinars we organised within the framework of the project.

The first webinar in the series, titled [Two years of just transition planning – what have we learned?](#), reflected on the programming phase of the Just Transition Fund (JTF) and documented experiences at the regional, national and EU levels. The panel consisted of representatives from Bankwatch, DG Regio, Estonia’s Ministry of Finance, and the deputy mayor of Pernik in Bulgaria. The second webinar in the series, titled [Is coal really making a comeback?](#), addressed the impact of the war in Ukraine on energy production. The panellists included experts from Ember, Europe Beyond Coal, Green Tank and E3G, who shared their expertise on the topic. The third webinar in the series, titled [Moving forward with pillars two and three](#), focused on the second and third pillars of the Just Transition Mechanism (JTM). To shed light on the challenges and opportunities related to these pillars, we invited experts from the Directorate-General for Economic and Financial Affairs (DG ECFIN) and DG Regio to share their knowledge and provide more information.

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