

Conference of the Civil Society Organisations' Group of the European Economic and Social Committee (EESC), Ostrava-Vítkovice (Czech Republic), 11 October 2022

'Reinventing the Moravian-Silesian Region in search of a socially just transition'

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS



Extraordinary meeting of the Civil Society Organisations' Group

Reinventing the Moravian-Silesian Region in search of a socially just transition

 @CSOGroupEESC #JustTransition

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Science and Technology Centre,
Ostrava-Vítkovice, Czech Republic



European Economic
and Social Committee
Civil Society Organisations' Group



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The Moravian-Silesian region, one of the three Czech coal regions and former steel heart of the Czech Republic, has worked hard and made significant efforts to transform itself into a sustainable and low-carbon region. The process, which is still ongoing, has clearly entailed a reinvention of the local identity.

Academia, local civil society organisations, representatives of regional and national authorities and the members of the EESC's Civil Society Organisations' Group met in *Dolní Vítkovice*, the former industrial area for coal mining and steel production in Ostrava in October 2022 to share success stories and discuss the challenges the region is facing in moving towards a socially just transition. The conference was organised within the framework of the Czech Presidency of the Council of the EU.

Towards a socially just transition: the challenges

- The route towards a socially just transition is full of challenges. First and foremost, a transition to be fair must imply an effort to **preserve local identities**. It is well known that mining communities have very strong identities. Transforming the 'steel heart' of the Czech Republic into a low-carbon economy is above all about **reinventing local identities**. It is essential that **people and local communities** are **empowered and directly involved** in the planning for the regeneration of the region.
- The greatest challenge of this century is **climate change**. With climate change at our doorstep, the **transition to climate neutral economies** is more urgent than ever, as enshrined in the heart of the European Green Deal. We learned of the devastating effects on a region of over a hundred years of coal mining, the loss of a whole town and the scattering of communities. This demonstrates on a micro scale the consequences of not **planning ahead** and is a reminder of the **consequences of ignoring climate change**.
- Another challenge rises from the ashes of the **Russia-Ukraine war**. This involves **achieving energy independence**, first and foremost from Russia. Although it entails numerous intrinsic complex obstacles, energy autonomy has indeed become one of the major strategic challenges of our time, not only at the national level but also at the **local level**.
- The **brain drain** phenomena and the **current demographic trends** are challenging the transition as well. Brain drain, which is one of the main causes of the current demographic decline in the region, is gradually depriving several regions of skilled labour. And skilled labour constitutes one of the main driving forces of economic and social development. The successful transformation of a region depends on its **capacity for innovation** to keep people in the territory.
- Last but not least, another crucial challenge is making the socially just transition **balanced** and **inclusive**. That is, delivering a transition for the many and not only for the few. **Every local community must be treated equally**, and several related problems must be tackled, such as **social exclusion**, especially of the most vulnerable people.

How to approach and ensure that the transition is socially just

- First of all, it is vital to acknowledge that **the world is changing**. We therefore need to **embrace the change** and **try to exert the most virtuous possible influence on it**.
- In this context, it is crucial to **recognize that civil society must be directly involved** in how changes occur. Civil society organisations must be involved in partnership, through an inclusive

bottom-up approach, so as to ensure a **participatory endeavor** and, ultimately, a **real fair transition**.

- At the same time, **local government** has an essential responsibility to **support the most vulnerable** and those who are less able to adapt to change. **A partnership between local authorities and civil society organisations is key to delivering the just transition.**
- **Transitions are often a radical issue.** Thus, we need to undertake and accept **profound changes**, especially in our attitudes and perceptions. Changes are part of any transitions, and the current circumstances require radical changes.
- However, despite being radical, the socially just transition should be carried out gradually, through a **step-by-step process**. During each step of the process, we must create all the conditions that, added together, will create a fair social environment.
- Finally, we must pledge to **tackle all the different aspects of life**, from industry to environment, from education to health. To make this pledge more effective and consistent, it is crucial to **identify specific and targeted actions.**

Tools for a socially just transition

- A socially just transition can become reality only by means of a **resourceful toolkit of actions and measures**. First of all, we must **enhance investment**, even if the benefits of our investments will be seen only in the **long run**. We must agree to invest today, but to only reap the benefits tomorrow.
 - Hence, it is crucial to **guarantee continuous access to public and private funds**. The **European Green Deal** and the 'Fit for 55' package are already providing substantial resources. Resources that are already supporting the transformation of the Moravia-Silesian Region, just like other regions within the European Union.
 - In this context, it is especially important to focus on **small projects, social services, infrastructure, innovation and research, agriculture, development and social cohesion**. But even more essential is ensuring consistent funding in the fields of **culture and education**. Culture and education are indeed the most powerful engines to spur changes in social and economic structures.
 - Other significant tools are **knowledge sharing** across industries and sectors, and **learning from best practices and positive examples**. We must encourage these processes and make sure that they lead to a **virtuous circle**. For instance, the transformation of the Moravian-Silesian Region could be a leading example for other European regions undergoing transformation processes.
 - All these actions and measures should particularly be aimed at **creating new job opportunities, a more skilled workforce, more integration and inclusiveness, developing urbanism, enhancing regional heritage**, and so on so forth. Ultimately, at **giving new breath to a region and new lives to its people**.
 - Finally, it should not be forgotten that to be successful, it is fundamental to **ensure a mutually reinforcing synergy** among all the actions and measures previously mentioned.
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