



JTP GROUNDWORK

Supporting Europe in just transition

Lessons learned from 11 technical
assistances implemented in 2024

*Regional and
Urban Policy*

Lessons learned from JTP Groundwork – Technical assistance for EU regions supported by Just Transition Fund

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This report outlines the results of comprehensive advisory support provided under the JTP Groundwork to eleven regions covered by the Just Transition Fund (JTF) across Europe in 2024. The report highlights the impacts and lessons learned from each technical assistance. The first section provides an introduction and background of the programme and introduces the JTP Groundwork participants. The following sections present a summary, impacts and lessons learned per technical assistance.

Introduction

The Just Transition Platform (JTP) supports Europe's coal and carbon-intensive regions as a single access point to support each region's just transition to a sustainable, climate-neutral economy. The Platform is the EU's key tool to help Member States and regions unlock the support available through the Just Transition Mechanism, ensuring a fair and 'just' transition that leaves no person or region behind.

It provides technical assistance, exchange and capacity-building as well as knowledge sharing resources to enable the implementation of a successful and inclusive transition for all stakeholders involved.

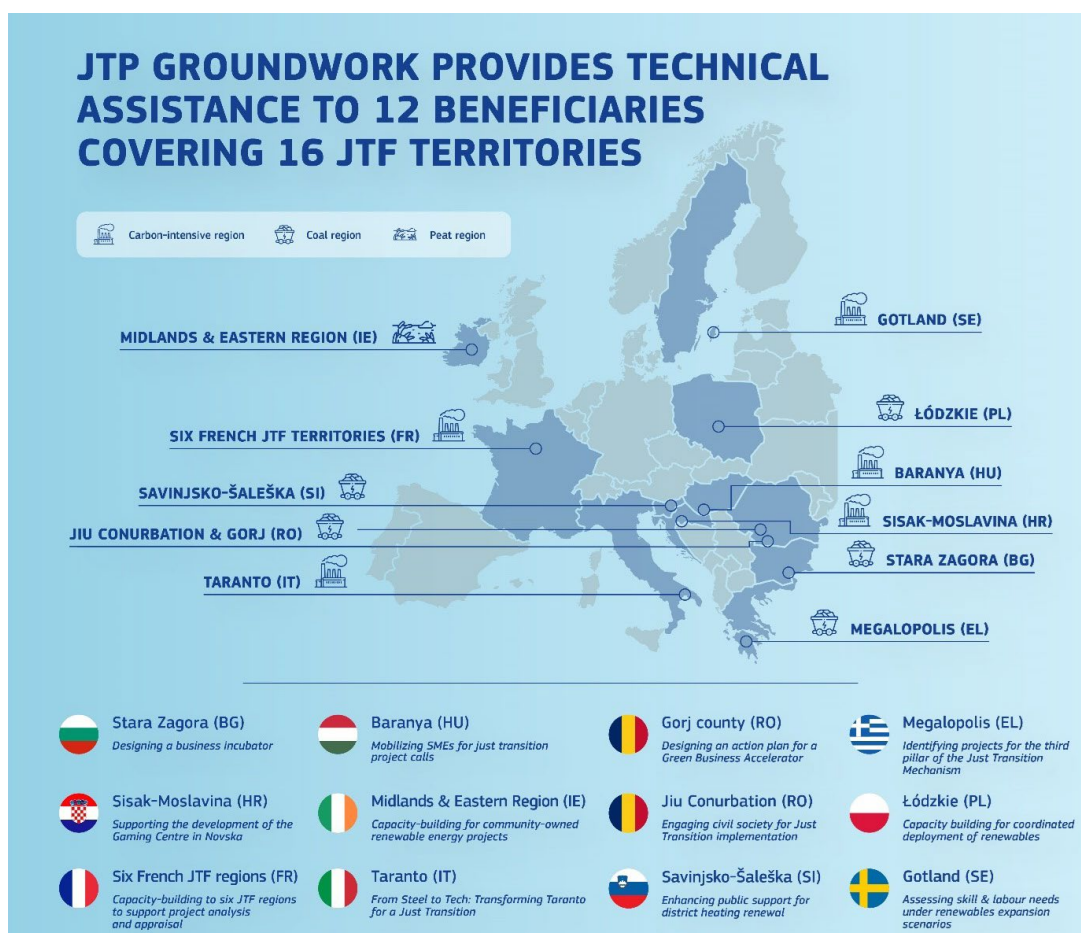
One of the JTP's capacity-building activities is the JTP Groundwork for technical assistance. Launched in March 2023, this programme delivers tailored support, based on the needs that regions have identified. The technical assistance can, for example, support:

- Project identification and development
- Capacity building for regional and local administrations and other stakeholders

- Support to develop transparent, inclusive, and efficient governance mechanisms for TJTP implementation
- Stakeholder engagement and mobilisation
- Awareness-raising campaigns and communication strategies
- Support to engage in cross-border cooperation and/or projects

JTP Groundwork exclusively targets Just Transition Fund (JTF) regions with approved Territorial Just Transition Plans (TJTTPs), as it helps these regions to implement their TJTTPs. Participating regions work with a dedicated JTP Groundwork team to develop a service package where content and scope are tailored to the region's needs and transition plan. For each selected region this package will include a scoping, planning and implementation of the technical assistance, as well as an in-person capacity building workshop to engage with local stakeholders and interested citizens. A summary of each technical assistance as well as the impacts and key lessons learned are provided below.

In 2024, JTP Groundwork provided technical assistance to 12 beneficiaries in 16 JTF territories:



Capacity building on development of the Gaming Centre project



 **Sisak Moslavina County, Croatia**

Just transition in the territory

The Technical Assistance was delivered to the regional coordinator of Sisak Moslavina County. The assistance focused specifically on supporting the Centre for Gaming Industry project. The Centre for Gaming Industry is a key strategic project of the regions Territorial Just Transition Plan (TJTP), expected to foster economic diversification and sustainable development. The Technical Assistance provided support on navigating State Aid regulations as well as gathered good practice European examples of other similar gaming facilities to foster knowledge exchange and cooperation. The Technical Assistance also provided assistance in communicating with national authorities and strengthened local capacities to report on social benefits of the project, ensuring that it aligned with social inclusion and community development objectives outlined in the region's TJTP.

Impacts of the technical assistance

- Strengthened the regional coordinator's capacity to manage the Centre for Gaming Industry project, equipping them with knowledge on state aid regulations and best practices from similar European facilities.
- Facilitated potential partnerships, knowledge exchange, and long-term cooperation with gaming facilities from across Europe which will continue to support the region's development and be further used.
- Established a framework for sustainable gaming industry initiatives, contributing to the potential future development of gaming and related industries in the county.
- Increased the visibility and importance of the project (nationally and in the EU) by highlighting the region's potential, showcasing locally rooted initiatives, and demonstrating the region's capacity to effectively guide this strategically significant project.

The technical assistance we have received has helped us in project planning and various capacity building activities have led to the increase of the knowledge on state aid issues, governing the centre and key aspects for future functioning. The importance of researched wider social impact of the project with views on gamification in public sectors for the wider good is the first of its kind and a solid base for future strategy and project implementation."

Tatjana Puškarić, Head of Department for Regional Development and Strategic Planning

Lessons learned

- **Cross-regional collaboration supports innovation and long-term growth** –the exchange of ideas and best practices with similar facilities across Europe can uncover significant opportunities for cooperation. Sharing experiences fosters innovation and contributes to long-term success.
- **Clear communication and open discussions** are key to aligning on desired outcomes
- **Showcasing capacity builds confidence** – when key stakeholders have the opportunity to observe the potential, and effective functioning of a project within existing infrastructure, firsthand, it becomes easier to understand the project vision and potential for upscaling.



© Regional Coordinator of Sisak-Moslavina County

The action plan for a business incubator in Gorj region



 **Gorj region, Oltenia,** Romania

Just transition in the territory

Romania plans to decommission its remaining coal and lignite power generation capacity by 2032, implement measures to rehabilitate closed mines, and introduce special programs to mitigate the socio-economic impacts on affected communities.

Gorj County is part of the Jiu Valley (Valea Jiului) just transition region. Gorj County, with its capital Târgu Jiu, is situated in the southwestern region of Romania. It is divided into two municipalities and encompasses several cities, including Turceni, Rovinari and Motru. The region has relied heavily on lignite mining for employment and economic development for decades. The Jiu Valley is historically known for its coal mining industry with Gorj housing several key mining operations, particularly in the Rovinari and Motru basins. The Rovinari and Turceni power complexes in Gorj are among the largest energy producers in Romania.

Gorj County, like other coal-dependent regions, is embracing new opportunities as it transitions towards a green economy. While the reduction in coal usage to meet environmental and climate goals has led to a decline in mining jobs, this shift is opening up new avenues for growth and innovation. The loss of mining-related jobs has left a gap in employment opportunities for young people and Gorj region is looking into alternative pathways for growth. One of the identified ways to stimulate economic development and job-creation is to establish a business incubator, focused on green technologies. The technical assistance equipped Gorj with information on how similar incubators around Europe function, information on multiple funding sources (private, EU program and national funding), coalesced and engaged a variety of stakeholders, and gathered a more in-depth understanding of the needs of the youth in the region.

The JTP Groundwork Technical Assistance for the Gorj region has identified an important priority: the establishment of a green business incubator. Young people in the region are highly motivated to be part of the green transition. Many of them are eager to work, with a significant number interested in starting their own businesses. However, they need structured support such as a dedicated institution that provides not only training but also fosters and maintains an entrepreneurial community.

What makes this technical assistance particularly special is the extensive support we have received from both, the private and public sectors. This includes the Gorj County Council, RDA, Employment Agency, City Halls of Târgu Jiu, Motru, Rovinari, and Turceni, as well as Rubik Hub, Impact Hub, Darcom Energy, and Armeanca Company."

Roxana Pistol, Be Teen Association



Impacts of the technical assistance

- Local Romanian community leaders in the Gorj region have deepened their understanding of the needs of the youth and align on the concept of green business incubator.
- Major stakeholders are better connected and aligned to effectively collaborate to deploy a green business incubator. They developed a clear, detailed action plan (available in [English](#) and [Romanian](#)), which supports applications for funding.
- Local stakeholders have learned about good practice examples of existing incubators and relevant partnerships among local stakeholders as well as with selected international incubators have been established.

Lessons learned

- Selecting the appropriate governance and ownership model is crucial to ensuring that a green business incubator is successfully established and operates effectively.
- Formal institutional capacity and the availability of facilities alone are insufficient. A business incubator should not merely be seen as a support hub but as a community—a dynamic institution that offers support and actively organizes and empowers youth.
- An action plan will remain ‘on paper’ unless there is a clear owner to implement the next steps of the established process.
- A clear driving force and strong determination to deliver are essential. These qualities are sometimes more readily found in non-governmental organizations than in established public entities.
- Establishing a green business incubator requires proactive management and active engagement with funding authorities, local governments, and other key stakeholders.



© Iulian Marinescu, Be Teen

Capacity building for renewable energy generation benefitting communities



Midlands and Eastern Region, Ireland

Just transition in the territory

In Ireland, where the National Climate Action Plan aims to achieve a climate-resilient, biodiversity-rich, environmentally sustainable and climate-neutral economy by 2050, the JTF is focused on the wider Midlands region, which has been impacted by the move away from peat production and electricity generation from peat. Ireland's just transition focuses on: (i) diversifying local economies, (ii) creating new opportunities that complement the assets of the Territory, (iii) restoring peatlands and regenerating industrial heritage assets, and (iv) investing in smart and sustainable local mobility. These focus areas are reflected in Ireland's TJTP which emphasizes opportunities around bolstering economic, social, local and community development, as well as plans to channel investments into further focus areas, particularly renewable energy generation. The technical assistance aimed to better equip local community project developers with knowledge and expertise to develop community renewable energy projects, or renewable energy communities, to completion.

The JTP Groundwork Technical Assistance for Midlands Ireland was immensely beneficial for our Renewable Energy Communities (REC's). The Technical Assistance provided very useful insights on how REC's in other Member States are achieving their ambitions and delivering concrete benefits to communities. Key outcomes included: Helping REC's to crystallise their objectives and the different means of achieving them; establishing a strong networking collaboration among Irish REC's; and creating links to REC's across the EU.

Major learnings included: Information on multiple funding sources – national and EU; diverse ownership/benefit models ranging from 100% community owned REC's to community benefits derived from profit/revenue sharing with State/Private entities; better understanding of key enablers and challenges for REC's."

Hugh Baxter, Irish Sustainable Energy Communities Representative, ORS Consulting

Impacts of the technical assistance

- Local Irish community energy leaders in the Midlands have deepened their understanding and tangible resources they can leverage to align REC projects with Irish regulatory processes and EU funding opportunities.
- Local Irish community REC project developers across the Midlands are better connected and aligned to effectively collaborate to deploy REC projects in the region.
- Project developers have established connections to good practice examples of existing European RECs projects that Irish stakeholders hope to replicate.
- Furthermore, REC project developers have a better understanding of the current regulatory enablers and challenges and required improvements to provide enhanced benefits to communities in the just transition region.

Lessons learned

- Selecting the right governance and ownership model is key to determining who benefits from the revenues and/or energy produced by the REC.
- A REC does not have to be wholly owned by the community developing the project for it to benefit that community. Models in which a share of project profits are reserved for the community can be equally if not more effective.
- Currently, RECs in Ireland face significant challenges, including regulatory and resource issues, in developing projects in the 1-6 MW range. Nonetheless, such projects may be achievable if RECs have sufficient financial and human resources; examples from RECs in other EU Member States, identified in the Technical Assistance, included models where RECs successfully completed smaller projects (e.g. 100-200 kW) before progressing to larger projects.
- Funding for RECs is available at EU and national level but requires active management and engagement with funding authorities.



Capacity building for coordinated deployment of renewables



 **Łódzkie region, Poland**

Just transition in the territory

One of the main objectives of the TJTP of the Łódzkie region, home to Europe's largest coal-fired power plant in Bełchatów, is to promote innovative solutions for clean energy and renewable energy sources (RES), including electricity generation and energy storage facilities. Łódzkie's transition area covers 35 municipalities with varying levels of investment in RES and grid integration. Despite a large number of individual micro-installations, most of the region's wind and solar potential remains untapped. The slow uptake of renewables, combined with new EU requirements for Member States to define and implement designated renewable acceleration areas and a lack of operational energy communities in the region, prompted the regional government to seek capacity building support.

The technical assistance supported the Marshal's Office and 35 municipalities in the transition area by analysing barriers to RES deployment, assessing the current state of investments in RES, exploring wind and solar potential in the region, and create an overview of models for energy communities and available EU project funding sources.

Impacts of the technical assistance

- A basis for continued stakeholder collaboration was established through the co-creation of an Action Plan for boosting renewables and grid investments (available here: [JTP Groundwork](#)). The plan was co-created with businesses, regional and local public authorities and includes 35 measures with assigned responsibilities across five action areas.
- For the first time, the JTF region's municipalities gathered to discuss RES projects and energy communities, enhancing their knowledge and collaboration with regional authorities and local businesses.
- Deepened Marshal Office's knowledge of coordinating RES deployment, providing them with an inventory of installations, analysis of PV and wind potential (developed by experts from Forum Energii), data on rejected grid connections, an overview of EU funding for RES, and examples from energy communities in Poland and Europe.

The technical assistance helped us to understand who owns which data regarding renewables in the transition area and also helped us to collect this data. The main benefits for us are enhanced collaboration between different departments and experts from JTP Groundwork, Forum Energii and Instytut Reform, as well as the engagement of over 70 representatives from municipalities on this topic."

Małgorzata Misiak, Plenipotentiary for Just Transition, Department of Entrepreneurship and Just Transition of the Marshal's Office of Łódzkie

Lessons learned

- Getting the distribution system operators (DSOs) on board is crucial to accelerate renewable energy deployment in Poland, as they are responsible for grid investments. Grid connection rejections are currently the main hurdle for developing RES in the region.
- Technical assistance has highlighted the need for additional capacity-building and support for municipalities. Łódzkie's 35 municipalities in the JTF region are responsible for local spatial planning and parts of the RES permitting process but lack resources and knowledge to initiate larger RES projects.
- There are over five models for community energy projects, requiring careful selection to maximize benefits. Various funding tools are available for energy communities and grid investments.



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From Steel to Tech: Transforming Taranto for a Just Transition



 **Taranto**, Italy

Just transition in the territory

In alignment with Taranto's TJTP and the beneficiary's priorities, JTP Groundwork assisted the ASI Consortium, a public economic entity responsible for the infrastructure and management of industrial productive areas in Taranto, to assess the needs and opportunities to establish an Innovation hub in Taranto. The Innovation Hub is intended to support companies working on cybersecurity, telemedicine and e-health, to provide network services, start-up incubation and training services that up- and re-skill professionals, with a focus on youth.

The technical assistance first carried out a comprehensive analysis of the local territorial context, focusing on the characteristics and growth prospects of the IT sector, key stakeholders, and the existing policy framework. It also examined the local and regional skills supply and demand to identify relevant skills and competence gaps in the region. Additionally, the assistance identified good practices in developing innovation hubs at both national and European levels, analysing their success factors and achieved results. Finally, a workshop was organised to present the findings and gather feedback on the analysis from participants.

Impacts of the technical assistance

- Improved the understanding of key stakeholders of future employment and skills needed to develop a thriving ICT sector.
- Supported the beneficiary to identify the most relevant focus areas and the key strategic steps of establishing the innovation hub, as well as enhancing their understanding of the funding opportunities provided by the JTF and other EU programmes.
- Strengthened connections between key local stakeholders, as well as with other just transition stakeholders across Europe working to implement innovation hubs for the ICT sector.

The added value of JTP Groundwork lies in the expertise and professional support it brought to our project, ensuring its alignment with the objectives and principles of the JTF. The comprehensive market analysis and study of existing case studies were instrumental in refining and reinforcing the project's goals. Through this process, we learned to assess the territory's real needs and expand our perspective to include contexts that, while geographically distant, share similar challenges and objectives."

Giacinto Angelastri and Claudio Fuggetti, ASI Consortium

Lessons learned

- Meeting regional demand for digital and ICT skills requires collaboration with universities to align educational and training initiatives with labour market needs.
- To attract and retain a skilled workforce, local businesses and enterprises must actively and consistently engage students and youth through internships, apprenticeships and partnerships with educational institution. These efforts help develop practical skills, align education with industry needs, and build connections that strengthen the local talent pool and support the transition.
- Adopting a bottom-up approach is essential when developing project proposals: by identifying the specific needs of the territory and considering existing initiatives, this approach ensures that the design of the project proposals leverages synergies and prevent duplication, ensuring an efficient use of available resources.
- To minimise overlap and maximise value added, a digital innovation hub should: (i) focus on sectors and niches that are not covered by existing hubs; (ii) be developed with great attention to networking and consultations with local stakeholders; and (iii) consider strengthening its contribution to the green transition by establishing links with the renewable energy sector.



© Margherita Coltri, JTP Groundwork

Labour market consequence of the green transition



 **Region Gotland, Sweden**

Just transition in the territory

One of the main objectives of the TJTP in the Gotland region is to support the reduction of greenhouse gases from the cement and limestone industry, while increasing the use of sustainable energy sources. The green transition and reduction of CO2 emissions from production at Heidelberg Materials in Slite and Nordkalk in Storugns are important for the industrial transition on Gotland. The transition may lead to social challenges, particularly in ensuring access to the right skills. Plans to increase energy efficiency, electrify industries, increase the use of biogas, and develop carbon capture and storage options require skills and competences that are currently scarce. The technical assistance aimed to provide Region Gotland and key stakeholders with knowledge and background to develop the green transition for industry and energy projects in renewable energy. The support focused on assessing the skills requirements and labour market needs for the industry transition and provision of renewable energy.

We received the analysis we applied for, excellently executed by the JTP Groundwork team, much appreciated! We think that we have gained knowledge on how to strengthen the capacity in our region to attract new qualified skills. We will make use of the recommendations in the report, as for example the need for key stakeholders to gather and formulate a common strategy. Further, the analysis will be useful in the region's own activities in several sectors.

We've got a valuable overall picture of the job creation opportunities that the energy transition entails, and an understanding of the varieties; temporary and permanent jobs, direct and indirect jobs - as well as the need for dedicated coordinated planning and capacity for, among other things, education-, mobility - and distance work-initiatives."

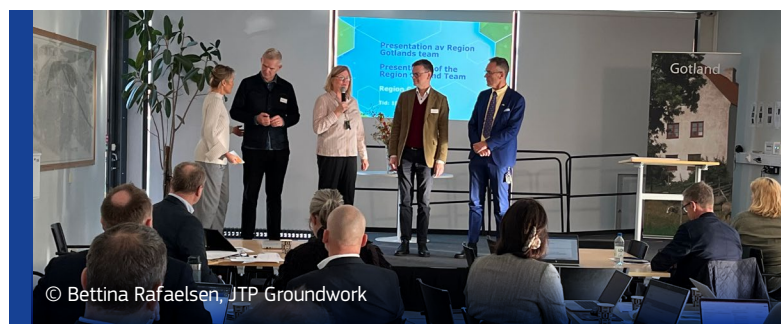
Helena Andersson, Region Gotland

Impacts of the technical assistance

- Key actions that Gotland must undertake to implement the green transition in the cement and mineral industries were identified. These actions are essential for ensuring a sustainable energy supply to the island and securing a qualified workforce.
- Enhanced networks, strengthened connections, and greater awareness among stakeholders were created or further developed, thereby facilitating the incorporation of proposed actions into the roadmap that Region Gotland will develop next year. The workshop generated innovative ideas for business and skills development, along with strategies for attracting labour.
- A comprehensive overview of initiatives contributing to the green transition on Gotland was provided, detailing expected timelines, investment scopes, and anticipated local contributions. This analysis equips Region Gotland with a solid foundation to advance the green transition and local labour market development.

Lessons learned

- Region Gotland will require close collaboration with all relevant stakeholders to facilitate the green transition. These relationships have proven to be immensely valuable in the context of the Technical Assistance.
- Critical investments are needed in transportation and renewable energy, particularly focusing on affordable energy solutions, as well as the enhancement of the energy distribution system.
- To secure the necessary workforce, Region Gotland will have to both attract additional labour and offer training and capacity-building opportunities for the local population.
- Infrastructure and efficient transportation connections are pivotal in cultivating a skilled workforce for the green transition.



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Engaging the community for district heating renewal



Savinjsko-Šaleška region, Slovenia

Just transition in the territory

The SAŠA region is Slovenia's only territory still mining coal, which has been central to the region's identity, economy and infrastructure. A local coal-based power plant, itself also due for closure, supplies the district heating system upon which most of the community depends. A thorough renewal and decarbonisation of the outdated district heating is highlighted as an official "operation of strategic importance" and a primary goal within their TJTP.

Regional decision-makers were keen to leverage JTP Groundwork to help them engage community members more in the district heating renewal process. Structured practices learned during the Technical Assistance, but tailored towards SAŠA's context, have resulted in a higher share of signed easement contracts, a prerequisite to join the renewed district heating. Furthermore, the groundwork has been laid out for accelerating the renovation of buildings, improving energy saving habits and on-boarding locals to support the region's transition "from black to green."

JTP Groundwork has offered us a unique experience, listening to our specific problems and providing us valuable mentorship throughout the Technical Assistance. Their team explored the region's challenges to understand better those opposing the district heating renewal and resisting the transition. Guided by their experts with useful advice, valuable comments and good practice examples, we learned to work on the issues to enhance our own ideas. We are happy that we increased the share of those approving the heating renewal more than expected, and now we are looking forward to use the capacities we gained for the next steps of JTF implementation in the Savinjsko-Šaleška region."

Katarina Ostruh, Head of the Savinjsko-Šaleška (SAŠA) Just Transition Centre

Impacts of the technical assistance

- Augmented local engagement and communication capacity of regional decision-makers. By applying learnings from the Technical Assistance, the beneficiary increased the rate of signed district heating easement contracts, from ~45% of local apartment blocks at the start of the Technical Assistance, to now ensure that over 80% of buildings can enjoy the comfort of more efficient, decarbonised district heating. This demonstrates a crucial boost in public trust and engagement in the district heating renewal, as well as a positive shift in local dynamics.
- Enriched buy-in from other key stakeholders to cooperate on the region's transition "from black to green." An even stronger network in SAŠA has now started meeting more regularly to apply lessons learned from peers in other JTF regions.
- Applying their enhanced skillset, SAŠA's leaders have already developed a well-structured public engagement roadmap to more effectively support the district heating renewal beyond the duration of the Technical Assistance. Their plans even branch out into complementary issues important to the community's transition, including: increasing building renovation rates, improving energy-saving habits and nurturing a deeper acceptance and ownership of the just transition as a whole.

Lessons learned

- Meaningful engagement should begin already during the early stages of any given process. Proactive awareness-raising and mobilisation campaigns are of course important, but credible and transparent public participatory methods can prove even more crucial to stimulate strong involvement from the start.
- Holistic and timely preparation is critical for the successful decarbonisation of electricity and heating systems, particularly for JTF regions dependent on local fossil fuels. Whole communities rely on these essential services, and so any technical upgrades and shifts to sustainable sources must be accompanied with thorough consideration of socio-economic effects. Meaningful public participation in decisions and processes at early stages and solid awareness-raising about planned solutions could do wonders in avoiding subsequent discontent.
- Energy efficiency measures, such as building renovations and better energy-use habits, are crucial to complement heating system renovations. Streamlined regulatory processes can also enable the uptake of both demand-side and supply-side efficiency measures. As shown by the SAŠA case, policies requiring 100% of homeowners of any given building to sign easement contracts can delay or diminish the success of district heating renewal. Other regions are therefore recommended to update their own policies in advance to avoid unnecessary obstacles, so that all residents can duly benefit from more sustainable, modernised heating services.



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Designing a business incubator



Stara Zagora, Bulgaria

Just transition in the territory

Stara Zagora is known as the energy heart of Bulgaria, hosting several large coal mines and energy generation activities. Notably, the region is home to four thermal power plants, the Maritsa Iztok energy complex, which employs more than 13,000 people. The Territorial Just Transition Plan of Stara Zagora identifies the region as one of three regions in the country (the other two regions are Kyustendil and Pernik) that will be significantly affected by the green transition process due to former dependence on coal deposits (lignite and brown), mining activities, and coal-fired thermal power plants. The transition to a zero-carbon economy is expected to affect up to 80% of the jobs in coal mining and energy production necessitating that new job opportunities are created already from 2024. The municipality of Stara Zagora intends to diversify the economy by supporting entrepreneurship and business development that can create alternative employment opportunities in the region.

Impacts of the technical assistance

- Improved understanding and capacity of the municipality to develop a business incubator based on identified local needs and demands.
- Local, regional and national stakeholders mobilized with an interest to collaborate and contribute to creating a business incubator partnership.
- Municipal stakeholders acquired connections to good practice examples of European business incubators for inspiration and replication.
- A process action plan developed enabling the concrete next steps after the technical assistance was completed.

Lessons learned

- Tailoring the business incubator to the specific socio-economic context of the Stara Zagora region required a strategic focus in selected sectors where it can make a difference. The sectors suggested were clean energy and digitalisation.
- Starting with a “light” infrastructure set-up and an entrepreneurial team that will go the extra mile to succeed will be essential to deliver the initial services and to ensure the future sustainability of the incubator.
- An engaged and supportive ecosystem partnership with a shared view on needs and vision engaging all relevant partners, and creating community engagement,

is essential for the incubator to deliver broad mentorship programs to build entrepreneurial knowledge and specialized bootcamps to engage startups in the identified sectors.

The technical assistance provided to the Municipality of Stara Zagora has been highly valuable and necessary, particularly as it comes at a critical time for the region's future development when effective and long-term measures must be sought to address the challenges arising from the transition to a carbon-neutral economy. Establishing a business incubator emerged as a key measure to positively impact the local population, especially young people by fostering an environment for skill development and retention. The incubator aims to attract companies and provide retraining opportunities for energy sector employees, driving local economic growth.

The technical assistance deepened our understanding of the local ecosystem and connected us with individuals and organizations supporting entrepreneurs, helping Stara Zagora evolve into a thriving European city.

We also learned from successful examples in other EU cities, showcasing effective strategies for developing business incubators through private sector involvement or public authority leadership, each offering valuable insights for shaping our vision of a sustainable incubator. We strongly recommend leveraging similar assistance to address challenges beyond local authorities' expertise, as well-conceived ideas can achieve significant success.”

Rositsa Raykova, Head of Investment Department, Municipality of Stara Zagora



Preparing for the mobilisation of SMEs for JTF project calls



Baranya, Hungary

Just transition in the territory

Baranya is a carbon-intensive region in Hungary that depends heavily on the cement and lime industry. The phase-out of mining activities in the early 1990s caused a significant economic decline, from which the economy has not fully recovered to this day. The TJTP of Baranya identifies supporting the development of SMEs as a main objective for the just transition of the region. The region has an active SME ecosystem but is currently lacking large-scale investments and innovation-based cooperation to leverage Baranya's Research & Innovation expertise. The TJTP identifies investments in energy efficiency and the circular and green economy as a priority to foster SMEs and reduce emissions in the region. The technical assistance supported the University of Pécs – a main actor in the just transition of Baranya – to prepare to mobilise SMEs for upcoming JTF calls for proposals.

Impacts of the technical assistance

- The University of Pécs has a deepened understanding of how other JTF regions are using the JTF to help SMEs diversify and how these regions mobilise SMEs.
- The University of Pécs and local SMEs have more and relevant information about different types of green and circular SME projects that can be supported by the JTF.
- Local SMEs and other regional stakeholders have received initial information about the upcoming JTF calls for proposals for SMEs.

For us, JTP Groundwork provided very useful information about other regions' JTF programmes, managing authorities, challenges and calls for proposals already launched. We learned a lot about how other regions have identified eligible activities through which they support small and medium-sized enterprises (SME) actors in their regions and the means they use to mobilise SMEs. We also received very useful information on concrete projects being implemented in other regions."

Csaba Vaszkó, Just Transition Expert and Consultant for the University of Pécs

Lessons learned

- Funding for SMEs should not depend on their current sector. A wide participation of SMEs in the green and circular economy is key to ensuring that they can contribute to the diversification of the economy.
- Research & Innovation institutions play an important role in the success of circular projects as they can make the links between local stakeholders for effective collaboration.
- It is not always easy to mobilise SMEs. Providing clear, tangible, and practical information helps them to connect to the opportunities.
- There is a need for a strong network to ensure that SMEs can be successful in the green and circular economy. Business associations and entrepreneurship centres should be involved in promoting the JTF calls for proposals for SMEs once they become available.



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Development of projects to be financed under the Public Sector Loan Facility



Megalopolis, Greece

Just transition in the territory

Just transition implementation in Megalopolis, Greece, aims to support economic diversification and social inclusion as the region transitions away from fossil fuels. The Territorial Just Transition Plan focuses on sustainable development, boosting SMEs, and creating jobs. Particularly, the TJTP supports the use of [Pillar 3 of the Just Transition Mechanism \(JTM\)](#), the [Public Sector Loan Facility \(PSLF\)](#). The technical assistance supported the region to better align with the PSLF application process, forms and requirements, and to prepare meaningful project proposals to be submitted for upcoming PSLF funding rounds.

The final workshop under the JTP Groundwork Technical Assistance in Megalopolis gave the opportunity to regional services to clearly understand the PSLF grant and loan application process. By showcasing a mature infrastructure project and comprehensively analysing its features, participants key questions on how to put together an application were answered.”

Antonis Psarakis, Peloponnese region managing authority

Impacts of the technical assistance

- Increased capacity of the Peloponnese Region Managing Authority¹ on how to prepare comprehensive project descriptions for the PSLF application.
- Deep-dive into the PSLF grant application form, including building an understanding of the purpose of each section in the application form and building a coherent narrative throughout the application form by preparing a grant application for one selected project. This application serves as the blueprint for the remaining project applications.
- Outlined the necessary next steps and approaches for developing a monitoring and evaluation mechanism for the Region's just transition process by leveraging complementarities between Pillar I (Just Transition Fund, JTF) and Pillar III (PSLF) funding resources.

Lessons learned

- Developing a coherent narrative in the grant and loan PSLF application forms on how the selected projects benefit the just transition in the region is key.
- Project development and selection for the PSLF cannot happen in isolation. It is crucial to ensure coordination and complementarity with ongoing activities and projects under Pillar 1 (JTF) to ensure that PSLF projects enhance infrastructure that also benefits JTF projects.
- Engaging a diverse range of stakeholders from the region has shown the importance of establishing a common vision for the just transition of Megalopolis and how to effectively rebrand and develop the transition process.



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1. The Peloponnese Region Managing Authority is the body responsible for the implementation of the Peloponnese Regional Operational Programme (ROP) and closely cooperates with the Greek national managing authority on Megalopolis' TJTP implementation.

Establishing a coalition of civil society actors



 **Jiu Conurbation**, Romania

Just transition in the territory

Hunedoara, Gorj and Dolj are Romanian counties that are deeply connected to coal mining and energy production, industries that are currently undergoing significant changes due to the energy transition and climate commitments. The three counties are connected by the Jiu River from the North to the South and all have submitted territorial just transition plans (TJTPs).

The TJTPs highlight the impacts of the planned closure of the coal and lignite mining operations and the phase-out of coal and lignite-based electricity and heat production by 2030. This will result in 5 GW of generation capacity to be shut down, 1.7 GW already closed in 2021, and all mining operations ending by 2032. This transition will result in significant labour market impacts, with an estimated loss of approximately 6,000 jobs by 2030. The region is also set to embrace new clean energy sources, such as solar and wind (1 GW by 2024), along with a shift towards cleaner fuels in sectors like iron and fertilizers.

There are considerable concerns amongst local communities regarding the transition. Providing more opportunities and information for citizens and businesses, alongside the development of projects that support the transition, can help foster understanding and support. Additionally, creating new jobs, offering training in non-polluting sectors, and improving living conditions through relevant skills development are essential components of the process.

Civil society actors (such as the Valea Jiului Society) play a crucial role in raising awareness about the importance and need for transitions. They can engage with communities through various means such as grassroots advocacy, campaigns, and educational initiatives to help bring people together and facilitate understanding. They can also collaborate with governments, international organizations, and private sector actors to ensure that the concerns and needs of communities are addressed during transitions.

Against this background, the JTP Groundwork for the Jiu region concentrated on establishing a coalition of civil society actors to facilitate advocacy, communication, and community engagement. By bringing together diverse organizations, grassroots groups, and local leaders, the coalition (Engaged Jiu Community) creates a unified voice that can amplify

efforts to raise awareness, mobilize communities, and influence decision-makers. This collaborative approach ensures that advocacy efforts are strategic, well-coordinated, and impactful in the region and are geared towards just transition.

In addition to forming the coalition, training was provided to in communication and advocacy to strengthen the capacity of civil society actors. The training sessions were designed to equip participants with the necessary skills and knowledge to effectively advocate for change, develop compelling messages, and engage with public and private stakeholders at the local, national and EU level. By enhancing their understanding of strategic communication and advocacy techniques, the coalition members were empowered to increase their efforts and create impactful just transition campaigns and projects.

I believe that the complex challenges that we are nowadays facing in Romania, as well as in Europe and around the world, can only be overcome by optimistic people that are actively involved in their communities and join their efforts for a better society. Through the JTP Groundwork program we managed to put ourselves together at the level of these three neighbouring counties, all of them under the just transition process, and start developing our competences to ensure our activities truly support the just transition to climate neutrality in our region, leading to a more developed and resilient community, with a better quality of life for the inhabitants."

Adina Vintan, Valea Jiului Society



Impacts of the technical assistance

- Mobilisation of civil society organisations (more than 25 organisations) covering the three just transition counties (Hunedoara, Gorj, Dolj) as a basis for collaboration on just transition projects.
- The Engaged Jiu Community coalition informal agreement of the members containing the mission, vision and objectives, as well as operating modalities.
- Improved skills and capacity of civil society organisations in communication and advocacy that can be used for setting up partnerships, communicating about the regions and activities.
- Increased awareness of civil society actors in the region to funding opportunities and training available through a comprehensive mapping of funding and training sources.
- Increased awareness to and promotion of the Jiu region local community and initiatives on a local, national, European and international level. Increased visibility of the transition regions and organisations working on just transition in the region at the European level and facilitation of contacts for exchange of good practices.

Lessons learned

- The engagement of civil society in the Hunedoara, Dolj and Gorj counties in just transition projects and collaborations requires a strategic focus on the development of fundamental skills related to communication, project management and implementation. Capacity in the regions remains low and more support is needed.
- An engaged and supportive ecosystem partnership with a shared view on needs and vision engaging all relevant partners, and creating community engagement, is essential for the coalition to develop broader membership and ensure the advancement of concrete ideas for projects.
- The national calls for Just Transition Fund (as well as other cohesion funds) are not directly targeting civil society organisations. This poses challenges in obtaining financing and the development of specific projects. Therefore, partnerships with other types of stakeholders (private and public sector actors) are key to ensure the engagement of civil society in concrete projects.



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