European Commission

Just Transition Platform – Project fiche:

RES-SKILL: RESKILLING COAL INDUSTRY WORKERS FOR THE RENEWABLES ENERGY SECTOR

This document is part of a series presenting information and lessons learned on policy approaches at national, regional or local level supporting a just transition to a climate-neutral economy. The Just Transition Platform (JTP) assists EU Member States and regions to unlock the support in this transition. Visit the JTP website: https://ec.europa.eu/regional_policy/funding/just-transition-fund/just-transition-platform_en

Member State:
n/a

Region:
n/a

Sector:
Coal

Total project budget (€):
EUR 287 281.00 (PROMEA et al. 2020)

Financing conditions (co-financing rate in %):
n/a

Sources of funding:

EU funding:
n/a

Other:
Co-funded by Erasmus+ programme of the EU

National funding:
No national funding

Regional funding:
No regional funding

Project Duration:
1 September 2020 – 28 February 2023

Responsible managing authority / agency / company:
Managing authorities of the Erasmus+ programme are the European Commission, the European Education and Culture Executive Agency (EACEA) and different national agencies and offices in programme/partner countries (EC 2023).

Summary

The decarbonisation will lead to changes in the employment structure of the energy sector. While there will be a decrease in employees in coal mining and coal-fired power plants, the demand for labour in the renewable energy sector is expected to increase. Because of comparable skill requirements, coal workers in principle are predestined to fill positions in the renewable energy sector. Against this background the RES-SKILL project aimed at facilitating the shift of coal workers to companies in the renewable energy sector. Through new vocational training offers in the energy sector the reemployment of coal workers should be achieved while at the same time meeting the demand for workers in the renewable energy sector. Objectives of the project were the development of new training curricula and materials, the support of vocational education and training providers in integrating these materials in their programmes as well as the facilitation of an exchange between different stakeholders involved in the training of workers in the energy sector (PROMEA et al. 2023).

Regional and Urban Policy

Type of activities:

Against the background of the sustainability transition of the energy system, the RES-SKILL project had the goal to improve the employment prospects of coal workers by adapting their skills to the requirements of the renewable energy sector (focusing on wind energy and photovoltaics). According to PROMEA et al. (2023) different activities were conducted such as the identification of skills gaps between these two sectors, the development of new curricula and customised teaching materials offered as Open Educational Resources (OER) as well as the promotion of career shifts through the provision of transition profiles, self-assessment tools and skills portfolios. These activities were supported by the establishment of institutionalised 'Joint Competence Centres' that should further support the integration of coal workers into the renewable energy sector. For the dissemination of project results different types of stakeholder events were organised (PROMEA et al. 2023).

Goals and approach:

The RES-SKILL project had the aim to improve the vocational education and training for coal workers in order to increase their employability in the renewable energy sector (focusing on wind energy and photovoltaics). With this approach the employment prospects of coal workers should be enhanced as well as the skill requirements of the renewable energy industry be met. Specific objectives of the project were the development of new curricula and training programmes, the assistance of vocational education and training providers to use RES-SKILL materials in their programmes and the enhancement of the collaboration between vocational education and training providers and private businesses from the coal and renewable energy sector (SZREDA 2020).

Important outputs, results or achievements:

PROMEA et al. (2023) summarise the key outputs of the project:

- provision of learning outcomes for the transition of coal workers into the renewable energy sector;
- development of different instruments for reskilling coal workers such as learning units, a career reorientation toolkit and guidelines;
- provision of publicly available education material (e.g. OER) in different languages;
- development of plans for 'Joint Competence Centres' as institutionalised platforms to guide coal workers through the process of reemployment;
- testing of a 'Joint Competence Centre' for the reskilling and career shift of coal workers;
- events in different nations to inform on the projects' results and facilitate a discussion among societal stakeholders regarding vocational education and training for coals workers.

Scalability[1] and transferability[2]:

The project focused geographically on the six countries of the project partners (Austria, Bulgaria, Germany, Greece, Poland, Romania), each of which has a high proportion of coal-fired power plants. The sectoral focus was on the coal sector and the retraining of workers for the renewable energy sector, especially wind energy and photovoltaics. Stakeholder events were held in the project countries to disseminate and transfer the project results. The aim was to inform about the project results and to facilitate a discussion between social stakeholders about vocational education and training for coal workers. There is generally seen a high degree of transferability of the project results, as the coal sector has a similar value chain and skills profile in different countries and regions. The technological skills of coals workers are in principle also transferable to other renewable energy sectors besides wind energy and photovoltaics (e.g. hydropower, biomass) (interview with project team member).

[1] Scalability entails that a policy approach can be adapted to a bigger scale than just the local context.
[2] Transferability entails that a policy approach can be applicable to a similar setting and replicated.

Key success factors and lessons learnt:

All planned outcomes of the project were implemented. An important success factor and finding was that workers in the coal sector have relevant qualifications and skills that are also needed in the renewable energy sectors. Therefore, they are to a large degree capable of filling jobs in the renewable energy sector when coal plants are shut down. The project results therefore contribute to a positive vision for a just transition in the context of the shift from coal to renewable energies. (interview with project team member).

Key challenges:

A key challenge was to get into contact with coal workers in the different project countries and to reach them for empirical assessments. In particular, this involved collecting information on coal workers' skills profiles and qualifications through questionnaires. However, as the project progressed, an increasing number of workers were included in the assessments. In the wind energy sector, the current structure of the training programmes has also been challenging in terms of the applicability of the project results. Another issue in some project countries was the accreditation of certificates for training programmes (interview with project team member).

Tools for supporting economic diversification and reskilling/ upskilling via projects:

- supporting vulnerable workers during the period of industrial transition;
- providing workforce and start-up with training and upskilling programmes;
- supporting green skills and jobs through training and upskilling.

Central framework conditions[3]:

The main framework conditions of the project were the energy transition towards an energy system with a high share of renewable energies and the associated coal phase-out. These developments pose challenges for the coal industry and in particular for the reskilling of workers in this sector. Against this background, the project identified skills that enable a shift of workers from the coal to the renewable energy sector (especially wind energy and photovoltaics) and developed learning programmes and other materials especially for vocational education and training centres (interview with project team member).

Outlook:

There are no direct follow-up activities from the project itself. However, the educational materials provided from the project can be used free of charge from the stakeholders in the different project regions and beyond. They primarily address vocational education and training centres but can also be used by other stakeholders that are involved in the reskilling of coals workers (interview with project team member).

[3] Framework conditions encompass the institutional, informational and socio-economic factors that determine a given environment (contextual information), e.g. market conditions, access to finance, tax regulation, infrastructure and support.

Partners & contacts:

- Hellenic Society for the Promotion of Research and Development Methodologies (PROMEA) (GR) (leading organisation);
- Berufsförderungsinstitut Burgenland (BFI) (AT);
- Liceul Tehnologic Ticleni (LTT) (RO);
- The Renewables Academy (RENAC) AG (DE);
- Stara Zagora Regional Economic Development Agency (SZREDA) (BG);
- Mineral and Energy Economy Research Institute of the Polish Academy of Sciences (MEERI) (PL).

Website / Social media:

https://res-skill.eu/

Facebook:

https://www.facebook.com/resskillproject

LinkedIn:

https://www.linkedin.com/company/res-skill-project/

Twitter:

https://twitter.com/res_skill

Sources:

European Commission (EC) (2023): How Erasmus+ is managed. https://erasmus-plus.ec.europa.eu/about-erasmus/how-erasmus-is-managed (date: 22.6.2023).

Hellenic Society for the Promotion of Research and Development Methodologies (PROMEA), Berufsförderungsinstitut Burgenland (BFI), Liceul Tehnologic Ticleni (LTT), The Renewables Academy (RENAC) AG, Stara Zagora Regional Economic Development Agency (SZREDA), Mineral and Energy Economy Research Institute of the Polish Academy of Sciences (MEERI) (2020): Project RES-SKILL. Reskilling coal industry workers for the renewables energy sector. Project brochure. URL: https://www.szeda.eu/docs/res-skill/RES-SKILL_Brochure.pdf (date: 11.5.2023).

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Interview with project team member of RES-SKILL, June 2023.

Stara Zagora Regional Economic Development Agency (SZREDA) (2020): RES-SKILL: Reskilling coal industry workers for the renewables energy sector. ERASMUS+ Programme. URL: https://szeda.eu/images/RES-SKILL/RES-SKILL_Erasmus_project_summary_v2.pdf (date: 11.5.2023)