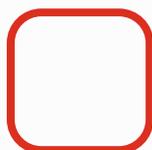
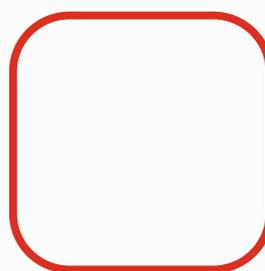
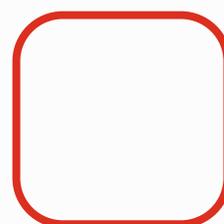




# **SUMMARY OF EXPERIENCES WITH THE INVOLVEMENT OF CSOS IN V4 IN THE DECARBONISATION PROCESS**



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The project is focused on the examination of the role of non-governmental organizations in the process of decarbonization of coal regions in V4 countries (Czech Republic, Hungary, Poland, Slovakia). The aim of the project is to describe the best and worst practices of the individual processes for Serbia, who awaits the transformation of its energy mix, largely based on coal.

The examined V4 countries have had a slightly different share of coal in their energy mix, while the largest one being in Poland and the second largest one in the Czech Republic, followed by Hungary and Slovakia. There are many similarities and differences in their takes on decarbonisation, thus providing different range of experiences.

## Czech Republic

In the Czech Republic, a Coal Commission was established in 2019, recommending a phase-out by 2038, which was later changed by the government to a more ambitious target of 2033. The decision to phase-out coal should refocus the attention to the development of renewables in the country, especially solar energy, and which would potentially create around 32 000 new jobs. Czech Republic has both hard coal and brown coal reserves, and the plans to close mines will be delayed because of the health crisis and current energy situation.

The transition of the regions built-on the coal-mining regions is ongoing. The government has developed a strategy for social and economic reconstruction, implemented through annual action plans. The strategy however faces issues such as lack of transparency, weak public participation, or lack of concrete steps specifications. The country also lacks a national climate law, which makes it vulnerable to changes in political priorities. Another important strategy is the Territorial Just Transition Strategy, again criticized for the lack of involvement of the third sector and lack of transparency.

The NGOs in the Czech Republic are often only added to the decision-making process to ensure formal compliance with the rules, but their presence is



small, with limited options to shape the outcome of the policies. Nevertheless, Czech NGOs continue to be active in helping the local communities by organizing protests against coal in their areas, using media pressure to accelerate changes and connecting the policy makers with the local audiences. The public perception in Czech Republic shows citizens are more inclined towards renewable energy.

## Hungary

In Hungary, the decision to shut down the only coal power plant left was most importantly an economic decision, as the power plant Mátra would have been soon past its technical viability. Furthermore, most of the coal mines have closed by 2021 and the coal phase-out is of a small concern for the country, with relatively small socio-economic impacts.

There is a LIFE-IP program which focuses on re-training of employees and recultivation of mining sites. In the region where the power plant is situated, the issue of energy poverty is significant, and now it is exacerbated by the energy crisis. For these reasons, the mentioned program and TJTP focus on the improvement of energy efficiency for households.

Despite some calls from NGOs and international organisations, the involvement of civil society and NGOs and their voice in the phase-out process was not strong. This is the case especially since the government was already inclined towards the closure of the power plant and the mines, as it was economically rational. Similarly, when the government decided to postpone the closure of the plant because of the energy crisis, NGOs were not involved in this decision.

## Poland

From all the V4 countries, Poland has the highest share of coal in the electricity production, accounting for about 46% and in the heat production the coal accounts for 71%. The phase-out is currently envisioned for 2049. The government has now adopted goals in terms of phasing-out coal power plants,



increasing energy efficiency and the share of renewables in the energy mix, albeit at a much-delayed timeline in comparison to the other V4 countries. There are plans to reduce gradually the share of coal in the energy mix mentioned in the national energy policy plan until 2040, with the aim to include local communities in the decarbonization process or the plans to increase a share of renewables. Moreover, territorial just transition plans are a necessity and for the regions, there were seven individual plans formulated.

A good example of a TTJP plan for region is the Eastern Greater Poland, where an open participation process was conducted with representatives from all sectors. A special focus was put on young people, to resolve the issue of lack of opportunities in the touched regions by providing them training programs and counselling in schools or soft-skills classes. An inclusion of wider public also positively impacted public awareness about the consequences of the transition.

However, this was only done in one territorial just transition plan and not in others, which then turned problematic. The most affected people (e.g., the residents or miners) were left out from the process, and the documents did not adequately address questions of support for miners after the loss of jobs or incentives for the creation of new industries and work opportunities in the region. Another negative experience were vague definitions of the proposed transformation, e.g., regarding socio-economic impacts and the failure to apply the EU polluter-pays principle for the coal power plants.

There was the aim to prepare a national plan for just transition which was criticized, as locally focused plans would be more efficient. Local governments had involved in the process of decarbonization both regional actors such as citizens and regional governments representatives and the governmental representatives, who then commonly prepared the documents for the transition.



## Slovakia

In Slovakia, similarly to Hungary, the phase-out of coal (planned for 2023) does not pose such an issue for the country, given the relatively low presence in the energy mix. The only relevant region is thus the Upper Nitra Region.

The old mines were later used for beneficial projects involving local actors, such as breeding of African catfish or growing tomatoes, which serves as a positive example. Furthermore, the socio-economic impacts should be mitigated using money from European funds with the involvement of municipalities, cities, and representatives of the third sector. The heating of the region should largely rely on gas boilers, as a transitional measure, long-term proposals for solutions involve for example district heating of fourth generation and of course renewable energy sources and biomass. A renovation of the buildings, especially in the region, will be necessary for the transition.

Local communities in the coal region were interested in the process from the beginning, e.g., NGOs, citizens, or representatives of schools in the region, when they created an action plan for the transformation of the region. After initial difficulties with cooperation of governmental and local level, the Slovak government later involved the local actors into decision-making process. The Action Plan for example focuses on bringing innovation to the region or development of sustainable mobility. The main drivers behind the dialogue are the mayors of affected cities.

## Conclusion

All the countries have had the strong financial stimulus coming from the European Union and high required EU environmental standards to phase-out coal, albeit with different approaches from the various stakeholders involved in the process.



The governments were mostly reluctant vis-à-vis the transformation in the beginning and only later committed to the process after a pressure from the EU side. Similarly, all the countries faced socio-economic and energy poverty risks resulting from the phase-out of coal, some countries more severely than the others. What turned out to be beneficial was the development of clear transparent strategies for the phase-out, supplemented by regional programs focused on re-skilling and re-education.

There are similarities between the V4 region and Serbia, such as the need to improve the low energy efficiency, particularly in buildings. If we want decarbonization to be perceived as just as possible, **the involvement of local actors into discussions and final decisions is imperative: that is the key aspect for a successful beginning of transformation.** Furthermore, in the case of the most-heavily impacted country, Poland, it turned out to be more beneficial for locally focused decarbonization strategies, rather than a national one.



## Policy recommendations towards actors in the state administration of Serbia

The Green Agenda for the Western Balkans and goals to achieve the emission reduction of 80-95% will provide both challenges and opportunities to Serbia. Serbia has made some improvements towards the environment and clean energy, e.g., in the legislation for a swifter adoption of renewables but more must be done for a successful transition. This will bring not only environmental and health benefits, but also economic ones since the Serbian economy will turn more competitive as a result of deployment of renewables.

To achieve a successful process there are a few recommendations formulated resulting from the discussions with the representatives from the civil society and NGOs in Serbia.

- **First and foremost, higher inclusion of local municipalities and civil society** into governmental discussions is crucial to ensure better decision-making through bottom-up approach. Strengthening of the regional civil society also proved to be crucial in the case of Poland and Slovakia, where a region with stronger public participation was more successful in the shaping of the transition plans.
- **Development of a clear strategy for the country's coal phase-out, along with regional strategies and specific targets to achieve.** As shown in Poland, this would ensure all the problems stemming from the phase-out, e.g., the loss of mining jobs, would be addressed accordingly, as the regions differ, and the potential for new industries and work opportunities may differ as well. For just transition, it is a key to develop and implement **education and re-skilling programs** for the miners and related occupations, as well as incentives for innovation hubs or tourism. At the same time, the **transparency** of the whole process should be guaranteed, e.g., by providing open data.



- As the “*green narrative*” is perceived negatively among citizens, **strategic communication** should be aimed at averting this. Furthermore, target the communication at the environmental benefits of green-produced energy and the health benefits which the phase-out of the coal would bring.
- Include **tools to better promote renewable energy** and the need for green transformation, such as “green number plates” for vehicles in Hungary which would be subsidized and thus cheaper (which are vehicle registration plates for electric and hybrid vehicles). This in effect incentivises the owners to buy mentioned types of vehicles and helps promote and increase clean transport.
- With the coal phase-out, the question of **energy poverty** comes up as well. Preparation of programs with specific targets to be achieved, e.g., in the renovation of buildings or transformation of the heating system to ensure a just transition, is key. A practice to avoid in this regard is the “negative” motivation in the form of restrictions on burning coal at households, rather opt for **positive incentives**.
- **Choose a pilot region** in Serbia, where the transformation will first happen, possibly even a small one, and communicate positively the results to the wider public.



## Recommendations towards CSOs/NGOs in Serbia

Phasing out coal is a difficult and lengthy process, and the role of NGOs and civil society is a core element of transition. Resulting from the studies carried out in the V4 countries on the coal phase-out and decarbonization, and from the subsequent discussions in Serbia with the civil society and NGOs, there are a few recommendations formulated.

- **NGOs to support local efforts** to achieve positive results, either by supporting local voices, connecting the relevant stakeholders in discussions to form partnerships or conducting studies and developing action plans on transformation of the region. The key is to remain persistent despite challenges it brings. An important element is to maintain positive approach towards all the relevant stakeholders.
- As shown on the Slovak example, the old mines can be used for **smaller green projects**, such as for the breeding of African catfish by using the water from the mine or growing tomatoes. This may involve local communities and help in the process of raising awareness. It also creates some new jobs, which is another positive element in communication.
- Placing a special focus on the **involvement of young people** and their role in the process as they are the ones most likely to be concerned about the future and climate change. The inclusion of young people turned out to be useful in the cases of Slovakia or Poland, where the focus was put on the consequences of depopulation of the region.
- To ensure high public participation in the process, involve wide public, for example through an **education campaign** about the risks and benefits (such as health and environmental) of the transition process as illustrated in the Polish example. Except for being involved in the process directly, NGOs and CSOs can greatly support the transition through **raising awareness** of the wider public **on climate change and the transition**



**process** based on **scientific evidence**, both for those who are directly and indirectly affected by the coal phase-out. In the V4 countries, it is important to point to the health problems (e.g., premature deaths and lung cancer) and environmental damage (e.g., polluted water). It is similarly important to reassure the society that their jobs will not be impacted, but on the contrary new jobs would be created.

- To exchange experiences, remain active in the sharing of best and worst practices not only regionally within Serbia, but also towards the European Union, which launched a programme focused on helping Western Balkans in the decarbonization process. Collaboration with NGO's, academia and civil society proved crucial in other countries, hence **forming similar coalitions** in Serbia would be beneficial in creating ownership of the process at both local, regional, and national level.
- Get **engaged in a chosen region** to be transformed, and inform and train the public, through workshops and media coverage.

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