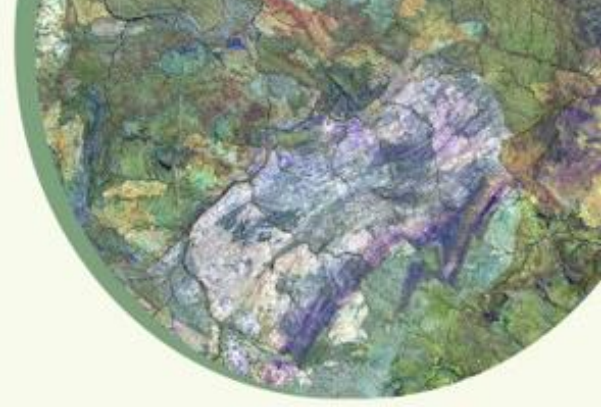




Bridging Organizations and marginalized
communities for Local Sustainability
Transitions in EuRope



Building bridges: Harnessing the JTF for vulnerable communities

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Key-messages

- We found that the TJTPs mostly directed investments towards SMEs and economic policies.
- The most vulnerable people in the regions that we studied voiced significantly different needs and priorities than outlined in the TJTPs.
- The JTF should be used to address the structural process of marginalization
- Local organizations should be more involved in the process and have better access to funding
- The access to the opportunities of the JTF should be improved



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1. Introduction

The European Commission has introduced the Just Transition Mechanism to address 'the social and economic effects of the transition, focusing on the regions, industries and workers who will face the greatest challenges^[1]'. The goal is that the transition should be achieved in a fair way, leaving no one behind^[2]. The Horizon Europe research consortium BOLSTER has scrutinized how seven European regions aim to address those socio-economic challenges and have contrasted those policies with the needs of the most vulnerable people. In this policy brief we describe the main findings, and we give policy recommendations.

Regions in Europe with a high concentration of carbon intensive industries receive funding through the Just Transition Mechanism to deal with those social and economic effects of the transition. To be eligible for support from the Just Transition Mechanism regions had to design Territorial Just Transition Plans (TJTPs). In the TJTPs they describe the economic, employment, environmental and social effects of the transition towards climate neutrality. Next, the plans describe how they will use the funds to address

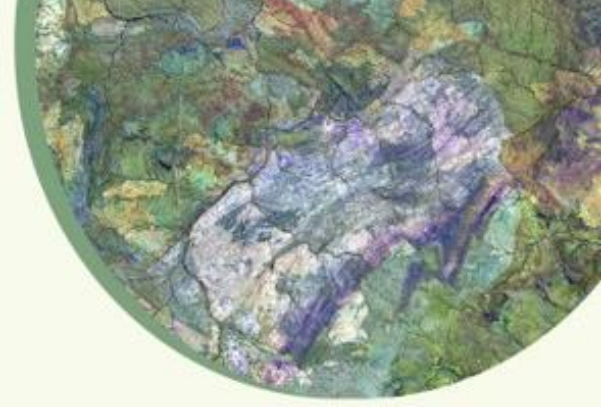
challenges. According to the regulations on TJTPs, investments should target SMEs, research and innovation activities, renewable energy and efficiency, mobility, retrofitting, rehabilitation of brownfields, retraining and upskilling of workers and jobseekers, education, social care, and social inclusion^[3].

2. Methods

The BOLSTER consortium investigated the participatory processes of TJTPs in seven regions: Hainaut (BE), Saxony-Anhalt (GE), Silesia (PL), Prahova (RO), Stara Zagora (BU), Leon (ES) and Istria (HR). Those regions were selected because they represent some of the largest (ex) coal mining regions – Saxony-Anhalt, Silesia, Stara Zagora and Leon – or represent regions that are depended on other carbon-intensive industries such as cement, chemicals or oil – Hainaut, Prahova and Istria. Moreover, they represent a mix of West- and East European countries. We did an extensive desk analysis of the TJTPs and relevant policy documents. We used the data from Cohesion Open Data Platform to understand how much funding was directed to certain policy

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goals⁴). Next, in the regions we have done interviews with 120 representatives from government agencies, civil society organizations and industries. Moreover, we have done interviews with 70 representatives from marginalized communities and focus groups with 100 participants who represented marginalized communities.

3. Main findings

We found that the TJTPs mostly directed investments towards SMEs and economic policies, such as the establishment of business incubators or support for large corporations to decarbonize. For example, regions like Istria and Prahova invest the majority of

their budget for stimulating SMEs. Another example is the region of Wallonia that invests 46% of its budget in measures to stimulate the clean energy transition, but 80% of that budget is reserved for large companies. Investments in environmental policies, such as land rehabilitation and the circular economy, come in second. Especially Leon invests much in land use & circular economy, part of their strategy to unlock the agricultural and tourism potential of the region. Prahova, Leon, and Wallonia invest very limited in social policies, while the regions of Istria, Saxony Anhalt and Upper Silesia do. Although it should be noted that the majority of the budget designated for social policies is going to investments in broadband internet in Saxony Anhalt.

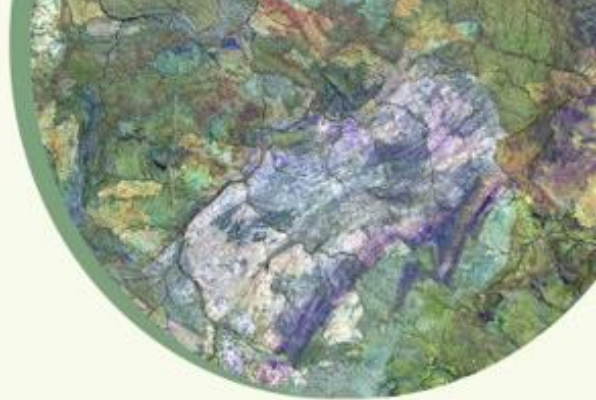


Table 1: Funding of policy priorities through the TJTPS

	Istria	Saxony Anhalt	Upper Silesia	Prahova	Leon	Wallonia
Employment	6	4	5	12	2	13
SME's	56	2	33	61	17	17
Large	0	47*	5	0	0	0
Energy	8***	3	14	21	12	46**
Land use & circular	1	9	23	6	63	0
Social care	0	0	2	0	1	13
Education, research & internet	25	30	18	0	3	8
Other	4	6	0	0	2	4

*41% is for decarbonizing

** 37% is for energy efficiency for large corporations and SMEs

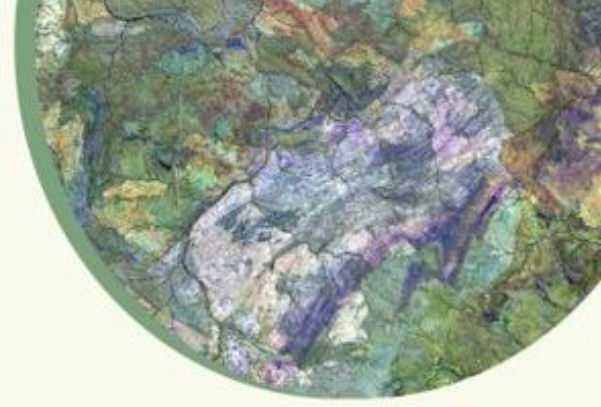
*** for resource efficiency for large corporations

The most vulnerable people in the regions that we studied voiced significantly different needs and priorities than outlined in the TJTPs. They highlighted important issues that are not addressed well in the TJTPs but are crucial for addressing the socio-economic challenges of the transition towards climate neutrality. These are namely issues related to ownership and accessibility.

First, the people we interviewed often felt like they lacked ownership over the transition towards climate neutrality. However, in our meetings they also showed a willingness to take ownership, signaling an untapped potential for creating more support for the climate transition. For example, care for the environment – including pollution, waste, and nature conservation – came up as an important issue. These are important issues not only because they are related to the goals of the European Green Deal, but also because they are

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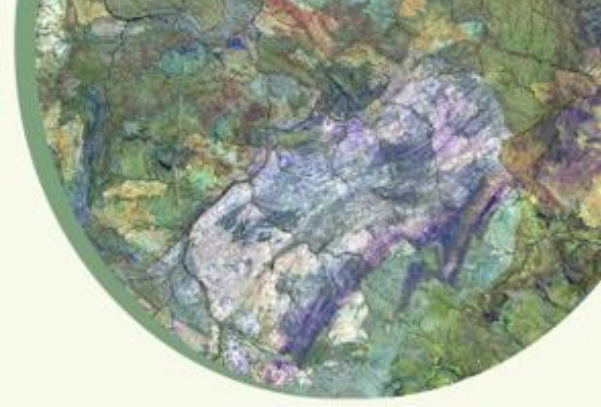


related to feelings of being left behind. Waste was associated with a feeling of being deserted, a loss of social cohesion and seems to amplify feelings of powerlessness[NP1] . Decaying industrial sites are also associated with lacking ownership over the transition. [CJ2] Moreover, decision makers and politicians are often perceived as being 'far away' seldom engaging with the communities.

Second, the accessibility to opportunities was flagged as an important issue. While there might be education or job activities throughout the region, they were often not accessible because of the lack of public transport. Thus, transportation issues severely limited the action radius of people. TJTPs address education and employment risks, but often have limited attention for mobility. Whereas mobility will connect people with those opportunities. Additionally, the scarcity of social workers and teachers can

hamper the regions' attempts to improve social work and education. Next, the lack of child- and elderly care often creates barriers for woman to access opportunities. Moreover, a reduction in access to social, and cultural activities have coincided with the economic decline in the regions, strengthening the feeling of abandonment.

Third, it should be noted that these communities face structural barriers – related to class, gender, and race – that give them less access to the opportunities of the just transition. In order to make the 'just transition' more just, there should not only be a focus on leaving no one behind, but also on those that are already being left behind. Without a focus on these structural barriers, the untapped potential of communities eager to improve their lives will be lost.



4. Policy recommendations

In order to better align the needs of vulnerable people and the goals of the TJTPs, we have several policy recommendations. These recommendations will help to build support for climate policies and deliver a just transition. In our research we found that there is a lot of need for just transition policies; however the way they are implemented can be improved. These policy recommendations can help to better address the social and economic effects of the transition towards climate neutrality:

1 The JTF should be used to address the structural process of marginalization:

a. Projects being currently implemented should design an 'accessibility plan' to make sure that vulnerable people can also benefit from the project. These plans should target:

- i. Understanding how different groups – such as youth, women, people with disabilities, migrants, and Roma – have access to projects.
- ii. Describing how the access for those groups will be improved.
- iii. Describing how awareness can be raised about job and education opportunities throughout the region and especially towards vulnerable people.

b. Projects that improve the 'social infrastructure' of a region should be considered equal to those that mainly boost employment and job opportunities. Such as:

- i. Community projects that improve the social cohesion (community garden, community center, art projects)
- ii. Community projects that aim to improve the energy efficiency of houses.
- iii. Energy community projects
- iv. Projects that prioritize social entrepreneurship

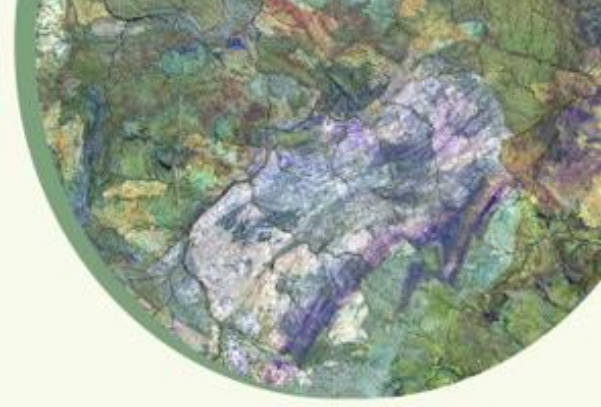
2 Funding should be made available for smaller local organizations that target the priorities of vulnerable people, such as waste, pollution, and land rehabilitation, to increase the feeling of ownership over the just transition.

a. Smaller grant opportunities should be created, for example for the creation of community gardens or small-scale energy efficiency measures.

b. Smaller local organizations should receive support to design and submit proposals.

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c. The grant application process for smaller grants should be organized in such a way that it recognizes the limited capacities of smaller local organizations to apply for grants.

3 Local organizations should receive funding and support for the appropriation of abandoned buildings and areas in the region.

- a. Funding from the JTF should be made available to buy or appropriate abandoned buildings.
- b. Governmental agencies should provide administrative and legal support for local organizations that aim to take over abandoned buildings in the area.
- c. Support should be given to local organizations to design and execute plans to transform abandoned buildings.

4 Large projects should include a 'community benefit agreement' with local NGOs:

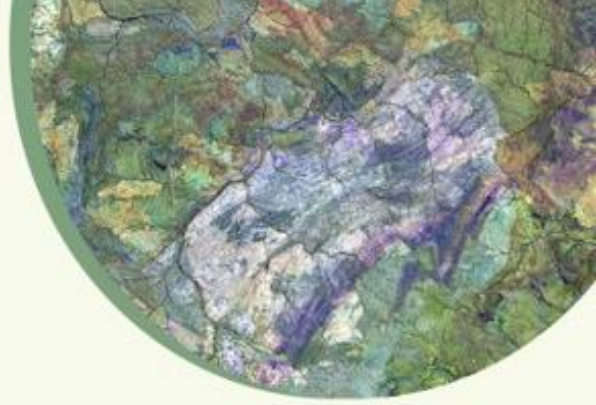
- a. The agreement should regulate how the execution of the 'accessibility plan' is being monitored.
- b. Agreements should be made about the possible use of space for community groups. For example, a business incubator building can be used for cultural activities in the evening.
- c. Agreements on hiring people from different groups such as youth, woman, people with disabilities, migrants and Roma.

5 When reskilling and upskilling activities are organized the following things should be considered:

- a. Taxi services or other innovative transport modes should be included for vulnerable people.
- b. Childcare should be offered for parents.



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5. References

[1] https://commission.europa.eu/strategy-and-policy/priorities-2019-2024/european-green-deal/finance-and-green-deal/just-transition-mechanism_en

[2] https://commission.europa.eu/strategy-and-policy/priorities-2019-2024/european-green-deal/finance-and-green-deal/just-transition-mechanism_en

[3] <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/eli/reg/2021/1056/oj>

[4] <https://cohesiondata.ec.europa.eu/>

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