



Summary and conclusions

Aims and Objectives of the Dialogue

The Multi-Level Dialogue on Just Transition is a collaboration between the European Commission and the European Committee of the Regions in the context of the Just Transition Fund. As part of the Just Transition Platform, it aims to promote partnership, interregional cooperation and the promotion of multi-level governance in implementing the Just Transition Fund.

Under the topic "Transformational Ideas from EU's Cities and Regions", the second Multi-Level Dialogue on Just Transition focused on involvement of local actors in coal and energy-intensive regions.

The event took place online, and was streamed via the website of the Just Transition Platform and directly via Interactio and the CoR web streaming¹. 228 registered participants joined via the Platform website, and additional 130 participants logged in to the Inteactio livestream.

Ms. Nathalie SARRABEZOLLES (FR/PES), the Chair of the CoR COTER Commission, delivered the opening speech, underling the chances of transition to more sustainable economic and societal models and highlighting the potential of the Just Transition Fund as a truly regionalised instrument to serve as a model for other instruments supporting transition.

¹ Recording of the meeting available under <https://frontend.cor.smv.cloud/en/sessions/reference/cor-multi-level-dialogue-on-just-transition-transformational-ideas-form-eus-cities-and-regions>

Speakers

- *Normunds POPENS, Deputy Director General DG REGIO, European Commission*
- *Dimitrij PUR, Slovenian Presidency of the Council of the EU*
- *Jan KŘÍŽ, Deputy Minister for the Environment, Czech Republic*
- *Martina MICHELS Member of European Parliament (D/THE LEFT)*
- *Jakub CHELSTOWSKI (PL/ECR), Regional President of Silesia, Poland*
- *Thomas SCHMIDT (DE/EPP), Minister for Regional Development, Free State of Saxony, Germany*
- *Dagmar SCHMIDT, Chair of Association "Lausitzer Perspektiven e.V," Germany*
- *Karel TICHÝ, Project Manager, Economic and Social Council of the Ústí Region, Czech Republic*
- *Robert MACIASZEK Mayor of Chrzanów, Poland*
- *Stefan KRASDEV Deputy Mayor of Pernik, Bulgaria*
- *Vesna BALTINA, Deputy Mayor of Burgas, Bulgaria*
- *Bernd LANGE (DE/EPP), Goerlitz, Germany: CoR rapporteur on "Equivalent standards of living as a joint challenge for all levels of government in Europe"*

Summary and Conclusions

The roundtable discussion consists of two thematic parts. In the first, participants focused on the JTF programming in the context of implementing the National Recovery Plans. Specific questions to the panellists included:

- *What is the state of play of the development of the territorial transition plans and where are possible overlaps with the national recovery plans?*
- *Which challenges do exist for promoting synergies between both instruments?*
- *What solutions have been found at local, regional and national level to combine both instruments in an effective manner and which lessons could be learned for the future?*

Normunds POPENS shared details on the current JTF programming. According to him, the EU still needs to work on the general perception of the Fund and its main role as a tool for transition, highlighting its complementarity with the recovery plans.

Dimitri PUR presented the path of the JTF regulation through Council and underlined the importance of local actors in order to develop strong ownership of the projects at local level.

Jan KRIZ presented the current state of play in the JTF Programming in the Czech Republic. He also commented on the link between the modernisation fund, recovery and the JTF facility.

Martina MICHELS spoke about the social dimension of transition and the future of cohesion and JTF, and the possibilities to use the green reward mechanism built into the JTF. Ms MICHELS also encouraged mayors to be engaged in the process and share their experiences.

Jakub CHELSTOWSKI presented the Silesian approach to the TJTPs as a part of the regions' global approach to the process. In his opinion, the push towards just transition will be even bigger after 2027, requiring even bigger funding during the next programming period.

Bernd LANGE underlined the importance of the social aspect of the JTF, especially for rural areas and small towns, but also its unique feature allowing the engagement of SMEs.

During the second part of the discussion, the panellists focused on the challenges of local engagement in just transition. Civil society and local representatives are the drivers of transition and the key to success of this undertaking. Some of the specific questions to participations were:

- *What experiences have been made in successfully engaging local communities in the development of territorial just transition plans?*
- *What obstacles exist for an effective involvement of local communities and the civic society and how can they be overcome?*
- *Is there a need to change existing rules and procedures to ensure more citizen engagement?*

Thomas SCHMIDT showcased the initiative "simult+" which aims to unite local and regional actors, academia and research, clusters and associations to work together towards just transition. The state minister presented the important linking of LEADER funding to the political priorities of just transition, and presented the specific JTF governance approach in Saxony in the context of cross-border cooperation.

Dagmar SCHMIDT, pointed out the importance of the social component of the JTF as well as the involvement of the civil society, and voiced her concern that this component is not represented sufficiently in the JTF planning. Ms. Schmidt emphasized the difficulties in cross-region and cross-border cooperation for non-governmental actors, and insisted that social development and quality of life should be equally funded as economic measures.

Karel TICHÝ managed so sum up the challenges of local engagement in one paragraph:

"We must honestly admit, that engaging local stakeholders is one of the hardest part of the whole just transition exercise. In order for the local engagement and participation to be real, there is need of time and need of capacities – on the side of the authorities, trying to come up with a transition strategy, but also on the side of the local community as such. And you definitely also need enough resources to support the local engagement."

The mayor of Chrzanów, Poland, Robert MACIASZEK, shared his town's experiences with local engagement, confirming the already voiced suggestions by previous speakers. He was able to recruit additional personnel in order to achieve better stakeholder engagement, reaching out to social partners, businesses, NGOs and associations.

Stefan KRASTEV pointed out two main obstacles hampering local engagement: the lack of technical capacity on the ground and the lack of internal knowledge due to the use of temporary consulting services. Another issue is the co-financing rate for his region, which is too high as the municipalities concerned are in one region with the capital city, driving up the GDP for the entire administrative region.

Vesna BALTIMA also pointed out the lack of capacity and technical support next to a problem that is currently present regions with energy-intensive production facilities: although Burgas is home of the largest refinery on the Balkan peninsula and other heavy industrial sites, the city cannot benefit in any way from the JTF as it is not included geographically in the TJTP.

Concluding, CoR Member Bernd LANGE voiced his concern that in the context of just transition special attention should be paid to rural areas. He underlined that rural areas are still losing population and one solution would be to support SMIs.

Conclusions

- JTF is not an instrument for large scale energy transition, but rather a targeted instrument for to help transition away from coal and fossil fuels in specific geographic areas. The national recovery plans create the needed synergy by supporting measures outside the scope of the Just transition mechanism. Complementarity and seamless integration in national funding schemes is needed for the success of the JTF.
- Member States must ensure that municipalities and regions are involved and their specific needs properly addressed, since most green deal investment will be at local level. Main challenges for the JTF appear to be the creation of synergies with other pillars of the Just Transition Mechanism, Cohesion funding, Next Generation EU resources and as well local and national funds, proper addressing of the different needs of regions and last but not least the development of stronger ownership at local level.
- Engaging local stakeholders in the long term requires much more time than the current system of programming and implementation allows. While the interest of citizens degrades over time, authorities and local communities often lack capacity to be fully involved in terms of participation and expertise.
- There is need for technical assistance and individual approach to each individual case. Flexibility in state aid policies and quick execution of projects are needed to assure high stakeholder engagement.

Recording of the event available at: <https://frontend.cor.smv.cloud/en/sessions/reference/cor-multi-level-dialogue-on-just-transition-transformational-ideas-form-eus-cities-and-regions>

Please join us for the **next edition of the CoR Multi-Level Dialogue on Just Transition**, which will take place in the framework of the next meeting of the Just Transition Platform. We will continue to discuss the socio-economic dimension of Just Transition as well as local engagement, this time **from the perspective of cross-border cooperation**.