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Supporting households in regional transformations

A toolkit for just transition regions

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Supporting households in regional transformations – A toolkit for just transition regions

Contents

Aim and scope	2
Who is this toolkit for?	2
Background information	2
Considering the household perspective in just transition implementation	3
Key action areas	4
Case study: A socially just transition in Jiu Valley, Romania	8
Conclusion – Key messages	9
Endnotes	10

1. Aim and scope

This toolkit is designed to help local and regional governments address the impacts that the transition to a carbon-neutral economy has on households, the individuals in them, and the communities they form. The toolkit focuses on the different challenges that these groups face in Just Transition Fund (JTF) regions. It provides a first look at the impacts that may be relevant in a JTF territory and encourages regions to identify and address the challenges relevant to their local context.

2. Who is this toolkit for?

The toolkit is aimed at local governments in JTF regions and local actors, such as social service providers, interested in understanding and responding to the challenges households face as a region transforms.

3. Background information

While the transition to a carbon-neutral economy is necessary, it will have significant impacts on people's lives, jobs, incomes, and communities. Certain socioeconomic groups are and will be disproportionately burdened during the transition, including low-income families, those with poor housing or lack of access to public services, and those who are employed in the mining, energy, and heavy industry sectors.¹ For workers and their families, the energy transition – and the risk of losing their jobs – is often an involuntary, disruptive life event that can have far-reaching effects.² The transformation of a region will have widely differing impacts on its inhabitants, depending on

families' current and future circumstances. The impact of the transition on people can be mitigated by effective transition planning – as such, local governments have a big role to play. Environmental and socioeconomic risks are strongly interlinked, making adequate social protection an essential component of a just transition to a carbon-neutral economy.³

The transformation of regions is associated with various challenges at the individual, household, and community level. While the impacts of the energy transition on workers in carbon-intensive sectors are often discussed, it is important

to recognise that the impacts extend beyond individuals. People do not exist in a vacuum, but are integral parts of interconnected systems, such as households and communities. The energy transition can change the social framework, impact households and, subsequently, the community formed by these households.⁴

The household serves as a central point of focus in this toolkit, since households are the fundamental social unit in most societies.⁵ It is where individuals live and share resources, and they often form the basis for community structures. This toolkit explores the individual, household, and community dimensions of the just transition and introduces strategies to address impacts. The described challenges and strategies are also explored through a case study of the Jiu Valley region in Romania.



Figure 1: The individual, household, and community dimensions. Source: Prevention Resource Guide (2019). Strengthening individuals, families, and communities.

KEY DEFINITIONS

Household – Households are defined as more than a co-living arrangement, involving people with heterogeneous needs sharing living spaces, making consumption decisions as a group, and acting as a social unit.⁶

Job loss – Job loss is generally understood as an involuntary separation that occurs when workers are fired or laid-off, where layoffs occur as a result of firms downsizing, restructuring, or relocating.⁷

Energy poverty – Energy poverty is a situation in which households are unable to access essential energy services and products, negatively impacting the inhabitants' health and wellbeing.⁸

Social protection – Social protection systems consist of policies that help people manage social risks in order to prevent poverty and maintain decent incomes and living standards.⁹

Social inclusion – Social inclusion is the process of improving the terms on which individuals and groups take part in society – improving the ability, opportunity, and dignity of those who are disadvantaged.¹⁰

4. Considering the household perspective in just transition implementation




The European Commission provides support to the regions expected to be the most negatively impacted by the transition towards climate neutrality. The **Just Transition Fund** aims to improve economic diversification in regions that rely heavily on carbon-intensive industries. These regions have formulated Territorial Just Transition Plans (TJTPs) to secure funding from the JTF and kickstart their transition initiatives. The TJTPs describe the challenges in each territory and set out the development needs and objectives to be met by 2030.

Many Member States recognise that the energy transition will have a substantive effect on households, but few TJTPs propose concrete measures on the subject. For example, the TJTP of the Dolj region in Romania states that the needs of different social groups should be considered, including those affected by the transition to climate neutrality. It also acknowledges that layoffs affect the whole household. Several TJTPs also include a focus on promoting social infrastructure. The TJTP of Megalopolis in Greece states that funded activities should support vulnerable population groups. Social services and specialised counselling and empowerment programmes at the local level are planned,

as well as strengthening the relevant infrastructure for socioeconomic integration. In total, 14 TJTPs mention energy poverty, and Sulcis Iglesiente in Italy emphasises the topic, since around 20% of Sardinian households currently cannot afford to keep their homes adequately warm. The region wants to promote the establishment of renewable energy communities and districts, with the involvement of the entire community, private and public authorities, as well as public service operators. While many TJTPs recognise the impacts of the energy transition on households, a holistic approach to social inclusion is currently missing for many regions.

The following section offers an outline of common challenges in JTF regions on the individual, household, and community level, and describes strategies to address these when implementing the just transition. Key action areas have been identified based on the existing literature. Table 1 provides an overview of the identified action areas and the related challenges and strategies.

Table 1: Overview of identified action areas and related challenges and strategies for JTF regions.

Key action area	 Individual level	 Household level	 Community level
Challenges	(Individual) material deprivation	(Household) material deprivation	Social segregation
	Mental health effects	Risk of household dysfunctionality	Low community involvement
	Loss of identity	Change in roles	Unwillingness to accept transition
	Social isolation		Demographic impact
Strategies	Job-seeking assistance and vocational coaching	Financial assistance for households	Communication strategies
	Financial support	Investments in social inclusion	Encouraging political participation
	Personal counselling	Family counselling	Stimulating community activity
			Creation of social infrastructure

5. Key action areas

5.1 Individual level

Challenges

- **Material deprivation:** Shifting a region towards a carbon-neutral economy might lead to job losses and/or rising energy and transport costs. Unemployment is generally linked with various financial challenges, such as a decrease in earnings, the loss of health and pension benefits, and disruption of asset growth. Typically, the prospect of being laid off leads to a phase of financial struggle and uncertainty about the financial future.¹¹ Adjusting to a decreased financial situation may impose limitations on one's personal lifestyle and impact the entire household (See [section 5.2](#)).
- **Mental health impacts:** Job loss is a significant life event and typically involves a sequence of stressful experiences – from being laid off and experiencing unemployment to (in most cases) searching for alternative employment, eventual retraining, and re-employment. It can lead to different patterns of interaction with household members and personal reassessment in terms of individual values and societal pressures. Employment is often an important source of structural routine, and disruption of this routine can potentially lead to insecurity or a general perception of instability.¹² Layoffs can also cause motivational problems and sometimes lead to depression, discouragement, and an unwillingness to be proactive.^{13,14}
- **Loss of identity:** Individuals who have defined themselves

based on traditional energy-related jobs may find it challenging to adapt to the changing landscape. This could potentially lead to a sense of loss and confusion regarding their identity and purpose, often enhanced by uncertainty about their future role. As such, layoffs can lead to problems with self-esteem and overall life satisfaction.¹⁵

- **Social isolation:** Layoffs and the closure of large industries can have an impact on social dynamics, changing the social routines of workers, impacting their social contacts, and requiring them to build up a new social network. On a larger scale, the search for alternative employment can create the necessity for community members to move to different regions or countries, uprooting their social life.¹⁶

Strategies

- **Job-seeking assistance and vocational coaching:** Job-seeking assistance is critical to help individuals find alternative employment. This may involve offering training programmes to develop skills that align with green or future-proof jobs, facilitating the search for alternative employment, and even supporting relocation efforts if suitable employment in the area is limited.¹⁷ Support for workers is considered more effective if it includes opportunities for re-skilling, which is important given the region's future economy may look quite different.

Example:

- Local governments can use the Just Transition Fund to invest in job-seeking assistance and development of the local economy. The Midlands region in **Ireland** is using the JTF to fund its [Local and Regional Economic Strategies Support Scheme](#), aiming to boost the communities that were dependent on peat production, create employment, and help diversify the local economy. Among other things, the scheme allows for investment in skills development, enterprise infrastructure, and training and education programmes. It allows the region to build on successful initiatives, such as the [Midlands Network of Co-working Facilities](#), an initiative of the four Midlands local governments, supported by the Just Transition Fund.
- The re-skilling and counselling programme offered by the Upper Nitra region in **Slovakia** is a best practice example of vocational coaching. More information can be found on [page 6](#).¹⁸

- **Financial support:** Financial support in the form of subsidies, compensatory payments, or structured instalments can act as a safety net for those facing layoffs. These measures help reduce immediate financial stress and the potentially associated mental health effects, allowing individuals to focus on finding alternative employment.¹⁹ Financial support can also include budget counselling, which entails educating individuals about effective financial management during and after the transition. This can include guidance on budgeting, debt management, and financial planning. To ensure equality, efforts should be made to tailor these sessions to reach women effectively, considering their financial circumstances and needs.
- **Personal counselling:** Recognising the substantial psychological impact of being laid off, personal counselling sessions can provide emotional support, coping strategies and guidance. Making these services easily accessible is key to encouraging participation. Group therapies may also be considered to prevent the risk of isolation or loneliness.



5.2 Household level

Regional transformations can have long-lasting effects on workers, also impacting their family. Layoffs cause household dynamics and income structure to change, and the household budget can become strained by the loss of a primary source of income.

Challenges

- **Material deprivation:** Layoffs can create financial difficulties for the entire household, ultimately affecting their ability to meet basic needs. The transition to sustainable energy sources and technologies can have significant upfront costs, often shifted downstream to consumers. Combined with external events, such as the impact of the war in Ukraine on energy prices, a region's transformation can thus lead to increased energy prices, further straining household budgets

and potentially causing energy and transport poverty.²⁰

- **Risk of household dysfunctionality:** Changing circumstances can trigger conflicts and uncertainty within the household. These shifts can strain relationships, potentially leading to dysfunctional relations. Laid-off workers face a heightened risk of household tension and disruptions. An Annual Review of Sociology study describes the deleterious effects of parental displacement on children, including a lower self-esteem and a higher likelihood of grade repetition, dropout, and suspension or expulsion from school.²¹ A study from Warwick University finds that unemployment – whether of men or women – increases domestic violence. Men who lose their jobs are more likely to inflict domestic violence, while women who lose their jobs are more likely to become victims of domestic violence.²²
- **Change in roles:** Experience indicates that in changing circumstances, households adapt and restructure their dynamics. Women's identities in carbon-intensive regions are frequently tied to the domestic sphere. They often take up extra responsibilities as wage earners due to layoffs of predominantly male workers, causing them to experience the double burden of work and domestic responsibilities.²³ Further information on this topic can be found in the [Considering gender in regional transformations](#) toolkit, published under the Just Transition Platform of the European Commission.

Strategies

- **Financial assistance:** Financial assistance can take different forms – including grants, loans, and subsidies – to help households cover basic needs such as energy, rent, groceries, or public transport. As a result, families can maintain an equilibrium and eventually regain financial stability. Training or counselling on good practices for budgeting household expenditures can complement financial support.²⁴ Local governments should pay particular attention to ensuring that women and men are both helped in an inclusive way, and that no financial dependencies are created.²⁵

Example:

- In **Poland**, the nationwide [Clean Air Priority Programme](#) offers grants to three million households to replace polluting boilers with cleaner, more efficient installations and insulate their houses, in turn reducing energy bills. Households can ask their municipality to assist in the grant application, and lower-income households are eligible for more subsidy coverage. Special attention is given to empowering women to apply for the programme.

- **Investments in social inclusion:** Investing in social inclusion initiatives and programmes for people of different ages and backgrounds can help ensure that households in transition feel supported and connected. Local governments can map the social infrastructure available in the region to identify where resources need to be directed. Twelve Member States point to the need for quality childcare services in their TJTPs. Finland's TJTP puts special emphasis on the needs of children. The country plans to invest in social inclusion by

focusing on the cooperation and networking skills of teachers and by centring young people, people of working age, and households. Finland also aims to end intergenerational exclusion and poverty by supporting families and promoting parents' participation in education and employment. In general, local governments can build on existing structures, such as local and regional family and adult social services. Local governments should build a strong base of social initiatives and establish flexible social services to respond to emerging needs and prevent marginalisation. Effective communication measures – such as a regional information platform and up-to-date information available at housing communities, neighbourhood initiatives, and social services – will ensure that households know who to reach out to when in need.^{26,27}

- **Family counselling:** Counsellors and social workers can guide households in understanding and managing the challenges they face, supporting them to resolve potential conflicts, and reinforcing family bonds. Counselling can help households to

develop coping strategies, boost relationships, and navigate the region's transformation with greater resilience. To create greater understanding of the challenges households face in the transition, local governments can ask social workers to conduct interviews during counselling sessions.

Example:

→ The contact centres of the Upper Nitra region in Slovakia are a good example of successful support (see below). These centres employ psychologists and social workers to help former miners and their families access mental support as well as financial expertise on household budgeting. Individual consultations on topics such as post-traumatic stress disorder, broken family relationships, fear, and stress complement the initiative. Social counselling on housing and health problems, processing of social benefits, and designing problem-solving options helps former miners and their households to cope with the region's transformation.²⁸

Support for employability in the Upper Nitra region

In the Upper Nitra region, Slovakia, a resolution was passed to decrease support for electricity production from coal by 2023 at the latest. The resolution also set a timeframe for the gradual closure of three mining fields in the region. In response, the region has introduced different measures to increase the employability of workers in the region. This includes:

- Compensatory payments for layoffs.
- A re-skilling programme and targeted assistance from a tutor.
- Professional retraining courses, such as for electrical engineering and accounting, including a budget of €700 per person.
- Contact centres offering professional consulting services – from legal services to assistance from psychologists and finance experts.
- The centres also organise community activities, including events, seminars, and group activities.

→ A total of 240 participants took part thus far, with the majority aged between 50-59.



5.3 Community level

Challenges

- **Social segregation:** Local governments should consider that the region's transformation can cause an unjust distribution of the burden on society, impacting disadvantaged households that are already struggling. A study by the University of Lund shows that the energy transition can deepen the social divide. For example, when energy prices rise, vulnerable households need to set aside an even larger part of their disposable income for their energy costs. This augments existing inequalities, which have led to social segregation and overrepresentation of low-income

households in buildings with low energy performance.²⁹ Transport poverty – which limits access to jobs, education, and social services – can create further social disadvantages and segregation.³⁰ Families living in remote areas where cars are the only means of transport may become more vulnerable when fuel costs increase, and those dependent on public transport may become at risk of transport poverty if ticket prices increase.³¹ When introducing more sustainable transport, local governments should ensure accessibility, especially in remote areas, leaving no one behind.

- **Low community involvement:** Experience shows that displaced workers do not always maintain their involvement in various community activities. Community members sometimes feel uprooted following layoffs, and they often feel insecure about their future in the region or feel disadvantaged by the transition.³² These sentiments can contribute to a decreased level of social involvement and keep community members from participating in decision-making processes. A reluctance to continue to engage in community life is both a loss for the individual as well as for the community, as workers affected by the transition are important stakeholders that should participate in shaping the future of their communities.³³
- **Unwillingness to accept the transition process:** A lack of understanding about the complex processes involved in the transformation of a region can lead to an unwillingness to accept the transition. When a particular group of the community, such as former workers who have contributed significantly to the region's economy, do not accept the transition, this can also hinder the acceptance of the community and even create fragmentation. Originally arising from a personal sense of rejection, this sentiment can spread across the community.³⁴
- **Demographic impact:** A Research on Aging study found that younger workers can cope better with layoffs and are more adaptable to changing circumstances.³⁵ However, JTF regions often suffer from 'brain drain', which occurs when skilled professionals or young talents from the region migrate due to a lack of employment options. Brain drain can diminish a community's capacity to contribute to the region's transformation and can hamper innovation, reduce economic growth, and cause a demographic shift.³⁶

Strategies

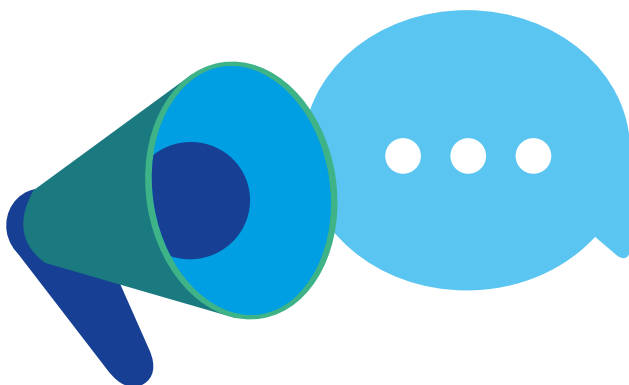
- **Communication strategies:** A clear communications strategy to explain the reasons for the transition, its implications, and the vision and measures to diversify the economy can help increase acceptance by the community. The strategy should outline the communication channels and targeted approaches to reach as many community members as possible. Messaging should emphasise what communities can gain from the transition, and community members' role in shaping and driving it. Stakeholder forums that are easily accessible and open to the public can enable broad participation and offer an opportunity to hear grievances and articulate key messages. Local governments can also include schools and other education forums in their communication strategy.
- **Stimulate community activity:** Associations of former workers can foster a sense of community and purpose. They can consist of cultural and heritage gatherings related to their working experience, or more informal gatherings. Community gatherings can help to foster belonging in the region and mitigate feelings of isolation or loneliness (see section 4.1).
- **Social infrastructure:** Social infrastructure builds on the social protection system, which consists of measures that help communities manage social risks such as poverty or social segregation. Social infrastructure and community programmes support individuals, but also the community as a whole. A first step that local governments can take is collecting and analysing regional data on social demographics to identify where social support is needed. In addition, local social partners – including social workers and psychologists – should be consulted when developing policies for a carbon-neutral economy in order to ensure a just transition that guarantees decent jobs and livelihoods as well as improves community spaces.³⁸

Example:

→ In the city of Sokolovsko, **Czech Republic** a stakeholder engagement strategy is being developed by the Just Transition Platform capacity building mechanism **JTP GROUNDWORK**. The engagement strategy identifies key stakeholder groups in Sokolovsko relevant for implementing the region's just transition, and how to effectively engage these stakeholders. Key to this engagement approach is identifying existing and potential channels to communicate with relevant stakeholders and the general public, specific communication tools relevant to the Sokolovsko context, and messaging approaches that will resonate with different stakeholder groups.

Example:

→ In Northern **Hungary**, just transition leaders developed a multi-stakeholder committee, consisting of affected workers, to evaluate the impact of a coal phase-out on the region. The multi-stakeholder committee led to the development of a strategy supported by all regional and local actors and increased buy-in from community members.³⁷



Example

→ Member States and regions can utilise funding from the Just Transition Fund to invest in social inclusion, including investments in training centres, childcare facilities, and care homes for the elderly. For example, an NGO submission to the public consultation on the JTF in Ireland noted that more than 70% of women in households that were involved in peat production in Ballyleague and Lanesborough – located in the Midlands – are now the only working member of the household, necessitating a rethink of the community's childcare arrangements.



6. Case study: A socially just transition in Jiu Valley, Romania

The following case study on the social impacts of the energy transition in Romania's Jiu Valley region is provided by Alexandru Kelemen, a social service expert based in the region.

6.1 Introduction to Jiu Valley

Situated in southwestern Romania, Jiu Valley is a region known for its long mining history. The region has produced coal for more than 150 years, and miners from all over Romania immigrated or were forcibly sent to Jiu Valley during the communist industrialisation period after the 1940s, creating a cultural community around the mining industry. The mining industry had a strong influence on the social life of workers – mining companies were actively involved in providing housing for the miners and offered cultural and sport activities. The economy of Jiu Valley was geared almost exclusively towards coal mining, with more than 45.000 miners and 75.000 indirect jobs related to the mining industry at its peak. The decline of coal mining in Jiu Valley began in the late 1990s. Today, four coal mines and two coal-fuelled power stations remain active.

6.2 Challenges of the Jiu Valley region

The energy transition of Jiu Valley has affected the region's collective consciousness and created a situation in which the negative impacts of the transition dominate the public discourse. Since the 1990s, several top-down measures – mainly focused on the economy of the region – were introduced to counteract the impacts of the energy transition, but success has been limited.

At an **individual level**, the energy transition has had – and continues to have – a severe impact on workers in the mining sector. Many of the former workers were affected by unemployment and a lack of job opportunities, causing them to face poverty as a result. An increase in alcoholism was also seen in the region. The role of miners as important contributors to the region's prosperity was never acknowledged, and miners believe that their position in society has diminished considerably. They feel as if they have gone from being “the backbone of the nation's industry to the polluters of our society”, which demonstrates the importance of properly explaining the context of the necessary transition and accounting for psychological impacts.

At the **household level**, different challenges emerged. Ill-conceived layoffs caused social and economic hardship and left many households in a difficult position. At the time, the relief measures were very limited and/or not implemented effectively. Households in Jiu Valley report that they felt as if they had to find a future for themselves, without any external guidance. The social safety net was inadequate and many households experienced poverty, marginalisation, and family disruption. Issues such as alcoholism and lack of job opportunities affected the whole household. The traditional family model changed abruptly – many women became the main provider of their household, and many of the former male miners took on an increased role in childcare. Social workers from Jiu Valley report that there have been many instances in which the abrupt change in family roles has affected the care of children or, in the most extreme cases, has resulted in trauma or child neglect.

The energy transition has led to general distrust of the **community** towards transformation and a sense of social isolation. Today, almost every former miners' neighbourhood is characterised by social housing problems, increased rates of school abandonment, and increased crime reports. In general, Jiu Valley risks having an older population that is not receiving adequate care due to depopulation and brain drain.

6.3 The way forward: Strategies for the future of Jiu Valley

Today, Jiu Valley is investing in a new approach that treats the transformation of the region holistically and involves vulnerable communities in its planning and implementation. Elements that were missing at the beginning of the transition in Jiu Valley in the 1990s are now on the table.

There are two main strategies that define the goals and strategies for the future development of the region, and both include a strong social pillar.

Social and Economic Development Strategy for Jiu Valley 2022-2030

The Strategy for Social and Economic Development was formally adopted by the Romanian government in 2022 and is supported by the European Commission. Improving the quality of life in the region is one of the aims of the strategy, and education, health, and social services feature heavily. The local government aims to develop an integrated social services network, including digital connectivity and low barriers to accessing support. Local NGOs, the University of Petrosani, and a specialised social work programme are expected to play a strong role in the project, together with the relevant local and regional authorities. The strategy also includes planned investments to combat social exclusion and fuel poverty in residential neighbourhoods through thermal rehabilitation and energy efficiency.

Territorial Just Transition Plan for Hunedoara County

Jiu Valley is located in Hunedoara County, comprised of seven localities in which coal mining was the dominant industry. The TJTP of Hunedoara County describes the lack of social measures in the area and aims to invest in quality of life, with a focus on education, health, and social services. Particular attention is given to the need to improve the quality of medical and social services to ensure care for an ageing population. The plan also aims to improve access to essential services by reducing the cost of public services, investing in the efficiency of public buildings, and investing in public green mobility.

Jiu Valley's difficult historical social conditions have created a dynamic environment for social initiatives, though these are mainly based on childcare – older and disabled people are underrepresented. While many NGOs operate in the region, most of the initiatives exist on a small scale and are not linked to public administration, highlighting the need for integrated and connected social services.

The creation of new social service infrastructure, the development of new social partnerships between NGOs and public administration, and the training of new social workers are central to future transition initiatives. From a strategic point of view, Jiu Valley now has the necessary framework and budgetary allocations to build a strong social safety net.

6.4 Next steps: From strategy to implementation

The experience from Jiu Valley shows that understanding households, the people in them, and the communities they form should be a first step when designing a region's transformation. People should not be seen as the sum of their competencies, but as individuals who function in interlinked systems such as households and communities. The energy transition will affect these different social dimensions, and social systems should be designed to ensure that everyone's needs are considered.

To do that, social workers should be closely involved in just transition implementation in Jiu Valley. Local specialists – such as psychologists and social workers – can offer individualised help that considers the specific challenges in Jiu Valley. Social services should be accessible, and diligent case management is vital as each household faces different challenges and each member is affected in a different way. A combination of grants, case management, and monitoring can improve the reintegration of former workers in JTF regions, and a more coherent social safety net can accompany re-skilling efforts.

7. Conclusion – Key messages

- Workers affected by the energy transition should be seen as integral parts of interconnected systems, such as households and communities.
- Understanding the impacts that the transition has on individuals, households, and the communities they form should be the first step when designing a region's transition strategy.
- The psychological impacts of the transition might not be visible at first sight, but can have profound impacts on households and the people living in them. Local governments should invest in the social infrastructure needed to alleviate the psychological impacts of the transition.
- Strategies to counter the social impacts of the transition should be well-rounded: a combination of financial support, social measures, and close monitoring of individual cases can improve the situation of households in JTF regions.
- Local governments should consider how they communicate about the energy transition: the attitude of the community towards the transition can make or break the transition. Acknowledging the role of miners in building up the economy of the region is a first step.

This document was prepared by researchers at Guidehouse having conducted desk research, interviews and surveys. Any information and views contained in the present document do not reflect the official opinion of the European Commission. Reuse is authorised provided the source is acknowledged.

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](#).

Endnotes

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