



# Just Transition Platform

## Case study:

### Regional observatory of the transition process in Silesia (ROPT)

#### Key information

**Member State:**

Poland

**Region:**

Silesia

**Duration:**

2022-2023

**Sector:**

Several sectors

**Main activities:**

Collection and dissemination of information on regional transition processes, organisation of series of workshops and study visits, stakeholder engagement, monitoring just transition activities.



#### Background

The **Just Transition Fund (JTF) programme** for Silesian Voivodeship allocates EUR 2.4 billion to facilitate the green transition in Silesia and Western Małopolska<sup>1</sup>. Specifically, the JTF will support local economic diversification by investing in small and medium-sized businesses (SMEs) working on renewable energy, clean mobility, and other green sectors. To restore environmental damage from the mining activities, the JTF will also invest in the rehabilitation and decontamination of 2 800 ha of post-mining areas, aligning with the polluter pays principle. The fund will contribute to enhancing energy efficiency in public buildings and housing, including home insulation, rooftop solar installations, and heat pumps. Finally, the JTF will invest in the training of 100 000 workers, particularly those currently employed in the fossil fuels sector, equipping them with new skills to work in renewable and climate-neutral industries. The implementation of these just transition measures is anticipated to create 27 000 new jobs directly in Silesia.

The **Territorial Just Transition Plan** for Silesia, which was approved by the European Commission in 2022 and ensures access to the JTF, is in line with the strategic provisions of regional documents defining the framework of development policy and just transition processes. These

documents include the Strategy for the Development of the Silesian Voivodeship “Silesia 2030” – Green Silesia, the Regional Strategy of Innovation of the Silesian Voivodeship 2030, the Low-Emission Economy Policy for the Silesian Voivodeship until 2030, the Regional Revitalization Policy for the Silesian Voivodeship, and the Social Policy Strategy of the Silesian Voivodeship for 2020-2030.

The **Strategy for the Development of the Silesian Voivodeship “Silesia 2030” – Green Silesia**, adopted in 2020, serves as the cornerstone of the region’s green transition. Its objective is to transform the Silesian Voivodeship into a modern European region with a competitive economy by 2030, providing development opportunities for its inhabitants and ensuring a high quality of life in a clean environment. To achieve this, a series of regional strategies were developed:

- The **Regional Strategy of Innovation of the Silesian Voivodeship 2030**, updated in 2021, identifies five strategic areas of intervention for the potential development of the region (namely, “smart specialisations”): energy production and distribution, medicine, information and communication technologies, emerging

<sup>1</sup> [https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/detail/en/ip\\_22\\_7413](https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/detail/en/ip_22_7413)

industries (e.g. eco-industries, creative industries, maritime industry, mobility industries), and green economy.

- The main regional energy policy is the **Low-Emission Economy Policy for the Silesian Voivodeship until 2030**, adopted in 2020. Its general objective is to increase the energy security of the Silesian Voivodeship and ensure energy efficiency while limiting the negative impact of human activity on air quality.
- The **Regional Revitalisation Policy for the Silesian Voivodeship**, adopted in 2022, addresses the social dimension of the transition by fostering social inclusion processes for the region's residents. It aims to improve their living conditions by employing tools for the development of entrepreneurship, improving the quality of the environment, and adapting the living space to residents' needs.
- The **Social Policy Strategy of the Silesian Voivodeship for the year 2020-2030** outlines the directions for the development of regional social policy until 2030. It provides a comprehensive diagnosis of the socio-economic situation of the Silesian Voivodeship, its mission, strategic goals, and directions of activities.

Another essential document is the so-called **Social Contract**, a negotiated agreement between the Polish government and the mining trade unions which stipulates a package of safeguards to support miners during the gradual coal phase-out. To ensure a just transition, miners have options to retain their jobs until retirement, or if that is not possible, to relocate to operational coal mines; receive an early retirement package equal to 80 % of their salaries; or choose to leave mining with a one-time severance payment of PLN 120 000 (EUR 26 800), with the opportunity of retraining. Additionally, the Social Contract plans an investment of more than EUR 3.5 billion in clean coal technologies, such as coal gasification, carbon capture and sequestration, or smokeless fuel production installations.

Overall, these strategies and policy documents reveal a common objective for Silesia: a shift from its industrial and carbon-intensive past to a modern, green hub.

## Characteristics of the region

The Silesian Voivodeship is one of the 16 Polish regions with the greatest economic potential. With the second highest gross domestic product (GDP) in Poland after the Warszawski Stołeczny region, it accounts for 12 % of the national GDP and has a GDP per capita of EUR 15 400 (purchasing power standard) in 2021<sup>2</sup>. Silesia has the largest coal field in the EU and, despite the planned coal phase-out, the mining industry still employs over 4 % of the region's workforce. The economic structure of the region reveals that 42 % is attributed to the industrial sector, surpassing the national average of 22 % and the EU average of 20 %,

while services account for 57 % of the economy<sup>3</sup>. Within the industrial sector, manufacturing takes the lead with 56 %, followed by construction industry (19 %), mining (16 %), and energy production and distribution (slightly over 5 %). Key players in these sectors include iron and steel production, transport, and automotive. The mining sector employs around 200 000 people directly working in the coal mines and indirectly working in coal-related industries. Energy production and distribution are also very important in the region, together with a small but strong presence of the chemical industry.

The automotive sector is firmly rooted in the Silesian economy and can be considered a key transition opportunity for this region, evolving towards the production of hybrid and electric cars. Using the network of connections between companies present in the region (such as Fiat Auto Poland, Konstal, Bumar), and the available human capital with many years of industry experience, the Voivodeship will increasingly focus on such areas as autonomous and semi-autonomous driving systems, digitisation of vehicles (touch screens, voice assistants), security systems (including traffic monitoring systems or vehicle surroundings) or keyless vehicle operating systems. Smart automotive will be an area of synergy between the traditional automotive industry and future IT technologies.<sup>4</sup>

Silesia's potential extends to green economy activities, including the development of photovoltaic farms in post-mining areas, positioning the region as a production leader for photovoltaic module components in Poland. Silesia is also an important research and development centre, which includes institutes and universities conducting research independently or in cooperation with businesses, focusing on environmental protection, energy, automation, electronics and construction. Furthermore, other sectors such as medical technology and information and communication technology contribute to its diverse economic landscape.

The region's commitment to innovation is exemplified by its investment in emerging industries, such as the establishment of an IT and gaming hub in Katowice. Partially funded by the JTF and situated in the former Wiczonek coal mine, this hub is set to become a state-of-the-art research centre and gaming technologies facility.

## Central framework conditions

Silesia is located in southwestern Poland, bordering with Slovakia and Czechia. With over 4.4 million inhabitants (out of the 37.6 million inhabitants in Poland<sup>5</sup>), the Silesian Voivodeship is the most populated and urbanised region in Poland; 76 % of its population lives in cities, with its two most populous cities having a population density above 3 000 people/km<sup>2</sup> (compared to the national average of 123 people/km<sup>2</sup>)<sup>6,7</sup>. It is also the biggest coal mining region in the EU (in terms of number of coal mines, coal production and coal mining employment), with an economy that is primarily based on fossil fuels and energy-intensive industries. Compared with other Voivodeships, Silesia is the third-largest producer and the second-largest consumer of electricity in Poland.<sup>8</sup>

2 Eurostat (2023). Gross domestic product (GDP) at current market prices by NUTS 2 regions, Purchasing power standard (EU27 from 2020), per inhabitant. [https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/databrowser/view/nama\\_10r\\_2gdp\\_custom\\_8619944/default/table?lang=en](https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/databrowser/view/nama_10r_2gdp_custom_8619944/default/table?lang=en)

3 Eurostat (2023). Gross value added and income by A\*10 industry breakdowns. [https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/databrowser/view/nama\\_10\\_a10/default/table?lang=en](https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/databrowser/view/nama_10_a10/default/table?lang=en)

4 Silesian Centre of Services for Investors and Exporters (2022). The automotive industry in the Silesian Voivodeship. [https://invest-in-silesia.pl/content/bran-za-automotive-w-województwie-slaskim?fbclid=IwAR1t1us1aKQc9GNID6Cnt-GMKto5Iz2uPOaXEBmPQqUNz\\_-BEKoc8Lc73ZA](https://invest-in-silesia.pl/content/bran-za-automotive-w-województwie-slaskim?fbclid=IwAR1t1us1aKQc9GNID6Cnt-GMKto5Iz2uPOaXEBmPQqUNz_-BEKoc8Lc73ZA)

5 Eurostat (2023). Population on 1 January. <https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/databrowser/view/tps00001/default/table?lang=en>

6 Eurostat (2023). Population density. <https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/databrowser/view/tps00003/default/table?lang=en>

7 Polish Statistical Office. Population. Size and structure and vital statistics in Poland by territorial division in 2022. As of 30 June 2022: [https://stat.gov.pl/en/topics/population/population/population-size-and-structure-and-vital-statistics-in-poland-by-territorial-division-in-2022-as-of-30-june-2022\\_3\\_32.html#](https://stat.gov.pl/en/topics/population/population/population-size-and-structure-and-vital-statistics-in-poland-by-territorial-division-in-2022-as-of-30-june-2022_3_32.html#)

8 Territorial Just Transition Plan of Silesian Voivodeship by 2030 approved by EC. Appendix 1 to the Resolution of the Voivodeship Board (21/12/2022). Available at: [https://transformacja.slaskie.pl/images/Dokumenty/1671795836\\_projekt\\_terytoriaalny\\_2022%20-%20Copy%20.pdf](https://transformacja.slaskie.pl/images/Dokumenty/1671795836_projekt_terytoriaalny_2022%20-%20Copy%20.pdf)

The region comprises eight NUTS-3 subregions, of which six are notably affected by coal mining and related industries. The communities where most miners live are in the central and western subregions, namely Katowicki, Bytomski, Gliwicki, Rybnicki, Sosnowiecki, and Tyski. While coal mining still plays an important role in the regional economy, its gradual decline in recent years has been marked by falling production volumes and productivity, and low profitability. The share of mining in gross value

added of the Silesian Voivodeship decreased from 9.7 % in 2000 to 6.2 % in 2019. Nonetheless, the sector still employed directly 72 000 individuals and indirectly 128 000 workers in 2021, representing 4.3 % of total employment in the region. It is expected that direct employment in coal mining will be reduced by 12 300 people by 2030 and by 48 700 in 2050, as a result of the coal phaseout.<sup>9</sup>

## Description of the regional observatory of the transition process in Silesia

### Box 1: General project details

**Total budget:** PLN 1 606 855, EUR 349 001

**Region:** Silesia

**Sector:** Several sectors

**Financing conditions (co-financing rate in %):** ~93 %

**Sources of funding:**

- EU funding: European Regional Development Fund (2014–2020): PLN 1 497 464, EUR 325 187

**Duration:** 19 months, April 2022–October 2023

**Responsible Managing Authority:** Silesian Voivodeship

**Partners:**

- The Central Mining Institute (GIG) – scientific community;
- Mining Chamber of Industry and Commerce (GIPH) – organisations of employers;
- The Trade Union of Miners in Poland (ZZG) – employee organisations.

**Contact:** Regional Transition Unit, Regional Development and Transformation Department Marshal's Office of the Silesian Voivodeship

### Type of activities

The project implementation is divided into three modules: research, participation, and implementation.

As part of the **research module**, the Trade Union of Miners in Poland and the Central Mining Institute carried out research on several topics, preparing:

- Eight study reports with results and recommendations, allowing for a better understanding of the transition process, focusing on employees' and employers' perspectives. The topics studied include the expectations of employees of mines and mining-related companies towards the transition, the visions and plans of the main stakeholders towards the challenges of the region's decarbonisation, the role of trade unions, the impact of the closure of mining plants on the local labour market, predicting future skills and the potential of entrepreneurs,

the attitudes of employees of mines and mining-related companies towards changes, the inclusion of stakeholders in social dialogue in the process of closing a mining plant and anticipating and mitigating the negative social impacts related to the process of coal mine closure.

- A collective report called the "Strategic Balance" for the priorities of the just transition of the Silesian Voivodeship, which will be used as a monitor to update and redirect the goals, actions and strategic projects for the socio-economic transition of the region.

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<sup>9</sup> Ibid.

Under the **participatory module**, the Silesian Voivodeship and the Mining Chamber of Industry and Commerce organised a series of workshops for local communities and entrepreneurs, seminars in the sub-regions and a final regional conference. In detail, the participatory module included:

- Eight social and economic development workshops for local communities in the subregions of Silesia, engaging 298 participants from local governments, regional associations, social organisations, entrepreneurs, and NGOs. Discussions covered project proposals, contextualised processes, transition models, good practices, and innovative technologies.
- Six innovation workshops for entrepreneurs, employers, inventors and technology pioneers, with a total of 113 participants. The workshops showcased the latest technological trends of the economic transformation of the Silesian Voivodeship and of the regional smart specialisations.
- Six seminars in mining sub-regions, gathering 219 representatives to discuss sub-regional socio-economic processes and analyse project proposals to be implemented under the JTF.
- The organisation of one regional conference summarising the implementation of the project and presenting the results of research and the Strategic Balance.

Finally, the **implementation module** foresees the management of the transition process in the region through:

- the development of a stakeholder database in the Silesian Voivodeship, which is continually being updated;
- the monitoring of just transition-related activities and projects ongoing in the area, together with the development of implementation recommendations;
- the analysis of the conclusions from the research conducted in the project and their appropriate inclusion in the implementation of the socio-economic transition process of Silesia;

- the organisation of two study visits to other coal regions in Poland, Dolnośląskie, Wielkopolskie and Łódzkie Voivodeships, to exchange experiences, develop competencies and build knowledge on good practices of the transition process;
- the organisation of recurring meetings of the Steering Committee.

Additionally, one extra activity was organised, the so-called “Café of Transformation”. This event had a consultative and advisory nature for stakeholders planning to change their business profile, as a result of the transition process in the region. Participants had the opportunity to consult individually on the possibilities and conditions for obtaining financial support in their respective areas. The results of the research conducted during the project were also discussed. During the discussion, meeting participants had the opportunity to comment on the planning and implementation of the transition process, raise the most problematic issues, and express their concerns and hopes for the future.

### Goals and approach

The main goals of this policy approach are the following:

- support the management of the socio-economic transformation process in the Silesian Voivodeship;
- collecting and disseminating knowledge about the socio-economic processes taking place in the region, effective transformation measures and tools, and innovative technologies supporting the diversification process towards a green, digital economy;
- promoting frameworks for professional reorientation in the area by initiating cooperation of local partners and research and development units with business entities;
- identifying and engaging the local stakeholders in the transition process.



## Key success factors and lessons learnt

One of the key success factors of this project was the establishment of strong cooperation between partners from different fields and various stakeholder groups. Local authorities demonstrated interest and active engagement, with a solid understanding of the transition process and their role in it, their challenges and funding needs, and overall they showed themselves to be open to dialogue.

Another indicator of success was the high level of participation in various organised activities, such as seminars and workshops. The structure of the latter was well-received. Each workshop started with professional lectures from experts in fields aligned with the regional smart specialisations, covering topics of green economy, energy, information and communication technologies, medicine, materials and nanomaterials, and transport. Following expert lectures, moderated discussions allowed participants to contribute their experiences and plans, fostering conversations around potential joint projects and the

establishment of bilateral contacts for confidential discussions on competitive business and technological projects.

In general, participation exceeded expectations, especially in the workshops series for local communities, where numerous and diverse stakeholders, ranging from research and academia to civil society and SMEs, actively engaged. This increased participation not only raised awareness of available funding opportunities but also resulted in a surge of project proposals. This can be attributed to the collaborative environment fostered by the workshops, as stakeholders came together, engaged in discussions, shared knowledge and joined forces to develop impactful project proposals.

The success of the Transformation Café also merits mention. The informal setting proved conducive to fruitful discussions and lively interactions, further enhancing the project's overall impact.

### Scalability and transferability

While each region presents distinct challenges, needs and key players, the Regional Observatory can serve as a model illustrating effective collaboration with stakeholders and replicable research topics. The flexibility of tools outlined in the three modules adds to the adaptability and scalability of the concept: the activities outlined possess a general applicability that allows replication in both smaller and larger regions. However, adaptation is necessary due to unique challenges, varied players, and diverse circumstances of every context. The scalability of the approach could also extend beyond Poland, offering inspiration for regions abroad that are struggling with the transition process and its consequences. Witnessing its success in action, even within a relatively short span of 1.5 years, is a testament to its viability and the potential for efficient implementation in different contexts.

An initiative similar to ROPT is the Coal Commission under the LIFE Integrated Project North-HU-Trans project in North Hungary, which is the first consultation platform of Hungary focusing on coal transition. Its primary goal is to map and involve all relevant stakeholders and ensure their participation in the transition process. The Commission also focuses on building connections and facilitating knowledge-transfer with other domestic and international coal regions.<sup>10</sup>

A Just Energy Transition Observatory (JETO) is set to be established as part of the EU-funded initiative SITRANS (Governance and Social Impact of Coal Regions under Transition). This project advocates for a place-based governance

approach and tailor-made transformative policies. The primary objective of the Observatory is to develop, manage, and oversee evaluation models using predetermined indicators and criteria, which will be collaboratively determined through public consultation.<sup>11</sup>

### Key challenges

One of the main challenges faced revolved around creating events that were sufficiently interesting to encourage widespread participation, particularly among micro and small entrepreneurs, who often lack the same resources and knowledge as bigger entrepreneurs. While workshops for local communities were revealed to be more manageable, tailoring events for entrepreneurs, especially in the initial phase when engaging small and micro-entrepreneurs, posed a greater difficulty. It was crucial to design workshops that would not only captivate their interest but also overcome the initial hesitations of smaller players to actively participate.

To avoid the risk of creating an information bubble, the Observatory ensured capillary dissemination of information during all stages of the project. For the next phase of the ROPT, increased promotional and communication efforts are imperative to counter this challenge.

Additionally, the initial survey approach proved ineffective, prompting a shift to a more hands-on strategy where they moved to the field, targeting workers and miners directly, and acknowledging the need for a more personalised and direct engagement approach.

10 North Hungary in Transition. Coal Commission. <https://igazsagosatmenet.eu/en/coal-commission/>

11 Sitrans. Project Objectives. <https://sitrans-project.eu/project/>

## Strengths and weaknesses

The project exhibited several **strengths** that contributed to its overall success.

- Collaboration and active involvement of diverse stakeholders ensured comprehensive representation. In particular, a standout strength was the active participation of trade unions, a feature not commonly found in the EU. This partnership demonstrated the feasibility and positive outcomes of involving trade unions in such projects, showing that collaboration is possible and necessary in a just transition process.
- The use of study tours proved to be a potent tool for engagement, creating lasting impressions on participants due to the tight small group setting and intensive exposure to the subject matter.
- In general, the project successfully conveyed a broader message about the just transition, emphasising economic diversification, workers, and the broader challenges faced by communities and municipalities in redefining their identity post-coal phase-out. Specifically, the project is actively supporting the economic diversification of the

region, promoting the sharing of knowledge on practical examples and investment opportunities especially on the five areas of smart specialisation.

However, the project had its share of **weaknesses**.

- The duration of 1.5 years limited the time available for post-events reflection and in-depth analysis.
- The need for additional partners from different sectors was evident to enhance the project's reach and impact.
- The survey approach could have been more extensive, incorporating elements related to communication and information distribution.
- Recognising these weaknesses, there is a commitment to address and overcome them in the continuation of the project, namely ROPT 2.0. This reflects an ongoing dedication to learning from the initial phase and making strategic improvements to ensure a more robust and impactful future for the initiative.

## Outlook

The “Regional Observatory of the Transition Process ROTP 2.0” will be launched in January 2024, lasting until the end of 2026. It will be an opportunity to extend the scope of the pilot project and address the weaknesses and challenges experienced in ROTP 1.0, as well as sustain the momentum in the region regarding just transition and support for the affected communities.

The results and recommendations derived from the research module will serve as a solid starting point to refine the trajectory of the second edition of the project, tackling additional topics and a wider set of issues. For example, the research showed an incomplete diagnosis of the scale, needs, and directions of professional reorientation caused by the energy and socio-economic transition. To address this gap, ROTP 2.0 could offer support by preparing forecasts on the demand for vocational school graduates, developing an educational framework for affected sectors and areas, creating professional profiles for employees at risk of job loss during the transition, and investing in job-to-job transition programmes for a seamless shift to new employment.

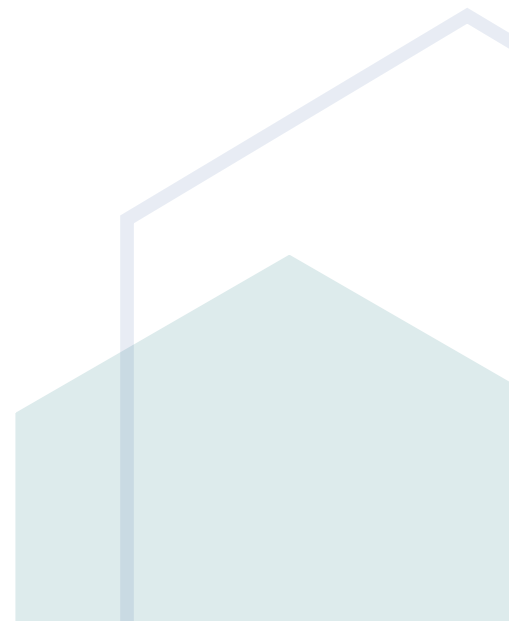
Furthermore, the research recognised the need for increased involvement of entrepreneurs in the transition process, coupled with low financial readiness among mining-related industries for changes linked to the closure of mining plants. In response, ROTP 2.0 could emphasise the necessity for long-term planning of adaptation activities, even preceding the final closure of

mining industries. The project could also focus on collecting a knowledge base regarding the competence needs of employers and employees in transformed areas and employing proven instruments of professional reskilling and training.

This extended timeframe of three years will allow more tasks and activities to be conducted, and broaden the number of partners involved, including up to seven partners from the scientific community, employers’ organisations, business organisations, trade unions, and NGOs. The project’s outreach will be widened to encompass a more extensive group of beneficiaries, involving different stakeholder categories.

One new module will be added to the project structure, namely a “Transition Laboratory”. This module will focus on preparing the local transition strategies and the call for proposals for projects under the JTF. It aims to develop model solutions related to a just transition that can be implemented in the region, creating a project bank and facilitating community meetings of project stakeholders. The financial aspect will also receive a significant boost, with an estimated allocation of approximately EUR 5 million within the JTF.

The project will most likely be followed by a third phase “ROPT 3.0” from 2026 to 2029, marking a sustained commitment to fostering just transition in Silesia.



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