



## Just Transition Platform – Project fiche:

# SITRANS – GOVERNANCE AND SOCIAL IMPACT OF COAL REGIONS UNDER ENERGY TRANSITION

Bulgaria, Italy, Greece, Poland

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](https://ec.europa.eu/regional_policy/funding/just-transition-fund/just-transition-platform_en)

**Member State:**

Bulgaria, Italy, Greece, Poland

**Sector:**

Energy, coal

**Total project budget (in €):**

985 232.45

**Sources of funding (in €):****EU funding:**

European Climate, Infrastructure and Environment Executive Agency (CINEA)

**Project duration:**

30 months (November 2022 – April 2025)

**Responsible managing authority / agency / company:**

University of Western Macedonia

## Summary

The SITRANS project is a research project initiated by a consortium of seven organisations including universities, NGOs, regional development agencies and research institutes across Europe. It is dedicated to facilitating a just and inclusive energy transition in regions heavily impacted by the phase-out of coal. The initiative promotes a place-based governance approach and the development of tailor-made transformative policies to address the complex nature of decarbonisation in coal-dependent areas.

The SITRANS project's ultimate goal is to establish a sustainable development apparatus for improved inclusive and place-based governance at all levels. It aims to promote the transition to a low-carbon economy and address the social, economic, and environmental

repercussions of this shift. The project encourages grassroots just transition governance approach that actively involves local stakeholders. Additionally, it focuses on building the capacity of key stakeholders to facilitate participative decision-making. Furthermore, it supports the transition towards an energy-efficient, renewables-based economy and advocates for an inclusive community-centred approach. The project also entails the implementation of sustainable energy-related aspects of local just transition plans, as well as the coordination of support from various funding sources.

## Type of activities:

The project will assess the socio-economic impact of the energy transition to develop an effective governance model based on the principle of 'leaving no one behind'. One central activity will be the creation of a Just Energy Transition Observatory (JETO), which will oversee and manage evaluation models aligned with predetermined indicators and criteria, collaboratively established within the framework of public consultation. Additionally, the project's models and approaches will be tested in four demo sites in coal-intensive regions. Those regions are Western Macedonia (Greece), Silesia (Poland), Stara Zagora (Bulgaria), and Sardinia (Italy).

## Goals and approach:

The main objective of SITRANS is to promote the place-based governance approach and tailor-made transformative policies in areas that are intensely experiencing the phase-out of coal. The project pursues eight specific objectives:

1. Address the shift to a low-carbon economy
2. Economic and social impacts of such a transition
3. Bottom-up and just transition governance approach with local stakeholders and citizens
4. Building capacity and understanding amongst key stakeholders & citizens
5. Transition towards an energy-efficient, renewable energy-based economy
6. An inclusive, consumer and community-centred approach
7. Implementing the sustainable energy-related elements of their local and/or regional just transition plans
8. Combining the support provided by the Just Transition Mechanism and/or other sources of available funding

## Important outputs, results or achievements:

As the project has only been in existence for a short time, no results have yet been recorded.

However, the primary achievement of the SITRANS project will be the establishment of a JETO tasked with designing, hosting, and monitoring evaluation models based on predefined indicators and criteria.

The project's expected key results and impacts include supporting the shift away from coal by ensuring a fair distribution of costs, benefits, and risks among stakeholders – benefiting society as a whole and minimising the negative effects of the transition. In this process, the

project is expected to empower both public and private stakeholders, involving civil society and promoting a just energy transition through an inclusive and place-based governance approach.

SITRANS focuses on specific regions facing unique challenges related to coal phase-out. By adopting a bottom-up approach and drawing on public and private funding, the project aims to facilitate a just and timely transition away from coal in these areas, encouraging public awareness, stakeholder involvement, solid analyses, and knowledge sharing among coal-dependent regions.

## Scalability<sup>1</sup> and transferability<sup>2</sup>:

The SITRANS project anticipates delivering tools and assessment methodologies for clean energy transition impacts with a high degree of replicability. The project aims to enhance acceptance and replicability through co-creation and guidelines applicable to diverse regions beyond its own. Success hinges on engaging stakeholders interested in the project solution, fostering potential replication in the future.

Scalability in EU energy transition projects generally requires consideration of factors such as flexibility, adaptability to other projects, and technological transferability. Sustainable funding models play a pivotal role in scalability, while projects involving innovative technologies must assess transferability to different regions. The ease of adapting the project to varied contexts and addressing challenges like technological transfer will impact its scalability within the broader framework of European Union energy initiatives.

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.

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

- Building private and public sector capabilities for innovation
- Capitalising on unique regional strengths for innovation

## Key success factors and lessons learnt:

The success of the SITRANS project is dependent on effective stakeholder engagement and collaboration throughout its entire duration. This is a pivotal factor not only in EU-funded projects but particularly so in endeavours of this nature. Actively involving all pertinent stakeholders from project initiation is imperative. The managing authority proactively engaged with numerous local stakeholders, encompassing local communities, industry representatives, government agencies, and environmental groups. This proactive approach enabled them to glean valuable insights into communication strategies, aiding in addressing the diverse interests and concerns of the stakeholders. Furthermore, in projects related to energy, fostering innovation assumes paramount importance, particularly in endeavours focused on energy transition, renewable energy technologies, and the promotion of clean energy solutions in targeted regions.

Another success factor aimed for is the development of programmes to support the local communities in coal regions by addressing socioeconomic challenges and ensuring a just transition. Furthermore, it is important to support initiatives in these regions that consider cultural, social, and economic factors of the energy transition.

## Key challenges:

The project management encountered a significant challenge in the SITRANS project, particularly in the realm of exploitation. This challenge stemmed from the inherent difficulty of initiating such activities due to the heightened expectations associated with the project's success. The project management grappled with the difficulty of addressing various issues in one project, including climate change and energy security, garnering public acceptance, competing with alternative solutions, mitigating energy poverty, navigating the transition to low-carbon energy systems, and striving for net-zero economies. Consequently, the establishment of innovative business models and the adoption of new governmental practices emerge as crucial prerequisites for sustaining activities throughout the project's lifecycle and subsequently exploiting the developed solutions. The project management has identified this as the primary challenge currently confronting the SITRANS project.

## Central framework conditions<sup>3</sup>:

At a time when decarbonisation is enshrined in the EU's objectives and has become a major policy goal of many European governments, there is growing concern about the economic and social impact this transition will have on regions that are economically reliant on fossil fuel extraction. The project is addressing this concern and works towards enabling a publicly accepted just transition approach. The project targets multiple sites and regions across multiple countries ensuring that the regional specificities are taken into account. For the context of the project's work, the National Energy and Climate Plans (NECPs) are important reference points. They outline at the member

state level the energy and climate goals from 2021-2030. Moreover, for the use of the Just Transition Fund (JTF) resources, the set-up of Territorial Just Transition Plans (TJTJs) is a requirement. Both NECPs and TJTJs were considered for the selection of demo sites.

The project joins the ranks of five other EU projects addressing the needs of carbon-intensive regions and the accompanying challenges of the energy transition.<sup>4</sup>

## Outlook:

As the project only started at the end of 2022 and is expected to run until 2025, most of the lifespan of the SITRANS project lies in the future. The project management remains steadfast in its commitment to ensuring the success of the SITRANS project and its contribution to the energy transition in the European Union. The managing authority

has stated that many expectation management activities, which have become integral parts of the project, have been planned. No difficulties are foreseen in the near future.

<sup>3</sup> 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.

<sup>4</sup> Those sister projects are listed on the SITRANS website: <https://sitrans-project.eu/project/>

## Project partners & contacts:

- Instytut Gospodarki Surowcami Mineralnymi i Energia Pan (Meeri Pas)
- KIKLO - Geospatial Information Technologies P.C.
- Fondazione ICONS
- LAORE – Sardegna Agricoltura
- Stara Zagora Regional Economic Development Agency – SZREDA
- FLEXIWATT
- University of Western Macedonia (UoWM)

### Website / social media:

<https://sitrans-project.eu/project/>

## Sources:

- Enlit World. SITRANS. Available at: <https://www.enlit.world/projects/sitrans>
- Fondazione ICONS (2022). SITRANS: a new project to support energy transition in coal regions. Available at: <https://www.icons.it/news/sitrans-a-new-project-to-support-energy-transition-in-coal-regions>
- Interview with a representative of SITRANS, 17th November 2023.
- SITRANS. Project. Available at: <https://sitrans-project.eu/project>