



Just Transition Platform Conference

15–17 October 2024

Event report

*Regional and
Urban Policy*

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Contents

About the event	4
------------------------------	----------

Session summaries: Tuesday 15 October 2024 (Day 1)	5
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Opening session: 10th Edition of the JTP Conference – Just Transition Mechanism	
Projects Exhibition	5
We Support You: Advisory Tools for Just Transition Regions	8
Just Transition Boosting Competitiveness	10

Session summaries: Wednesday 16 October (Day 2)	12
--	-----------

Third Pillar of the Just Transition Mechanism – All You Want to Know	12
Just Transition Made by Women	14
Conversion, Rehabilitation and Repurposing of Sites after Coal Phase-Out	16
Closing remarks: Alejandro Ulzurrun de Asanza y Munoz, Head of Unit, DG ENER, European Commission	18

About the event

The 10th edition of the Just Transition Platform (JTP) Conference took place on 15–17 October 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 several hundred participants, online and in-person.

The landmark 10th conference provided a forum to take stock of Just Transition Fund (JTF) implementation and achievements and to share views and experiences on the just transition process to 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 Commissioner for Cohesion and Reforms, Elisa Ferreira.

The core sessions of the conference on 15 and 16 October facilitated exchanges between stakeholders on the journey of a just transition towards a climate-neutral Europe. The event also included high-level discussions on resources and inspirational examples of just transitions, and featured an exhibition of Just Transition Mechanism (JTM) projects providing good practice examples in harnessing the financing opportunities offered by the JTM.

Specific sessions addressed various topics such as the advisory tools available for just transition regions, how to benefit from the Public Sector Loan Facility (the third pillar of the JTM), how the just transition boosts competitiveness, international examples of female entrepreneurship in regions in transition, and rehabilitation and repurposing of sites after coal phase-out. A Multi-Level Dialogue on Just Transition took place on 17 October, organised by the Committee of Regions.

This report provides a summary of the conference's core sessions, which took place on Tuesday 15 and Wednesday 16 October 2024. The report provides a summary of the main themes and conclusions of the sessions.

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

Session summaries: Tuesday 15 October 2024 (Day 1)

Opening session: 10th Edition of the JTP Conference – Just Transition Mechanism Projects Exhibition

Tuesday 15 October, 10:30 – 12:00

▶ Session recording

Structure of the session

- **Moderator:** Sasha Twining
- **Keynote speakers:**
 - Elisa Ferreira, European Commissioner for Cohesion and Reforms, DG REGIO
- **Project exhibitors:**
 - Tatjana Puškarić, Head of Department for Regional Development and Strategic Planning and Regional coordinator of Sisak Moslavina County, representing Center of Gaming Industry (Croatia)
 - Jozef Vlček, Director of Research and Development, Materialovy a Metalurgický Vyzkum s.r.o., representing Circular Economy R&D Centre (Czechia)
 - Meelis Kuusk, Chief Executive Officer, Association of Local Authorities of Ida-Viru County, representing Jõhvi digital and multimedia incubator complex (Estonia)
 - Maarit Helena Kari, Project Manager, Kouvola Innovation Oy, representing New Peatland Farming Based Business in the Kymenlaakso (Finland)
 - Amy Walker, Post-Doctoral Researcher, Martin Luther University Halle-Wittenberg, representing European Centre of Just Transition Research and Impact-Driven Transfer (Germany)
 - Dimitrios Ptochos, Governor of Peloponnese, representing Bioeconomy 360° Hub (Greece)
 - Shirley Clerkin, Project Manager, National Parks and Wildlife Service, Department of Housing, Local Government and Heritage, representing Tóchar Wetlands Restoration Scheme (Ireland)
 - Ilja Gasan Osojnik Črnivec, Research Assistant Professor, National Institute of Chemistry Center for Development, representing Demonstration and Training for Carbon-Free Technologies (Slovenia)
 - Sabine Van Knijff, Commercial Director, Women in Technics, representing Women in Technics for de IJmond (Netherlands)

Summary

Commissioner Ferreira reflects on the 10th JTP Conference

European Commissioner for Cohesion and Reforms, **Elisa Ferreira**, opened the conference by expressing her joy to participate in the landmark 10th edition of the conference – her final one as Commissioner.

The Commissioner reflected on her experiences of visiting JTP regions on the ground, saying: ‘When I first visited JTP territories I was struck by so many different situations, and I found some common factors in this diversity.’

‘Time and again’, she said, ‘I was struck by community pride and a common energy, a sense of engagement, a vibrant civil society. Our goal became very clear to me: to give all these communities a future and a hope and to help them deliver their dreams.’

Amidst the diversity, Commissioner Elisa Ferreira found common factors, including community pride, energy with the people, institutions, workers, young people, NGOs, a sense of engagement, and a vibrant civil society.

The Commissioner went on to highlight the great impact that the JTM has had on the economies and ecosystems of local areas, saying: ‘Estimated figures are reason for optimism; from the Just Transition Fund (JTF), 63 000 new jobs will be created [...] and an estimated 8 000 hectares of land will be rehabilitated.’

Setting the tone for a key theme of the conference, she said that ‘something that cannot be put in figures is the strong just transition community’, citing ‘a community of practice with a common objective that learns and works together’.

She acknowledged the strong just transition community and its shared objective, which fosters collaboration and learning. The Commissioner praised the proud heritage and historical significance of the mining and industrial areas, emphasising the need to create conditions that allow people to remain in their regions. She also highlighted the strong just transition community spirit present at the conference and encouraged intensified efforts in project selection and implementation.

Moreover, the Commissioner Elisa Ferreira stressed the importance of making full use of available strengths and resources, building a European home together through projects of solidarity. Admiring the energy, courage, and competence of the communities that are materialising the hope of a new future, she also recognised the challenge of finding alternatives to traditional industries and the necessity of a bottom-up approach, internal organisation, and multi-level partnerships to drive these transitions.

Exhibition presents inspiring, tangible examples of EU-funded projects

Following the Commissioners' welcome, practitioners from nine regions around Europe took turns to present their JTM-funded projects in an on-stage projects exhibition. Short summaries of the exhibited projects are presented below.

As the first to present on the JTP projects, **Tatjana Puškarić** showcased the **Center of Gaming Industry** project, based in an industrial zone in central Croatia. The project aims to

boost economic transformation in a region historically built on a socialist industrial system.

Ms Puškarić explained the shift away from heavy industry has been challenging for the region, as it is part of the region's identity. The transformation began in 2016 and includes a factory, dormitory, incubator, and accelerator, along with programmes and training courses.

'Why gaming? Because we wanted to attract young people, young talents, to give them job opportunities that will keep them in our region,' Ms Puškarić explained. The project will also develop sports facilities and promote healthy activities for children and youth.

Jozef Vlček presented the **Circular Economy R&D Centre** project in Czechia, aimed at establishing a new research centre focused on circular economy principles in the Moravian-Silesian region. The project involves 11 members from various sectors and will be built on the site of a former hockey arena, revitalising the region's industrial heritage to attract new talents and excellence.

The centre will bridge technology and innovation to build a sustainable future, focusing on cutting-edge waste management research. This initiative aims to position the Moravian-Silesian region as a leader in circular economy practices.

Sabine Van Knijff presented the **Women in Technics for de Ijmond** project from the Netherlands, which addresses the need for a greener way of working and filling skill gaps in the technical sector.

This initiative aims to train 100 women to contribute to the transition through proactive recruitment, the DevelopHER Academy, and a diverse link to support and train the existing population, ensuring inclusivity during the transition.

The project aims to create an inclusive, skilled workforce driving the green transition, and Sabine emphasised the importance of diversity and collaboration: 'The engine of evolution is variety. In order to survive, we need each other, each other's skills and creativity to keep growing,' Ms Van Knijff said.

'We needed a champion to join us in our dream – a champion we found in the JTF,' she added.

Ilja Gasan Osojnik Črnivec introduced Slovenia's **Center for Development, Demonstration, and Training for Carbon-Free Technologies**. The centre supports local industry with labs for battery, hydrogen, and carbon dioxide testing, aiming for a carbon-neutral future.

It will provide training for carbon-free technologies to industrial personnel and young talents, leveraging local expertise and attracting international researchers.

The centre is anchored around local talents and will retain highly qualified individuals, fostering knowledge transfer and cross-sector development. It is set to be fully operational by spring or summer 2026.



Commissioner Elisa Ferreira delivers her keynote speech



Exhibitor Shirley Clerkin discusses her project with Commissioner Ferreira

Shirley Clerkin presented the **Tóchar Wetlands Restoration Scheme** from Ireland, which aims to support the ongoing work of smaller wetland sites.

Tóchar means 'the pathways under the peatlands', so Ms Clerkin emphasised the paradigm shift from extraction to transformation. The initiative encourages people to gain a new perspective, highlighting wetlands' health and recreational benefits, as well as their heritage and cultural significance, instead of burning turf (cut peat) as fuel.

To achieve this, the project is developing a course for peat contractors to transform their roles from extractors to restorers. By launching a call for expressions of interest from landowners, communities and enterprises, the scheme seeks proposals for community restoration or the purchase of wetland sites to improve wetland habitats.

In a similar vein, **Maarit Helena Kari** presented the **New Peatland Farming Based Business in the Kymenlaakso** project, based in the southwest region of Finland near the Russian border.

With Finland encompassing 9 billion hectares of peatland – half of which remains wild and undrained or protected, and 1 % used for extraction or mining – there is a need to find new uses for these areas. As peat energy use declines, the project explores alternative applications such as reforestation, rewetting, and wetland farming.

Meelis Kuusk introduced the **Jõhvi digital and multimedia incubator complex** in Estonia, aimed at fostering innovation, creativity, and economic growth. Funded by the JTF, the incubator stimulates the growth of digital media and technology startups by providing office spaces and services, creating jobs and attracting young talent.

The complex also includes a second incubator focused on the audiovisual field, offering infrastructure for creative companies and SMEs, including film studios. These incubators are key to diversifying the economy, fostering innovation and creating opportunities for young talent, contributing to a more sustainable future.

'The goal here is to spark industrial innovation that really stimulates green economy in the region,' he said.

Amy Walker presented the **European Centre of Just Transition Research and Impact-Driven Transfer** project, from Martin Luther University, Germany. This centre, based in a prominent mining district, focuses on research related to the just transition and coal phase-out, in a region that is facing it first hand.

The centre's 17 interdisciplinary research teams have been engaged in relevant research for a significant time. Now, the centre aims to foster collaboration across the wider region. It is working to make tangible, practical impacts across three pillars: just transition society, which takes a social science approach; material sciences, focusing on CO2 storage, battery technologies and industrial innovation; and Transfer Labs, which examine educational and legal aspects, including justice and fairness.

Each pillar contributes to a Transfer and Innovation Incubator working to move the ideas and work beyond the academic work, and to support startups, technology companies, and more.

Dimitrios Ptochos presented the **'Bioeconomy 360 Degrees Hub'** in Greece, which is establishing a hub across four municipalities in the region. The hub aims to drive the transition of the local economy, promote entrepreneurial spirit and create new business opportunities and job growth.

More than just an infrastructure project, it is focused on economic and productive activities, encompassing full spectrum of bioeconomy chain. Addressing the region's main challenges of the demographic and fostering growth, the project leverages technology and climate change as key accelerators.

The project emphasises being sustainable, green and socially just, with a focus on retaining local talent by fostering synergies across various sectors such as agri-food, technology, and innovation.

After this series of inspiring presentations, audience members were invited to choose their favourite projects via a series of audience polls. Throughout the conference, the projects also exhibited their work in a poster exhibition at the venue.



Attendees explore the in-venue poster exhibition

We Support You: Advisory Tools for Just Transition Regions

Tuesday 15 October, 13:30 – 14:45

▶ Session recording

Structure of the session

Presenters:

- **Just Transition Platform (JTP):**
 - **Balbina Gluza-Czyczerska**, Just Transition Platform Coordinator, DG REGIO, European Commission
 - **Testimonial: Helena Andersson**, Eco-strategist, Regional Development Department, Gotland, Sweden
- **START:**
 - **Eva Srnova**, Policy Officer, DG ENER, European Commission
 - **Testimonial: Przemysław Piechocki**, Chief Executive Officer, Wielkopolska Social Economy Support Centre (WOES), Eastern Wielkopolska, Poland
- **Cohesions for Transitions (C4T):**
 - **Myriam Boveda**, Team Leader for Sustainable Growth, DG REGIO, European Commission
 - **Testimonial: Miljenko Sedlar**, Head of Climate Department, North-West Croatia Regional Energy and Climate Agency (REGEA), Croatia
- **JASPERS & TARGET:**
 - **Šarūnas Bruzgė**, Economist, Project Directorate, Energy, European Investment Bank (EIB)
 - **Testimonial: Karla Sitar**, Director of SAŠA business incubator, Municipality of Velenje, Slovenia
- **Technical Support Instrument (TSI):**
 - **Ariane de Dominicis**, Head of Sector, Sustainability, DG REFORM, European Commission
 - **Testimonial: Ján Stano**, Head of Unit, Just Transition Strategy, Ministry of Investments, Regional Development and Informatization, Slovakia

Summary

This session featured an informative and practical discussion outlining the services available to support coal and carbon-intensive regions in their just transition process. These services aim to build capacity, share best practices, develop solutions and provide hands-on expert support to the regions implementing their Territorial Just Transition Plans (TJTPs).

The session included overviews of the available support programmes and insights on programme developments, including upcoming calls. It also featured live testimonials from beneficiaries of each programme, as summarised below.

Just Transition Platform (JTP)

Balbina Gluza-Czyczerska, Coordinator of the Just Transition Platform (JTP), began by underlining that the European Commission has set up a dedicated JTP to support regions in implementation of their TJTPs. The JTP is a unique advisory tool, an EU-wide, high-budget technical assistance that is entirely focused on supporting coal and carbon-intensive regions in unlocking financing from JTM. Mrs Gluza-Czyczerska delivered an overview of a few streams of support under the JTP: [JTP Groundwork](#) (JTP capacity building on the ground), [JTPeers](#) (experts and exchange), and the [JTP Knowledge Hub](#) (which provides knowledge and resources for

practitioners). She highlighted the key role of the platform in helping all stakeholders from territories in transition across EU. The JTP also operates two working groups and is in charge of organising bi-annual JTP conferences. The call for JTPeers is ongoing and new calls for applications for JTP Groundwork are due to launch in early 2025.

Helena Andersson, representing JTP Groundwork beneficiary Gotland, Sweden, then provided a testimonial explaining how easily she was able to navigate the application process for JTP Groundwork, citing the valuable support she received from the national government.

Secretariat's technical assistance to regions in transition (START)

Eva Srnova of DG ENER presented [START](#) and the Initiative for coal regions in transition (CRiT). She explained that CRiT covers fewer regions than the JTP, supporting 31 coal regions and eight peat and oil shale regions, known collectively as coal+ regions, to ensure that no region, worker or community is left behind in the energy transition. Since 2019, START has been providing tailored, short-term support to stakeholders in coal+ regions to build local knowledge and capacity.

Pzemyslaw Piechocki, of WOES, Eastern Wielkopolska, gave a testimonial on how START is helping Wielkopolska in its ambitious journey as a Polish coal region committed to coal phase-out by 2030. Pzemyslaw works on the transitioning social economic ecosystem in Eastern Wielkopolska. He described how START uses dialogue workshops and development opportunities to support the region.

Cohesion for Transitions (C4T)

Myriam Boveda, Team Leader for Sustainable Growth, DG REGIO, discussed the [C4T Community of Practice](#), which is based on the JTP model. C4T comprises Working Groups on Energy, Environment and Climate, an Academic Sounding Board, and C4T Groundwork. The Academic Sounding Board, made up of 11 academics, tackles specific challenges related to both Cohesion Policy and the JTF to create solutions that work. C4T Groundwork, meanwhile, provides tailor-made technical assistance focusing on place-based solutions for sustainability transition governance, as well as project identification, preparation and implementation.

Miljenko Sedlar, of the North-West Croatia REGEA, shared his experience of C4T. He described how the project enhanced the climate proofing capacity in the City of Zagreb and facilitated stakeholder engagement. Previously, there had been little understanding of climate proofing, but C4T helped to raise capacity and improve understanding of different levels of governance.

JASPERS & TARGET

Šarūnas Bruzgė of the EIB, described JASPERS and TARGET, which are joint initiatives of the EIB and the European Commission. Support is provided by a dedicated EIB team and over 100 experts who support managing authorities, individual projects, and capacity-building initiatives.

Karla Sitar of the City of Velenje provided insights into how TARGET and JASPERS have been instrumental in decarbonising the district heating system in Velenje. They have also helped the municipality to apply for JTF funding and to explore housing energy efficiency through the European Local Energy Assistance (ELENA) facility.



Presenters during the session on advisory tools

Technical Support Instrument (TSI)

Ariane de Dominicis of DG REFORM presented the TSI, describing the instrument as an annual EU programme that provides technical assistance for the design and implementation of reforms. Ms de Dominicis described how the TSI allows for multi-country and multiregional support. There have already been 1 800 TSI projects since 2017 and 35 just transition projects, including helping to prepare the TJTPs.

Ján Stano, of the Ministry of Investment, Regional Development and Informatisation, Slovakia, gave a testimonial on the TSI projects that have been part of the just transition process in Slovakia since 2018. He explained that the TSI has assisted in the development of the vision, strategy and implementation of the just transition. Mr Stano described how TSI also supported the analytical work behind the TJTP for the three eligible regions and helped with the preparation of high-quality projects for funding. In recognition of their assistance in moving things forward, Mr Santo also said meetings with the European Commission were helpful for this process.

The testimonials from beneficiaries of each programme were followed by a short Q&A. Asked what is often missing from applications, Šarūnas Bruzgė, who spoke on JASPERS and TARGET, answered that key information on the kind of support being requested is often lacking. The speakers on TSI agreed and added that information on what will happen after the TSI project has concluded is often absent. Myriam Boveda, who spoke on C4T, also mentioned that support from the relevant authority can frequently be absent from applications.

Ongoing and upcoming calls

The session concluded with a look at what is coming up next for these advisory tools. The TSI's 2024 application round closed on 31 October 2024; its next deadline will be one year later, on 31 October 2025. For JASPERS and TARGET, applicants may apply at any time. There are no restrictions on application timings, at least for the next couple of years.

For CRiT, applications are due to run until next year, as discussions on the future of the initiative continue. As of the date of the conference, there are no calls currently open but many supporting knowledge products are available on the initiative's website. The initiative is also organising its Annual Political Dialogue in 2025.

For the C4T Community of Practice, the next call for applications will take place in the first quarter of 2025. Ms Boveda reiterated that this initiative is very much needs based, so ideas are welcome. She also noted that not all Member States are represented in the initiative's working groups on energy, environment and climate, and invited participants to apply to join the groups.

For the JTP, calls for JTPeers Experts and Exchange were ongoing during October 2024. A new call for JTP Groundwork technical assistance will open at the beginning of 2025. A new working group is also due to open, focusing on a new topic linked to the just transition, and new knowledge products will continue to be published on the JTP Knowledge Hub. Ms Gluza-Czyczerska encouraged participants to keep an eye on the [JTP website](#) and subscribe to the [JTP newsletter](#) for updates.

Just Transition Boosting Competitiveness

Tuesday 15 October, 15:30 – 17:00

▶ Session recording

Structure of the session

- **Moderator:** Nicola De Michelis, Deputy Director-General, DG REGIO, European Commission.
- **Presenters/panellists:**
 - Zdeněk Hušek, Innovation Centre of the Ústí region, Czechia
 - María Belarmina Díaz Aguado, Director General of Energy and Mining, Ministry of Ecological Transition, Industry and Economic Development, Asturias, Spain
 - Annika Mäkitalo, Coordinator, Västerbotten Region, Sweden
 - Stephan Meyer (remote), District Administrator from the District of Görlitz, member of the Lusatian initiative for a Net Zero Valley, Germany

Summary

This session opened with a short introduction by Nicola De Michelis, Deputy Director-General of DG REGIO, who introduced presentations from four different EU just transition regions, highlighting the efforts and initiatives of these regions to boost competitiveness and attract new and clean industries.

Building on existing regional strengths

Beginning with the Ústí region in Czechia, **Zdeněk Hušek** outlined the Innovation Centre's approach to creating a regional innovation ecosystem. He spoke of the region's advantages, including its existing industrial mindset, the availability of brownfield sites, and its geographical location between two centres of innovation: Prague, the capital of Czechia, and the nearby Saxony region of Germany.

Part of the region's efforts focus on the development of partnerships with national and European universities, from which two research and development centres have already been established in the region. To ensure highly skilled workers take root in the region, the current focus is on facilitating dialogue between industry and research and promoting the development of local spin-off companies.

Specific challenges for Micro SMEs

In the Asturias region of Spain, **María Belarmina Díaz Aguado** highlighted the activities being undertaken to support local small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) in the region, 96 % of which are micro SMEs. These micro SMEs face specific challenges such as their inability to absorb large funds and their limited administrative capacity.

Other challenges in Spain include the so-called 'regulatory tangle' faced by various regulations, which include EU-level regulations such as the JTF and the Temporary Crisis and Transition Framework, each with their own guidelines to follow. Combined with this, companies also need to adhere to climate-

proofing and do-no-significant-harm guidelines. The presenter also mentioned the challenging timeline, using the example of transitioning from coal to hydrogen in three years, which is extremely expensive, and technological and geopolitical uncertainties.

In response to the specific challenges faced by SMEs, the regional government, the regional government has organised social dialogues tailored to SMEs. It is considering creating a new fund dedicated to SMEs and has set aside a proportion of the JTF budget allocated for larger companies to those that include SMEs in their development plans.

Opportunities in green industries

Annika Mäkitalo outlined the significant changes her region, Västerbotten, is undergoing as a result of increasing interest from many European and international companies to invest in clean and green technologies in the region. Factors contributing to Västerbotten's attractiveness include its access to land and fossil-free energy (predominantly hydro), its existing industrial cluster with extensive knowledge in wood, metal and energy industries, and a local community committed to a sustainable transition. In contrast to previously high rates of unemployment, Västerbotten currently has the lowest rate of unemployment in Sweden; nevertheless, attracting skilled workers and new people to the region is a key challenge.

Stephan Meyer highlighted how the Lusatia region of Germany is aiming to create the first Net Zero Valley in Europe, harnessing the opportunities emerging from the EU's Net Zero Industry Act to transition from a historically coal-producing region towards a centre for local climate-neutral industry.

Clear benefits of a locally owned approach

In the subsequent panel discussion and Q&A, speakers and participants outlined their experience and lessons learned in

engaging and supporting SMEs in the transition. Mr Hušek noted the importance of starting with early adaptors who are able to make the change and of presenting good practices to inspire and motivate local companies.

There were contrasting experiences amongst participants; one audience member from Estonia described the success of the Ida-Virumaa region, whose SME support scheme, designed as part of the JTF, was ultimately over-subscribed. In contrast, an audience member representing Spanish mining municipalities described the significant challenges of cultivating entrepreneurial spirit in regions with a long history of coal mining.

The discussion also explored the benefits of the JTF in comparison to other EU funding instruments. On this, there was collective agreement amongst panellists that the JTF offers more flexibility, allowing regions to allocate resources

according to the most pressing challenges and to support private as well as public actors such as large companies and SMEs.

To close the session, **Nicola De Michelis** of DG REGIO reiterated the support available to support regions to be competitive via the instruments presented in the previous session on advisory tools.

Mr De Michelis then closed the first day of the conference by highlighting that complex discussions are ongoing in Brussels around the devolution of investment programmes. Regional stories such as these need to be shared to demonstrate the benefits of this locally owned approach, he noted. 'Not all investments can be designed centrally; they need the integration that only you, at the local level, can bring about,' he concluded.



Panellists in the session on boosting competitiveness

Session summaries: Wednesday 16 October (Day 2)

Third Pillar of the Just Transition Mechanism – All You Want to Know

Wednesday 16 October, 10:00 – 11:15

▶ Session recording

Structure of the session

- **Moderator:** Emma Toledano Laredo, DG REGIO, European Commission
- **Presenters/panellists:**
 - Sabine Vandermotten, DG REGIO, European Commission
 - Borislava Gabrovska, Senior Advisor, EIB
 - Gustaf Ulander, Coordinator, International Unit, Skellefteå kommun, Sweden
 - Laurianne Jaskolski, Team leader, Partnership Support and Europe Directory, European Metropolis of Lille, France
 - Ludmila Bačová, Head of External Financing, Strategic Development Department of the City of Ostrava, Czechia
 - Pavla Kozáková, Specialist in External Financing, Strategic Development Department of the City of Ostrava, Czechia

Summary

Emma Toledano Laredo of DG REGIO began the session by highlighting the significance of the third pillar of the JTM, the [Public Sector Loan Facility \(PSLF\)](#). The facility assists the public sector in the regions most affected by the transition to a climate-neutral economy to reach their objectives and achieve a just transition. 'We know the socio-economic cost of just transition is particularly high for certain regions and people,' she noted.

The session featured audience polls to gauge the level of awareness of the PSLF among the audience before the session's presentations began. The audience was fairly evenly split between those who are new to the facility, those who have basic understanding of it, and those who already know it well. Most answered that they had not yet applied for PSLF funding and were not yet aware of advisory support via the InvestEU Advisory Hub.

A crucial role in supporting public authorities

Following these initial insights, **Sabine Vandermotten** showed a [video](#) explaining the PSLF application process, explaining that those interested in receiving support should apply for funding via the [EU Funding and Tenders portal](#).

She cited this quote from **Commissioner Elisa Ferreira** highlighting the crucial role of the PSLF: 'Thanks to this agreement with the EIB, the PSLF will offer public authorities in regions and territories that most need support preferential lending conditions for projects that do not generate sufficient revenue to be financially viable.'

Ms Vandermotten explained that the PSLF is a blending facility including both loan and grant components: encompassing EUR 6-8 billion in loans provided by the EIB, EUR 6 billion in

additional mobilised resources, and EUR 1.3 billion in grants by the EU. Overall, it is expected to mobilise EUR 13-15 billion in public investments.

She presented the [PSLF budget](#), which is divided into national shares until the end of 2025 and explained that from 2026 remaining available budget will become available on a competitive basis to all Member States. She also explained that the grant amount is not linked to costs of the project, but is a percentage of the loan, which can be 15 % or 25 % in less developed regions. Regarding geographical scope, she noted that projects must benefit a territory identified in the TJTPs.

Ms Vandermotten went on to describe the application process for grant proposals submitted to the Commission and loan requests to the EIB. The award criteria for grant assessment focus on relevance, impact and quality, with bonus points given for projects in less developed regions, those contributing directly to EU climate and energy targets, and projects that have adopted decarbonisation plans.

This session revealed that as of mid-October 2024, 37 proposals had been submitted, 15 applicants selected for funding, and five grant agreements signed, accounting for over EUR 100 million in grants. Countries such as France and Sweden have already exhausted their national shares, whereas other Member States such as Poland, Romania, and Germany are yet to utilise much of their substantial allocations.

Complementary support from the EIB

Borislava Gabrovska then took over, saying that she hoped to 'add a piece to the puzzle' by explaining how the EIB supports all three pillars of the JTM through blending and advising. Under Pillar 1, the EIB support with co-financing and

managing financial instruments using JTF funding, while JASPERS supports project preparation for JTF grants. It also supports InvestEU under Pillar 2, while Pillar 3 involves a blending facility combining EIB loans and EU grants under the PSLF.

Providing more detail on its support under Pillar 3, she noted that projects must address market failures and comply with EIB sector policies, the Paris Agreement, and the EU Taxonomy. The minimum loan amount is EUR 12.5 million, or EUR 1 million for intermediated loans. Investment loans may cover more than 50 % of project costs for less developed transition regions. Projects must not receive funding from other EU programmes.

Types of EIB loans under the PSLF include investment loans, framework loans and intermediated loans. Ms Gabrovska mentioned that the application process can take some time and urged the audience to contact the EIB as soon as possible in order to get involved in EIB funding: 'Contact the EIB if you are interested in the PSLF so we can discuss your project in more detail, the loan, the maximum loan amount, and the process.'

She also presented free-of-charge assistance available under the [InvestEU Advisory Hub](#) to support the preparation of PSLF projects.

The presentations were followed by testimonials of three PSLF beneficiaries from Sweden, France and Czechia.

Societal transformation via public-private collaboration

Gustaf Ulander presented the affordable housing project in Skellefteå, Sweden, which has received support via the PSLF. He described the region's ongoing societal transformation, which is being driven by new industries such as green steel and the Northvolt Ett battery factory. 'It's not about one company but about a societal transformation that is happening,' he noted.

The city's population is expected to grow to 90 000 by 2030, which generates a need for support for growing housing demands. 'People don't just need somewhere to live but an attractive place, somewhere they can prosper, they want to stay. Our model is a sustainable place for a better everyday life,' Mr Ulander said.

He described the development of 750 sustainable homes across seven sites in the municipality, with three sites already completed. These projects, covering an area of 656 km², include over 30 separate buildings and cater to people with specific needs. The project received a grant of EUR 11 million, complemented by a loan of EUR 71 million under PSLF.

Mr Ulander stressed the importance of collaboration between the public and private sectors: 'It is very important for the public sector to work together with the private sector, to stand up and provide stability even though the private sector may face obstacles. We must show that we believe in the transition, because we really do.'

Innovative projects in green and low-emissions industries

In **Laurianne Jaskolski's** presentation, she explained that European Metropolis of Lille aims to offer its 1.2 million residents more efficient, affordable and environmentally friendly mobility services.

Ms Jaskolski cited the renewal of the city's tramway fleet, the creation of 220 km of cycle paths, and new hydrogen vehicles. She explained that the project is due to be completed by end of 2027, after a successful application process completed in September 2024.

Ludmila Bačová and **Pavla Kozáková** then presented a transformation plan of the city of Ostrava, Czechia, using green technologies and moving to less emissions-intensive industries. This should improve the image of Ostrava as a centre of green technology and a great place to live, transforming it from its history of carbon-intensive industries and improving living conditions in the process.

Part of this effort is Ostrava's new concert hall, which should match other important concert halls in Europe and have a capacity over 1 300. The project received a EIB loan of around EUR 84 million, plus a EUR 21 million EU grant under PSLF. The project should be implemented between 2023 and 2027 and in operation from 2028.

It fulfils the objectives of the JTM by transforming a former coal region, using renewable sources, and supporting urban infrastructure. Moderator Ms Toledano Laredo agreed that it is a 'great example of transforming a city in a sustainable way'.

The presentations were followed by a question-and-answer session, which touched upon the challenge of scepticism in local communities and application deadline. Ms Vandermotten explained that the call is ongoing. There are three deadlines in 2025, plus three more in 2026 and probably one more in 2027. The grant agreement signature can take up to 18 months. Normally projects run for 60 months but can be longer if justified.

This session was followed by a discussion corner on the PSLF, which provided a space for attendees to ask further questions to the presenters.



Panellists in the session on the Public Sector Loan Facility

Just Transition Made by Women

Wednesday 16 October, 12:00 – 13:15

▶ Session recording

Structure of the session

- **Moderator:** Catherine Wendt, Head of Unit for Smart and Sustainable Growth, DG REGIO, European Commission
- **Presenters/panellists:**
 - Clara Casert, JTP Secretariat
 - Florence Raes, Director of the Brussels Liaison Office of UN Women
 - Apostolina Tsaltampasi, President, WEnCoop
 - Aileen Barron, Managing Director of Green Acre Marketing; participant in the Gender Equality in Rural and Agricultural Innovation Systems (GRASS Ceiling) project
 - Catharine Kartika Winata (remote), Environmental Safeguard Specialist and Co-lead for the Just Transition Working Group, JETP Secretariat Indonesia

Summary

This session focused on approaches to supporting female entrepreneurship in JTF regions and the challenges women face in setting up and scaling their enterprises.

Catherine Wendt began by outlining the session's goal to bring attention to women in policymaking and entrepreneurship. She emphasised the JTF's focus on equitable policies benefiting vulnerable groups, noting that only one in three entrepreneurs is a woman.

JTP publishes new catalogue on female entrepreneurship

Clara Casert of the JTP Secretariat then presented the JTP's newly published catalogue, [Boosting female entrepreneurship: A catalogue for just transition regions](#). Supporting women to set up businesses in just transition regions promotes gender balance in the region, boosts the local economy by involving women in green sectors, and diversifies the labour pool to ensure broader participation.

Five key action areas are identified in the catalogue to achieve these goals: incubation, capacity building, financing, education, and peer learning. Ms Casert also discussed the benefits observed from regions that have implemented these measures. One example is that female entrepreneurs tend to employ other women, which further promotes gender balance.

Ms Casert advised regions to speak to female entrepreneurs to understand their challenges and ask what funding and support has been helpful when setting up their enterprises. Regions should also engage with business support institutions and consider the regulatory framework, including social protection policies, to see if they inhibit or encourage the establishment of businesses.

Stereotypes and several other barriers

The audience then had the opportunity to share their views via live polls, which asked about the barriers that prevent women from engaging in entrepreneurship. Various factors were identified, including stereotypes, risks, financial barriers, unemployment, lack of role models, motherhood, traditional family models, and patriarchy.

One question focused on the sectors where more female entrepreneurship is needed. The sectors highlighted included energy, decision-making, technical fields, STEM, and nature restoration. Another question revealed the opportunities for entrepreneurship presented by the just transition, including circular economy, new ways of life, the emergence of new industries, inclusion, and grassroots initiatives.

Common challenges and stereotypes faced by women were also discussed. These included gender role models, the impact of motherhood, being perceived as too emotional, experiences of sexism, male predominance in many fields, and a perceived lack of pragmatism.

If the transition is not gender equal, it will not be effective

In the following discussion, **Florance Raes** asked 'What can women do for the just transition, and what could the transition do for women?'. She emphasised that if the just transition is not gender equal, it will not be effective. This is not only a matter of fairness but also of economic development; it is essential women have equal access to finance and technology, she said.

There is a need to disaggregate data by gender when it comes to transition planning and monitoring. Ms Raes pointed out that women bear the burden of caring for children and older people. The newest data show a global inequality of 2.5 more hours per

day spent by women on care activities compared to men, with some regions showing a difference of up to 7 hours. Without addressing this aspect, we will not increase participation of women in the labour market.

Ms Raes offered three key messages on how to improve the engagement of women. First, it is important to have policies in place at both local and global levels. Second, a human rights approach should be brought into the conversation. Third, access to resources, including technology and finance, should be improved.

Indonesian perspective reveals challenges and opportunities

Catharine Kartika Winata discussed the challenges faced by women entrepreneurs in Indonesia. She pointed out that these challenges include limited access to education in technical sectors, insufficient knowledge about financing tools, difficulty balancing family and business responsibilities, and cultural and social barriers.

Ms Winata emphasised the need for women entrepreneurs in key transition sectors in Indonesia, such as renewable energy, sustainable agriculture, energy efficiency, waste-to-energy solutions and educational and advocacy enterprises. As of 2021, 64.5 % of all micro, small and medium-sized enterprises (MSMEs) are managed by women, she said. yet only 5 % of women are in decision-making positions. She also called for the provision of affordable childcare services to support working women.

She highlighted several opportunities to foster entrepreneurship within the just transition framework. These include encouraging positive attitudes to gender equality through initiatives like the Gender and Energy Transition (GenSet) programme, equipping women with green jobs and skills, implementing gender-responsive public procurement, and providing blended funding options. Ms Winata added that the Women's Livelihood Bond is the first listed, gender-focused social bond.

Greece's first women-led energy cooperative

Apostolina Tsaltampasi spoke about an initiative by the Greek Business Association to support marginalised groups and sectors where women are underrepresented. She highlighted that women in Greece make up less than 5 % of the local

economy, and noted that women are not present in the energy sector in particular. The WEnCoop aims to change this by establishing an energy community run solely by women.

She shared that it was very difficult to set up a female-run energy cooperative, as they faced rejection from all levels of government and stakeholders. However, they persevered and succeeded, becoming the first women-led initiative of this type to succeed. The cooperative is now a best practice example and supports women in setting up and leading energy projects in wind and solar, currently totalling around 3 MW of production.

Ms Tsaltampasi emphasised that women are more than suitable for a career in the green economy, and when obstacles appear, they find ways to overcome them. It is crucial to explore supportive networks, she said, and involving women in the green economy should be a priority.

Creating a more inclusive and supportive environment

Aileen Barron noted that the historical context is important for understanding the challenges women face in the workforce. She addressed the numerous challenges women encounter due to stereotypes, especially when it comes to driving a business forward while also being a mother and caring for the family.

However, she also pointed out the positive aspects of working for oneself, such as increased flexibility, which is particularly beneficial in areas with insufficient childcare facilities. She emphasised that women should not hide behind motherhood and should continue to pursue work opportunities.

One of the highlights of the GRASS Ceiling project is its focus on the innovation needs of young farming and rural innovators in the southeast region. The project aims to empower women and increase the number of socio-ecological interventions, thereby fostering a more inclusive and supportive environment for female entrepreneurs.

Wrapping up the key points of the session, Ms Wendt highlighted that women's representation in the just transition is not about key performance indicators. She spoke on the relationship between the just transition and gender:

'It's a two-way channel. As Ms Kartika Winata said, you can't play football with half a team. Let's bring in women constructively, to their best potential.'



Panellists in the session on boosting female entrepreneurship

Conversion, Rehabilitation and Repurposing of Sites after Coal Phase-Out

Wednesday 16 October, 15:00 – 16:30

▶ Session recording

Structure of the session

- **Moderator:** Alejandro Ulzurrun de Asanza y Munoz, Head of Unit, DG ENER, European Commission
- **Presenters/panellists:**
 - Piotr Cofalka, Deputy Director for Research and Development, Institute for Ecology of Industrial Areas (IETU), Poland
 - Jannis Beutel, Researcher, Wuppertal Institute & CRIT Secretariat
 - Martin Šikovec, Head of the Zasavje Just Transition Centre, Zasavje Regional Development Agency, Slovenia
 - Anna Ozerova, Programme Manager JTF and OP Zuid, Province of Dutch Limburg, Netherlands

Summary

The session began with a welcome and introduction by the moderator, **Alejandro Ulzurrun de Asanza y Munoz**. He emphasised the importance of rehabilitating mining sites, which is crucial for CRIT, and highlighted challenges in repurposing brownfields, including legal obstacles. Often, these sites are owned by national governments, creating issues in asset management and dispute resolution.

Rather than constructing new facilities, upgrading the existing ones can help to avoid complex processes. It is essential to focus on the unique opportunities these sites offer, as they are well-suited for business residences, and are already connected to existing infrastructure for water, transport, and electricity. Attracting new businesses and creating jobs frequently depends on successfully repurposing these areas, paving the way for a new future.

Project examples from Poland

The keynote speech from **Piotr Cofalka** shared experiences from Silesia, Poland. He noted that when rehabilitating post-mining and industrial sites, it is essential to consider various scenarios and aspects, particularly during planning. These include health and environmental considerations, remediation expenses, administrative and ownership issues, and future maintenance costs for facilities. Mr Cofalka noted that larger cities find it easier to repurpose sites, as smaller cities often do not own post-mining assets and struggle to gather funds.

He also provided several project examples. The Katowice Culture Zone, an area of a former coal mine, involved an investment of PLN 1 billion, with half of those funds coming from the EU. It took five years to secure ownership, the next six years to procure and plan, then the final five years to construct. The Katowice Gaming and Tech Hub, funded by the JTF, hosts many information and communication technology

(ICT) companies and aligns with the regional development strategy.

Smaller projects, such as in Chorzow, involve adapting to climate change, enhancing biodiversity, and developing green and blue infrastructure for rainwater retention. Another example is the Antonia Heap, where safe rehabilitation methods are providing recreational spaces.

Post-mining sites can also be used for renewable energy generation. In Gliwice, a centre for skills development and reskilling has trained more than 70 000 people. In Czechia, the Industrial Complex in Ostrava has repurposed post-industrial facilities for industrial tourism, attracting numerous visitors.

The importance of spatial and strategic planning

Jannis Beutel presented how the CRIT initiative supports regions that need to convert and repurpose sites. He highlighted the initiative's [toolkit for environmental rehabilitation and repurposing](#), which provide guidance on securing financing and managing sites.

Mr Beutel also discussed technical assistance provided for Poland, which guides repurposing for mines and brownfield sites. Additionally, he mentioned an upcoming toolkit for managing post-coal assets, which showcases various examples of how spatial and strategic planning can link these projects to transition targets and the overall strategic goals of the regions.

He encouraged the integration of spatial considerations (not only sectoral) into planning and noted that mixed land-use approaches are most effective, as they allow multiple goals to be met through the repurposing of a single site. He also spoke about the timing of repurposing initiatives, stressing that such efforts should begin while mining activities are still ongoing.

Ownership often a challenge

A panel discussion followed. Asked about the barriers to success, Mr Cofalka said the main problem is ownership transfer. From a Polish perspective, post-mining assets are transferred to a company from the state, which can take a lot of time. The other challenge is funding, as bigger projects cannot get funding easily. The best practice, he said, is to split projects into phases and allocate aggregated financing accordingly.

Asked about the responsibilities of different government levels, **Ms Ozerova** said her region of Dutch Limburg had to have a long-term strategy for transition. 'The municipality of Heerlen took a lead on the project and submitted an Interreg proposal for a pilot, asking miners where to bore holes,' she said. Thermal water is now used to heat homes and businesses.

Mr Šikovc said that in Zasavje, a mountainous area degraded due to mining, it is challenging to attract businesses. The former open pit mine ceased in 1966 and was rehabilitated by the mining company. Now, repurposing through the JTM has designated the area as a business zone. As it is close to solar power plants in Slovenia, it is easy to get access to renewable energy.

Environmental and health considerations

Asked about health and environment, Mr Cofalka said his project had to gather information about actual and potential site contamination and consider geological characteristics. 'You can also construct different repurposing scenarios through the information obtained with different budgets,' he said. Mr Beutel mentioned the many examples of how old mines can be used for power purposes, such as geothermal heating and use pits for energy storage.

'Transitioning to chemical industries from mining can have environmental and health issues, so we want to look into circular economy sites,' said Ms Ozerova. One JTF project involves building a circular space to test new technologies focused on closed loops and recycling. 'Politics is rooted in short-term cycles but transition takes decades – including fitting goals into political expediency and funding,' she noted.

On increasing opportunities for workers, Mr Cofalka said people often want to reskill, so that was one of the main activities of the business and education centre in his region. The centre attracted 40 companies that delivered 2 000 jobs in the area, focused on new and emerging branches like space and technology.



Closing remarks: Alejandro Ulzurrun de Asanza y Munoz, Head of Unit, DG ENER, European Commission

Wednesday 16 October, 16:15 – 16:30

▶ Session recording

Structure of the session

- **Closing remarks:** Alejandro Ulzurrun de Asanza y Munoz, Head of Unit, DG ENER, European Commission

Summary

In his closing remarks following the final session, **Alejandro Ulzurrun de Asanza y Munoz** began by thanking the attendees. He emphasised the importance of practical projects and regional efforts in the energy transition. Reflecting on the event as a whole, he said:

‘Brussels is very far away; sometimes, it is a good reality check to come here to this kind of event, to look at the actual projects, and to be amazed and celebrate the creativity, the effort, the investment that regions are doing to go through with the transition.’

He also underscored the numerous opportunities in the transition, especially for coal and carbon-intensive regions, including the net zero industry act, which can help identify industries to help Europe become more competitive.

He stressed the need for inclusivity, particularly the participation of women in decision-making processes:

‘The fact that not enough women take part in deciding about the transition is bad – this is something that we need to tackle, and first of all we need to acknowledge the issue. This is detrimental to the concept of a just transition, which should involve everyone equally.’

Mr Ulzurrun de Asanza y Munoz also reiterated Commissioner

Ferreira’s important words from the first day of the conference, emphasising that regions facing decarbonisation are part of a community on the path to a just transition. Reflecting on the wider politics of the Commission relating to the just transition, he said:

‘These are not just my words – President von der Leyen has presented her views for the next five years on how we must work on clean industrial deal, along with European Green Deal objectives.’

He reminded the audience of how the Commission is helping regions not just through the JTF, also the PSLF, technical support instruments: Just Transition Platform, CRiT, C4T Groundwork, JASPERS, TARGET and many more initiatives presented during the conference.

‘As we speak, the next college of Commissioners is getting ready for the next five years,’ he said. ‘There will be very important dialogue out of which we will have action. The just transition will certainly feature.’

Mr Ulzurrun de Asanza y Munoz concluded by reassuring regions that they are not alone: ‘The community of regions that face decarbonisation is not alone on the transition path. The just transition will not allow anyone to be left behind.’





