



Just Transition Platform Conference

16–17 April 2024

Event report

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Luxembourg: Publications Office of the European Union, 2024

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About the event

The 9th edition of the Just Transition Platform (JTP) Conference took place on 16–17 April 2024 in Brussels and online. Co-hosted by the Directorate-General for Regional and Urban Policy (DG REGIO) and the Directorate-General for Energy (DG ENER), this hybrid event brought together over 1 000 registered participants, including around 300 in person.

The conference provided a forum to share views and experiences on the just transition process. It offered a space to discuss progress on the ground and share best practices that have demonstrated their added value in the 96 just transition regions identified across the EU, including the achievements of Just Transition Fund (JTF) projects so far.

Attendees included stakeholders from national, local and regional authorities as well as economic and social partners, the wider society and representatives from the European Commission; among them were the Commissioner for Cohesion and Reforms, Elisa Ferreira, Commissioner for Energy, Kadri Simson, and Commissioner for Jobs and Social Rights, Nicolas Schmit. Also in attendance was Zakia Khattabi, Minister for

Climate, Environment, Sustainable Development and Green Deal of Belgium, who gave a keynote address on behalf of the Belgian Presidency of the Council of the EU.

This report provides a summary of the Conference's sessions, which took place on Tuesday 16 April and Wednesday 17 April 2024. It is not intended as a comprehensive summary of all details discussed at the conference, but rather as a summary of the main themes and conclusions, for those who were not present or wish to refresh their memory at a later date.

Each session summary also includes a link to watch back the recording online.



Session summaries: Tuesday 16 April 2024 (Day 1)

Opening session: Just Transition projects in spotlight

Tuesday 16 April, 10:30 – 12:00

▶ Session recording

Structure of the session

- **Moderator:** Sasha Twining, professional moderator.
- **Keynote speakers:**
 - Elisa Ferreira, European Commissioner for Cohesion and Reforms;
 - Kadri Simson, European Commissioner for Energy.
- **Presentations and roundtable discussion:**
 - Henk Emmens, Regional Minister, Province of Groningen, Netherlands;
 - Jorge Brandão, Vagal da Comissão Diretiva, Programa Operacional Regional do Centro 2021-2027, Portugal;
 - Lukáš Turiak, Director of the Just Transition Department, Ministry of Investments, Regional Development, and Informatization, Slovakia;
 - Christos Lampropoulos, Deputy Governor, Region Peloponnese, Greece;
 - Jan Bondaruk, Director, Central Mining Institute – National Research Institute (CMI-NRI), Poland;
 - Fredrik Granberg, Project Manager, Luleå University of Technology, Sweden.

Summary

European Commissioner for Cohesion and Reforms, **Ms Ferreira**, opened the conference by reflecting on progress with the implementation of Territorial Just Transition Plans (TJTPs).

'We have achieved a lot in a few short years, but this is just the beginning. There is still a lot of work to be done,' the Commissioner said. She noted that in some Member States the process is 'remarkable', with nearly half of the budget already programmed.

The Commissioner encouraged all JTF regions to make progress with implementing their TJTPs and turning plans into concrete actions. She also invited stakeholders to make the most of the support available under the Just Transition Mechanism (JTM), including [JTP Groundwork](#), [JTPeers](#), and the new [Strategic Technologies for Europe Platform \(STEP\) initiative](#).

Commissioner Ferreira encouraged speakers and attendees to share experiences, including tangible results and challenges, and form a true 'community of practice' to drive the transition process. 'We do not always have to reinvent the wheel; let us share and learn from each other,' she added. 'Let us all inspire ourselves from these projects, which are transforming economies, creating new opportunities, new jobs, new communities that are future oriented.'

Sharing her opening remarks via video, Commissioner for Energy, **Ms Simson**, commented that 'we are in the middle of a monumental shift' in the energy transition. Renewables represented a record 44 % of EU electricity generation in 2023, she reported, passing 40 % for the first time.

Setting the tone for a key theme of the conference, she said: 'We need this [transition] to be socially just for all citizens in the EU, especially in coal and carbon-intensive communities.'

Commissioner Simson invited stakeholders from coal, peat and oil regions in transition to join the Initiative for Coal Regions in Transition's Annual Political Dialogue, which will be held on 11–12 July 2024 in Velenje, Slovenia.

Following the Commissioners' welcome, practitioners from various regions around Europe presented **JTF projects** and projects supporting JTF territories as tangible contributions to regional just transitions.

A geothermal district heating plant in Kosice, Slovakia, has funded over EUR 56 million of its 96 million costs via the JTF, helping it overcome a longstanding funding obstacle. The project will benefit 170 000 inhabitants, with potential for an entire microeconomy to be built around it. An innovative

development space for small entrepreneurs in Groningen, Netherlands, has already committed EUR 200 million in JTF funding to 10 projects, while a EUR 92 million circular organic agriculture project is gaining momentum in Megalopoli, Greece.

The presentations also featured a project focusing on economic dynamism and diversification in Médio Tejo, Portugal, which has put EUR 51 million in JTF funding towards seven projects, aiming to support innovative investments, generate new jobs and address hundreds of job losses. A green energy ecosystem in Norrbotten, Sweden, is investing EUR 120 million in reskilling and upskilling, while an innovative IT system focusing on mapping post-mining sites in Silesia, Poland, will support investments in the re-industrialisation and transformation of the region.

'Across Europe, you are delivering projects on the ground. We are doing this together in way that is tailored to each region, catering to specific needs and ambitions for the future,' Commissioner Ferreira said.

Reflecting on future challenges, the Commissioner also spoke of the importance of avoiding so-called *brain drain*, while preserving regional identities and building on existing knowledge: 'We can really bring historically strong European areas – which people feel pride in – and show them a future in high-profile future industries; not just a memory of the past. Young people have huge power in them, but we must create conditions for them to stay, keep them so they do not move elsewhere to give their services,' she added.



Commissioner Elisa Ferreira addresses the audience during the opening session

Keynote: Zakia Khattabi, Minister for Climate, Environment, Sustainable Development and Green Deal of Belgium

Tuesday 16 April, 13:30 – 14:00

▶ Session recording

Structure of the session

- **Moderator:** Sasha Twining, professional moderator.
- **Keynote speaker:** Zakia Khattabi, Minister for Climate, Environment, Sustainable Development and Green Deal of Belgium.

Summary

Ms Khattabi, Minister for Climate, Environment, Sustainable Development and Green Deal of Belgium, delivered a keynote speech on behalf of the Belgian Presidency of the Council of the European Union. She started by stating that 'the ecological crisis we face is not just an environmental issue, it is the social issue of the century'. She underscored the disproportionate impact on certain groups, noting that those least responsible for the crisis are often the hardest hit.

Ms Khattabi emphasised the wide-ranging effects of the transition, stating that it 'will affect not only our ecosystems but our daily lives, economic capabilities, health, and economic security'. Yet from this challenge comes an opportunity to build a new world founded on principles of resilience and solidarity, she said.

In Belgium, she explained, there has been a concerted effort to involve various stakeholders in shaping policies for a just transition. Through a democratic process, recommendations have been developed to institutionalise a just transition, considering sectorial and thematic aspects. Additionally, a citizens' assembly was convened to address the specific needs of vulnerable groups.

Turning to the EU context, Ms Khattabi highlighted the steps taken to implement just transition initiatives, such as the JTM and the adoption of TJTPs. She also referred to the Council's adoption of conclusions on ensuring a fair transition process.

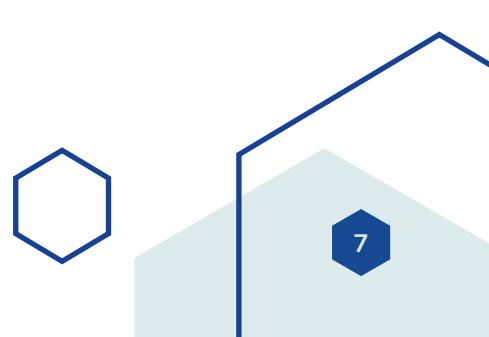
Ms Khattabi stressed the urgency of ecological policies and measures, citing Eurobarometer data showing strong public support for ecological transitions. However, she acknowledged a gap between support for such transitions and the belief that sustainable products and services would be accessible to all, particularly the poorest. 'We must make the just transition a real lever in the fight against inequalities,' she asserted.

Furthermore, she insisted on elevating the importance of just transition on the European agenda again. She underscored the essential role of stakeholder involvement in policy formulation, particularly those with direct experience on the ground.

Referring to the [Exploratory Opinion 'Advancing the EU's just transition policy framework: what measures are necessary'](#), adopted in December 2023 by the European Economic and Social Committee (EESC) at the request of the Belgian Presidency, Ms Khattabi outlined the framework's key principles. These include promoting a sustainable economy, providing prosperity for all, strong, resilient and sustainable businesses, adequate investment, civic dialogue and participation of local and regional authorities, and a backbone including a social model and welfare states. She highlighted the discussions held at an informal meeting of environment ministers in January and at a European conference on just transition in March, where experts had supported the need for a robust just transition policy in the EU.

Ms Khattabi concluded by emphasising the need to draw on best practices in other Member States and leverage past experiences. She praised the JTM as a testament to European solidarity and stressed its potential applicability across various sectors facing similar challenges. Closing, she said: 'The scale of what lies before us is formidable but equipped with strong policy framework of the JTM, we have the means to move to a strong future for everyone.'

'The European Green Deal needs to move forward now and keep the environmental and ecological transition at its centre,' she added.



The keynote speech was followed by a short question and answer session with the audience, which touched upon themes such as the challenge of scepticism in local communities. This required credible policy coupled with humility, Ms Khattabi said.

Asked about the importance of social equity, Ms Khattabi stated: 'At end of our mandate, my conviction is that the challenge on just transition is a governance one. We have to end siloed approaches to just transition, not taking into account social aspects.'

'We see the violent effects of [the ecological] crisis', she added, 'most of all for the poorest of us'. 'This is not just a narrative, but reality. In the name of social justice, we have to go through the transition. [...] We can't have a transition without taking into account the consequences of the choices we make.'



Zakia Khattabi answers a question from the audience

Keeping an eye on JTF implementation through monitoring

Tuesday 16 April, 14:00 – 15:30

▶ Session recording

Structure of the session

- **Moderator:** Emma Toledano Laredo, Director, Directorate-General for Regional and Urban Policy (DG REGIO), European Commission.
- **Panellists:**
 - Mieke De Schoenmakere, Stakeholder engagement and sustainability transitions Expert, European Environment Agency (EEA);
 - Corina Murafa, Lecturer/ Independent advisor, Bucharest University of Economic Studies, Romania;
 - Theodora Zacharia, Head of National Just Transition Observatory, Special Service for Just Transition, Greece;
 - Małgorzata Staś, Director for Regional Transformation, Marshal's Office of the Silesian Voivodeship, Poland.

Summary

Opening the session, **Ms Toledano Laredo** set the context for an in-depth discussion on monitoring JTF implementation. She highlighted that several regions have already made progress in monitoring the implementation of their TJTPs in accordance with the JTF Regulation. She emphasised the importance of tailoring these efforts to suit the unique contexts of each territory.

She pointed out that authorities and other stakeholders can consider adopting various models for monitoring, such as monitoring committees, Just Transition Observatories (JTOs), public fora, and working groups. These models, she noted, facilitate multi-level governance (MLG) and offer opportunities for diverse involvement of key actors at different levels.

However, Ms Toledano Laredo acknowledged that many countries are facing challenges in establishing JTOs. Despite these obstacles, there is growing recognition of the potential of JTOs for listening to people's concerns and understanding the impacts they face. Such observatories could help ensure that decision-making processes retain principles of partnership and MLG, particularly when involving partners representing civil society, including NGOs, trade unions, and researchers. By involving these stakeholders closely in the implementation and monitoring of regional just transition efforts, JTOs can facilitate a bottom-up approach to decision-making.

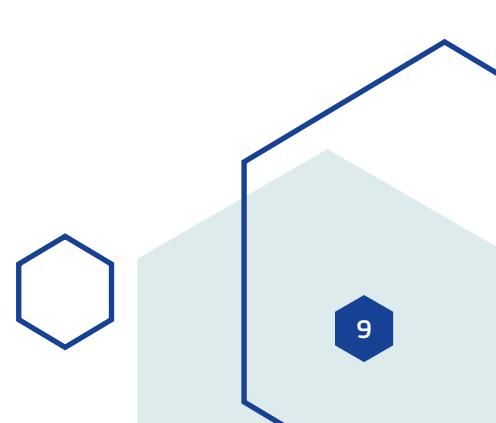
Ms De Schoenmakere discussed the definition of justice and a just transition. The EEA emphasises environmental justice, encompassing concepts like just resilience, ensuring that no one is left behind, especially in climate adaptation efforts. It is important to consider intersectionality, capabilities, epistemic justice, spatial considerations, and temporal aspects.

Monitoring should involve using both qualitative and quantitative data, she said. The EEA is working to create indicators for just transition focusing on areas like circular economy, energy, resilience, and unequal impact. It will release a report in October 2024 to help policymakers and will team up with the Eionet's Just Transition Working Group to develop new indicators and fill gaps. This effort involves an advisory group from various EU institutions.

Presenting a research perspective, **Ms Murafa** said the focus of just transition monitoring should extend beyond conventional indicators associated with Cohesion Policy or the JTF Regulation. These can be a good start, but specific indicators are needed.

There is a growing acknowledgement of the need to align monitoring practices with the principles of justice, she said. Positive examples, such as in Médio Tejo, show the significance of participatory approaches, where diverse stakeholders and experts co-create scientifically-sound monitoring frameworks involving data collection and outcome-based indicators.

Civil society involvement is crucial, ensuring objectivity and a comprehensive understanding of the complexities of a just transition. Initiatives like the EU-funded [EU4Energy project](#) in Bosnia and Herzegovina highlight the importance of leveraging existing assets and maximising available resources.



Ms Zacharia explained that the Greek national Just Transition Special Authority processes data for stakeholders, informing recommendations to the Managing Authority. It soon plans to publish data on a public Just Transition Digital Platform. With a bottom-up approach, it aims to facilitate science-based monitoring in Greece. It focuses on providing data and indicators, addressing local needs with scientific data to inform policymaking and regional planning.

However, challenges persist, including difficulties in gathering reliable data, especially at the local level. Efforts are ongoing to establish a network of local researchers to address this. Communication remains a work in progress but is committed to involving scientific bodies and local partners.

Ms Staś explained that Silesia's 2030 Green Silesia Strategy and TJTP prioritise stakeholder engagement and flexibility, while the [Regional Observatory of the Transition Process \(ROPT\)](#) plays a crucial role in monitoring challenges, needs and impacts, fostering cooperation among stakeholders. With significant funding allocated for the region's transition, the ROPT ensures effective utilisation and monitoring of funds, reflecting lessons learned from past transitions. These experiences emphasise the importance of community engagement, sustainability, and adapting indicators to regional contexts, with a focus on both qualitative and quantitative data.



Just transition combatting poverty

Tuesday 16 April, 16:00 – 17:15

▶ Session recording

Structure of the session

- **Moderator:** Alejandro Ulzurrun de Asanza y Muñoz, Head of Unit, Directorate-General for Energy (DG ENER), European Commission.
- **Keynote speaker:** Juliana Wahlgren, Director, European Anti-Poverty Network (EAPN).
- **Panellists:**
 - Mags Bird, Senior Policy Officer Just Transition, WWF EU;
 - Michel Hetmanski, CEO & Co-founder, Instrat Foundation;
 - Johanna Cludius, Senior Researcher, Oeko-Institut;
 - Eleonora Gaydarova, Chairperson, CAC Centre for Sustainable Housing of the Union of Homeowners' Associations;
 - Dora Biondani, Senior project coordinator, Climate Alliance.

Summary

In her keynote speech, **Ms Wahlgren** highlighted the stark statistics of poverty in Europe: one in five people are at risk of poverty and social exclusion, with 1 in 10 households facing energy poverty. ‘In the just transition, social policies are often an afterthought of the industrial, climate discussion,’ she said. ‘People are often left behind.’

Ms Wahlgren noted that poverty affects all aspects of life and must be addressed comprehensively to avoid reinforcing inequalities. She stressed the importance of an intersectional approach, considering vulnerable groups such as women, youth, older people, and marginalised populations.

EAPN recently launched an annual poverty report, questioning the sustainability of social welfare policies. Ms Wahlgren called for a holistic approach to just transition, intertwining environmental, economic and social dimensions. This will require alignment on transition goals between the public and private sectors, prioritising the root causes of poverty, and addressing the cost of living. She also spoke of the need for global empathy in green policies, acknowledging the interconnectedness between Europe and the global south. Ultimately, she emphasised the importance of efforts to eradicate poverty, not just alleviate it.

Mr Hetmanski raised the question of how EU funds can be directed towards eradicating poverty or exacerbating disparities. He referred to examples from coal regions, where wealth from coal has not been equitably distributed. Despite these regions being major beneficiaries of just transition funding, reaching those in poverty in the regions remains a challenge.

Ms Bird spoke of how the urgency of implementing just transition measures cannot be overstated in addressing poverty. Delaying decarbonisation efforts and structural reforms will exacerbate the impact on impoverished communities, she noted.

‘When we think poverty, we often think of individuals and households,’ she said. ‘We forget that sometimes that poverty has societal impacts.’ She added that despite just transition regulations emphasising social priorities, the actual implementation often falls short, highlighting the need for civil society engagement and involvement of vulnerable groups.

At the local level, **Ms Biondani** reported that cities are working with civil society and vulnerable consumers. ‘We need to find concrete solutions that are adapted to the ground, but also look at multi-impacted solutions,’ she said.

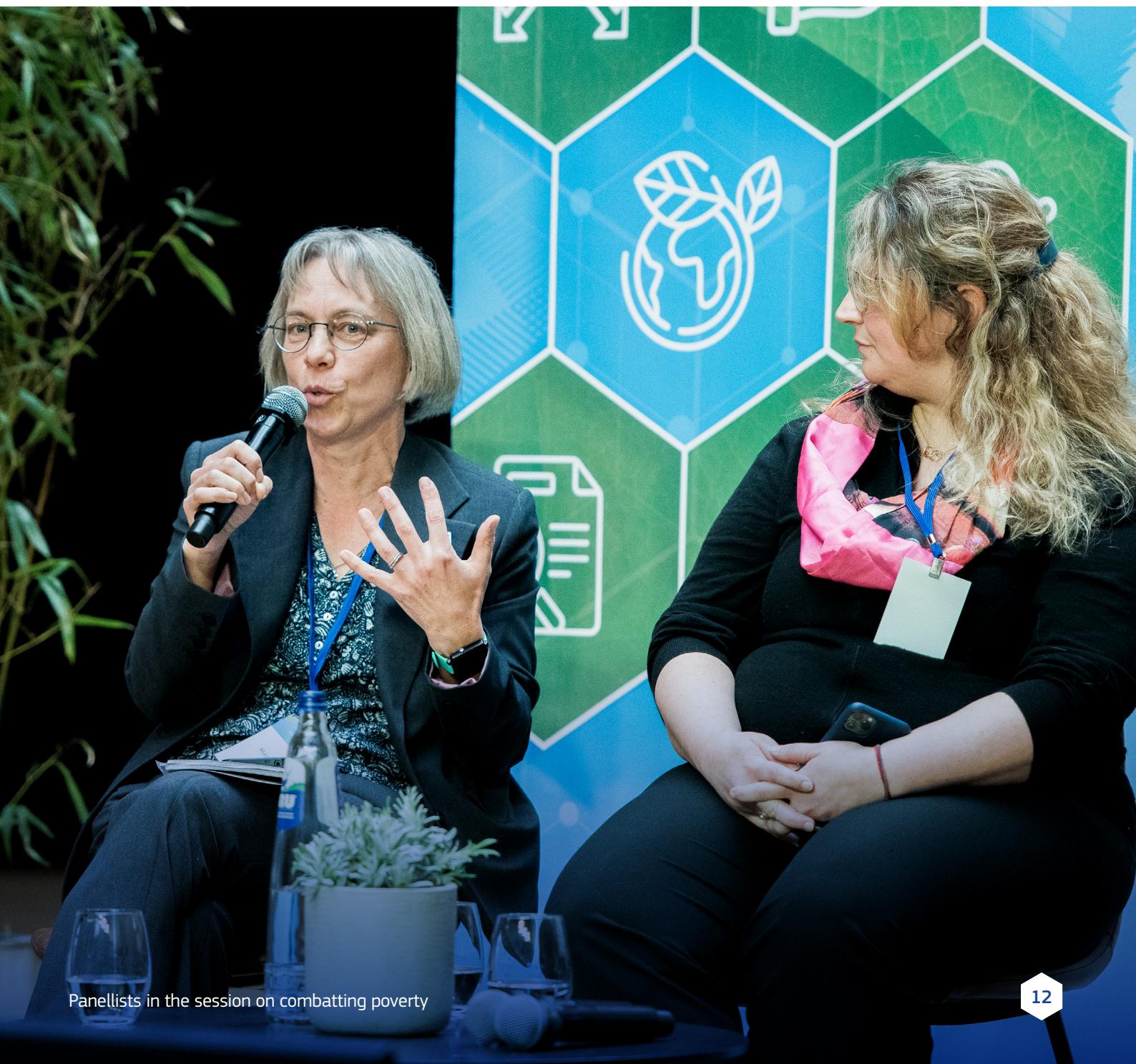


Ms Gaydarova referred to her experience of projects using indicators across four key dimensions: vulnerability, buildings, energy, and direct impacts. Regional energy poverty is examined within the just transition framework to understand its impacts and assess regional capacities. Stakeholders then develop targeted strategies to address energy poverty, considering infrastructure, social factors, and justice concerns.

As **Ms Cludius** explained, transport poverty is often overlooked compared to energy poverty but is equally significant. It encompasses various aspects, such as access and affordability of transportation, and affects vulnerable groups like women and older people, highlighting the need for tailored, targeted measures.

Member States are developing social climate plans, drawing on experiences from drafting TJTPs. Local and regional involvement is crucial to ensure that vulnerable groups are not overlooked and that social climate plans adequately address their needs, Ms Cludius said.

'Often poverty groups don't get invited to the conversation,' Ms Wahlgren added. It is essential, she said, to have democratic spaces and manage them correctly to ensure no one is left behind.



Panellists in the session on combatting poverty

Conclusions first day: Themis Christophidou, Director-General for Regional and Urban Policy

Tuesday 16 April, 17:15 – 17:30

▶ Session recording

Structure of the session

- **Speaker:** Themis Christophidou, Director-General for Regional and Urban Policy, European Commission

Summary

The first day of the conference ended with conclusions on the day's discussions, provided by **Ms Christophidou**, Director-General for Regional and Urban Policy at the European Commission. 'As I look around, I don't just see a conference centre, but an engine room,' she said, recalling the inspiring projects making tangible contributions to regional just transitions.

She acknowledged the diverse participation, noting the presence of not only representatives from the European Commission and governments but also key stakeholders from civil society and social partners.

Highlighting inspiring projects from across Europe, Ms Christophidou praised their ability to bring together stakeholders to effect change on the ground and contribute to regional just transitions. She emphasised the urgency of the transition to climate neutrality, calling it 'the challenge of this century' and stressing the need for it to be just.

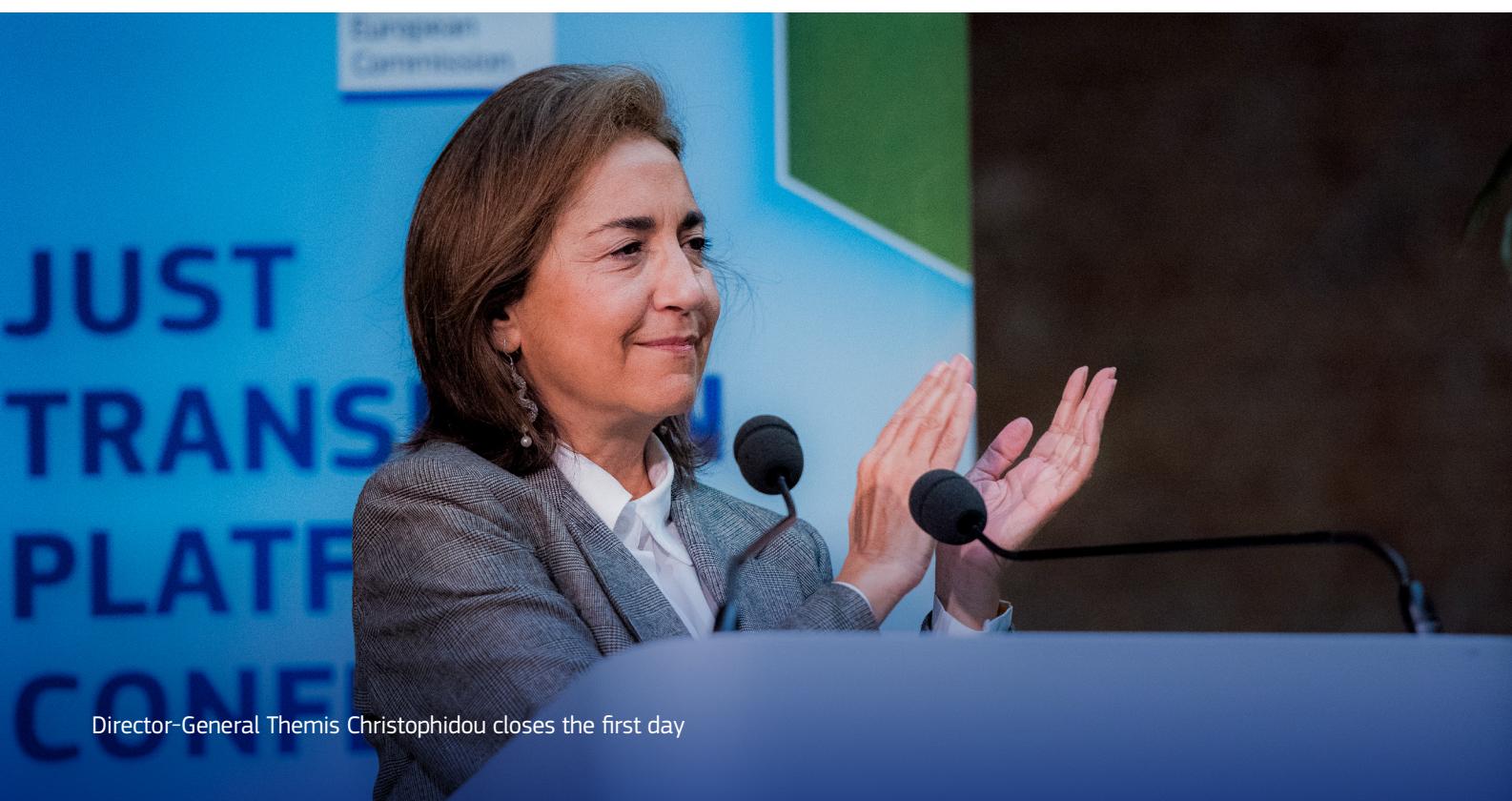
She cited stakeholder involvement and the partnership principle as central themes of the day's discussions, recalling that the

JTP was created with the purpose of engaging civil society. Other themes evident from the sessions included challenges being faced by regions in monitoring transition progress, and the importance of clear strategies for tackling poverty.

Addressing the need for continued action, Ms Christophidou outlined the expansion of the workstreams of technical assistance under the JTP. In 2024, 16 additional JTF territories will receive support, while 14 territories will participate in region-to-region or expert-to-region exchanges. She encouraged participants to leverage all available support to help them progress with JTF implementation.

'You can count on our support. You are part of a growing movement' she said, offering assurance and encouragement. The Director-General continued, 'Today is another milestone towards a just transition that leaves no place or person behind'.

Ms Christophidou's marks concluded the first day of the conference, which would reconvene the following morning.



Director-General Themis Christophidou closes the first day

Session summaries: Wednesday 17 April (Day 2)

Emerging voices: youth shaping just transitions around the world

Wednesday 17 April, 9:00 – 10:30

▶ Session recording

Structure of the session

- **Moderator:** Catherine Wendt, Head of Unit, DG REGIO, European Commission.
- **Panelists:**
 - Zagy Berian, Founder and Advisor, Society of Renewable Energy, Indonesia;
 - Maja Ibričić, Youth eco-activist, UNICEF-supported programme 'Improving Air Quality in the Western Balkans', Bosnia and Herzegovina;
 - Maria Savina, CEO, Interns' League, Ukraine;
 - Zipporah K. Amankwah, Programme Coordinator, Youth in Engineering Programme, Working Group Member YOUNGO Just Transition & Green Jobs, Ghana;
 - Aleksandra Ugarković, Policy Officer, WWF Adria Serbia, involved in the 'Panda Labs Junior for Just Transition' project, Serbia.

Summary

Ms Wendt introduced the first session of the second day of the conference, focusing on the topic of youth involvement in the transition in countries around the world. Ms Wendt began by giving the floor to Ms Ibričić, who spoke about her experience as a youth activist in Bosnia and Herzegovina.

Ms Ibričić explained that there is still a perception among both the public and decision-makers that the energy transition poses a threat to the country's economic progress. The entire system is based on fossil fuels, especially coal, and discontinuing coal exploitation is a difficult topic because it leads to a 'loss of political points' in the local community. This perspective has led to resistance against transition process.

However, she highlighted the pivotal role of young people in advancing the just transition in the country and the Western Balkans. Their activist spirit and enthusiasm for a more sustainable future make youth essential advocates for change, she said.

Ms Ibričić noted the importance of educating young people about the transition, with events like these conferences serving as ideal platforms to share positive experiences and examples. Drawing from her own involvement in conferences, Ms Ibričić has been advocating for policy reforms that prioritise youth engagement, address climate change, and ensure an equitable transition. She stressed that achieving a just transition is a challenging journey, underscoring the need to recognise and address key challenges, empower young people and amplify the voices of marginalised groups.

Asked about her hopes for the future, she said a realistic goal would be to replace existing thermal power plants with new ones that emit significantly less pollution. This transition requires enormous assistance, she said, to transition the economy and open new companies and jobs.

Ms Amankwah explained that in Ghana just transition can represent several different things: for youth, it may be job creation and decent jobs, for the oil and gas industry it's a feeling of anxiety and uncertainty about job security, for civil society organisations it's a desire for inclusion. She added that it not only prioritises environmental sustainability, but also social justice and empowerment.

Her organisation has empowered over 2 000 women and young people through an initiative focusing on renewable and clean cooking technologies, leading to a substantial reduction in greenhouse gas emissions, improved air quality, and the creation of green job opportunities. However, it has faced challenges linked to funding and policy.



As for the future, Ms Amankwah hopes that across Africa, young people can access policymaking positions and have an alternative that gives them security, stability, and support.

Ms Ugarković is involved in the project '[Panda Labs Junior for Just Transition](#)', which aims at advancing the just transition in Bulgaria, Serbia, North Macedonia and Montenegro by engaging young people in green entrepreneurship. Its goal is to raise awareness on climate change and just transition challenges and to actively involve youth in problem solving.

Key to this is the establishment of an innovation culture that encourages young people to engage in green entrepreneurship and eventually create green jobs and sustainable livelihoods in the regions. Alongside the circular economy, green entrepreneurship is the biggest transition-related topic of interest for youth.

Ms Savina spoke about [Interns League](#), which aims to cultivate a fresh Ukrainian leadership cohort united by common values to foster constructive changes, elevate political standards and advance state-building efforts by identifying, bringing together and nurturing talented, proactive people. Interns League organises internship programmes for youth in the Ukrainian Parliament, ministries, the President's office and other government institutions. This involves selecting young professionals to undergo a six-month internship, including a 'Leadership Development' component to develop skills in ethical leadership.

Due to the difficult situation in Ukraine, it is hard to promote the just transition and related projects when the main priority is to recover and rebuild the country. However, there have been success stories. 'The most effective way to engage with the local community and include them is going to the regional and local level and spread the word, get in touch with young activists, who initiate many educational events in their communities, and share the project with them,' Ms Savina advised.

Mr Berian presented the [Society of Renewable Energies](#) project, which focuses on tackling climate change and accelerating the energy transition through youth empowerment and multi-institutional collaboration. The project has created a network of universities across Indonesia and brought together academia, private sector, government, civil society, media and NGOs in one platform, so that youth can connect with them more efficiently.

Young people tend to think more concretely and differently, and society tends to be more accepting of ideas coming from young people, Mr Berian reported. In particular, the project engages with local communities in rural areas, including women who lack empowering opportunities.



Maria Savina presents during the session on youth

Energy communities in the just transition process

Wednesday 17 April, 11:00 – 12:30

▶ Session recording

Structure of the session

- **Moderator:** Paula Pinho, Director, DG ENER, European Commission.
- **Presenter:** Arthur Hinsch, Senior Expert – Sustainable Energy Systems, ICLEI European Secretariat.
- **Panellists:**
 - César Valmaseda, Digital, Green and Just Transition Expert, FAEN (Asturias Energy Agency), Spain;
 - Claudia Carani, Energy and Sustainable Development Agency (AESE), Italy;
 - Eleftherios Ioannidis, Member of local council, Municipality of Kozani, Greece;
 - Liina Talistu, Geoinformatics and planning specialist, Alutaguse Municipality Government, Estonia;
 - Tereza Mušková, Energy Advisor, ENERKOM Opavsko association, Czechia.

Summary

Ms Pinho introduced the section on energy communities, which began with a keynote speech by **Mr Hinsch**. He began by explaining that energy communities are a broad concept but can essentially be defined as collective initiatives managing energy-related activities, involving stakeholders such as citizens, local authorities, businesses who jointly finance, own, govern and carry out energy-related activities. Mr Hinsch pointed out that a [toolkit](#) for these communities is available online via the JTP Knowledge Hub. Among the key principles discussed are to focus on the region's energy heritage and tap into regional identities.

Energy communities should primarily reduce energy costs and can even reduce the costs of municipal services. Another recommendation is for local and regional governments to set up accessible funds for volunteer organisations, but not highlight volunteering as a main principle. He also shared a tip to use the [rescoop.eu](#) tracker to help track EU directives' transposition into national laws.

The keynote speech was followed by a panel discussion. **Mr Valmaseda** spoke on behalf of FAEN, which is implementing the concept of a one-stop-shop for Energy Communities in Asturias, Spain. They offer a set of services and accompany the community throughout the whole process and can serve as an example for other countries and regions. They also monitor alignment to regulations and dissemination of best practices and regional lighthouse initiatives.

Mr Valmaseda stressed the importance of citizens creating actions benefiting their communities. He also advocated for energy communities as a means to ensuring a democratic and inclusive transition process.

Representing Local Action Group Opavsko, **Ms Mušková** explained how the group has initiated an energy community built on the principles of participation, cooperation, sustainability, sharing and coordination. She advised starting at the community level, increasing awareness, building trust, and implementing projects gradually, while seeking inspiration from more developed energy communities.

Ms Talistu explained how the TARGET project 'Development of clean energy investment programme in the Ida Viru region in Estonia' created the Tudulinna Renewable Energy Community, which has a 2 MW PV park with a possible battery energy storage system.

Former mayor of Kozani, **Mr Ioannidis** is coordinator of Ofelos, a non-profit energy community network in Western Macedonia. The network advocates for non-profit energy communities as a pivotal mechanism for facilitating the just transition of the region. He cited the importance of cooperation, stakeholder involvement, social dialogue and complementarity with other programmes. Financial support is also crucial, he said, as well as addressing issues such as problems with the energy grid before establishing energy communities.

Ms Carani described how non-profit association AESSION is working to develop sustainable energy development in Italy. It provides Renewable Energy Communities (RECs) services in 279 local authorities, such as support in planning, accessing funding, and technical assistance for public procurement and photovoltaic plant design. She is also a member of the [Cohesion4Transitions working group](#) focusing on energy.

Ms Carani discussed challenges in securing investments for energy communities in Italy, mentioning recent regulatory developments and significant financial incentives from the government, and highlighted the importance of continuous support for new legal entities and integration with smart grids and digital services. She also emphasised the importance of cross-European collaboration, particularly in addressing energy poverty.



Panellists in the session on energy communities

Skills for green future

Wednesday 17 April, 13:45 – 15:15

▶ Session recording

Structure of the session

- **Moderator:** Andrea Leruste, Deputy Head of Unit, Directorate-General for Employment, European Commission.
- **Presentations and roundtable discussion:**
 - Stavroula Demetriades, Senior Research Manager, Eurofound;
 - Carla Vale, Regional Director Norte, Institute for Employment and Training, Portugal;
 - José Pedro Machado, Deputy Regional Director, Institute for Employment and Training, Portugal;
 - Louise Hoj Larsen, Senior Advisor, Confederation of Danish Employers, Denmark;
 - Vassilis Dertilis, Head of the Managing Authority, Just Development Transition Program, Greece.

Summary

Ms Leruste began by setting the context of the session, which looked at the impacts of transition on jobs, the importance of vocational education and training (VET), including continuous VET and the need for skills for a greener future.

She then gave the floor to **Ms Demetriades**, who presented a research perspective on the topic. In examining the governance structures within the TJTPs, she said, there's a noticeable variation in models, with some emphasising strong MLG. The perception of the just transition varies among different stakeholders. Social partners, including employers and trade unions, prioritise issues like jobs and reskilling. Some regions used their TJTPs to develop detailed maps of their skills needs.

Mr Dertilis, head of the JTF Managing Authority in Greece, shared his experience of a project in Western Macedonia, which as part of the region's TJTP is designing and implementing an integrated approach to reinforce human resources at the local level. In Western Macedonia and Megalopolis, 11 000 people are unemployed as a direct, indirect or induced effect of the transition away from lignite activity. These areas have an unemployment rate of 18–20 % – double the national average.

Investments will create 8 000 new jobs by 2028, which in turn means a need to meet demand for new skills and knowledge. The project aims to preserve existing jobs and create sustainable, high-quality new ones for the green and digital transition, while also halting depopulation. It does so by creating stakeholder partnerships and networks, implementing training programmes, and providing skills certification and work placements, involving subsidies for companies who recruit unemployed people.

Ms Vale presented a project on reskilling former workers in the oil refinery sector in Matosinhos, Portugal, through a railway driver training and certification programme. Part of the region's TJTP and co-funded by the JTF, the project has involved relevant local actors, including the regional authority, local authorities, public employment services, and former workers and their trade unions. The project is part of a package of green skills-oriented jobs designed to respond to national policy and regional public and industry needs. Ms Vale also showed a testimonial video featuring a former oil worker who took the training programme, sharing the added value of this requalification to his career prospects.

Mr Machado shared insights on the Portuguese experience in developing a tailor-made training programme with the involvement of the former workers, and how the public employment service worked to set and manage expectations on the training and later on career opportunities.

In the panel discussion that followed, **Ms Larsen** of Business Europe spoke about the need for green skills amid skills shortages in Europe, particularly at the technical level, for example skills in engineering.



Other themes of the discussion included the implementation of training programmes in various green sectors, barriers and enablers of partnership creation, the importance of involving social partners, the role of mobility in VET, the significance of adult apprenticeships for upskilling and reskilling, and the establishment of observatories to assess skills needs and employment impacts.

Additionally, managing expectations of participants in training programmes involves selecting participants carefully, designing tailored training programmes, and addressing infrastructure needs at the local level.



Panellists in the session on skills for a green future

Closing remarks: Nicolas Schmit, European Commissioner for Jobs and Social Rights

Wednesday 17 April, 15:15 – 15:30

▶ Session recording

Structure of the session

- **Closing remarks** by Nicolas Schmit, European Commissioner for Jobs and Social Rights

Summary

In his closing remarks, Commissioner for Jobs and Social Rights, **Mr Schmit**, began by reiterating that Cohesion Policy should be a strong promoter of just transition. Since the European Green Deal was first launched, the idea of a just transition has been becoming increasingly important.

Expanding on this point, he noted the urgency of the process. ‘This is not just about the next 20–30 years; this is something people are asking for now,’ he said. ‘We must implement this just transition. People have to see that things are moving, and time is an important factor. [...] Climate change is not something that will happen, but something that is [already] happening now.’

Echoing previous speakers, Commissioner Schmit highlighted the importance of combatting poverty as a crucial issue for our societies. He conveyed a clear message that transitions can only be successful if they have a strong social dimension. He also insisted on the need to ensure a collaborative approach with stakeholders: ‘We cannot talk about a smooth transformation without social partners, not just unions but employers and industry,’ he said.

Commissioner Schmit further highlighted the indispensable role of regional and territorial aspects in supporting a just transition and in fostering cohesion. At the same time, he underlined the imperative to address climate challenges within a global context and make sure that the EU does not lag behind.

Concluding the conference, Commissioner Schmit summarised the presentations, highlighting the new ideas showcased by regions featuring ‘excellent just transition projects’ and using EU financing, in particular the JTF, in the most effective way.

He mentioned the [Social Climate Fund](#), which will be set up in 2026, and the challenge for the EU and Member States to coordinate in order to meet the ‘enormous need’ for investment to mitigate, accelerate and coordinate the new economy. ‘We have to leave our silos and have a comprehensive approach,’ he said.

The Commissioner stressed the importance of developing skills to reap the benefits of the green transition, describing investments in future skills as ‘a must and a huge opportunity’. ‘We are under time pressure to retrain and reskill more people’ he said. He emphasised this is a transition that goes deep into our society, affecting many regions, many economic sectors and all citizens.

Commissioner Schmit concluded his speech by stressing the key importance of ensuring increased public understanding and acceptance of the transition’s challenges and opportunities.

‘Thank you very much for the work you are doing,’ Commissioner Schmit said, addressing the audience. ‘I am happy that twice a year, this forum brings experience and ideas on the transition process from different regions and Member States. I think this is a very valuable exercise and we have to really build on it.’



Commissioner Nicolas Schmit delivers his closing remarks

Side event: STEP in the context of Just Transition Fund

Wednesday 17 April, 15:45 – 16:30

▶ Session recording

Structure of the session

- **Speakers:**

- Myriam Bovéda, Team Leader for Sustainable Growth, DG REGIO, European Commission;
- Kadri Uustal, Head of Unit Coordination of Programmes, DG REGIO, European Commission.

Summary

In this side event, which followed the closing words by Commissioner Schmit, **Ms Bovéda** presented the [Strategic Technology for Europe Platform](#) (STEP).

STEP brings new opportunities to accelerate the implementation of funds, including but not limited to the JTF. It leverages additional investments into strategic technologies and skill areas, allows Member States to accelerate expenditure through increased pre-financing and co-financing, and boost liquidity.

Moreover, STEP introduces a new Sovereignty seal, an EU label for top-tier projects, enhancing their visibility and facilitating cumulative or combined funding from various EU budget instruments or national investments. The seal does not apply to the JTF projects, but to other funds. More details are available on the [Sovereignty seal](#) webpage.

In the context of JTF reprogramming, the STEP framework follows the JTF logic in terms of eligible territories and exclusions. The prerequisites to programming with STEP include a clear transition process at national level, including key transition milestones, evidence of the impact at the level of the concerned territory (social, economic, demographic, environmental or health impacts), and the need to target investments to alleviate those impacts.

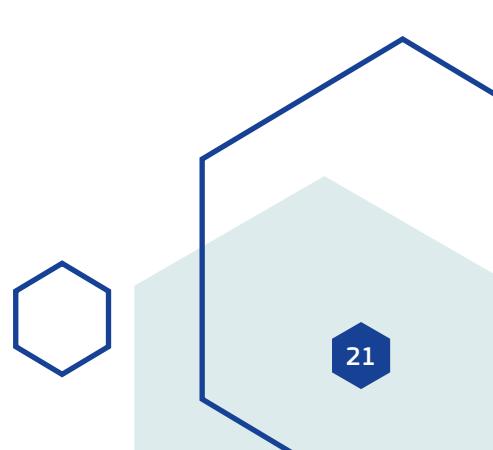
Ms Uustal then provided some practical tips for JTF reprogramming and programming STEP investments through existing or dedicated priorities. STEP objectives are already covered under the JTF Specific Objective, so already-programmed activities in the TJTPs might be eligible for support under the STEP framework. She also noted that in March 2024, an exceptional pre-financing of 30 % of the entire JTF allocation was disbursed.

Selected investments must fulfil the STEP objectives to support the development or manufacturing of: critical technologies and their value chain in digital technologies; deep tech innovation; clean and resource-efficient technologies; and biotechnologies. Fulfilment of the STEP objectives is also necessary to address the shortages of labour and skills necessary for those investments. There are easier rules for implementing productive investments contributing to STEP in enterprises other than small and medium-sized enterprises.

Ms Uustal also presented the STEP-dedicated priorities, which must include operations contributing to STEP objectives exclusively. She explained that a JTF priority can be adjusted to a STEP priority, but an amendment of the TJTP is required in such as case.

Investments under STEP priorities have specific benefits, for example they do not need to undergo the mid-term review if the request (TJTP amendment) is submitted before 31 August 2024. Furthermore, up to 100 % co-financing is allowed, hence increasing the total financing volume, but State aid limitations apply at operation level.

When programming through existing priorities – those which do not exclusively include operations contributing to STEP objectives – an amendment of the TJTP might be required and the STEP benefits (exclusion from mid-term review and up to 100 % co-financing) do not apply.



Ms Uustal also reminded attendees of the spending deadlines: 70 % of the funds available in the JTF need to be spent by the end of 2026. However, this relates to the NextGenerationEU budget and the JTF funding deadline – not funding level. This means projects can continue until the end of 2029.

Finally, all information about upcoming STEP opportunities across Member States will be made available on the Sovereignty portal. For more information, visit the [platform](#).



Myriam Bovéda and Kadri Uustal during the side event on STEP

Side event: Just Transition Platform on the ground

Wednesday 17 April, 16:30 – 17:30

 Session recording

Structure of the session

- **Speakers:**

- Balbina Gluza-Czyczerska, Just Transition Platform Coordinator, DG REGIO, European Commission;
- Emma Krause, Just Transition Platform Secretariat;
- Wiktoria Beckmann, Just Transition Platform Secretariat;
- Lena Knab, Just Transition Platform Secretariat.

Summary

Introducing the second side event, **Ms Gluza-Czyczerska** emphasised the availability of support via the JTP: ‘All regions undergoing transition, particularly those phasing out coal or facing challenges, can seek assistance from the Commission.’

Alongside the JTP, she mentioned other avenues such as [Secretariat Technical Assistance to Regions in Transition \(START\)](#), [Joint Assistance to Support Projects in European Regions \(JASPERS\)](#), [EIB](#) support, and the [Technical Support Instrument \(TSI\)](#) (DG Reform) as additional resources. For more information, individuals were directed to visit the [JTP website](#) or contact the [JTP Secretariat](#).

She then outlined the various support streams via the JTP in 2024, noting several differences compared to 2023. Services have been expanded, and more territories are being supported, having seen a rise in applications and interest in the technical assistance provided.

New [Working Groups](#) have also been established, including a consolidated stakeholder engagement group and a dedicated group focusing on equal opportunities, targeting vulnerable groups and incorporating a Youth Task Force.

All relevant information is readily accessible on the [JTP website](#), **Ms Gluza-Czyczerska** said noting the JTP’s commitment to transparency in knowledge sharing. Looking ahead, there are plans to release new calls for technical assistance starting in 2025, building on the support provided in 2024.

She then gave the floor to **Ms Krause**, representing the JTP Secretariat, who presented a [lessons learned report](#), available on the JTP website, with insights from the 2023 round of technical assistance. She added that the Secretariat is here to [support](#) anyone with questions.

Ms Krause then gave the floor to **Ms Beckmann**, who presented [JTP Groundworks](#) beneficiaries for technical assistance in 2024. A core element of the technical assistance will be the production of tangible outputs as well as a capacity-building workshop. Large-scale regional fora events with experts will also be organised. These will be region focused, scoped from the technical assistance, and hosted by beneficiaries.

Ms Beckmann presented the 12 projects covering 16 territories this year. The majority of regions are carbon-intensive regions – a slightly different make-up to last year’s beneficiaries. She also presented the focus topics, which include: energy efficiency of public buildings, universities and youth; electricity generation; skills needs for renewables expansion; project development and analysis, including State aid issues, communication on district heating, and identifying projects that could be funded by the [third pillar of the JTM](#), the Public Sector Loan Facility.

Lessons learned reports as well as one deliverable and output per technical assistance beneficiary will be shared after this year’s round. Several solutions from last year are already available on the above-linked JTP Groundwork webpage.

Ms Beckmann then gave the floor to **Ms Knab** who presented [JTPeers](#), which involves two strands: an exchange programme of region-to-region and expert-to-region exchanges, and an online [experts database](#). The programme is all about learning from each other, she explained. The database features more than 100 just transition professionals from around Europe, who can advise on specific topics and also have language and country knowledge in many cases.

She then presented the exchange beneficiaries for 2024. There will be eight exchanges covering 14 JTF territories. Of those, five will be region-to-region and three will be expert-to-region.

They will focus on many topics of relevance that have come up in the conference, for example State aid, as well as re- and upskilling, SMEs, youth, monitoring, communications, energy communities, and the labour market. The common theme, Ms Knab said, is that they are all very much implementation focused.

In the autumn, there will be a further call for exchanges and new experts on the database, which will be communicated via the JTP newsletter and website.

Ms Knab then gave the floor to Ms Krause who presented the [JTP Knowledge Hub](#), which provides lots of short, succinct, accessible materials that can be used to support JTF implementation. All are available on the JTP website.

She shared examples of [toolkits](#), which cover topics such as gender, biomass and energy storage, catalogues covering topics like funding and just transition measurement, [case studies](#), [policy approaches](#) and [project fiches](#). She also encouraged attendees to share topics of interest with the JTP Secretariat, as further knowledge products will be produced in due course and such ideas can be taken on board.

Ms Gluza-Czyczerska then thanked all attendees and organisers and formally closed the 9th JTP Conference.



Ms Gluza-Czyczerska during the side event on JTP on the ground

