

Cohesion Policy in EU Coal Region



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Decarbonisation policies in the European Union (EU) risk compromising the long-term economic sustainability of regions that have historically been dependent on coal. The coal sector remains significant in several EU regions and a phase-out from coal will inevitably have a myriad of economic and social impacts. As such, **Cohesion Policy is expected to play an important role in supporting these regions to meet EU decarbonisation ambitions and commitments.**

In the study attention is given to the different contributions of the ERDF and ESF over the 2014-20 period, and to the prospects for future programmes, including the Just Transition Funds (JTF), to further support and ameliorate the transition towards decarbonisation in these regions.

The study

presents an analysis of the implementation and impact (actual or expected) of Cohesion Policy at the regional and local levels in EU coal regions

Moreover, this study provides a further assessment of the challenges, opportunities and negative impacts of the coal phase-out, the effectiveness and potential unforeseen consequences of Cohesion Policy and the effect of the COVID-19 pandemic on transitioning coal regions.

Six case study regions (NUTS2-level) and within these, NUTS3 coal regions, have been selected to draw detailed and specific evidence on the application and programming of Cohesion Policy within coal regions, namely Asturias, Śląskie, Düsseldorf, Severozápad, Dytiki Makedonia, and Yugoitztochen.

Main observations

From 2014 to 2020, total climate-related Cohesion Funds spending amounted to EUR 56.5 billion (ERDF share: 67%, CF: 31% and ESF: 2%). Cohesion Policy over

the 2014-2020 programming period did not make explicit reference to coal phase-out and the corresponding Operational Programmes (OPs) did not include any policies specifically tailored to supporting the transition in coal regions. Nonetheless, analysis of the projects and investment spending in the six case study coal regions points to **Cohesion Policy instruments playing an important role to pave the way towards a decarbonisation transition** via a multitude of Priority Axis (PA) and Specific Objectives (SO) that were either relevant to the transition and/or supporting low-carbon and climate resilient investments by addressing the social, economic and environmental aspects of transition.



For the 2021 - 2027 programming period, 30% of the EU budget should be dedicated to support climate change actions (30% of the ERDF and 37% of the Cohesion Fund resources). Within the six case study regions, the establishment of the Just Transition Mechanism (JTM), including the dedicated JTF, has raised the level of attention to transition in coal and carbon intensive regions and brought about changes to the way Member States program their use of Cohesion Policy funds. For the 2021-27 period, there is an **increase in the share of SOs that either explicitly or implicitly cover planned investments into transition topics.**

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Finally, evidence from the six case study regions suggests that **Cohesion Policy instruments were used to support short-term responses to the COVID-19 pandemic**, and that the pandemic has induced some **long-term changes in programming for the 2021-27 period**.

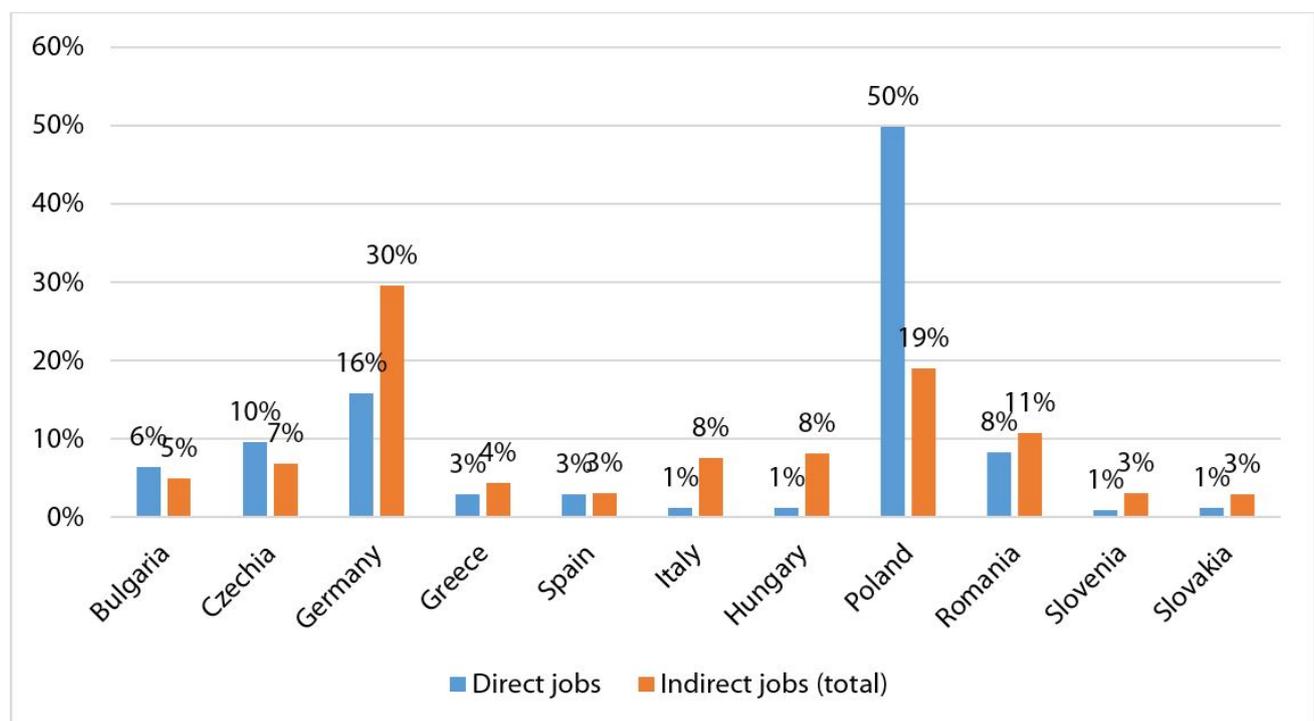
Policy recommendations

The main recommendations are that:

- Policies and instruments to support the just transition should **accommodate the specific characteristics** of each coal region, which may require strengthening regional-level inputs into their design;

- Programming should recognise the **multidimensional aspects of the transition**, including environmental rehabilitation and revitalisation of mining sites, and transformation of carbon-intensive installations;
- **Speed up, monitor and evaluate the implementation** of Cohesion Policy for the 2021-27 programming period, including with regard to strict observance of procedures and timelines;
- **Strengthen alignment, coordination, and cooperation** among Managing Authorities for ERDF, ESF, CF and JTF.

Country shares of EU total direct and indirect jobs related to the coal industry (2021)



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