



Exploring the just transition Europe



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I. Introduction

In response to a growing demand from cities for resources on “just transition”, C40 has commissioned several papers to explore the topic and establish a common global understanding with an appreciation for the nuances in different regions. This paper provides an overview of key concepts, themes, opportunities and challenges in relation to just transition in Europe. This paper (1) provides a key resource for European cities to improve their understanding of their national contexts and key plans, policies and projects relating to just transition; (2) emphasises the role of cities in, and identifies possible entry points for cities to contribute towards, the growing debate on the end of the fossil fuel era and a just transition, while aligning advocacy messaging and targets with efforts to deal with the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic; (3) evaluates advocacy opportunities in global climate discussions; (4) explains the range of regional stakeholders active in the just transition space; and (5) provides C40 with an up-to-date evidence base on the topic of just transition so that it can best support European and global cities to develop their climate actions.

The findings in this paper are derived from a literature and media review, complemented by preliminary observations by the authors. The report highlight the opportunities that cities can leverage and strategies that may be effective in shaping a stronger collective voice in pursuit of just transition in Europe.

*** The information in this report applies to all countries in the continent of Europe, including countries that are not Member States of the European Union.



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II. Definition and context of just transition in Europe

Public discussion increasingly refers to “just transition” as the process of decarbonising industry while simultaneously promoting social inclusion to ensure no one is left behind. The social dimension is a fundamental aspect to just transition, especially because there are already many marginalised individuals and groups under current conditions. It is therefore essential to ensure that the transition to a net-zero carbon economy will not contribute towards increasing the number of people in difficulty; on the contrary, it should create an opportunity for improving the living and working conditions of an increasing number of people. Strategies adopted to achieve a just transition should ensure adequate social protection measures.¹

“We define a “socially just transition” as the guarantee that the transformation processes and drastic structural adjustments that are needed to meet the climate emergency are being implemented taking the rights and needs of affected communities into consideration.” – Mikael Leyi, SOLIDAR Secretary General²

The European Commission³ has recognised the role of social inclusion in “just transition” and has used its forums to investigate a wide range of pertinent factors, such as minimum income, social security, occupational mobility, wages and salaries, and education and vocational training. Equally, with the environmental aspect of just transition in mind, it is essential to guarantee that new uses for and sources of fossil fuels will not be created, which means cutting subsidies for fossil fuel activities and reducing the dependence of SMEs or public revenue on carbon-intensive industries.⁴

Just transition is an increasingly relevant theme and policy goal throughout Europe, where it is being addressed by a range of institutions, policies and initiatives, of which the following are the most relevant.

European Green Deal: Approved by the European Commission in 2019, this set of policy initiatives aims to ensure that Europe becomes the first climate-neutral continent by 2050, resulting in a cleaner environment, more affordable energy, smarter transport, new jobs, an overall better quality of life with no net emissions of greenhouse gases by 2050, economic growth decoupled from resource use and no person and place left behind.⁵ To achieve these goals, EUR 0.6 trillion will be invested in the European Green Deal towards environmentally friendly technologies, supporting industry to innovate, rolling out cleaner, cheaper and healthier forms of private and public transport, decarbonising the energy sector, ensuring buildings are more energy efficient and working with international partners to improve global environmental standards.

Just Transition Mechanism: This is the key tool of the European Green Deal to ensure that the transition towards a climate-neutral economy happens in a fair way, leaving no one behind.⁶ It supports European Union (EU) Member States through three pillars: (1) the Just Transition Fund; (2) InvestEU “Just Transition” Scheme; and (3) a new Public Sector Loan Facility.

1. The **Just Transition Fund**,⁷ amounting to EUR 17.5 billion (at 2018 prices) and expected to mobilise close to EUR 30 billion in investments, will support the territories most affected by the transition by supporting productive investments in SMEs, the creation of new businesses, research and innovation, environmental rehabilitation, clean energy, up- and reskilling of workers, job-search assistance and active inclusion of jobseekers programmes, as well as the transformation of existing carbon-intensive installations when these investments lead to substantial emission cuts and job protection. In order to access the Just Transition Fund, each EU Member State must have a territorial just transition plan⁸ (TJTP) that clearly outlines the most affected territories, expected impacts and actions, and an effective participation, monitoring and evaluation process. The funding allocation criteria are based on industrial emissions in the regions with high carbon intensity industries, employment in industry and in coal and lignite mining, production of peat and oil shale, and the level of economic development. Member States that have not yet committed to implementing the objective of achieving climate neutrality by 2050 will only be awarded 50% of their planned allocation;

2. The **InvestEU “Just Transition” Scheme**, which is a dedicated scheme under the InvestEU programme, will mobilise private investment and provide an EU budget guarantee backing the financial products;⁹

3.

The **Public Sector Loan Facility** targets public entities and offers preferential lending conditions for projects that do not generate sufficient revenue to be financially viable. The EU budget secures EUR 1.5 billion in grants, complemented by loans of EUR 10 billion from the European Investment Bank.

The level of EU co-financing of projects is set according to the type of region in which the projects are located: for less developed regions, it is set at maximum 85%; for transition regions 70%; and for more developed regions 50%. The Just Transition Fund has an overall budget of EUR 17.5 billion for 2021-2027. Member States can complement their Just Transition Fund allocation with the resources allocated under the European Regional Development Fund and the European Social Fund Plus.

Research Fund for Coal and Steel (RFCS): This was established in 2002 to contribute to the competitiveness of the European coal and steel sectors by supporting collaborative research, and pilot and demonstration projects.¹⁰ Since then, around EUR 40 million has been made available annually to universities, research centres and private companies to fund projects. Today, the Fund is making a positive contribution to just transition because it is shifting towards large, clean steelmaking research and innovation breakthrough projects. It therefore covers steel production processes; optimised utilisation and conservation of resources; energy saving and industrial efficiency improvements; health and safety at work; environmental protection; technologies supporting coal regions in transition; and emission reductions from steel production.

Green Economy Transition (GET) 2021-25: This is a new approach by the European Bank for Reconstruction and Development (EBRD) to build green, low-carbon and resilient economies, while protecting vulnerable countries, regions and people from falling behind.¹¹ In line with the GET approach, EBRD has also launched a just transition initiative based on three pillars: (1) green economy transition in which the bank will work with clients that have high-carbon assets to facilitate the transition to a low-carbon economy; (2) supporting workers whose livelihoods are affected by the transition process through reskilling and enhancing entrepreneurship; and (3) regional economic development, emphasising activities that provide access to quality employment, including tailored support for competitive SMEs and larger firms, as well as the financing of projects on sustainable infrastructure.





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III. Key themes and challenges related to just transition in Europe

The debate on just transition has become an integral part of Europe's overall objective of becoming the first climate-neutral continent by 2050. Policies targeted at the climate emergency and the reduction of inequalities, particularly in territories strongly reliant on carbon-intensive industries, are being developed in an integrated manner to ensure that the transition is inclusive of all.

This section outlines some of the key themes and challenges identified in the European debate on just transition.

3.1 Coal regions and cities

Coal regions and cities were the engine of economic growth for more than a century in many European countries. However, more recently these regions have posed new challenges in terms of the reclamation of brownfields and industrial structures, as well as in the creation of new strategies for a balanced economic and social development. Up until the early 1990s, coal accounted for close to 41% of the total European energy consumption and 39% of power generation: this had dropped to 16% and 24% respectively by 2015.¹² The decline in coal-fired power generation and the loss of a significant number of jobs was primarily caused by the loss of economic competitiveness in the global coal market.

Green recovery can be an opportunity for placing sustainability at the core of medium and long-term strategies, especially when creating new jobs. Actions already carried out in the framework of national, regional and urban plans show how the vibrancy of the coal regions and cities can be restored through the active support of industrial

transformation, rather than just reverting to a tertiary economy. Coal regions and cities are often knowledge and networking hubs, with the strong presence of business and industrial actors, unions and urban activists, residents and NGOs: all these stakeholders can collaborate to define a common vision on medium- and long-term goals while creating critical mass, which may influence how local and regional governments collaborate with other institutional levels within a multilevel governance framework.

3.2 Industrial sector transformation

The closure of coal mining and associated activities poses several economic, social and environmental challenges to cities and regions. In most cases, the phasing-out process can lead to a more sustainable management of environmental resources and to increasing energy efficiency, even though the regeneration of whole industrial areas and introduction of new industry sectors is a long and costly process.

Case study 1:

Wałbrzych (Poland) - inclusive economic diversification

Wałbrzych (Valbrich in English) is one of the cities that suffered most from Poland's industrial shift in the 1990s. The city had depended on coal mining and heavy industry since the mid-19th century: the closure of mines brought dramatic social and economic consequences, with 14,000 local workers losing their jobs, leading to unemployment rates of up to 40%.

The city carried out a series of interventions to foster long-term economic diversification and reverse the decline.¹³ In the early 1990s, the Wałbrzych Regional Fund and Local Development Agency were established to support the restructuring of the local economy and incubate SMEs and social enterprises, acting as an intermediary for EU microloan revolving funds. In 1997, the city established a special economic zone, called INVEST-PARK, attracting investments from global players such as Toyota and Bosch. This action contributed to the economic recovery of the area, with the creation of more than 50,000 jobs.¹⁴ Wałbrzych set ambitious climate targets in 2018, such as becoming 100% free from single-use plastic and reaching an 80% share of electric vehicles. The city received a loan of EUR 28 million from the European Investment Bank to co-finance a multi-year investment programme to revitalise urban areas. The investment is being used for energy efficiency measures, but also for improving road infrastructure, upgrading public spaces and creating social housing.

Industrial transformation is happening not only in regions that rely on coal and lignite production, but also in areas where other sectors predominate, such as automotive, chemical¹⁵ and steel¹⁶ production.

The promotion of green jobs in traditional sectors poses new challenges for the public and private sectors alike: it is often a struggle to modernise and diversify these industries, and that is also true for entire parts of the economy. The evolution towards less carbon-intensive industries is generally achieved via long-term holistic plans that take into account the potential impacts of the transition on natural resources and public spaces, as well as the level of employment and business opportunities for all actors involved. Seen from the perspective of cities and regions, industrial transformation is a driver for fighting climate change and creating new jobs, which should deliver balanced and sustainable development at the environmental, social and economic level.

A wide range of actions are connected to the transformation of industries: the improvement of urban and regional infrastructure; the creation of innovative welfare schemes; the strengthening of research and development (R&D) and business support; and the development of local branding and marketing strategies. Multilevel governance structures are needed to create synergies across different policy fields and to efficiently use different types of funding and incentives.

Case study 2:

Bilbao (Spain) - the role of local autonomy

Since Bilbao's de-industrialisation and the building of the Guggenheim in the 1990s, this northern Spanish city has been a world leader in urban regeneration.¹⁷ Today's manufacturing firms are very different from the heavy industry of the past: highly competitive and knowledge intensive, many of them operate on world markets. One of the major milestones towards transformation is the 'Strategic Plan for the Revitalisation of Metropolitan Bilbao', which was introduced in 1991, and promoted an integrated approach to regeneration with the objective of focusing on inner-city urban renewal through actions such as revitalising the Old Quarter; environmental improvements including river cleaning and industrial land recycling; strengthening of cultural identity through culture-led regeneration; and developing a knowledge-based high-tech sector.

Among the many flagship projects promoting specialisation in the priority sectors is AS-Fabrik Bilbao - an alliance for smart specialisation in advanced services towards the digital transformation of industry. The project's main purpose is to increase the competitiveness of the knowledge intensive business services (KIBS) sector of Bilbao through a capacity-building collaborative process.¹⁸

3.3 Reskilling/upskilling of workers and job market green renewal

Transition towards a green economy may have a severe impact on labour markets by changing the employment opportunities available for different categories of workers. It can be particularly challenging for regional and local authorities to create integrated strategies that balance the needs of workers from both declining industry sectors and newer green industries, particularly as those authorities may lack direct competencies on jobs and skills. However, local and regional governments are well placed to analyse, at the local level, the needs of workers to be reskilled and how they can be included in more dynamic sectors of the local economy. C40 is currently supporting cities in Italy, the United States and South Africa assess job creation and equitable distribution opportunities.

Case study 3:

London (United Kingdom) – targeted support on the basis of economic impact assessment

In London, the COVID-19 pandemic has demonstrated the disproportionate impact the environment can have on Londoners, with those living in deprived areas most likely to experience poor air quality, cold, damp homes and limited access to green space.¹⁹ These challenges may be worsened by an economic downturn and potential for increased unemployment. To meet these challenges, the Mayor of London has set the ambitious target for London to be a zero-carbon city by 2030 and introduced a Green New Deal for London.²⁰ The Green New Deal for London focuses on combating the climate emergency, boosting the economy and tackling inequality in tandem. It includes a Green New Deal Fund,²¹ which will help address some of the immediate challenges London faces. The first GBP 10 million (EUR 11.8 million) is being invested in projects that will support 1,000 jobs in the short term but is also laying the green foundations of supporting small innovative businesses, growing supply chains, and investing in green skills.

As part of these efforts, London has focused on the impacts and opportunities of just transition and undertaken detailed research in this area, which will underpin strategies for implementing and targeting its Green New Deal.²² The research showed that London's economy is based mainly on the services sector but nearly two thirds of the city's greenhouse gas emissions are created by other sectors, namely transport; electricity and gas; and manufacturing. Those sectors, which are the ones that will be required to change and adapt the most, account for a smaller share of London's jobs (e.g. the transport sector accounts for 35% of emissions but less than 5% of employment). Typically, workers in the sectors most at risk are on wages below the London average. The research also highlighted the disproportionately large role that workers from non-white ethnic groups play in some of these sectors. For example, more than half of the transport sector workforce are from non-white ethnic groups.

As a result, London has focused on making sure those people who are most impacted have opportunities to benefit from the transition to a low-carbon economy. As well as investing in programmes to stimulate and accelerate opportunities in the environment sector, it is working to map the skills and training Londoners will need to access the opportunities from the transition. Through the Green New Deal Fund – using the research – the city is also directly targeting support to clean tech businesses in areas also hit hardest by COVID-19, such as West London which has been adversely affected by the impacts on the hospitality, logistics and food preparation sectors. The Fund also prioritises businesses that encourage greater diversity in the clean tech sector, particularly female and Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic-led enterprises, and it supports young people who have been disproportionately affected by the pandemic.



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Skills mismatch will be particularly relevant in Europe: an analysis of trends suggests there is increasing skills polarisation between non-green jobs that will disappear in the transition and green jobs that will be created.²³

In many industrial sectors, with the creation of green jobs, the proportion of high- and medium-skilled jobs will increase, particularly in construction and transport, whereas the number of low-skilled positions available in sectors such as mining and quarrying will decrease, presenting challenges to current workers in terms of reskilling and upskilling.



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Case study 4:

Amsterdam (Netherlands) - matching skills to demand

The City of Amsterdam is undertaking a series of actions to promote reskilling and upskilling at the local level, making its labour market more adaptive to rapid technological and industrial changes. The city has brought together representatives from the business community, industry, employee and business associations, universities and research institutes into the House of Skills, a public-private partnership aiming to foster structural mobility and reduce labour market mismatches by investing in lifelong learning and strengthening the long-term employability of workers.²⁴ The House of Skills facilitates skills matching for employers, employees and job seekers via a series of tools, such as a digital platform displaying jobs and training opportunities, as well as a Skills Passport assessing inter-sectoral skills and employability of the job seekers. This system, also carried out in other Dutch cities, such as Eindhoven (which is adapting this model in the framework of the UIA co-funded project P4W-Passport4Work²⁵), is becoming part of a wider national policy, CompetentNL, promoting a common understanding of skills and stronger employability in the technical sectors.

National and local policies for upskilling and reskilling will be particularly relevant in sectors where low-skills jobs are going to be replaced by medium- or high-skilled jobs. A combination of strategies and actions in different fields, such as the launch of early retirement plans and the organisation of training measures on green jobs for younger workers, can be effective in helping to counteract the negative impact of industrial transformation on the jobs market in European cities and regions, as well as the risk posed by rising levels of unemployment and inequality.

Case study 5:

Rybnik (Poland) - co-designing an inclusive economic transformation

Rybnik has launched the “Rybnik360” project to co-create – with its citizens – an integrated strategy and a series of actions on just transition.²⁶ The project is part of the Just Transformation Deep Demonstration programme launched by EIT Climate-KIC to help European cities deliver a transformative green recovery.²⁷

Located in the Silesian *voivodeship* (province), the largest coal-producing region in the EU, Rybnik is addressing the challenge of energy transition by actively involving local stakeholders in drawing up a long-term development strategy based on systemic innovation. At the end of 2019 the city identified four thematic areas (air quality, quality of life, future of work and future of mining) on which it based a series of in-depth interviews with residents and subsequent analysis. This research, carried out using the Deep Listening method and active support from the EU-funded climate innovation initiative, contributed to identifying and understanding all the blockages and gaps, as well as Rybnik’s assets and opportunities, in terms of just transition. As a result of this participatory process involving residents, NGOs, entrepreneurs and the public sector, the city developed its Rybnik360 plan – a portfolio of strategic solutions addressing the most relevant urban challenges, such as how to support entrepreneurs and encourage the creation of new business activities, or how to catalyse the replacement of coal-based heating systems in residents’ homes.²⁸



3.4 Regional transformation and reduction of territorial inequality

Just transition will play a decisive role in transforming regional economies, but national and local authorities need to cooperate to foster stronger territorial cohesion and reduce inequality. The decline of sectors such as fossil fuel extraction and power generation, and the consequent loss of jobs, is expected to affect some regions more than others – such as Lower Silesia in Poland, which needs strong investment and integrated policies, and the south-west region of Bulgaria, which still does not have a proper plan to phase out coal mining. And there will be negative effects on regions where the economy is heavily reliant on these sectors.

At the regional level, transition to greener industrial sectors will also drive changes at the socioeconomic level, so local authorities will need to be committed to drafting and implementing long-term plans to reduce unemployment rates, foster attractiveness and manage the environmental consequences of the decline of polluting industries. The need for economic resources to drive a gradual industrial transition is particularly strong in many regions around Europe; and the creation of national plans can be helpful in reducing territorial inequalities. Creating a TJTP, which is essential for a region wanting to access the Just Transition Mechanism, is an important activity for defining the challenges in each territory, as well as the development needs, the objectives to be met by 2030, and the governance mechanisms to be adopted at the national and local level.²⁹ The TJTPs will be particularly useful for identifying the most urgent issues at the regional and urban level; and the accumulated information from a number of regions' TJTPs will make it possible to improve utilisation of EU resources and circumvent territorial inequalities, thus ensuring a balanced transition for all. Together, the TJTPs will improve the local governance of industrial transformation and its impact on targeted cities and regions, with a multiplier effect in terms of innovation (especially if the measures identified at a national level will be effectively combined with the use of the resources of the EU Cohesion Policy³⁰).

3.5 Fair working conditions, equitable opportunities and jobs for all

In 2017 the EU launched the European Pillar of Social Rights to reinforce a social Europe and grant better access to jobs for all.³¹ Just transition will be a crucial aspect of implementing those rights – which include fair working conditions, social protection and an inclusive social dialogue – because it takes into account the environmental dimensions of equity. Thus the stronger attention paid to social support will combine with implementing other dimensions of just transition, such as economic revitalisation and land restoration, as required by the Just Transition Mechanism.

The launch of services such as job-search assistance, mobility packages, income support and training activities will contribute towards better employability of workers in carbon-intensive sectors, as strongly advocated by unions in Europe.³² Including these actions in the Just Transition Mechanism, and more specifically in the TJTPs, can play a significant role in increasing social protection, reinforcing social dialogue and creating more opportunities for all.

Case study 6:

Oslo (Norway) - inclusive social dialogue

In 2008, the City Parliament in Oslo adopted “a ten-point plan” to reduce CO2 emissions, to which the large-scale introduction of Electric Vehicles plays a big part, and in which the biggest identified challenges were around the creation of charging infrastructure for private vehicles as well as the adoption of electric systems for vans and trucks.³³

A tripartite body between the City Council, the transport union and public transport organisations was formed to collectively make decisions on advancing local climate friendly jobs in the transport sector. Rather than taking unilateral action, Oslo City Council sought to actively involve the transport union in the decision-making processes for transport sector jobs. The establishment of the tripartite body started off through holding workshops with transport unions to understand their needs, following which private companies were brought into discussions, and finally the body was launched at the global 2018 Climate Action Summit. Oslo is the first C40 city to have announced a city-wide Declaration on Just Transition together with the local unions.

The establishment of the body has created a network of individuals and organisations with a platform to collectively discuss and participate in the city’s transport planning and policy decisions.³⁴

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3.6 Community leadership and ownership

Just transition is strongly connected to a paradigm shift in urban policies in Europe, which are increasingly more participatory and characterised by civic engagement and partnerships among public authorities, private sector and communities. The transformation of unused structures and public spaces into community hubs; the creation of local partnerships and cooperatives for the generation of energy from renewable sources; local strategies on sustainable food for all – these are just some of the examples of ongoing developments in medium and large cities across Europe. Such activities are also happening in rural areas, where all these elements are being included in smart rural strategies that contribute towards reducing the prosperity gap between urban and rural areas.

The consolidation of existing civic engagement and activism strategies, such as participatory budgeting systems (e.g. Lisbon’s Green Participatory Budgeting³⁵) or the strategies of collaborative management of commons,³⁶ means that European cities are “laboratories” for testing approaches towards a more integrated governance of urban challenges. These changes are fostering new types of leadership, modelled by community organisations or community-led development schemes, which are connecting environmental and social sustainability in urban policies. Interventions such as the regeneration of public spaces, the promotion of proximity businesses and services, and the creation of local strategies for sustainable food, involving canteens and restaurants, are all part of diverse integrated strategies (such as the “15-minute city”³⁷) that are reshaping European cities. Thus “just transition” is not only focused on social and environmental aspects but more generally on the quality of life and on the active participation of residents in the governance of local challenges.



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IV. National strategies on just transition

The EU countries and the regions of Europe are the main beneficiaries of the tools offered by the Just Transition Platform,³⁸ a knowledge hub created by the EU to foster the exchange of best practices and improve access to sectoral and thematic initiatives alongside the funding opportunities provided by the Just Transition Fund.

In many European countries, just transition has been a key focus of national discussions or specific strategies, involving public authorities, private stakeholders and civil society. Some of the most interesting and relevant strategies are described below.

In **Germany**, the Coal Commission was established by the federal government in 2018 with the objective of promoting a just transition and a balanced phase-out of coal.³⁹ The Coal Commission produced a report⁴⁰ with a set of recommendations that influenced the evolution of national legislation and pushed for a long-term commitment to ending coal-fired power generation by 2038 and redeploying more than 32,000 workers from the sector through a series of social and labour measures, including training and internal recruitment. The measures proposed by the report have an estimated cost ranging from EUR 69 billion to 93 billion. The Coal Commission is composed of social and economic actors, such as representatives of federal states and from the energy sector, NGOs and civil society, trade unions and the scientific community. Representatives of city governments have not been involved in the work of the Commission. Dialogue among the members of the Coal Commission will be crucial to ensure implementation of the measures proposed and, in many cases, will require strong and ongoing coordination among unions, businesses and different levels of government to reach collective agreements for workers' reskilling and compensation. The measures will have a strong impact at the urban level as well: the report recommends a dialogue among national, regional and local authorities and the residents regarding regeneration of open-cast mining plants.

In **Scotland**, the Just Transition Commission was launched by the government in September 2018 to investigate how to take advantage of decarbonisation for promoting better economic and social opportunities for all.⁴¹ Scotland set very ambitious climate targets through the Climate Change Act, such as a 75% reduction in emissions by 2030, compared with the 1990 levels.⁴² It is also active in decarbonising the power sector, despite the oil and gas sector still playing a relevant role in the overall national economy (accounting for 5% of Scotland's gross domestic product (GDP)) and needing to redeploy its ageing workforce. The Commission provided useful inputs to translate into practice the guiding principles of just transition developed by the International Labour Organization (ILO),⁴³ and the Commission's Final Report, published in May 2021, promotes climate action as a driver for addressing existing inequalities, pushing for an orderly, managed transition to net-zero that creates benefits and opportunities for people across Scotland.⁴⁴ The report also recommends equipping people with skills and education, and creating a skills guarantee for workers in carbon-intensive sectors as well as providing more resources to SMEs for retraining their workforces. Making the just transition fair for all, with a share of costs distributed on the basis of the ability to pay, is another relevant recommendation of the report that pushes for more reforms in sectors such as local governance and civic engagement, which may be crucial for accelerating just transition and ensuring wide participation around its priorities.



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In **France**, ecological transition contracts (*les contrats de transition écologique*, CTE) were created in 2018 to translate the national commitment to implement the Paris Agreement, and to support voluntary, locally driven projects.⁴⁵ The target to reduce fossil fuel consumption by 40% by 2030 and to end coal-based electricity generation by 2022 are some of the ambitious targets of France's Energy and Climate Strategy, which is a first among EU Member States to pursue climate neutrality on a statutory footing. In order to achieve these objectives, the French government encouraged active engagement among stakeholders to develop projects targeting ecological transition and economic diversification, with particular attention to deprived groups. The ecological transition contracts are a framework for providing technical, financial and administrative support to different agencies and levels of governance with the aim of creating new jobs related to sustainable development, promoting local industrial regeneration and just transition for workers and local communities. Local authorities, industries, trade unions, NGOs and civil society are involved in the participatory processes, which dedicate the

first six months to identifying the “green” sectors that have the highest potential in terms of economic and job creation, followed by identifying the specific commitments and outputs to be implemented in the next three to four years. To date, 100 territories and 200 inter-municipal partners are involved in the scheme: the first testing period in 2018–2019 involved 19 local areas, followed by 61 in 2019, while around 20 other areas started the process in 2020. Over 1,000 ecological projects are currently active in different areas of the country, attracting over EUR 1.5 billion in investment. The projects not only focus on regeneration of former coal mining sites, but also promote a holistic vision of development, with investments in renewable energy, building energy efficiency, sustainable mobility, urban planning, active inclusion and vocational training.



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In **Ukraine**, the government founded the Coordination Center for Transformation of Coal Regions to guide the recovery of declining mining towns.⁴⁶ The objective is to reduce coal production in state-owned mines by 25% by 2027 and create 40,000 jobs in other industries, with support from public resources and international technical assistance programmes.

The dramatic reduction in coal production after the revolution in 2014 led not only to the decline of one of the most important industrial sectors of the country, but also to an increase in unemployment and the reduction of social, health and education services for the residents of mining areas. The Donetsk region, with 44% of its population employed in the coal industry, was among the major territories affected by social, environmental and economic effects of the reduction in national coal production. A bottom-up initiative of collaboration among local authorities of the Donetsk area, called the Platform for Sustainable Development of Coal Towns of Donetsk Region,⁴⁷ was launched by a group of municipalities in 2019, with the strong support of social and economic stakeholders of the area. The Platform has the objective of developing a shared strategy for the transformation of the area, coordinating efforts towards implementing the National Energy Strategy 2035,⁴⁸ which aims to close unproductive coal mines by 2025 and to launch retraining programmes for workers and conservation measures to reduce the negative impact of closed mines on the environment. The municipalities participating in the Platform are developing a joint transformation strategy based on local strengths, with well-defined projects such as the purification of mine water and the creation of a Local Community Development Fund.



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V. Networks, initiatives and stakeholders

European cities are carrying out actions on just transition within the framework of regional networks, and this section describes some of the regional networks that provide useful resources and knowledge to better orientate local strategies related to industrial regeneration and mitigating impacts at the social and economic level.

Urban innovative actions

Many European cities are testing concepts and actions to address urban challenges through innovative projects in fields related to just transition within the framework of the major initiative launched by the EU.⁴⁹ Such concepts include the creation of skills for a green future; democratic transition for all; and identifying strategies for making cities affordable for all. Under these cross-cutting themes, cities are

- Developing innovative actions to forecast new skills useful for regenerating job markets and helping a vulnerable workforce;
- Supporting the development of sectors such as urban agriculture and circular economy, testing and developing new business models;
- Promoting the training and reskilling of workers through the creation of lifelong training so that local communities can adapt to the evolution of the job market;
- Rethinking participative processes to foster behavioural change and as key to achieve green transition;
- Involving citizens in policy-making, facilitating a smooth transition to climate-neutral society;

- Using carbon-neutral policies to address economic inequalities and improve access to better services and a healthier environment for deprived groups.

Some examples of cities working on just transition topics within this overarching framework are outlined below:

- The MAC project⁵⁰ in **Pozzuoli** (Italy) is regenerating the deprived area of Monteruscello, transforming 30 hectares of vacant land into a hub for innovative agriculture production (such as permaculture). Pozzuoli is also developing new skills and training unemployed people or non-expert workers on innovative agriculture techniques, supporting the creation of new businesses and start-ups in the sector;
- The IGNITION project,⁵¹ covering **Greater Manchester*** (UK), aims to increase retrofitting programmes of urban green infrastructures and promote investments in nature-based solutions and climate change adaptation schemes, with a focus on safeguarding vulnerable citizens;
- Through the Energy Poverty Intelligence Unit project,⁵² **Getafe** (Spain) is using data analysis to detect energy poverty and implement tailor-made solutions, paving the way for innovative solutions at the crossroads between poverty reduction and the creation of new skills and services in construction and energy management sectors;
- The SPIRE (Smart Post-Industrial Regenerative Ecosystem) project,⁵³ in **Baia Mare** (Romania), is mentoring young entrepreneurs at the local level to adopt nature-based solutions (phytoremediation) to revitalise land in the city that is contaminated with heavy metals, which can then be used for growing biofuels to produce clean energy for public buildings. Lessons learned will be used for expanding the adoption of similar solutions and experimental techniques to other cities.

Urban Transitions Alliance

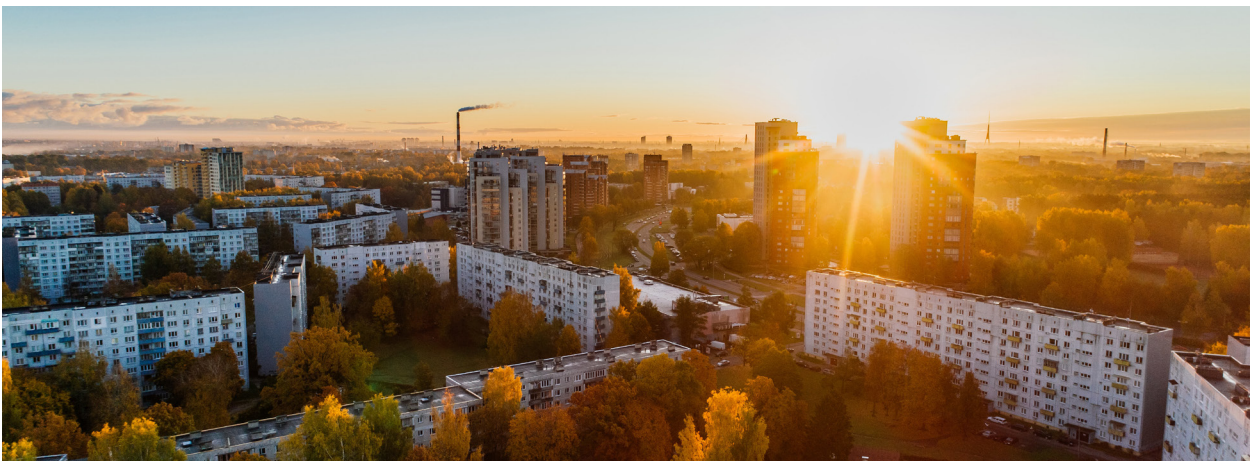
ICLEI – Local Governments for Sustainability,⁵⁴ the global network of local and regional governments, has launched the Urban Transitions Alliance – a network of cities with a rich industrial past that are facing environmental, economic and social challenges, and looking for solutions to create a more sustainable urban future.⁵⁵



European cities are the majority of the members of this group, with Bristol (UK), Mannheim (Germany), Turku (Finland), Katowice (Poland), Glasgow (UK), Gelsenkirchen (Germany), Essen (Germany) and Dortmund (Germany). The group supports the implementation of annual challenges chosen by the cities, providing them with expertise, partnerships and collaborative space for mutual exchange. Within the framework of these annual cycles, the European cities are working on integrated strategies and approaches that are connecting the recovery of industrial heritage to innovative fields and actions.

In the 2021 Challenge Support Cycle:

- Glasgow is focusing on the development of a circular strategy to convert unused industrial sites using urban food models and business innovation;
- Essen is active in tackling the challenge of financing climate adaptation and mitigation measures to improve the quality of urban infrastructure and public spaces with active collaboration between the public and private sectors;
- Gelsenkirchen is involving local businesses in an integrated strategy to reduce greenhouse gas emissions and improve adaptation to climate change. The city is creating a local network to foster knowledge exchange among companies to develop projects that counter the climate emergency.



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URBACT

URBACT is a well-established programme aiming to foster sustainable integrated urban development in cities across Europe by helping cities work together on common urban challenges, through networking, sharing experiences and identifying good practice.⁵⁶ URBACT has a number of themed networks to ensure that all the different policy dimensions are taken into account and converted into strategies that foster the environmental, economic and social dimensions of sustainable development and just transition. For instance, the Urb-En Pact network is guiding eight cities involved in energy transition to become net-zero energy territories no later than 2050.⁵⁷ Guided by Clermont Auvergne Métropole (France), the network is promoting a transnational exchange of knowledge among the cities and fostering the creation of small-scale actions and integrated action plans at local level with a particular focus on the active involvement of residents and stakeholders in circular economy schemes, in order to reduce emissions and create new employment opportunities.

Key stakeholders, positions and initiatives

Labour organisations and unions

Positions:

- European Labour perspectives are varied on the just transition, dependent on national context and sector;
- Overall unions want to see clear, actionable plans for job replacement and wage retention prior to climate policy roll out;
- Some union groups have been actively engaged with national governments and cities on just transition processes with a focus on jobs and skills training – for example Oslo and Scotland (see case studies);
- Labour organisations have been vocal in communicating policy asks to the EU Green Deal – for example:
- [IndustriAll](#) have expressed concern over the plans due to the job losses it will cause and have asked for concrete plans on a just transition;
- [ETUC](#) have asked for just transition principles to be embedded in the implementation of the Green Deal and asked for a tangible strategy to deliver this, as well as a guarantee to involve workers in all stages of the decision-making process at European, national, sectoral, regional and company level.

Possible city strategies:

- Work with employers and use city workforce data to determine and analyse sectors and areas affected by any plans underway and understand wage structures of existing/emerging green jobs compared with existing high-carbon jobs;
- Engage in collaboration and consultation with union/labour groups at city level to identify key areas of concern and strategies to deliver a just transition (e.g. reskilling programmes, guaranteed income or redeployment plans);
- Work with the local workforce development authority and key partners to develop training programs that support transition to alternative good quality jobs; and/or advocate for national and regional support to roll out programmes.

Business, industry and employers

Positions:

- Some leading businesses in energy and industrial sectors are working collaboratively to integrate just transition in their approaches – for example 27 businesses who signed the [B Team's Just Transition pledge](#);
- Business Europe, the biggest organisation representing European companies of all sizes, have [asked for](#) a “broader range of framework conditions” to prevent the Just Transition Mechanism from damaging economic growth and jobs. Other organisations, such as Eurochambres, the Association of European Chambers of Commerce and Industry, [were](#)

Possible city strategies:

- Develop incentive programs for businesses that demonstrate a commitment to create good quality jobs;
- Develop long-term industry cluster or sector strategies that could support economic growth and decent job creation;
- Recognise employers that model just transition principles through recognition and leadership programmes;

[in favour](#) of making the JTM more focused on job creation and support for structural change while showing a certain skepticism on the ambitious target of climate neutrality by 2050 posed by the European Commission, and how the JTM can contribute to that objective.

- Other employers resist sustainability efforts, often to protect their bottom line or the future viability of their business model. Other reasons include a lack of local infrastructure or incentives to support such a transition;
- Small businesses who may be part of a fossil fuel reliant industry supply chain could be affected by the low carbon transition and would need support throughout the process;
- Conversely, low carbon new small businesses and start-ups could be a potential [area of growth and new green jobs](#) as part of a low carbon transition.

- Work with high-carbon companies to develop long-term just transition strategies for the workforce;

- Develop financing and grant programs to support small businesses affected by the transition, and programmes to incentivise and support low carbon small business growth;

- Work with local business groups and economic development teams to understand concerns and issues facing members (and identify mechanisms to build more support for just transition);

- Convene and collaborate with investors interested in supporting just transition related initiatives – such as workforce development or investment in industries that create jobs.

Citizens (residents of all ages)

Positions:

- [Recent EU barometer surveys in 2021](#) show 93% of EU citizens see climate change as a serious problem. 90% of respondents - and at least three quarters in each Member State - agree that greenhouse gas emissions should be reduced to a minimum in order to make the EU economy climate-neutral by 2050;
- Citizens' views on climate action can be influenced by race, ethnicity, class, geography, politics and location – for example there can be localised opposition to action that would [close down fossil fuel industries and lose long standing, established jobs](#);
- Conversely, job creation programmes could be popular at a local level with citizens when being rolled out, or opposition could be seen to plans to increase fossil fuel activity, [such as fracking](#);
- Frontline communities are the most vulnerable and most negatively impacted by climate change and pollution (this can often be linked to [local fossil fuel related industries](#)), with more health implications, energy budget burdens, flooding and excessive heat.

Possible city strategies:

- Cities must ensure that community members are consulted and engaged in developing and implementing strategies;
- Develop public awareness campaigns to promote sustainability and just transition so that citizens are aware of the relevancy in their own lives, health implications, and how they can be supported if affected by the transition;
- Develop programs that assist low-income groups with energy poverty, resilience from excess heating, recycling and workforce training for good quality green jobs.

Civil society: NGOs and community groups

Positions:

- Some climate campaign NGOs have been highlighting the importance of a just transition when advocating for climate action – examples include the [European Movement for a Green New Deal](#);
- [Youth movements](#) have also started to campaign for and include just transition asks as part of wider advocacy on climate action;
- Academic institutions in Europe have been playing a leading role in conceptualising and researching just transition policies with some establishing just transition institutes or [hubs](#);
- Community based organisations can often be key partners in implementing strategies to drive a just transition – such as supporting training and reskilling programmes, implementing community energy and waste programmes, or being an important bridge to engage with affected communities.

Possible city strategies:

- Establish community grants and funds to support community organisations and NGOs that focus on just transition at city level;
- Identify academic experts on just transition to support research processes and recommend successful models;
- Engage, consult and inform non-profits and community organisations about city powers and strategies and on the important role they can play and influence they can have in ensuring a just transition locally.



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VI. Towards local strategies on just transition: recommended actions and tools

Even though most of the strategies for just transition have been launched by national and regional authorities, cities are the places where most of the effects of deindustrialisation and regeneration are tangible at the social and economic levels. Local authorities can play a decisive role in the different phases of just transition strategies, from engaging in dialogue with different levels of governance to the collaborative planning and the implementation of actions at the local level.

Engagement with national governments

Cities can take part in national dialogues and initiatives for planning just transition strategies, asking for the scope of action to be enlarged to cover not only coal and mining areas but all the areas where industrial regeneration is needed, and where the impact of COVID-19 has accelerated the need for workers' reskilling. Local governments can highlight neighbourhoods and areas to test innovative measures and actions for regenerating entire parts of a local economy, showing how actions on just transition can have a multiplier effect in terms for social and economic well-being.

Recommended actions for cities:

- Advocate at the regional and national level to be a part of the commissions and initiatives that define just transition strategies, including the identification of the areas benefiting from the resources of the Just Transition Fund, and/or related national initiatives, in order to represent the needs of the local communities at the institutional level;
- Propose concrete actions for TJTPs and other strategies that demonstrate the local implementation of just transition, including reskilling the local workforce, reusing abandoned spaces and promoting the social economy.

Multi-stakeholder dialogue at the city-level

Cities can launch participatory schemes to involve industries, NGOs, residents and other local stakeholders in a local process aimed at highlighting common strategies to remediate fossil fuel extraction sites and promote sustainable and collaborative urban development in the medium and long term. At the same time, the active involvement of local actors could prove crucial when focusing the transition of the local economy towards sectors with higher potential in terms of new job creation. Thanks to such processes, cities can be better equipped to use European and national resources for regeneration and reskilling, with bottom-up plans created by the analysis of local strength and potentials.

Recommended actions for cities:

- Create effective schemes of collaboration at the local level, following the model of similar groups created for the definition of "integrated action plans" (as used in the URBACT⁵⁸ network) or for platforms such as Amsterdam's House of Skills (see case study 4), which includes a range of private and public stakeholders to create concrete actions on the future of work and skills in the local economy. In a European context – where there has been limited involvement of cities in the definition of priorities and actions on just transition – this can help local governments to strengthen their advocacy messaging and increase their direct involvement in decision-making;
- Explore opportunities for increased civic engagement by supporting and/or partnering with local communities, community-based organisations, and so on, to foster a greater degree of agency and to leverage local resources and knowledge.

Interdepartmental coordination

The creation of integrated urban strategies on just transition is possible only if effective mechanisms of coordination within local authorities are put in place. Integration among different departments is essential for creating connections across policy areas, such as industrial regeneration, environmental protection and social inclusion, which affect the economic, environmental and social dimensions of urban sustainability. As shown by the experience of cities such as Rybnik and Wałbrzych, the creation of effective mechanisms of coordination among different offices and departments is crucial for improving the relationship with local stakeholders, national players and EU programmes and institutions. Greater interdepartmental coordination can lead to a more efficient use of EU financial resources for implementing effective investment plans and actions at the urban level for redressing previous transition processes and creating a more sustainable future.

Recommended actions for cities:

- Create internal groups of coordination among different departments working on aspects related to just transition (environment, welfare, employment, etc.) in order to explore possible connections with other fields (e.g. strategic integrated planning, EU funds), and develop common strategies and pilot actions to be implemented with different financing tools. These groups can be also useful for reinforcing connection with national and regional authorities and their offices working on just transition topics, in order to ensure a coherent framework for policies among different levels of governance.

Collaborative design of reskilling/upskilling policies and initiatives

Cities need to establish effective mechanisms of collaboration with regional and national authorities to invest in short-term and long-term measures for workers reskilling and upskilling. The limited success of national initiatives such as the Polish reskilling programmes for miners, which failed because many workers could not access them due their limited ability to work caused by health problems,⁵⁹ shows how a lack of analysis of the local situation and poor coordination among different levels of governance can weaken the impact of such measures.

Recommended actions for cities:

- Take part in or advocate for involvement in the regional and national working groups that are defining strategies and actions on just transition, highlighting the specific characteristics of the areas in which reskilling/upskilling local plans can be implemented. This will be essential for creating programmes tailored to the needs of the potential beneficiaries and to the current and future perspectives of economic development.

Advocating for an inclusive and equitable allocation of support at the European level

Local governments have been advocating for the inclusion of a wider number of cities and regions to be eligible for financial support under the Just Transition Mechanism. Cities and regions can pressure national governments to expand the list of beneficiaries or define alternative forms of support to cities and regions dependent on coal production or with the highest levels of emissions, or with a strong industrial transformation in the medium and long term.

Recommended actions for cities:

- Lobby for expanding the list of cities and regions eligible for receiving financial support for implementing TJTPs. This action needs to be carried out in collaboration with different levels of governance, and possibly needs to be expanded into regions that are not only focusing on coal and mining but also to the regeneration of other industrial sectors. The creation of new tools dedicated to the regions that are coping with the effects of deindustrialisation can be part of national recovery plans or plans co-funded by the European Regional Development Fund at the European, national or regional level.

Involvement in European networks and partnerships

The focus on the transformative power of just, green and productive cities arising from the New Leipzig Charter, approved under the German presidency of the EU Council in November 2020, paves the way for the creation of new tools that are strongly related to a just transition.⁶⁰ Cities can apply to take part in networks under the URBACT IV⁶¹ programme or implement actions under the new European Urban Initiative⁶² (which will contain a pillar dedicated to “Innovative Actions”, the former Urban Innovative Actions programme) with a strong focus on active involvement of residents and stakeholders. Furthermore, just transition will be a cross-cutting topic for the Urban Agenda for the EU⁶³ : cities can apply to become members of partnerships in which they can collaborate with national governments and EU networks to plan and test pilot actions on topics related to just transition.

Recommended actions for cities:

- Identify potential actions to be addresses collaboratively with other cities facing similar challenges as well as key stakeholders such as academia, businesses or NGOs, and explore opportunities to submit joint project proposals under the programmes outlined above;
- Explore opportunities to implement pilot actions on just transition in the framework of different partnerships under the Urban Agenda for the EU and collaborate with national authorities, European networks and other stakeholders to help guide replication of thematic models and actions in other territorial contexts.



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VII. Conclusions

Cities are in a crucial position to shape just transition processes: they are already experiencing the economic and employment impacts of decarbonisation and deindustrialisation, possess an in-depth understanding of the local context, and are equipped with the tools to convene a wider range of stakeholders in an effort to give a voice to those affected. The active engagement of local stakeholders and inclusive multilevel governance can facilitate the creation of integrated strategies for decarbonisation and the diversification of the urban economy. Effective coordination with regional and national governments also presents significant opportunities for cities to benefit from the EU's dedicated resources on just transition under the European Green Deal and its Just Transition Mechanism.

As shown in this report, European cities have extensive experience in carrying out effective strategies and actions for a just transition, and transforming cities into testing grounds for these solutions is crucial for multiple purposes – from localising the implementation of the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals, to the recovery after COVID-19. Local governments are already playing a decisive role in leading this change and in developing a vision that can be shared by regional, national and European authorities in the medium and long term. The implementation of strategies on just transition can restore trust between local governments and their communities, and demonstrate the transformative power of cities, highlighted by the New Leipzig Charter, in a concrete way. These strategies can bridge the gap between different sectors of society and contribute to reducing social and territorial inequalities still present in Europe. The future of work in many European regions and cities and the long-term prospects of economic development are strongly dependent on local implementation of a just transition and its alignment with regional and national strategies.

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