



Unravelling the Challenges
of Structural Change

4 Key Principles for a Just Transition

March 2024

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The content of this final policy brief directly draws primarily upon the findings of numerous other CINTRAN publications and deliverables which have been named and linked throughout this document. In a few cases, text has been directly used here, but in most cases content from those other project publications have been adapted. Readers are strongly encouraged to explore all of those other publications to learn even more insights. All of their respective authors, who are all partners within the CINTRAN consortium, should be considered as Contributors to this final policy brief.

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Executive Summary

The purpose of this policy brief, as with all other CINTRAN findings featured throughout this document, is to help guide decision-makers, experts and other relevant practitioners to get a firm handle on unravelling such a wicked problem as the just transition, before the system itself unravels further. It is therefore worth beginning here already with a summary of major takeaways linked to the four key principles featured in more detail in the upcoming chapters:

- ▶ **Transform Injustices into Justices!** Genuinely just transitions overcome resistance via mutual trust, understanding and collaboration.
 - ▶ The roots of resistance to the transition are usually tied to past, ongoing and anticipated injustices, as well as those locked in with existing infrastructure or relationships to affected sectors.
 - ▶ Understanding how to respond effectively is key – genuine trust and collaboration must be fostered through transparent communication and practices, especially for those subjected to doubt and disinformation.
- ▶ **Together We Thrive!** Meaningful engagement fosters strong participation and deeper ownership.
 - ▶ It is crucial to commit to creating an inclusive process with ample opportunities for meaningful engagement, especially in those early stages of the transition which greatly shape later phases, since latecomers may be likelier to resist.
 - ▶ Decision-makers should speak *with* key stakeholders (e.g., youth or women), rather than merely discuss *about* them, by bringing them onboard to give direct inputs and contribute to decisions that align with their needs and ambitions.
- ▶ **Attract and Retain Your Talent!** Enhancing regional prospects includes empowering local skills across the whole community.
 - ▶ Regional practitioners should nurture home-grown businesses and individuals to thrive at the same time as improving the attractiveness of the region through key services and infrastructure which make it a place worth staying.
 - ▶ Just as local residents need viable opportunities to develop new skills, local businesses may require guidance/support to thrive – establishing a holistic ecosystem catering to people and businesses can build a resilient economy.
- ▶ **Steady Compass for a Just Transition!** Robust planning, monitoring and revision steer effective implementation to stay on course.
 - ▶ Transformations should be strategic from the start, including how they are governed at all stages of the transition, but also in ensuring that objectives are not compromised by embedded agendas counterproductive to just transition.
 - ▶ While coal commissions have not necessarily proven an ideal mechanism for all regions, they served their purpose where implemented – now is the time for true political leadership and well-balanced, science-based governance that is not afraid to learn from failures, but rather navigates around (new) challenges.

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Unravelling the Challenges of Structural Change

Carbon-intensive and coal+ regions¹ continue to find themselves deeply engaged in socio-economic, socio-political, and socio-demographic transformation processes which threaten to unravel the foundations of their communities. Meanwhile, the CINTRAN project aims to unravel the complexities of the structural change transforming these regions. The aim is to contribute to the achievement of a socially- and politically acceptable transition away from coal/peat/oil shale, complemented with economic renewal, to ensure no one is left behind.

The shift away from coal+ fuels across Europe is advancing at different speeds. Some regions are obliged to implement a Territorial Just Transition Plans (TJTP) as part of the EU's **Just Transition Mechanism (JTM)**. Though having a TJTP can certainly prove very beneficial to guide strategic implementation, even that is not a guarantee that these regions or all their stakeholders are fully prepared for a coal+ exit. While much progress and good practice can be found across the EU and beyond, the broader transformation remains subject to complex challenges not always foreseen by top-down policies. Transition processes need to therefore balance the implications of the fossil fuel phase-out with the practical implementation of structural adjustments within the local/regional context.

Given the significant differences between carbon-intensive and coal+ regions, any set of policy recommendations must consider the difference in “adaptive capacity”. In other words, regions should adapt such recommendations to their own particular circumstances. This brief presents a set of four “key principles” which can be used as general reference across transformation processes and serve as an entry point into many of CINTRAN’s key findings:

- ▶ **Transform Injustices into Justices!** Genuinely just transitions overcome resistance via mutual trust, understanding and collaboration.
- ▶ **Together We Thrive!** Meaningful engagement fosters strong participation and deeper ownership.
- ▶ **Attract and Retain Your Talent!** Enhancing a region’s prospects includes empowering local skills across the whole community.
- ▶ **Steady Compass for a Just Transition!** Robust planning, monitoring and revision steer effective implementation and keep it on course.

Each of the above principles are based on lessons learnt via CINTRAN project research in assessing the transformation process in four target coal+ regions: Ida-Virumaa (Estonia), the Rhenish Revier (Germany), Silesia (Poland) and Western Macedonia (Greece). This policy brief also includes **insights featured in numerous project publications** and deliverables, as well as those gained during the CIN-

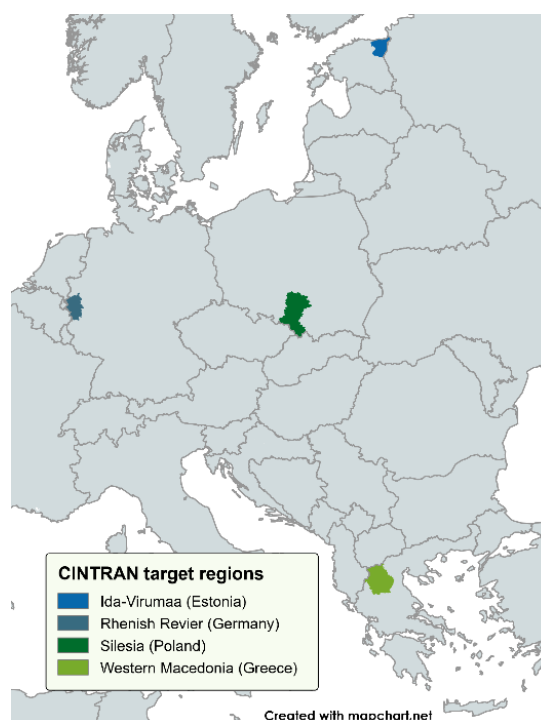


Figure 1: Locations of CINTRAN's four target regions. (Source: adapted from MapsChart.net, at NUTS3 level)

1 Within this document, “coal+” is used to refer to solid fossil fuels – coal (i.e., lignite, bituminous or anthracite), peat or oil shale – and “coal+ regions” refers to those areas which currently extract or (relatively) recently stopped harvesting those fossil fuels, whether via surface-based or underground mining. “Coal+” generally does not refer to processes focused on either petroleum nor fossil gas, nor those regions/industries utilising but not extracting the coal+ fuels, though there are of course significant overlaps with coal+ regions. In any case, the term “carbon-intensive” might cover all of these types.

TRAN Academy event series, particularly the final in-person events. Meanwhile, the project's **transition narratives linked to interactive maps** are certainly worth exploring to help visualise the green transformation, including their relationship to **coping strategies**. Finally, the Just Transition **Readiness Evaluation Tool** provides a very detailed whole-systems guide on translating the just transition concept step-by-step into concrete local action and is essentially applicable to enhance any coal+ region's way forward.



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Further learnings from the project:

- ▶ Towards a Comparative Political Economy of the Just Transition in the Carbon Intensive Regions of Europe
- ▶ Case studies for CINTRAN's for target regions – Ida-Virumaa, the Rhenish Revier, Silesia and Western Macedonia – as well as a comparative synthesis report assessing all four
- ▶ CINTRAN publications, as well as other relevant materials beyond the project, and articles
- ▶ Coal+ Regions in Transition event series of in-person Academy events and online webinars (all recordings found in this playlist)
- ▶ CINTRAN Maps – Visualization of the green transformation
- ▶ Coping strategies: resistance, adaptation and transformation – also specific examples found in a searchable inventory of examples
- ▶ JT:READY – Just Transition Readiness Evaluation Tool

Who is this policy brief for?

This brief is aimed primarily at those managing authorities who currently make most of the overarching decisions in the transition. But it also is meant to inspire others, especially lower-level authorities (and even in non-public sectors, like civil society), to ensure that they rightfully contribute to making their local transformation more just.

CINTRAN has shown that successful examples of just transition processes are the product of effective multi-level governance and multi-lateral engagement. The interplay and coordination between different government levels in different shapes and forms should go hand in hand with meaningful involvement of community-wide stakeholders. Evidence suggests that effective policies in just transition areas are cross-cutting by nature and successful measures can rarely be credited to the actions of only one specific institution, sector or level.

The lessons contained under each of the four principles outlined in this brief are therefore cross-cutting and should inspire further steering policies regarding the implementation of TJTPs, or similar transformational strategies, and whether they are leveraging any JTM funding or not. Depending on the country, sub-national public authorities might already play a crucial role within the transition, and could therefore enhance the justness of their work via the insights found in this document which have been consolidated from the other linked CINTRAN publications.

Meanwhile, those other public authorities with limited resources and/or mandate, as well as other eager stakeholders, who cannot (yet) steer the transition more meaningfully, could still exploit CINTRAN resources to improve their footing in decision-making. Since many of these same actors often are closer to local realities and circumstances, they can be a key binding element between citizens and higher-level government bodies. Therefore, they and higher-ups should fully embrace what it means to work on a just transition by doing so cooperatively.

At the same time, the brief emphasises the importance of effective coordination between government levels. Since sub-national authorities are often the main practical implementers of most required measures, **financial or technical support provided by the national government or by international organisations directly to regional/local governments is often essential.**

Transform Injustices into Justices!

GENUINELY JUST TRANSITIONS OVERCOME RESISTANCE VIA MUTUAL TRUST, UNDERSTANDING AND COLLABORATION.

Transformation processes incur change which can rather naturally lead to resistance among affected populations. This is especially true in coal⁺ regions where qualitative aspects, such as personal attachment to the mining landscape, mining-related community traditions and general social ties are less tangible, but nonetheless widespread. Feelings of loss can trigger further feelings of hopelessness and then help explain why resistance to structural change materialises in the first place.

In particular, this can be exacerbated when measures are seen to be implemented top-down from often-distant capitals, thereby providing fertile ground for anti-elitism and populism. Without truly meaningful, place-based participation within key processes by people on the ground, transition processes can create a climate that fosters **doubt and disinformation**. This negativity can be further fuelled by problematic discourse from certain parts of the political spectrum. Regional decarbonisation is often portrayed, especially by populists, as a direct threat to national sovereignty and elements of regional identity, family and cultural traditions. Such rhetoric tends to downplay any broader socio-economic opportunities to be found in the transition, instead in favour of feeding into feelings of injustice. However, resistance and concerns by affected populations really are a fundamental part of the picture, and knowing **how to respond well to resistance and concerns is key** to ensure the energy transition is also a success for justice.

Amongst citizens, most resistance strategies emerge when livelihoods are threatened, when people feel disadvantaged, when their voices have not been heard, or when they feel that the distribution of costs and benefits from transition activity is not fair – these perceptions can be based on past or ongoing experiences, and/or even anticipating that their grievances still will not be taken into account. When resistance strategies such as strikes or protests emerge, it is usually because there are unresolved justice issues, which may either be based on **past injustices or anticipating future ones** resulting from the pending changes. Therefore, to overcome community-driven concerns, rather than hoping that overly-abstract higher ideals (e.g., a just transition or climate crisis) are going to resonate as deeply with affected communities, it may be more important to talk with them in a rather concrete manner about how to genuinely address these prior injustices and prevent the new ones from ever emerging.

Resistance strategies are prominent in early to middle stages of the transition, when carbon intensive industries are still locked in and dominant, but where there is growing pressure to transform. CINTRAN research suggests that **resistance to transformation processes can be attributed to a lock-in** of critical infrastructure, non-cooperative trade unions², and a high level of political support for existing industries. In cases of more “material” resistance, actors argue against the need to phase out at all (e.g., proponents of so-called “clean coal” options or those trying to exploit the energy crisis exacerbated by Russia’s full-scale invasion of Ukraine in order to shift public dialogue back to coal⁺ fuels), while others resist the pace of transformation (e.g., deemed too fast in Western Macedonia, or too slow, expressed by some in the Rhenish Revier).

² Many trade unions have actually been quite pro-active in contributing to just transition processes, likely because they understand the inevitability of the transformation itself and simultaneously realise that they must adapt to avoid the worst effects once phase-outs do happen. In many ways, it might be seen that those unions still maintaining a high level of support for existing industries are perhaps doing so more as symptom than a cause of resistance.



Figure 2: The Garzweiler surface mine, in the Rhenish Revier, Germany, with wind turbines nearby.
 (Photo: Arne Mueseler / arne-mueseler.com / CC-BY-SA-3.0)

While resistance strategies persist throughout all transition phases, they become less frequent and prominent as the carbon-intensive system phases out. As political pressure for change builds, and as new renewable industries become dominant, **resistance strategies change in focus** as the transition progresses, since there is a decreased likelihood that outright resistance would even succeed anymore. For example, a formal phase-out decision is much like a watershed moment for stakeholders to shift from resistance to adaptation, and after this point it may be that actually any attempts to revert to the previous coal⁺-based system would be the one to face resistance (e.g., as occurred in Germany, when some high-level actors tried to use Russia’s war in Ukraine as a pretext to increase coal-mining again).

Messages and sentiments against transformation and regional decarbonisation process are often politicised and pushed by certain political parties, especially from the far-right. Such a narrative appeals to their so-called community values and the loss of traditionally well-paying jobs. At the same time, an increase in mis- and dis-information about decarbonisation pathways can be observed. To deal with this, policymakers should **develop clear communication strategies** emphasising the longer-term benefits of decarbonisation for improving environmental and health conditions which persist as a legacy of the previous system, as well as the opportunities to enable those new labour skills valuable in an increasingly diverse job market (e.g., clean energy). Engagement activities should not avoid the reality of the situation, but rather **highlight the problems and solutions in a transparent manner**. Challenges will surely arise and certain benefits might not materialise immediately, but by speaking openly about these issues, as well as their solutions, stakeholders can build trust in the just transition and be more readily able to accept that it is definitely worth the trouble. In order to counteract how fomenters of resistance frame the phase-out (e.g., as elites taking purpose away from those in legacy industries), regional actors should nurture mutual trust and understanding by ensuring that the just transition itself functions as a community-led project resolving injustices and giving purpose to all.



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Further learnings from the project:

- ▶ Populist far right discursive-institutional tactics in European regional decarbonization
- ▶ Webinar #1 Phase out Coal Slower or Faster? Effects of Russia’s War in Ukraine on the Just Transition and its related online article (which also includes slides presented)
- ▶ Integrated research framework: Transitions in carbon intensive regions
- ▶ Comparative analysis of socio-political dynamics in carbon intensive regions
- ▶ Decarbonization and Populism

Together We Thrive!

MEANINGFUL ENGAGEMENT FOSTERS STRONG PARTICIPATION AND DEEPER OWNERSHIP.

Effective communication and continued support are crucial for ensuring successful implementation. As the planned closure of coal⁺ mines approaches, it is imperative to communicate to both the government and the local community about the ongoing process, as well as the availability of beneficial opportunities (e.g., reskilling). As explained beforehand, most concerns regarding the transition, including its socio-economic and socio-demographic effects, arise from unmet human needs. Clear communication helps address frustrations and manage expectations (e.g., that the mines will not close tomorrow, and the existence of a transition framework does not mean full success by tomorrow either). While the transition process may face challenges, maintaining a transparent dialogue and providing ongoing support can facilitate a smoother transition for all stakeholders involved.



Figure 3: Messaging related to resistance and engagement, created by applying non-violent communication principles (Source: example adapted from participants' group work at the final CINTRAN Academy, March 2024).

This is the reason why participants from the final CINTRAN Academy were given the opportunity to learn about the principles of non-violent communication to **engage with empathy, cooperation and compassion**. This replicable approach allows both objective observations and subjective impressions to be linked to specific needs and from this to construct concrete messages and requests. Framing an injustice with such a clearer context enables better understanding of the issues at hand and therefore also the chances that a particular recommendation actually is integrated well into policy and action.

Such an approach also points to the importance of nurturing broad/deep public participation in decisions about how regions should adapt to the transformation. Creating ample space for **meaningful contributions from community-members into processes requires competence, time and dedication** on the part of those authorities mandated to make final decisions to earnestly seek and pay attention to local inputs. It is also helpful to provide clear guidance on how the community's concerns and needs will be integrated into decision-making.

This can be particularly useful to stimulate more stakeholder contributions in the early phases, which tend to greatly shape how later stages evolve. Unfortunately, it can be difficult to **motivate many stakeholders to engage, especially early** in the process, since it might not yet be clear to them how exactly they have been, are or will be affected by the transformation. Failure to properly design public participation mechanisms can discourage a willingness to get involved, generally erode trust – which may already be in a rather fragile state – even further and/or result in resistance strategies emerging once again, especially among those who did not engage in earlier stage. On the other hand, developing robust participatory processes should go a long way towards establishing credibility, particularly if opportunities to contribute are not only open to formal institutions and organisations, but also are used to activate marginalised and vulnerable groups (e.g., women, youth, elderly, ethnic minorities, the poor, etc.) directly.

Among these informal groups, most coal⁺ regions frequently express concerns about the **out-migration of young people and an urgent need to include youth** in discussions around the just transition, since

they will be the ones who will have to live with the impact of the process. Though positive examples of youth participation certainly do exist (e.g., the Climate Assembly for Youth in Estonia), such formats are still mostly lacking in general. Schools, associations, NGOs and youth movements should be directly involved in the management of just transition processes. However, there remains a challenge to encourage meaningful youth engagement, which entails the promotion of attractive benefits, but should also go beyond that to trigger deeper interest from young people. If one can successfully convince the youth that their participation will genuinely bring them higher life quality and more opportunities, they may overcome typically low trust in the system and instead become more profoundly motivated.

Highlighted benefits should of course include concrete aspects favoured by many authorities, like better education or job opportunities. But they should also feature less-tangible experiences often neglected by decision-makers, like straightforward travel options or attractive cultural activities to enjoy. After all, even if new education and jobs arise in their hometown, a region must do more to prevent young people from simply moving away to the capital or abroad where they can also enjoy more diverse leisure options. Therefore, regional **decision-makers should not merely discuss about youth, but communicate directly with them** (e.g., via popular social media or youth-led congresses) to enable a means for them to express their desires as well. Of course, not only must it be allowed for young people contribute to decisions, but also genuine follow-through demonstrates commitment and ensures that their priorities (e.g., local social/cultural growth) are part of the portfolio of transition projects actually implemented.

In practice, it can be admittedly difficult to motivate young people to participate in decision-making processes. To stimulate their interest, public authorities should tailor engagement strategies to **align with younger generations' values and aspirations**, providing meaningful roles and ensuring inclusivity. This approach fosters a sense of ownership and empowerment among youth, driving their active participation in shaping their own future. Engaging them meaningfully in transition initiatives means treating young people as equals, ensuring their voices are heard and valued, and that clear roles and responsibilities are available to those willing to accept them.



Figure 4: International expert participants from the second CINTRAN Academy visit the VKG Petroter shale oil plant in Kohtla-Järve in Ida-Virumaa, Estonia, May 2023. (Photo: Franco Crudi, CINTRAN project)

Certainly, this kind of an approach can also be **viably applied to all types of groups insufficiently integrated** into formal transition processes, whether lower-level public authorities, NGOs, trade unions or countless other stakeholders, not to mention (informal) community groups that are too-often marginalised. For example, many women from coal communities are often not sufficiently included in final decision-making³. While men comprise the majority of coal+ workers, women often make important financial and social decisions, whether in households or from local/regional institutions. What is needed to help counteract issues stemming from the male-dominated coal+ sector is a shift away its so-called “problem-solving” mentality. A transformation centred on a “care-based” paradigm could be more appropriate to ensure that justice thrives on a broader scale. It therefore follows that women – the traditional care-givers of society – must be an integral part of the equation and should be more thoroughly integrated into decision-making. After all, there can be **no just transition without gender justice**.



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Further learnings from the project:

- ▶ Webinar #4 [Coping together: united communities & engaged governments for a just transition](#) and its related online [article](#) (which also includes slides presented)
- ▶ [Comparative Analysis of Socio-Demographic Dynamics in Carbon-Intensive Regions in Transition](#)
- ▶ Webinar #5 [Powering the just transition through youth engagement](#) and its related online [article](#) (which also includes slides presented)
- ▶ Webinar #6 [Designing a gender just transition: women's agency and role in carbon intensive regions](#) and its related online [article](#) (which also includes slides presented)

Attract and Retain Your Talent!

ENHANCING REGIONAL PROSPECTS INCLUDES EMPOWERING LOCAL SKILLS ACROSS THE WHOLE COMMUNITY.

It should come as no surprise to anyone that the transformation process inevitably results in many jobs being lost, not to mention prospective careers of young people. However, despite numerous claims that coal+ regions have prospered greatly, CINTRAN research actually shows that these regions generally have been struggling for quite a while in many respects (e.g., environmental and health problems, poor reputation and mono-economies). Since enhanced development and prosperity remain primary concerns of most coal+ regions, it makes sense to focus also on solutions so that these communities can thrive. If done well, it can even form a cornerstone of engagement and messaging, to overcome resistance by demonstrating that viable options do exist or are on the horizon.

However, it is often impossible to provide a direct replacement for the jobs of coal+ miners in other existing or new industries. Even so, extensive reskilling, upskilling and other vocational programmes being implemented have the potential to allow for a transition of at least part of the workforce into newly developed or already existing sectors. This should take place ideally with economic diversification efforts within the same region to capitalise on synergies and avoid a high degree of out-migration into other regions or countries.

Examining migration patterns by educational attainment shows that carbon-intensive regions are generally perceived as unattractive for highly educated workers, and that the low level of their GDP per capita is associated with higher out-migration from these regions. More **attractive regions are likely to have greater ability to tackle ongoing challenges**, such as population aging, and brain drain. The lack of required inflows of potential workers, combined with outflows of relevant workers, can result in

³ Of course, this is unfortunately not only a problem for just transition, but at least in this field some of the most active and dedicated voices are strong female leaders working for public authorities, NGOs, researchers, etc. and advancing just transition initiatives in their respective regions, even if their representation among heavy industrial companies and miners is much lower.

local labour shortages and hinder the development of long-term growth potential. In addition, the departure of highly educated and young people can have important and adverse fiscal consequences for regions. The out-migration of such people corresponds to a lack of public revenues that are needed for public goods and services, including regions' capacity to put the green transition into practice effectively.

Therefore, supporting existing local and small and medium enterprises (SMEs) as they navigate towards a green economy is generally seen as an essential pathway for coal+ regions, though perceptions and success rates may vary region to region in what this means in practice. In many cases, decision-makers often seek to attract large investments, seemingly preferring such an approach in hopes of “solving” all economic problems in a single stroke. Though there are certainly cases where large investments do succeed (e.g., the new rare-earth magnets industry emerging in Ida-Virumaa⁴), regional stakeholders should **not rely only on large “angel investors”** to appear overnight. Instead, many decision-makers (e.g., the city of Bytom in Silesia) are learning the lesson that they need to equip themselves to cater to the needs of (local) SMEs.



Figure 5: The Nowe Gliwice Centre for Education and Business in Silesia, Poland.

(Photo: Kris Duda via Flickr.com / CC-BY 2.0 / linked to: <https://www.flickr.com/photos/ahorcado/5454968081>)

While many existing SMEs express a willingness to contribute to their region's transition, they often lack the knowledge and resources to do so effectively. Therefore, there is a real need to institute a kind of “care paradigm” also for businesses by providing guidance and assistance to nurture SMEs, especially already existing ones, and ensure they can contribute to the transition process in their own sustainable manner. Coal+ regions might be encouraged to also stimulate new local businesses and start-ups, including energy communities (assuming that this business model is deemed appropriate for the region), to help diversify the economy – in this regard, though Silesia is hardly the only coal+ region doing so, it is becoming a front-runner with numerous tech hubs, innovation incubators, etc. already set up or in the project pipeline to enable entrepreneurship across the region. Whether older or newer SMEs, an important part of their contribution to the region can include the absorption of workers (or their spouses) from directly affected sectors like mining, though doing this effectively may require shifts in skillsets.

While in the early days of coal phase-outs and similar industrial transformations the emphasis was often on financial settlements and early retirements of workers, current efforts should actually be geared more

⁴ In this Estonian case, their success is actually the result of over a decade of work to set up an attractive, business-friendly ecosystem for emerging industries within Ida-Virumaa, combined with national-level initiatives to hunt for viable investment and innovation opportunities nationwide, in particular identifying pre-existing local synergies as potential economic anchor points.

towards the promotion of **retraining opportunities for longer-term community-wide benefits**. Wide-spread skills-mapping can prove invaluable to understand viable options, account for workers' actual preferences and discover skills-gaps – the latter could be particularly addressed towards younger generations. Forecasting and anticipating skill needs is necessary to provide workers and youth with the right types of skills and a precondition for regions to plan a more future-proof transition. This allows to better assess the transferability of skills to other sectors and can guide in any educational reforms to be urgently adopted, especially considering that many of these regions face a shortage of well-educated workers in many fields which could potentially be covered with local (upskilled) talent. Depending on national framework conditions, skills assessments for the whole region can be carried out (e.g., by regional development agencies, local institutes, chambers of commerce or public employment services) to ensure that no one in the community is left behind.

However, it is not sufficient for these regions to compensate for potential job losses in carbon-intensive sectors only by creating new jobs or shifting workers to just any kind of job. Especially considering that mining/energy sector jobs have generally been rather well-paid, an emphasis on **job-quality should be part of the equation**. Otherwise, it will not necessarily stop out-migration nor improve the long-term skill structure of the workforce in the region. Rather, policies need to create and nurture more future-proof jobs which are perceived as genuinely appealing.

Furthermore, any steps forward in this direction should also be accompanied by a package of measures to **improve the overall attractiveness** of those regions, including leisure/cultural aspects and reliable services for everyday needs (e.g., schools, childcare, public transport, jobs for spouses, sponsored activities, etc.), which can be quite important for workers and their families. This last point implies also that investments are particularly necessary in areas such as social infrastructure, healthcare and (early) education. Ensuring that regional structural deficits are avoided goes a long way to ensure agency of those directly or indirectly affected by job loss.

However, though miners are typically men, it nonetheless remains especially important to not neglect the needs of women as well, especially since they are generally part of the support/administrative workforce of mining companies and energy utilities. Women also will require improved job opportunities and conditions in those fields where they traditionally work (e.g., care, education or services), and in other fields where they wish to work. Of course, better workplaces are important, but also more diverse job/training/education opportunities (e.g., STEM⁵ fields) for **women should be a top priority** for planned transitions of all regions affected by structural change. Finally, it is also worth noting a crucial side-benefit that can arise from a region having more satisfactory working conditions for more educated women, namely increased chances for women being enabled to participate more meaningfully in decision-making for the transition as a whole.



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Further learnings from the project:

- ▶ [Migration Drivers in Carbon-intensive Regions in the EU](#)
- ▶ [Webinar #2 Territorial Just Transition Plans, in Process and in Practice](#) and its related online [article](#) (which also includes slides presented)
- ▶ [Webinar #7 Promoting energy communities for a just transition?](#) and its related online [article](#) (which also includes slides presented)
- ▶ [Webinar #3 Building socio-economic resilience in at-risk regions](#) and its related online [article](#) (which also includes slides presented)
- ▶ [Downscaling or upskilling in carbon-intensive regions?](#)

⁵ STEM – Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics – fields are typically male-dominated worldwide, but the gender gap can be particularly striking in carbon-intensive and coal+ regions due to their economies being so strongly dependent on STEM-oriented jobs.

Steady Compass for a Just Transition!

ROBUST PLANNING, MONITORING AND REVISION STEER EFFECTIVE IMPLEMENTATION AND KEEP IT ON COURSE.

A just transition is a very complex process with many actors and institutions with overlapping responsibilities on different levels involved. Unfortunately, they are also often not yet ready to take charge of the transformation effectively, because of out-of-date legal and regulatory frameworks which have not (yet) adequately anticipated transition needs. Many propose that a specific body (in the form of a platform, development agency or other) can be set up to orchestrate that complexity and streamline processes and interactions among stakeholders. The governing body can also evolve from a development agency or stakeholder platform that already exists. Regardless of the body leading the process, it requires the long-term mandate and capacities to manage all stages of the transition cycle, from planning to funding to implementation to monitoring and back to follow-up planning.

Regional transition strategies are an essential element of a just transition as they can guide choices and actions in the transition process and provide planning security to workers, industries, investors and communities. Most coal* and carbon-intensive regions in the EU are under the umbrella of the JTM, and therefore obligated to develop specific action plans for their territories to access dedicated funding. Even if this TJTP approach can be considered as generally recommendable for other regions, especially if dedicated financing streams can be mobilised, planning processes certainly ought to be adapted to the local context.

As suggested within the **JT:READY** tool, such a strategy should at least include:

1. A strong and decisive commitment to deliver on the Paris Agreement (and EU 2030 and 2050 climate objectives).
2. Citizen and stakeholder involvement during the preparation, implementation, and revision stages while assuring equal representation of women and inclusion of vulnerable groups. Ideally, local activities are based on a sound knowledge base (e.g., a stakeholder analysis to map existing actors and organisations) and can take advantage of (local) research institutions.
3. Monitoring and adjustment procedures to keep the strategy up-to-date and ensure that implementation remains coherent to any updated policy goals or changing priorities in the region.

Allocating a leading (national) ministry, or a similar institution, to directly focus on just transitions as the main implementing agent of the strategy has so far proven to be a useful approach. This has typically been done at a national level, though the Polish system is worth noting for the very strong role held by its regional public authorities as key drivers of the transition. Such entities organise stakeholder involvement to identify priorities and measures designed to support affected regions/communities via the coordinated dispersal of funds to implement projects.

At the same time, responsibilities can also be more broadly shared, such as via a designated coal commission, by having additional relevant ministries and other institutions involved in the process. The general purpose of this collaborative approach is to increase the likelihood of outcomes to bring about various types of justice in a broader sense, particularly in the initial phases of planning before consensus has been reached among key entities. However, care should also be taken to avoid that collaborative governance mechanisms do not become overly dominated by incumbent actors with their own agendas. The case of the German Coal Commission may demonstrate that such inter-institutional organs can risk failure to achieve results in line with the Paris Agreement, unless they first precisely define **guardrails outlining ambitious greenhouse gas emission reduction targets**, arguably the primary impetus for phase-out policies in the first place.

Despite such concerns, multi-stakeholder coal commissions have still been replicated around Europe and across several continents to devise initial planning. They can (ideally) serve as useful instruments to create a social dialogue, come up with policy proposals, streamline just transition processes and potentially demonstrate how to govern structural change. If set up appropriately, they can foster inclusive deliberation to **overcome high-level resistance and stalemates** by helping to reconcile longstanding,

heated debates and find broadly accepted compromises. This can help to achieve lasting stakeholder support, and also (eventually) to improve the economic opportunities for structurally weak regions.

However, considering that of the three coal commissions assessed under the CINTRAN project, none decided on a phase-out date that was actually in line with the Paris Agreement, these commissions should **not be seen as a replacement of true political leadership**. If misused (e.g., to delay climate action), coal commissions can actually increase costs and reduce the legitimacy and stability of the eventual outcome. Even simple personnel imbalances (e.g., unequal roles for women, or a few commission members supported by multiple staff vs. others participating on their own) can deeply influence the fairness of negotiation processes behind the scenes.



Figure 6: International expert participants from the first CINTRAN Academy visit an apple orchard on reclaimed land near the Western Macedonia Lignite Centre in Greece, October 2022. (Photo: George Stiff, CINTRAN project)

Therefore, and since many coal+ and carbon-intensive regions in the EU are beyond the initial planning phases anyway, an **alternative approach to longer-term transition governance** may be necessary. This can be particularly true in cases where a given region does not conform very well with existing administrative structures or jurisdictions. Some have proposed that well-balanced, legitimately-elected and democratically-accountable expert commissions or steering committees may prove helpful for attaining more egalitarian outcomes than the oft-contentious coal commissions investigated in CINTRAN research. Such a body could also bring key benefits of potentially more agile governance to steer the region's transformation and avoid unforeseen internal and external influences. Furthermore, the nature of it being composed of experts first and foremost also facilitates the ability for such a body to acquire new knowledge, to link existing interdisciplinary research to better understand the situation and thereby to find solutions based in real science and feasible practice.

Other than ideally being legitimately-elected and democratically-accountable, if such a steering committee or similar is chosen to continue overseeing phase-outs, it should meet these criteria:

- ▶ A clear mandate must be complied with, and ensuring that ambitious targets remain in line with the Paris Agreement ahead of time.
- ▶ Rules on how to function and a timeline from the outset for when recommendations are to be implemented as legislation.

- ▶ Members should include diverse stakeholders affected by the decisions, but have been largely overlooked in the past, including younger generations, and of course community representatives most affected by the pending transformation – furthermore, it certainly should include a fair gender balance, as well as of other marginalised groups.
- ▶ Any power imbalances between members should be corrected as much as possible, including a reduction of barriers to ensure meaningful involvement of all (especially women), and decision structures and institutional processes must be made as transparent as possible, while still providing opportunities for confidential deliberations.

Similarly, a dedicated body should also be identified with the mandate to evaluate the success or failure of implementation, and even gauge the performance of the managing authority itself, as well as steer any revisions. A just transition must be properly monitored to ensure that it remains on the right path, and mechanisms put in place to recommend and implement corrections as needed – regions must **learn from any failures and fix issues in a timely manner**. Among those EU regions subject to **JTM regulations**, their managing authorities are obligated to establish monitoring processes (e.g., monitoring committees and/or just transition observatories). Most of these are still in their relative infancy, and are generally seen as still needing improvement (e.g., as expressed by regional experts in the final CINTRAN Academy), such as more representativeness within monitoring processes and more coherent data/indicators to measure those aspects of the transition which actually matter most to each region. However, considering that a just transition should be thought of as an iterative cycle, such requests for improvement should still have opportunities to be taken on board.



Figure 7: Messaging related to monitoring the just transition, created by applying non-violent communication principles (Source: example adapted from participants' group work at the final CINTRAN Academy, March 2024).

Regardless of a coal+ region falling under the JTM or not, the concept of monitoring and evaluation is not something to be neglected. One aim of such instruments should be to help **ensure accountability and transparency** of decisions – itself greatly beneficial also for increased legitimacy of the whole process, especially if there are concerns about how just the transition truly is. At the same time, any monitoring, evaluation and revision should be designed from the start to complement how the transition is implemented in practice – it should point out (unforeseen) flaws or challenges in a timely manner so that **implementation itself can be iteratively improved** to close such gaps.

Well-done monitoring/evaluation can provide an **objective, fact-based assessments** of not only easy-to-grasp concepts like unemployment rates or shifts towards greener energy, but also of rather abstract and complex ideas like various dimensions of justice or how particular vulnerable groups are affected positively or negatively by structural changes. The social sciences should be viewed as particularly suitable for providing a useful lens to monitoring activities that complement the more economic and technological indicators typically favoured by managing authorities, and therefore strongly supported to contribute both quantitative and qualitative analyses. Furthermore, the very nature of proper monitoring being a neutral process grounded in science, can itself generate substantial credibility and faith that the region's just transition leaders are doing their very best to leave no one behind.

Further learnings from the project:

- ▶ Webinar #8 JT:READY – Launch of the Just Transition Readiness Evaluation Tool and its related online article (which also includes slides presented)
- ▶ Analysis of Just Transition Agreements and the Role of Coal Commissions
- ▶ Comparing Coal Commissions
- ▶ Webinar #9 Accelerating Ambitious and Just Coal Phase-outs and its related online article (which also includes slides presented)

Next Steps? Time to Start Unravelling!

The four key principles presented in this document are meant to give a hint of the depth to be found in resolving the roots of resistance, encouraging inclusive engagement, scaling up upskilling and guiding good governance to support the adaptive and transformative capacity of coal⁺ and carbon-intensive regions. Naturally, the actual implementation of practical measures is far more multifaceted than can be covered in a single policy brief such as this. At the same time, those wishing to dive more deeply into these issues are recommended to explore CINTRAN's valuable findings, especially all those which have been featured throughout this document.

The purpose of this entire document is to help guide decision-makers, experts and other relevant practitioners to **get a firm handle on unravelling such a wicked problem as the transformation**. Given such complexity, it can help to take a step back and consider the applicability of these four principles across to regions' differing socio-economic, socio-political, and socio-demographic contexts. Some gaps might be more strongly felt than others, while certain principles may resonate strongly, but still require adaptation to align more closely with local circumstances.

The crucial thing is that decision-makers at all levels ensure that they **take genuine action** on all of these issues. Overly neglecting any of them may cause resistance to increase or re-emerge, certain residents to get left behind, miss out on valuable development opportunities or disrupt chances to govern the transition effectively. Meanwhile, those not (yet) in a position to contribute meaningfully to decisions about the transformation have the responsibility to **make sure that those in charge take notice**. Resistance does not have to mean only blocking processes, but can also mean that voices are raised and decisions made which help **shift towards adaptive and transformative strategies** by ensuring decision-makers understand and respond to all injustices. At the same time, such stakeholders should push to contribute to decision-making and encourage all members of the community, especially marginalised groups, have a chance to participate – whether in governance and monitoring processes or in the development of **future-proof skills and a green economy**. The real point is, no matter which type of actor, that the time to act is now. All members of the community must come together to collaborate on viable solutions. Time is of the essence to lead the transition justly and contribute to an effective phase-out of coal⁺ fuels urgently before any more systems or communities unravel further.