

Justice in Transition

Empowering citizens for a fair
green economy

Final project report

Findings, outcomes, and policy
recommendations for regions
in coal phaseout



February 2025

Introduction

To tackle climate change, European coal regions must transition away from coal. However, transition plans may challenge the social ecosystem of the regions where coal is still king: if they don't consider local conditions, they may increase unemployment rates and aggravate energy poverty and economic migration. Energy poverty is already a big challenge today in the EU, with coal-dependent regions generally being more affected by the issue.

In the spirit of the EU principle to “leave no one behind” in the transition, JUSTEM supported 6 European coal regions,

- Stara Zagora (Bulgaria)
- Istria (Croatia)
- Western Macedonia (Greece)
- Silesia (Poland)
- Jiu Valley (Romania)
- Asturias (Spain)

through a double-sided approach: (1) it helped regional authorities to develop ‘just’ transition plans that are sensitive to regional impacts such as job losses and energy poverty; and (2) it helped citizens learn about structural changes and express their ideas for a greener region.

This report summarises the main findings and outcomes of JUSTEM. It is aimed at regional and European policy makers, NGOs, and citizens interested in the just transition to a coal-free economy. Detailed reports are available in the [JUSTEM website](#), along with complementary resources developed throughout the project.

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Analysis of existing strategies

A cross-country analysis of national and regional energy transition policy documents and Territorial Just Transition Plans found that all countries addressed by JUSTEM are planning for coal phaseout. Overall, citizen participation in the planning is not evident. Also, the plans focus more on the technical impacts and financial resources for the transition. Social intervention focuses primarily on unemployment and energy poverty, though failing to present concrete measures on that area.

arise as part of the transition. We found that the pilot regions are at least as prone to energy poverty as the corresponding nations, while data from several indicators suggest that the prevalence of energy poverty could rapidly worsen, leaving citizens at high risk of poverty or social exclusion if potential socioeconomic impacts of the transition are not considered . These include trends in demographics (i.e., most regions have an ageing population), a potential reduction of the disposable household income accompanied by higher unemployment rates, and the poor efficiency of the building stock that has so far been dependent on fossil fuels to cover their energy needs.

Energy poverty vulnerability factors during a transition

Inefficient buildings	Employment / income	High energy prices	Ageing population
Inadequate insulation and outdated heating systems result in low energy efficiency, poor thermal comfort, and high energy expenditure	Coal phaseout eliminates a high percentage of jobs, thus adversely impact household income	They reduce the disposable income of households and often limit their ability to heat their homes adequately	Households consisting of elderly residents are particularly vulnerable to energy market fluctuations and rising energy costs

Mitigating energy poverty through the transition

Vulnerability factors and dimensions of energy poverty

One of the key goals of JUSTEM is to provide recommendations for coal regions to alleviate energy poverty vis-à-vis the just transition. We first performed an analysis of energy poverty in the pilot countries and regions to shed light on the status quo of energy poverty, while reflecting on the potential challenges that may

Based on these findings, we developed a set of energy poverty alleviation plans ([PL](#), [BG](#), [ES](#), [GR](#), [RO](#), [HR](#)) tailored to address the likely challenges of each region. The plans aim to help local and regional authorities mitigate the risk of energy poverty in their communities through a set of structured interventions with proposed timelines and budget estimates aligned with existing and anticipated European, national, and regional legislation. The plans also include a uniform model for monitoring and evaluation to help local authorities with the timely identification of issues and areas for improvement.

Citizen engagement in JUSTEM



Engaging citizens in the Just Transition

Towards increasing the level of citizen awareness and involvement for the clean and just transition in regions dependent on coal, we carried out a series of engagement activities to ensure that the voices of the local communities are heard.

Additionally, we developed APOLLO-Live, an open-access and open-source webtool that can facilitate stakeholder engagement synchronously during workshops and analyse survey results to prioritise needs and priority issues, as well as evaluate potential courses of action in just transition regions. Both the [webtool](#) and the [source code](#) are available online, ensuring that the resource developed during the project is freely and easily available to potential future users.

We got valuable insights about the opinions of citizens from the JUSTEM pilot regions:

Citizens want to be better informed about the just transition process and

their potential role in it, so they can participate in the decision-making processes and prepare for the future. They also expect public authorities to offer advice about available opportunities (e.g. jobs, reskilling, energy cost reduction) and to establish one-stop-shops to support their initiatives and encourage entrepreneurship.

Citizens aspire to be more actively involved in the design of policies and in the monitoring of implementation of policies and projects. They would like to see their representatives involved in public consultations and working groups for new policies, and they would expect an invitation to join a regional just transition observatory if it is established.

Citizens demand that education is aligned with the expected needs of the new economy, so they are well prepared to overcome the new challenges. Similarly, they demand adequate reskilling opportunities for the workers employed in coal-related fields. Additionally, citizens see research as a promising field for employment, potentially opening new opportunities.

Citizens want authorities to tackle **energy poverty** namely through supporting energy renovation of the building stock, but also efficient and clean transport. They expect governments to upscale supportive frameworks and expand effective mechanisms to protect citizens against the anticipated increase in energy poverty.

Evaluating multiple benefits of mitigation measures

Learnings from citizen engagement and research on vulnerability factors, when compared with the analysed regional strategies to implement the transitions, uncover a blind spot: the impact of transition processes on the social and demographic fabric of society, including social cohesion and cultural identity, where negative effects are expected to be high.

To tackle this issue, we outlined a multiple impacts approach to help regional authorities to better define and assess the regional impacts of the transition to climate neutrality, thus supporting the development of accurately-targeted policies. This process resulted in a [multiple-impact matrix](#) that can be applied to regions in transition across Europe, regardless their involvement in JUSTEM.

Boosting regional action for a just transition

Based on the regional needs identified in the status quo analysis and on the insights from citizen

Multiple impacts matrix

Social	Reskilling / upskilling of workers
	Access to public infrastructure and services
	Gender implications
	Community cohesiveness, social inclusion/exclusion
	Socio-cultural identity
	Energy poverty
	Living conditions
Economic	Unemployment
	Closure of mines and extraction sites
	Decommissioning of fossil fuel-fired power plants
	Structural changes in related industries
Demographic	Migration of (young) people
	Population density
	Attractiveness to live and work in the region
Environmental	Greenhouse gas emissions
	Health, including pollution
	Nature restoration/revitalisation, renaturation

engagement, JUSTEM elaborated a series of project proposals which aim to address the most prominent challenges of each region.

Project ideas were firstly discussed with potential implementors; they were finetuned and assessed for feasibility. Then they were discussed with fund-managing authorities to assess their eligibility for funding under any of the available options. As a result, we developed pipelines for a total of 31 just transition projects across the six pilot regions.

Finally, beneficiaries of the projects were provided training and advice to increase their chances of successful funding and implementation.



Pipelining projects for a just transition

The following pages summarise several just transition projects pipelined by JUSTEM. These projects were finetuned according to feedback from relevant stakeholders; beneficiaries will now apply with them for funding.

An exhaustive description of all projects pipelined by JUSTEM will be available on the project website.

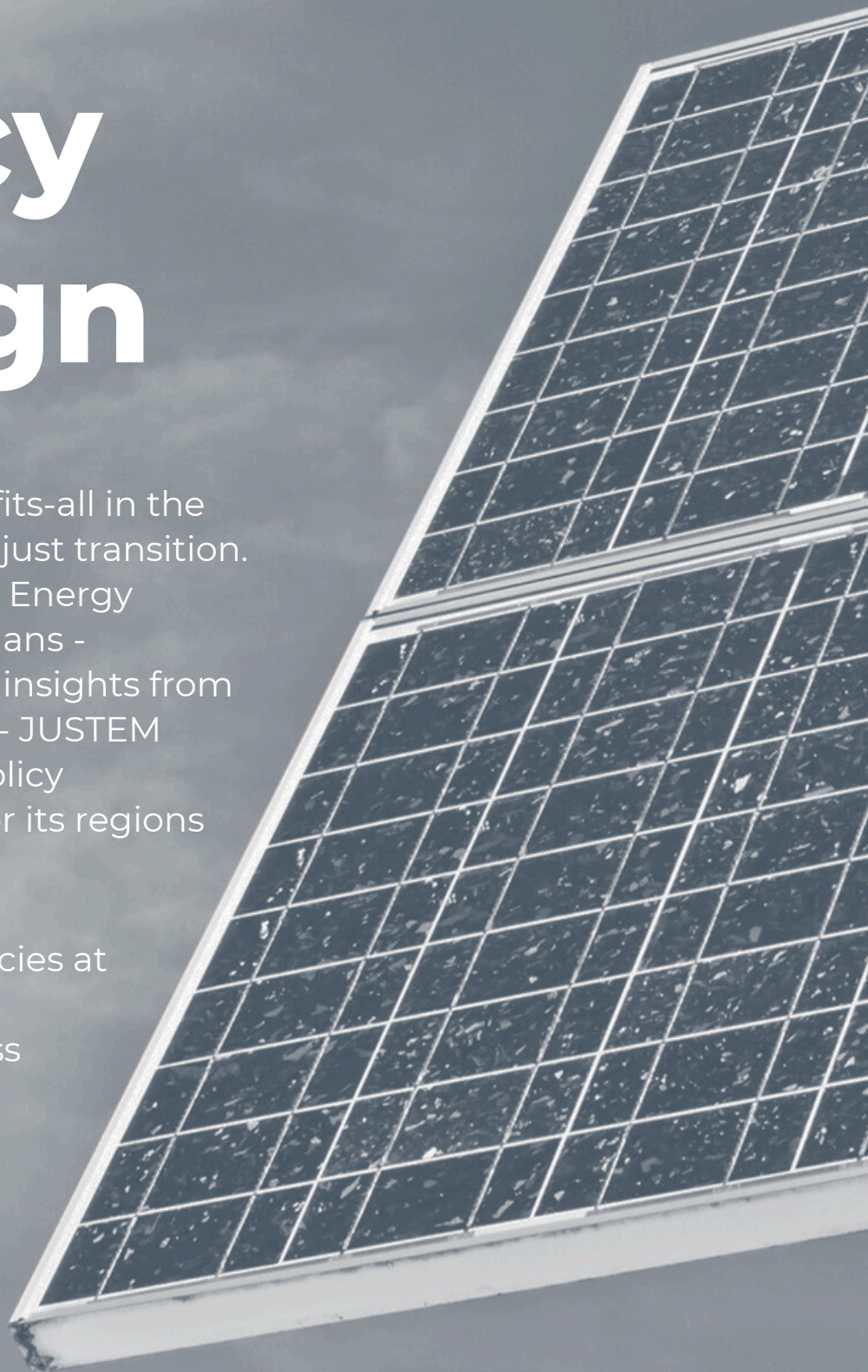
Country	Project	Description and estimated investment	Fields of action
Bulgaria	Support to the energy renovation of multifamily residential buildings	Renovation of 4500 apartments and improvement of building management and maintenance. Estimated investment: 57M€	• Energy efficiency • Energy poverty • Employment
Bulgaria	Battery recycling facility	Response to the rapid expansion of photovoltaic parks, the rise of electric vehicles and the increasing use of batteries in appliances. Estimated investment: 1,18M€	• Employment • Saving emissions • Energy affordability
Bulgaria	Renewable heat supply in a multifamily building	Installation of a VRF, individual heat pumps for hot water, and a stand-alone photovoltaic system with battery storage. Estimated investment: 310.000€	• Clean energy production • Energy efficiency • Energy affordability • Energy poverty
Croatia	Energy renovation of family houses in Istrian County	Provision of financial support for energy renovations of family houses with high energy consumption. Estimated investment: 25M€	• Energy efficiency • Energy poverty
Croatia	LA_BI(N)CIKLETA	Promotion of cycling and walking instead of car driving. Estimated investment: 710.000€	• Saving emissions • Social inclusion
Croatia	Establishment of Energy Communities in multifamily residential buildings in Istrian Region	Establishment of energy communities in multifamily residential buildings paired with PV installation.	• Energy poverty • Clean energy production • Energy affordability • Saving emissions
Greece	Re-opening the railway connection around Thessaloniki	Re-connection of the main urban centres of Western Macedonia with Thessaloniki. Estimated investment: 190M€	• Energy efficiency • Saving emissions
Greece	Installing heat pumps in energy-poor households	Installment of heat-pumps in 6,000 energy-poor households to cover their energy needs in the absence of a cheap and efficient district heating system. Estimated investment: 27M€	• Energy poverty • Saving emissions
Greece	Establishing a regional energy poverty observatory and advisory office in Western Macedonia	Creation of an office that will monitor the progression of energy poverty in the region and provide assistance to citizens on projects and funding.	• Energy poverty • Empowerment of citizens

Country	Project	Description and estimated investment	Fields of action
Poland	Re-skilling of employees working in the mining sector	Support current coal workers in pursuing a new career by promoting the acquisition of new knowledge and competences. Estimated investment: 190.000€	• Reskilling / upskilling • Employment
Poland	Thermomodernisation of single-family buildings and elimination of coal-fired heat sources	Allocation of subsidies for 150,000 buildings to replace inefficient heat sources and install renewable energy systems. Estimated investment: 2,8B€	• Energy poverty • Energy efficiency • Clean energy production • Saving emissions
Poland	Increasing women's labour activity	Encouragement of women to enter / return to the labor market. Estimated investment: 36.000€	• Social inclusion • Empowerment of citizens
Spain	Understanding and improving the Asturian coal transition narrative	Addressing of the sense of injustice felt by the citizens most affected by the closure of coal mines and the phasing out of TTPs. Estimated investment: 219.000€	• Empowerment of citizens
Spain	Making visible and accompanying the blinded (energy) poverty by local communities	Uncovering hidden energy poverty by developing new indicators, building capacity and engaging citizens. Estimated investment: 326.400€	• Empowerment of citizens • Energy poverty
Spain	Network of Local Desks acting as OSSs to prepare projects and overcome administrative procedures	Provision of support to municipalities, SMEs and local entities in the preparation and management of funded projects. Estimated investment: 282.000€	• Energy efficiency • Energy poverty • Empowerment of citizens • Saving emissions
Romania	Energy Efficiency Upgrades for Public Schools in Jiu Valley	Improvement of energy efficiency of public schools by upgrading insulation, heating systems, and lighting. Estimated investment: 400.000€	• Energy efficiency • Saving emissions
Romania	Training Programs for Green Jobs in the Energy Sector	Reskilling and upskilling of workers from coal-dependent industries for employment in the growing renewable energy sector. Estimated investment: 350.000€	• Reskilling / upskilling • Employment
Romania	Circular economy in the valorization of tailings - sustainable solutions for JT	Valorisation of tailings to regenerate the environment and create new economic and social opportunities. Estimated investment: 2,5M€	• Energy efficiency • Clean energy production • Saving emissions

Policy design

There is no one-size-fits-all in the implementation of a just transition. Based on its regional Energy Poverty Alleviation Plans - complemented with insights from citizen engagement - JUSTEM developed a set of policy recommendations for its regions in transition.

We also propose policies at an European level to facilitate action across Member States.



Summary of recommendations

Europe



Promote bottom-up approaches to policy design and implementation that support active citizen participation.

Creating the conditions for citizens to shape transitions will ensure that transition processes are inclusive, effective, and sustainable, thereby maximising their positive impact on communities.



Support territories to manage and monitor the positive and negative impacts of transitions away from coal.

To ensure just outcomes, it is essential to monitor transitions and enable the implementation of measures that minimise negative impacts and capitalise on positive ones.



Encourage Member States to sufficiently address energy poverty in the implementation of just transitions.

This requires that public funds are specifically targeted at the energy poor and enable the implementation of renewable energy and energy efficiency measures in housing to ensure that all communities, especially the most vulnerable, benefit from the transition.



Enable investments in social and cultural just transition projects to "reshape" identity and create cohesion.

European Union funding should not only facilitate the development of large-scale projects, but also support actions that address social vulnerabilities and contribute to the social and demographic fabric of societies.

Summary of recommendations

Bulgaria



Energy efficiency

Prioritizing Energy Efficiency in Housing Modernization: Improve the energy performance of multi-family residential buildings through large-scale renovation programs, including insulation, efficient heating systems, and smart energy infrastructure.

Replacing Inefficient Heating Systems: Support the phase-out of carbon-intensive heating appliances, replacing them with clean and efficient alternatives such as heat pumps, biomass boilers, and district heating solutions.



Renewable energy

Establishment of Renewable Energy Communities (RECs): Promote community-led energy initiatives that allow residents to generate, share, and consume locally produced renewable energy, reducing energy costs and improving access for vulnerable groups.

Build a battery recycling facility to support wider renewable energy uptake. The facility will provide materials for battery production (thus reducing their costs), create employment, and contribute to cleaner environment.



Community Empowerment and Participation

Energy Poverty Advisory Offices: Create local advisory offices to provide guidance, technical support, and financial assistance for citizens seeking to improve their energy efficiency.

Support for Community-Led Energy Projects: Facilitate grassroots initiatives tailored to local needs, ensuring that energy poverty solutions are inclusive and community-driven.



Social Inclusion and Employment

Reskilling and Upskilling for Affected Workers: Implement targeted training programs to help workers transition from coal-related industries into new job markets, including sustainable energy and technology sectors.

Financial Support for Displaced Workers: Provide social safety nets for individuals affected by structural changes, ensuring a just and equitable transition that prioritizes economic resilience.

Summary of recommendations

Croatia



Energy efficiency

Energy Renewal of Family Houses at Risk of Energy Poverty: Improve the energy efficiency of over 3,000 energy-poor households by providing financial support for home refurbishments, including insulation and structural improvements.



Community Empowerment and Participation

Energy Poverty Orientation Centre: Establish a centralized hub providing guidance and support to energy-poor households, offering reskilling opportunities, employment assistance, and energy efficiency advice.

Establishment of Energy Communities for Vulnerable Citizens:

Promote the development of energy communities in multi-family residential buildings occupied by energy-poor households. This initiative will provide clean, affordable energy while reducing monthly electricity costs and enhancing local energy independence.

Involve citizens in JT: organize information campaigns, establish co-working spaces, and organize educational seminars for students.



Supportive Policies and Regulations

Introduction of a New Educational Curriculum: Better align secondary school curricula with evolving job market needs, integrating future-oriented competencies in green technologies, digital skills, and sustainable industries.



Support for Businesses and Workforce Reskilling

Support for SMEs through Production Innovations: Facilitate investments in SMEs to foster innovation, business diversification, and process modernization, enabling a green and digital transition.

Implementation of Reskilling Programs for Occupations at Risk:

Develop tailored educational programs to equip workers—particularly those affected by the energy transition—with skills in green and digital industries. Training will focus on technical, managerial, and entrepreneurial competencies.

Summary of recommendations

Greece



Energy efficiency

Establish a Regional Energy Poverty Observatory: Set up a dedicated office within the Regional Authority to monitor energy poverty trends, evaluate policy effectiveness, and coordinate alleviation measures.

Insulation of Households under the "Saving at Home" Scheme:

Provide financial support to improve insulation in 15,000 energy-poor households, reducing heating losses and energy costs.

Smart Energy Meter Installation and Digital Solutions: Deploy smart meters in 100,000 households, prioritizing energy-poor communities. This initiative will improve energy literacy, enable real-time monitoring, and support dynamic pricing strategies to lower energy costs.



Community Empowerment and Participation

Introduction of Energy Poverty Mitigation Offices: Establish municipal-level offices to provide personalized guidance and support on energy efficiency measures, available subsidies, and financial assistance programs.

Capacity Development and Awareness-Raising Workshops: Conduct training sessions for technical staff, municipal officials, and citizens on energy poverty, energy efficiency, and renewable energy solutions.



Renewable energy

Self-Production with PV Cells: Support the installation of photovoltaic (PV) systems in 2,500 energy-poor households, reducing reliance on conventional energy sources and lowering household electricity costs.

Establishing Energy Communities: Assist in the creation of local energy cooperatives to promote energy democracy and provide low-cost, clean energy to vulnerable households.



Supportive Policies and Regulations

Prioritization of Energy-Poor Households in Energy Transition Policies:

Ensure that all policy measures and funding schemes explicitly target and benefit vulnerable households.

Financial Support for Energy Efficiency and Renewable Energy

Initiatives: Develop targeted subsidies and low-interest financing options to make energy-efficient upgrades and renewable energy adoption accessible for all households.

Support R&I initiatives: R&D will boost local employment alongside the green transition.



Social Inclusion and Employment

Training and reskilling programmes: design programmes with curricula in the area of energy transition.

Summary of recommendations

Poland



Energy efficiency

Incentive Mechanisms for Sustainable Renovations: Provide subsidies and low-interest financing for the renovation of residential buildings, focusing on thermal insulation, energy-efficient heating, and improved living conditions. Priority should be given to low-income households and older housing stock to maximize impact.

Replacement of Inefficient Heating and Cooling Systems: Support the adoption of modern, energy-efficient household appliances and heating systems through targeted financial incentives.



Renewable energy

Grants for Small-Scale Renewable Energy Installations: Promote rooftop solar panels and other renewable energy technologies in low-income households, increasing energy independence.

Incentive Mechanisms for Clean Heating Systems: Support the transition from outdated, inefficient heaters to renewable-based alternatives, improving air quality and reducing health risks associated with fossil fuel combustion.

Job Creation in Renewable Energy Sectors: Encourage workforce retraining and employment in the installation, maintenance, and operation of renewable energy technologies, offering new opportunities for individuals at risk of energy poverty.



Community Empowerment and Participation

Support for Local Energy Poverty Alleviation Projects: Fund and facilitate initiatives tailored to community-specific needs, ensuring solutions are locally driven and widely accessible.

Establishment of Advisory and Support Mechanisms: Provide guidance to energy-poor households on energy-saving techniques, financial support options, and renewable energy solutions.

Opportunities for Reskilling and Entrepreneurship: Develop training programs to help workers transition into new sectors, increasing employment in sustainable industries.



Supportive Policies and Regulations

Prioritization of Vulnerable Households in Energy Transition Policies:

Ensure that financial and technical support is directed toward those most at risk.

Incorporation of Energy Poverty Indicators in Policy Planning:

Establish measurable targets to track progress and refine strategies.

Implementation of Subsidies for Renewable Energy and Energy Efficiency Measures: Ensure affordability and accessibility for energy-poor populations.

Summary of recommendations

Romania



Energy efficiency

Energy Renovation of Residential Buildings: Promote large-scale refurbishment of multifamily residential buildings through grants and low-interest loans, improving insulation, replacing windows, and upgrading heating and cooling systems.

Replacement of Inefficient Equipment and Systems: Provide subsidies and incentives for households to replace outdated heating systems.

Smart Energy Infrastructure for Vulnerable Households: Deploy smart meters and energy management systems to empower consumers to monitor and optimize their energy consumption.



Renewable energy

Community Solar Energy Projects: Support the development of renewable energy communities, ensuring that vulnerable households benefit from locally generated solar energy. This will reduce energy bills, promote self-consumption, and encourage energy sharing within communities.



Supportive Policies and Regulations

Incentives and Subsidies for Energy Efficiency and Renewable Energy Solutions: Implement financial support mechanisms to ensure that vulnerable households and communities can participate in the energy transition, reducing both economic and environmental burdens.

Climate awareness narratives: deliver narratives, needed for developing communication campaigns tailored to the region's cultural and socio-economic specificities.

Engagement of education and research institutions: Establish strategic partnerships between universities, research centres, and local administrations.

Empowerment of local governments: strengthen their administrative and financial capacities.

Summary of recommendations

Spain



Energy efficiency

Rehabilitation Campaigns for Buildings in Vulnerable Areas:

Strengthen efforts to renovate homes in marginalized communities, improving energy efficiency and reducing energy costs for those at risk of social exclusion.

Thermal Vouchers for Vulnerable Households: Provide financial support to low-income families during winter, ensuring adequate heating and preventing health risks associated with cold homes.



Renewable energy

Expand PV System Installations: Encourage the deployment of photovoltaic (PV) systems in low-income households and public buildings to lower electricity bills, particularly in areas experiencing high energy poverty.

Develop Local Energy Communities (CELs): Establish energy-sharing initiatives in collaboration with public entities, ensuring vulnerable households benefit from locally produced renewable electricity.



Community Empowerment and Participation

Address Hidden Poverty Through Municipal Collaboration: Enhance cooperation with local governments to identify and support individuals experiencing energy poverty but not captured by traditional measures.

Promote Citizen Participation in the Just Transition Process: Establish a Regional Observatory to monitor energy poverty, facilitate data-driven policymaking, promote transparency, and foster collaboration among stakeholders.

Local (energy) communities: encourage and promote citizen participation in local energy communities

Empowerment of local governments: strengthen their administrative and financial capacities.



Supportive Policies and Regulations

Enhance Multi-Governance of the Just Transition Plan: Strengthen coordination among local, regional, and national governments, as well as civil society organizations, to ensure an inclusive and efficient transition that addresses social and economic challenges while promoting sustainability.

One-stop-shops supporting local authorities and SMEs in project preparation: Support in projects identification, preparation and bid for open calls.

Coal transition identity: change the popular narratives about coal transition.



Conclusions

The guiding principle of JUSTEM is that bottom-up engagement is key to the design of fair, equitable, and socially aware transition policies.

Starting from a mapping of the impacts of transitions, we developed an assessment methodology to support a detailed analysis of the energy poverty status quo in the six pilot regions. This analysis led to the identification of the energy poverty vulnerability factors and challenges faced by local communities in the context of the green energy transition. It was then complemented by a review of academic literature, which resulted in a proposed rank of citizens' concerns. We also analysed the alignment of the broader energy and climate policy context with the notion of the just transition.

The challenges and the policy gaps identified included potential employment losses, limited stakeholder engagement in the development of just transition plans,

lack of concrete measures and clearly defined targets, as well as increased energy poverty risks. On the latter, we highlighted that energy poverty may be quickly intensified due to energy supply shifts and, consequently, variations in energy affordability, which may be aggravated in the case of significant decreases in household income.

Through a series of workshops, JUSTEM partners engaged citizens and local authorities in frank discussions about the phaseout of coal, opening the path to mutual understanding, citizen empowerment, and bottom-up collaboration for policy design. Additionally, the project provided local and regional authorities with a tool to facilitate the achievement of consensus during in-person exchanges, thus encouraging the continuous engagement of citizens even after the project ends.

Based on the findings from workshops, desk research, and individual exchanges with regional

policymakers and citizens, JUSTEM issued and disseminated a set of policy recommendations to support EU and national authorities in the design of transition processes that truly leave no one behind.

As the pilot regions of JUSTEM (Silesia, Jiu Valley, Asturias, Istria, Stara Zagora, and Western Macedonia) are not the only ones in Europe where coal phaseout is being planned / implemented, partners also carried out replication activities to support additional regions with hearing their citizens and addressing their vulnerabilities in face of the transition. Such was the case of Pernik and Kyustendil (Bulgaria) and Megalopolis Arcadia (Greece).

While JUSTEM approaches an end to its activities, its results are designed to live beyond. Policy recommendations may influence how the transition to a coal-free economy plays out in other EU countries besides the pilot regions; energy poverty alleviation plans may be adapted and implemented in several coal- and non-coal regions; project pipelines may provide a framework for the financing of energy efficiency projects across the EU – regardless of coal dependence; the APOLLO-LIVE tool may be used to achieve citizen consensus in any socially divisive topics; and all the results and learnings from the project will surely offer a basis for further research in the fields of gender disparity, energy poverty, citizen engagement, and the social impacts of coal phaseout. Additionally, project partners are committed to exploiting the project results further through their institutional activities, which range from policy advising to academic research.

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