CEESEU-DIGIT

Central and Eastern Europe Sustainable Energy Union's Design and Implementation of regional Government Initiatives for a just energy Transition

Political parties include key elements of the just transition in the six partner regions

D4.3 Analysis of the Political Context

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Contents

Background of the CEESEU-DIGIT Project

The Central and Eastern European Sustainable Energy Union's Design and Implementation of regional Government Initiatives for a just energy Transition (CEESEU-DIGIT) aims to build the capacity of public administrators in Central and Eastern Europe to develop Energy and Climate Action Plans (ECAPs) that not only promote increased energy efficiency, sustainable energy, reduced carbon emissions and improved climate change adaptability, helping the region to contribute towards meeting the EU's climate goals, but also plans that follow the intent of the Commission to "leave no-one behind" in the process of the just transition to energy security and the goal of a climate-neutral Europe. To ensure a clear understanding among partners, the project's Advisory Board, and the EC that an ECAP includes sufficient and well-targeted attention to the social justice components of the clean energy transition, the term ECAP+ is used in the project.

CEESEU-DIGIT's primary objective is to build capacity in 6 carbon intensive regions in 6 countries in the CEE for holistic regional ECAPs aligned with NCEP national targets supporting the Green Deal, and will involve marginalised and vulnerable groups, especially energy-poor households. A second objective is to assist municipalities to formulate, fund, and implement their ECAPs aligned with regional ones. At both levels, extensive capacity building will be extended to assist with building ECAPs.

Drawing municipalities into energy regions will help cross-pollinate ideas, share knowledge and tasks, and apply for financing. Public-sector capacity building (WP2, WP3) will help (a) formulate a holistic ECAP with energy provisions and carbon footprint reduction while improving climate-sensitive social goods - mobility, parks, playgrounds, clean air and water, biodiversity conservation; (b) address energy poverty - heating/cooling, adequate ventilation/lighting, domestic hot water, cooking; (c), attend to constituents and act on behalf of their needs; (d) understand financing options and how to apply for these; and (e) work with the private sector to mute opposition to the CET and to encourage and incorporate funding of ECAP initiatives by business (WP5). A just Clean Energy Transition (CET) needs to maximise support, minimise opposition, and overcome apathy, requiring social science/social psychology theory to be applied (WP3). Non-public sector stakeholders (key players, context setters, the crowd, and subjects) will each be targeted by specific social and conventional media outreach (WP6). Dissemination will be (a) upward to national levels, the CoM, and the EU for use in energy transition planning (WP5, WP6); (b) across a broader CEE geography via the Central and Eastern Europeans Sustainable Energy Union (CEESEN), a recently established NGO, to have by the end-of-project 2500 members using its online platform to share best practices, lessons learnt, and ideas that can advance the EU's climate goals (WP6).

As a result of implementing the CEESEU-DIGIT project, it is anticipated that several important longer-term impacts will be achieved, a selection among which include:

- 6 high-quality ECAP+s formulated that align GHG reduction targets with 2030 goals and address the special needs of energy-poor, elderly, and minority communities, to include people with disabilities;
- Public/private participation of 900 people in ECAP+ planning meetings to voice their concerns;
- 18 Regional Work Groups are formalised to provide ongoing input into ECAP+ implementation and a longer-term, holistic vision for a just transition;
- At least 66 public sector employees are capacitated to develop regional ECAP+s including mapping of stakeholders and collection of baseline data, and to utilise participatory governance structures to ensure involvement of all stakeholders, especially groups that are often marginalised (energy poor, ethnic minorities, migrants, elderly, people with disabilities, Roma, etc.);
- At least 200 people from civil society and vulnerable groups are capacitated to advocate on behalf of their interests in relation to energy policy/transition;
- Regional/municipal governments designate 7% of their budget to energy transition activities.

Relevance of this Deliverable

This deliverable was originally intended to be a synthesis report of our project's effect on political parties' platforms, including a short overview of engagement methods used by our team. In retrospect, this was an overly-ambitious goal, as it became abundantly clear during the implementation of the project that it would have been necessary to co-opt local politicians into the project during its inception rather than expect them to derive political points from being on the project's sidelines. Instead, this Deliverable focuses on three analytical areas in regard to the Just Transition:

The degree of coordination between national and local political party levels with regard to party platforms' statements focusing on a just green transition.

A comparison among the project's three distinct partner regions - the Baltic States (represented by Estonia and Latvia), the Visegrad states (represented by Poland and the Czech Republic), and the Western Balkans (represented by the only two countries currently in the EU, Slovenia and Croatia) in relation to the transposition of party platforms to regional politicians.

Through the implementation of a questionnaire targeting the project's regional politicians and representatives, insight into how these respondents view the EU's 2030 and 2050 emissions targets, energy security, and energy poverty.

This Deliverable falls under the task *T4.3.2 - Analysis of political context: Within each region, the political conditions will be assessed, including examination of the relevant political parties, their relative strengths of support in different municipalities, their stated positions for and against different aspects of just energy transition topics (support or resistance to energy transition in general, or different forms of alternative energy, policies for alleviating social and economic dislocation, etc.) This will include interviews with relevant political actors or knowledgeable commentators who can give insights on the stances of political parties*. In the final Conclusions and Recommendations sections, the information obtained is presented in actionable form for the EC's consideration.

Analysis of Political Platforms and Budgets for the Just Transition

An analysis of regional parties' political platforms and budgetary information in regard to the Just Transition offers the opportunity to compile a broad picture of the political context in the target regions. This section outlines the key findings.

Political platforms and budgetary information

The target regions for this deliverable are Ida-Viru (EE), Vidzeme Planning Region (LV), Mazovia (PL), Broumovsko (CZ), Međimurje (HR), and Podravje (SI). To select party platforms to analyse, the following steps were taken. First, the three most populous cities in each region were selected. Then, within those regions, the two to three political parties that won more than three-quarters of the popular vote in the most recent local elections were identified. This is assumed to reflect citizens' demands for, or rejection of, the just transition as defined in the majority winning parties' platforms.

Table 1: Municipalities for the Political Platform and Budgetary Analyses

CEE region	Country	Target region in country	Most populous municipalities
Baltics	EE	Ida-Viru	Narva
			Kohtla Järve
			Sillimäe
	LV	Vidzeme Planning Region	Cēsis
			Valmiera
			Ogre
Visegrad	PL	Mazovia	Płock
			Radom
			Siedlce
	CZ	Broumovsko	Broumov
			Police nad Metují
			Meziměstí
Western Balkans	HR	Međimurje	Čakovec
			Prelog
			Nedelišće
	SI	Podravje	Maribor
			Ptuj
			Slovenska bistrica

Note. Warsaw was excluded from the Masovian Voivodeship (PL) to avoid disproportionate results.

The party platforms were identified through web searches and emailing party representatives in the languages of our regional partners. The availability varied, as some of the majority vote-winners were temporary coalitions or regional parties that do not publish information online. The platforms were then analysed in English using translation applications. Information related to the Green/Just Transition was extracted.

In addition, regional partners gathered budgetary information to analyse how much is spent on green or just transition efforts. The information was gathered for the three most populous cities in each target region for the years 2022, 2023, and 2024. The items collected were (1) the total expenditure amount, (2) amount spent on the green transition (i.e., anything related to policies aiming for carbon neutrality/renewable energy etc. that does not fit in the "just" description), and (3) amount spent on just transition (i.e., related to jobs lost by environmental policies, energy affordability, household energy efficiency, mental/physical health protection to contend with climate change). However, the two categories were merged in the analysis, due to the miniscule or non-existent spending on the just transition category. This information is summarised in the below tables; the key points determined through this analysis are as follow:

- All regions have specific ideas in their platforms about renewable energy investments. However, the type (e.g., roof solar, community solar, wind, hydro, biogas, geothermal, nuclear) and way of financing (e.g., private, EU, or national funds) varies by region.
- The Western Balkans and Baltics held generally positive attitudes towards the green transition in their platforms, while the Visegrads had little mention. The CZ outcome could be attributed to the particularly small municipality (and party) size.
- The budgetary analysis shows a wide spread on spending among municipalities, both absolute and relative. This could be due to massive projects' timing. For example, the highest spending in SI (40% of the annual budget) is for building renovations while 14 out of 18 (78%) of the municipalities had multi-year projects such as bicycle path development or community heating projects, which contributed to consistent investment in green transition efforts.

Table 2: Summary of Platform Analysis

Region in CEE	Country	Stance towards the green transition in party platforms	Specific points that are promised in party platforms
Baltics	EE	Positive tone, especially for job creation; intertwined with energy independence from Russia; mentions of "just" elements	Attract renewable energy business; green areas; subsidizing efficiency & prosumers; transportation; reduce waste; biodiversity in agriculture
	LV	Messaging varies but generally positive: Some talk about a clear path to climate neutrality, some emphasize energy independence. Most combine it with job creation	Renewables (solar, wind); efficiency, local investment & thorough evaluation of projects, vehicles, risk map development, organic farming
Visegrad	PL	Little mention except for one party; focused on reducing living costs for citizens and farms	Renewables (solar, wind, nuclear, biogas), green recreational spaces, lower energy price, zero emission transportation, waste management, forest preservation, smog abatement
	CZ	Little mention and weak in promises; very small municipalities that have not yet developed green plans.	Reducing concrete; sustainable transportation; charging stations for EV; projects for alternative energy sources
Western Balkans	HR	Generally positive, especially in the context of using EU funds and economic progress; one party is clear about supporting the Green Deal	Railway connecting rural cities and Zagreb; green tourism and recreation; waste management; renewable energy (roof solar, hydro, nuclear)
	SI	Positive in all parties (underlying acceptance of climate policy); policy is local level (transportation, infrastructure, green space); reliant on EU funds	Renewables (roof solar, emphasis on community solar projects, biogas, geothermal, nuclear); infrastructure improvement and waste management; public transportation and EVs

Table 3: Range of Annual Spending on Green and Just Transition Actions in the Three Most Populous Municipalities of Each Region (2022-2024)

Region	Country	3-Municipality Population	Absolute Spending on Green and Just Transition (€)				Per-Cap Mean (€)*	Percentage of Spending within Total Expenditure	
			Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Median		Min	Max
Baltics	EE	99,298	973,502	3,789,228	2,303,008	1,685,617	23.19	1.20%	20.73%
	LV	149,200	605,046	11,711,170	3,631,044	2,603,608	24.34	0.53%	14.34%
Visegrad	PL	409,929	894,254	8,775,849	4,590,244	4,389,506	11.20	0.23%	3.09%
	CZ	13,619	0	299,206	51,315	9,500	3.77	0.00%	11.92%
Western Balkans	HR	45,166	27,388	1,492,903	304,129	145,965	6.73	0.09%	2.40%
	SI	162,193	2,876,088	37,798,582	14,412,293	8,779,864	88.86	8.62%	40.66%

Note. Conversion rates applied to non-Euro currencies

*Per-capita expenditures based on the means and the 3-Municipality combined population figures

Evident from Table 3 is that on a per-capita basis, but taking into account the aforementioned expenditures on building renovation in Slovenia, the Baltic states lead, with more than twice the per-capita expenditure of Poland among the Visegrad states and, if only Croatia is considered in the Western Balkans because of the Slovenian anomaly, nearly four times that of Croatia. While the data are limited, as is the sampling of locations in the countries, it is possible to hypothesize that the Baltics are perhaps more focused on targeting Green and Just Transition expenditures than the other two regions of this study. Countering this hypothesis, however, is the fact that Slovenia's renovation expenditures are indeed an integral part of the Just Transition, focusing as these do on both public buildings and energy-inefficient multi-apartment units, plausibly demonstrating that the other countries lag far behind in implementing the EU's Renovation Wave. Note that this discussion is both preliminary and speculative as more data is needed to concretise these findings.

Local politicians adherence to party platforms via the interviews

Although the analysis of the interviews with local politicians are presented in depth in the rest of this report, two salient points emerge when comparing the interview results with the analysis of platforms and budgetary information.

- Party platform and individual stances are equally consistent and inconsistent

26 of the 39 interviewees were from political parties that release publically available platforms used for this analysis. Within those 26, 13 (50%) had consistent stances with their party platforms, with 10 having positive attitudes toward the green and just transition and 3 being neutral. The other 13 (50%) were inconsistent with their platforms: 6 politicians voiced negative attitudes while their platforms were neutral, 4 politicians had positive attitudes while their platforms were neutral, and 3 politicians had negative attitudes while their platforms were positive (refer to Table 4 for the summary). While the overall attitude is slightly positive (54%), the inconsistent stances lean in a negative direction, showing the risk of taking party platforms at face value without considering the concerns of individual representatives.

Table 4: Alignment Between Local Politicians and Their Party Platforms Regarding Their Attitude Towards the Green and Just Transition

			Politician's attitude					
			Positive		Neutral		Negative	
Party's attitude	Positive	Baltics	EE	LV	EE	LV	EE	LV
				1			1	
		Visegrad	PL	CZ	PL	CZ	PL	CZ
			2				1	
		Western Balkans	HR	SI	HR	SI	HR	SI
			2	5				1
	Neutral	Baltics	EE	LV	EE	LV	EE	LV
				1		2	2	1
		Visegrad	PL	CZ	PL	CZ	PL	CZ
			3				2	1
		Western Balkans	HR	SI	HR	SI	HR	SI
						1		

Note. The “negative” row for the party’s attitude with zero responses is omitted.

- Specific points promised in party platforms generally aligned with politicians’ specific ideas about how to approach a just, green transition

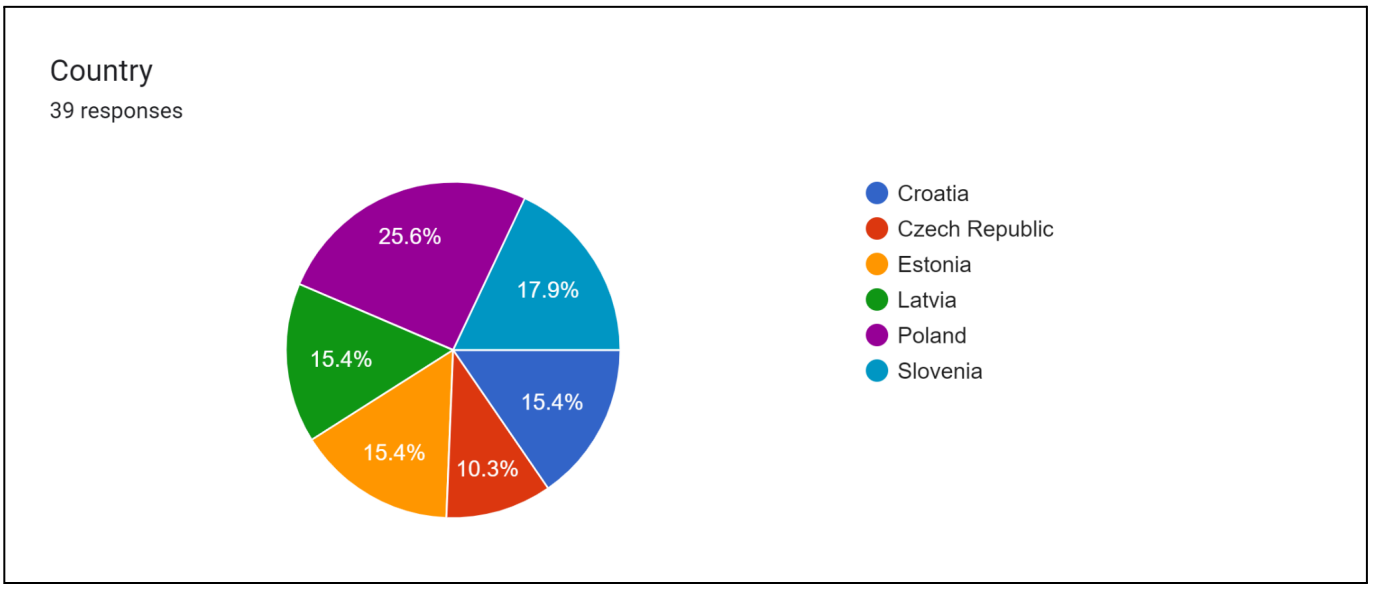
Specific points about how to achieve climate neutrality (e.g., renewable energy expansion, EV investment, etc.) listed in party platforms were generally echoed by politicians from the same party in the interviews, which suggests a substantial level of coherency between parties and individual politicians. However, given the opportunity to deliberate in the interviews, some respondents provided more creative solutions. Refer to the section “Inclusiveness within national legislative and regulatory actions” for specific ideas propounded by the interviewees.

Overall, given the small sample size of the interviews, broader generalizations would not necessarily be coherent or applicable. Nonetheless, this report may provide a foundation for the EC and municipalities to more deeply investigate and analyse how parties view the just, green transition, whether elected officials put words into action, and how budgets are spent to fund initiatives related to the transition.

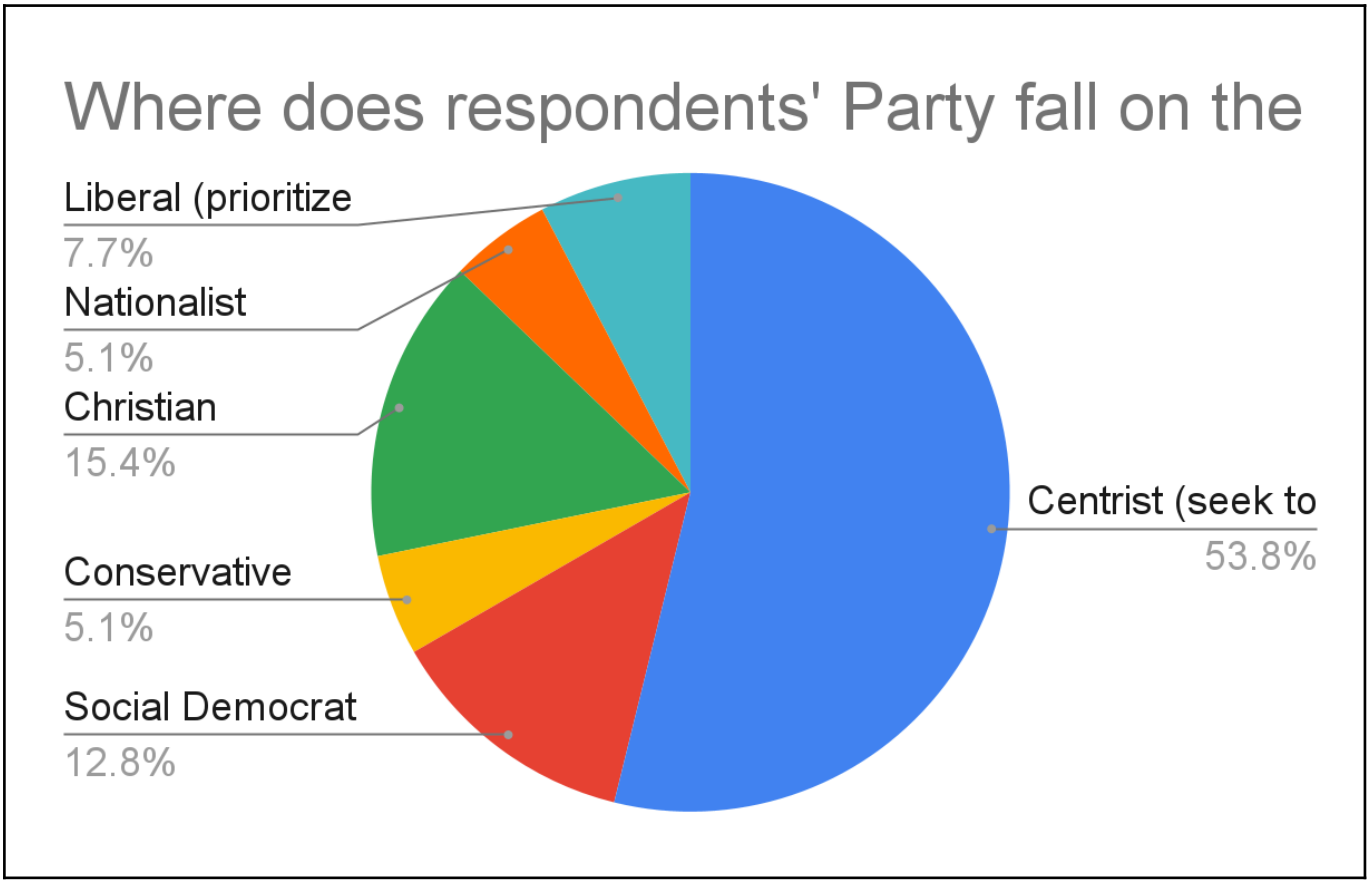
Analysis of Interviews with Local Politicians

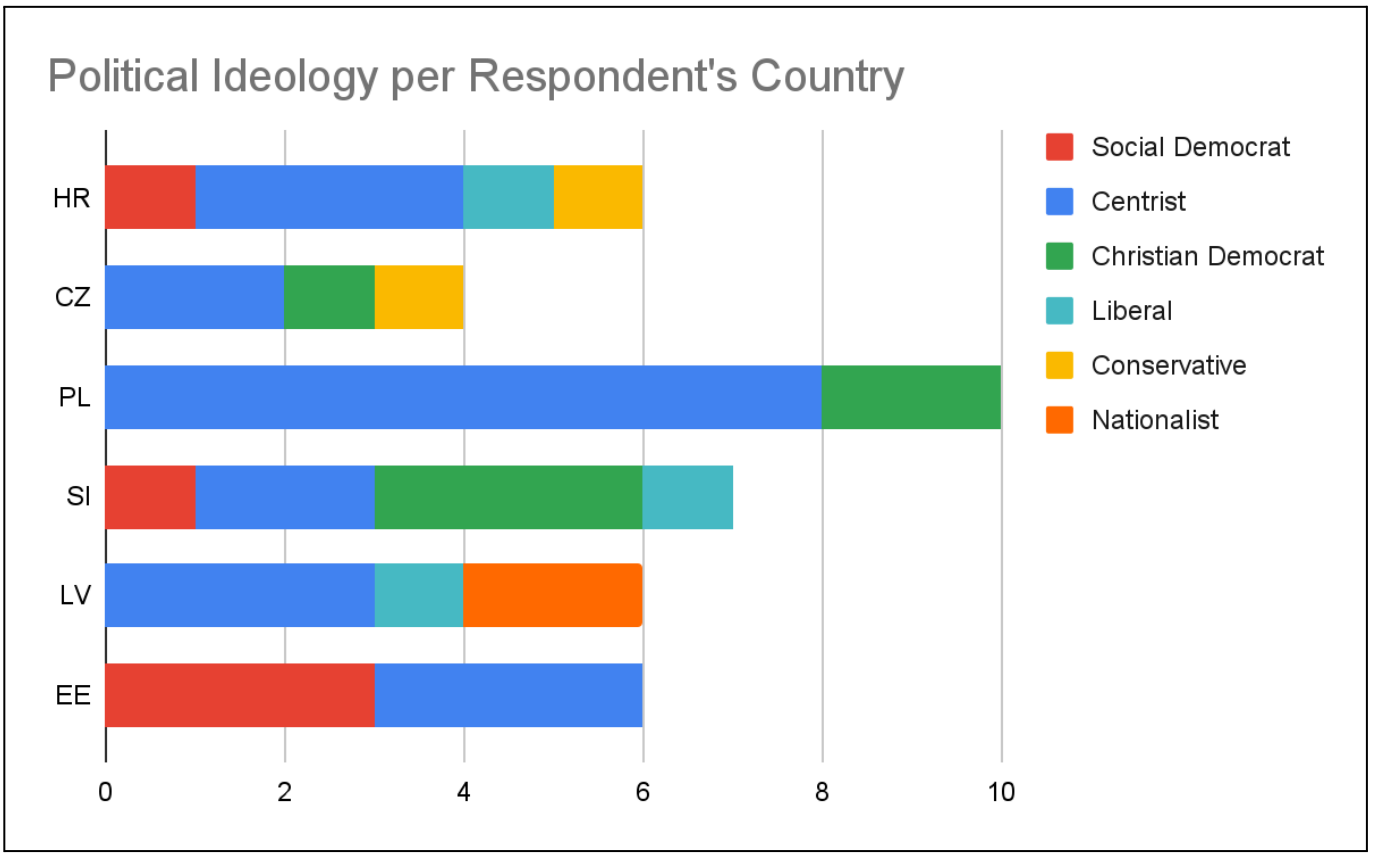
Overview

A total of 39 responses were gathered by the 6 partners. CZ (4 responses only, out of a target of 6+) had the most difficulty in the willingness of local politicians to be interviewed, which can be ascribed to the fact that many municipalities in the country have tiny populations compared to municipalities in other EU member states. Conversely, the Polish partner operates in Mazovia Voivodeship, a county-level entity with over 5 million inhabitants, the urban centre of which is Warsaw, which correlates with the hypothesis that municipal size matters - they secured 10 interviews.



Political parties represented in this survey range from Social Democrats to Nationalist, with more than half represented by Centrist parties. The placement of the parties on the political spectrum is a judgement by local partners.



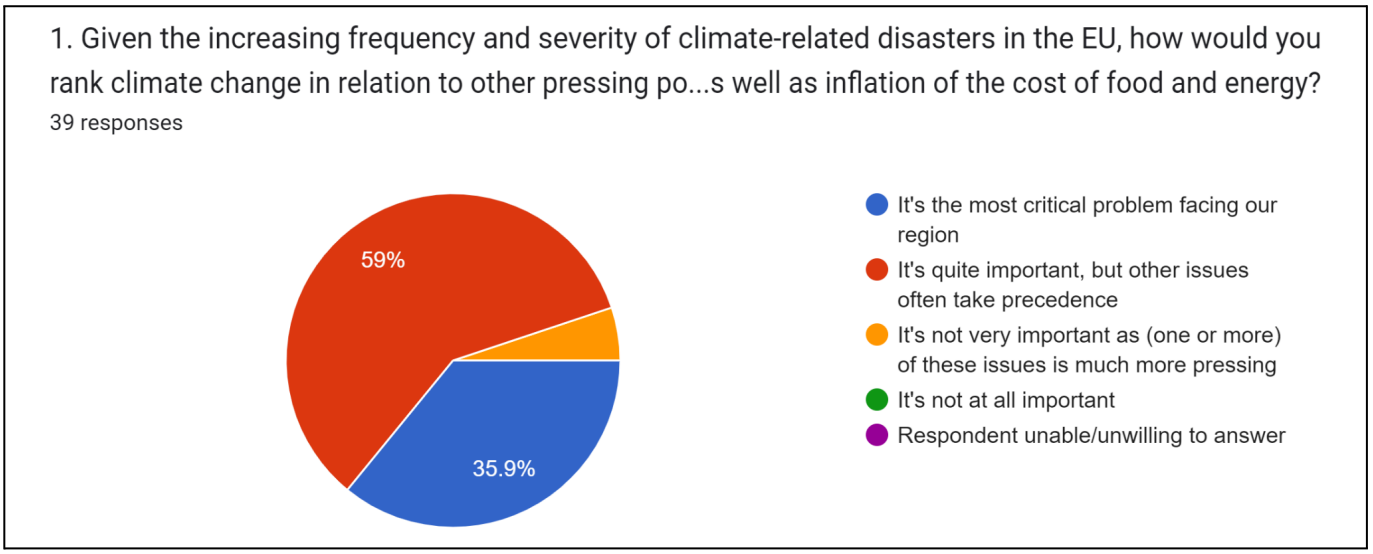


Local importance of the climate crisis

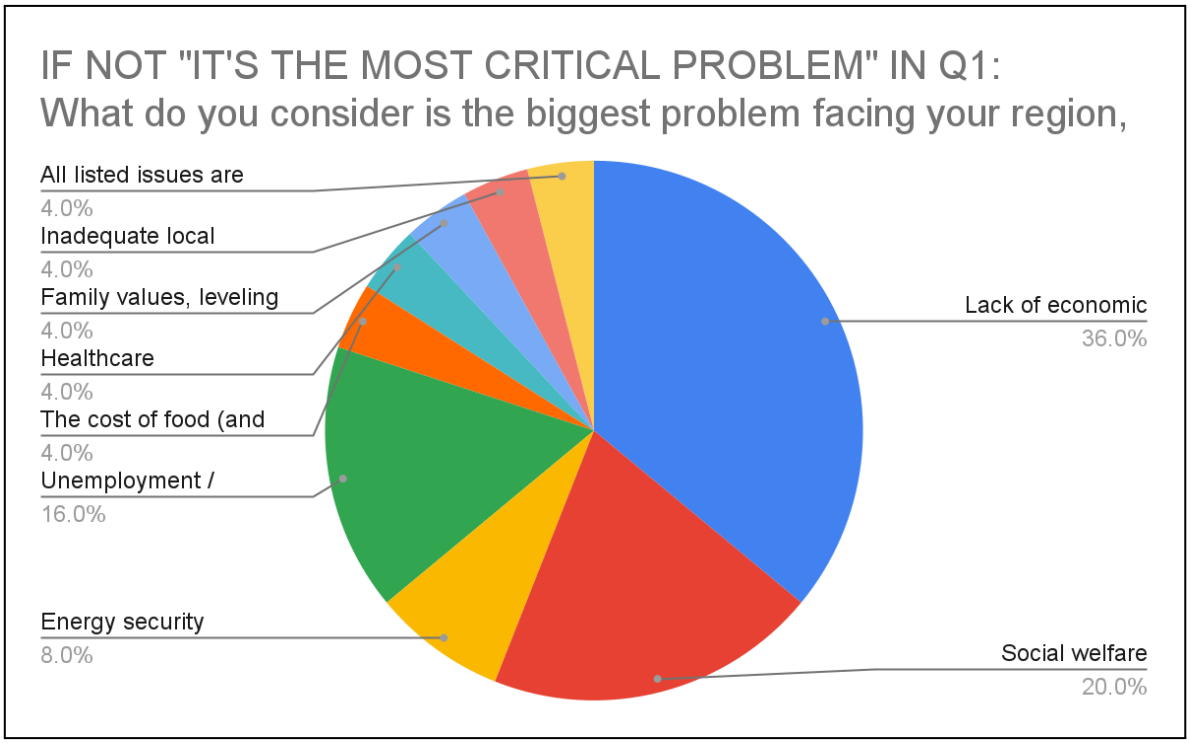
Asked to rank the climate crisis in terms of its importance in the current political arena, 37 respondents stated that it's the most important or quite important albeit other issues often take precedence. Just over a third (14 in total) of respondents believe it's the most critical problem facing their region, with 9 of these belonging to Centrist parties (defined as those seeking to balance left and right ideologies, focusing on pragmatism and consensus), 3 from Christian Democrats (those embracing conservative social values and combining these with moderate economic policies, and 1 each from Social Democrats (advocates for a mixed economy, social welfare, and equality) and Liberal (prioritize individual liberty, limited government, and free markets). This points to the fact that the risks associated with climate change can be highlighted by EU-level policymakers and regulators as there is a receptive audience in the middle of the political spectrum (and of course among the Greens, but no politician from this party is among the 39 respondents). Note too that one of the goals of CEESEU-DIGIT is to ascertain if there are discernible differences across different regions in the CEE; pairing EE and LV to represent the Baltic States, PL and CZ the Visegrad states, and SI and HR the Western Balkans. For the category of local politicians who rank climate change as the most important issue facing their region, we combine respondents into these 3 groupings so that there are in total 12 for the Baltics in which 16.7% concede the overwhelming importance of climate change (but none from LV), 14 for the Visegrad states in which 57.1% focus on climate change, and 13 from the Western Balkans in which 30.8% feel the same way. While noteworthy that this survey's sample is too small to be statistically significant especially when it comes to these 2-country groupings, it may be worthwhile for the EC to focus its climate adaptation finding efforts more on regions such as the Baltics and the Western Balkans so that these countries can free up national resources to address competing problems that may be viewed as more urgent.

Just 2 respondents held that the climate crisis is not very important; one from a Liberal party in LV cites economic progress as overriding, the other from a Christian Democratic party in CZ had a crucial point to

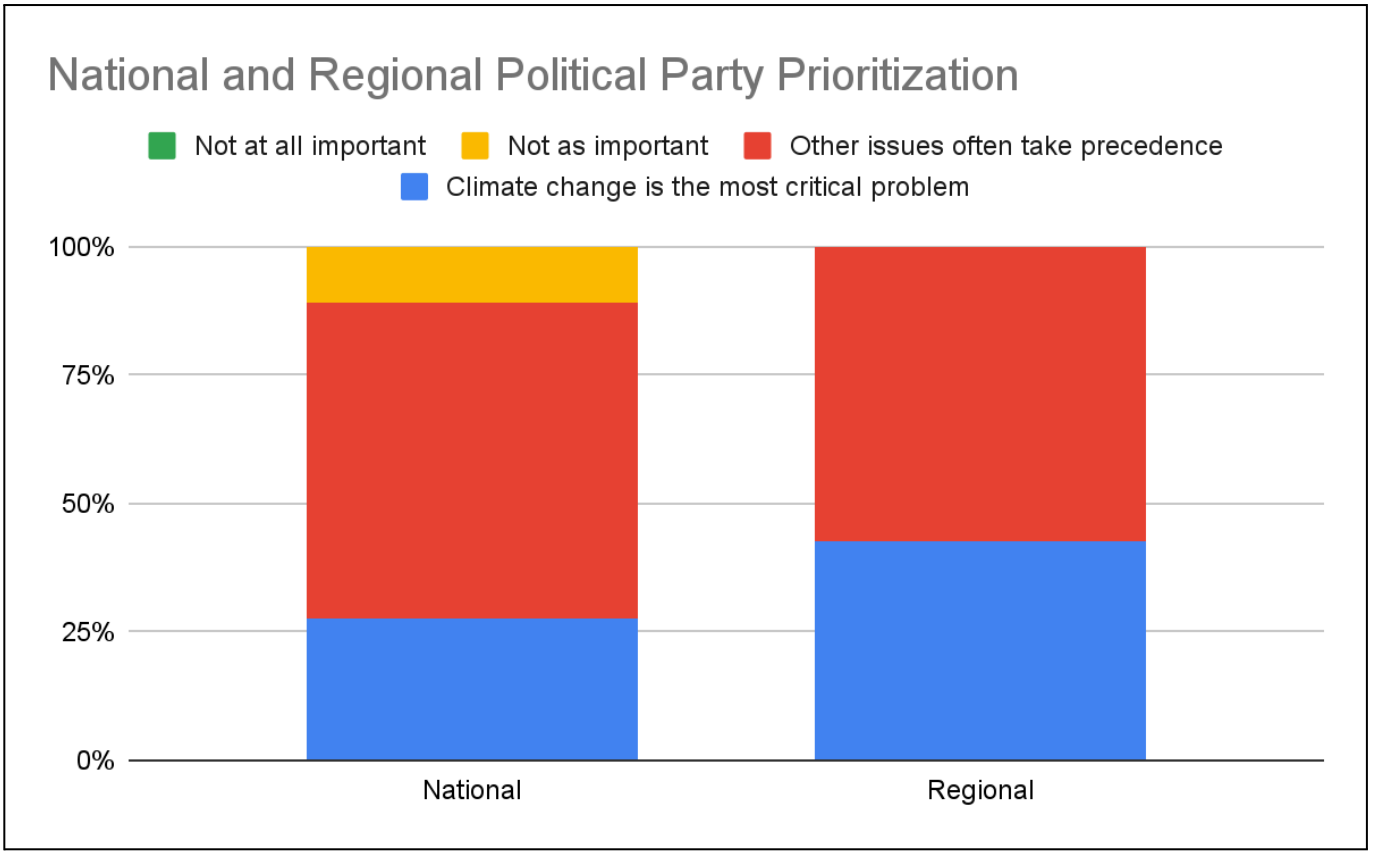
make regarding the difference of being on the periphery vs. the centre, and while it coheres with the need for more economic progress as stated by the LV respondent, it is worth quoting in full: “The region is at risk due to its location on the periphery, bordering impoverished Poland. There are few job opportunities. Young people tend to stay in large cities. Small regions are often overlooked. Future complications will arise in providing young people with access to a decent labor market, which is closely tied to the entire future of the town. The goal is to ensure and stabilize the population, especially young people, by offering them job opportunities.”



For those respondents who concede that climate change is important but not the most important item in their region for them to address, more than two-thirds (72%) cite the following 3 factors as the overriding concern: lack of economic progress (36.0%), social welfare concerns (20.0%) and the availability of remunerative jobs (16.0%). Perhaps unexpectedly, given recent inflationary pressures in the CEE following the Russian war on Ukraine, just one respondent thinks that the cost of food and other basic necessities tops their agenda, and this is in HR, which at the beginning of 2024 adopted the Euro as its currency, which itself drove inflation. It is also in HR and only in HR where two respondents regard energy security as the most important topic for their region to deal with.

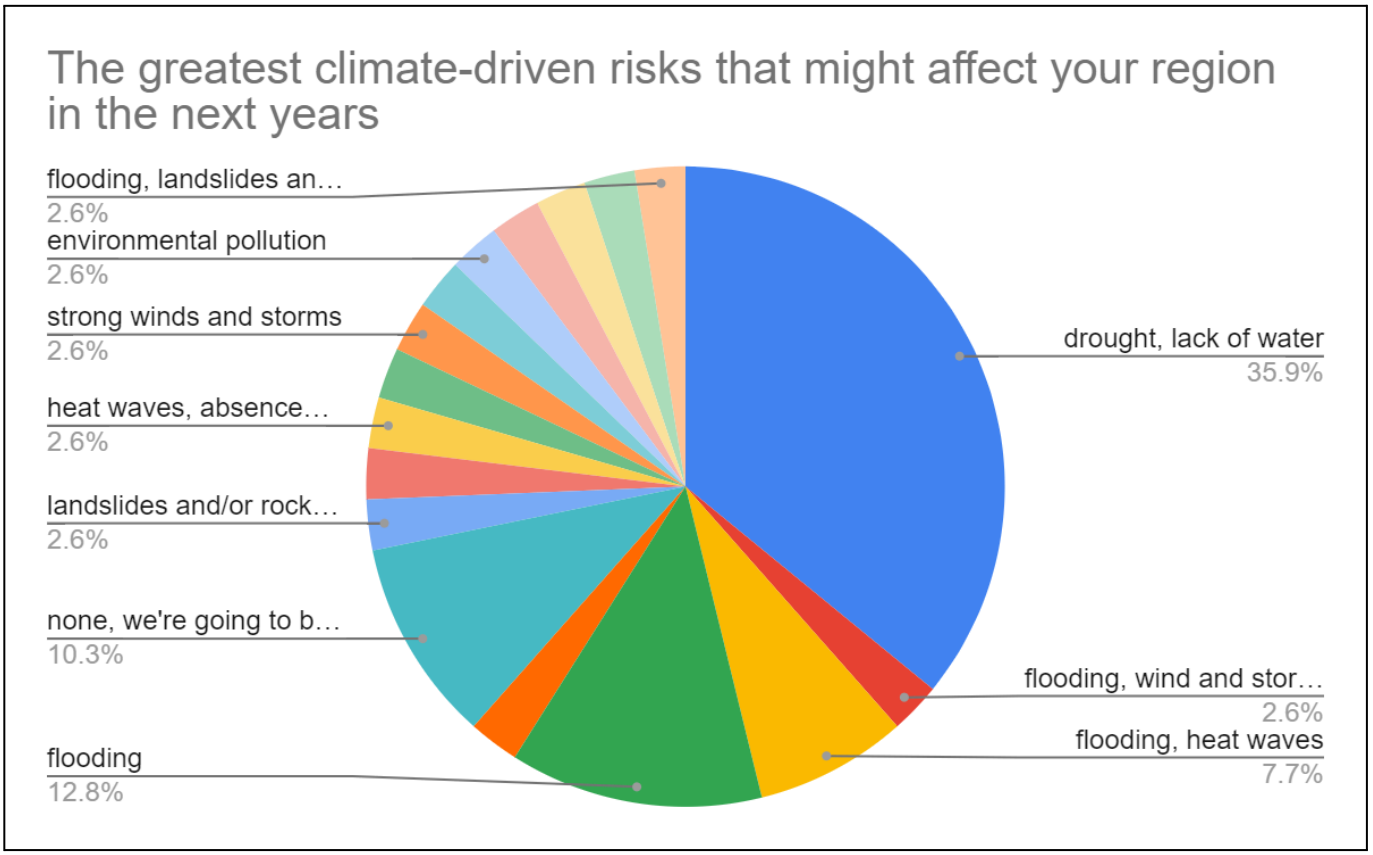


There are 18 respondents from national political parties which operate at a national level, and 21 regional political parties which operate only in a specific region. Respondents from regional parties were more likely to see climate change as the most critical problem over other policy issues (43%), compared to those from national parties (28%). This could suggest that regional parties are more likely to prioritize climate change over national issues such as social welfare and the lack of economic progress, often listed by national parties as problems taking precedence over climate change. The EC might therefore target regional political parties to engage with localized priorities relating to the just transition.



The next question delved into respondents' understanding of the impacts of the climate crisis in their regions. More than a third (35.9%) consider drought and falling reservoir levels to be most important, while nearly a quarter (25.7%) consider some aspects of flooding to be the greatest risk. However, one-tenth of respondents remain blasé about the risks associated with climate weirding, stating "none, we're going to be ok." This of course is the proverbial ostrich with its head in the sand, and perhaps an area where greater reinforcement of climate risks made by regional energy agencies can help local politicians come to grips with likely future scenarios.

Several respondents elaborated on the simplified responses depicted in the chart below, adding that, for example, warmer winters retard pest winter kills, thereby threatening harvests the following year. Another noted that freeze-thaw cycles are now more common than previously, damaging roads and other infrastructure. A third respondent was alarmed at how vulnerable is the electric grid to storms in their region. Fifteen percent of respondents are concerned about increased landslides/rockslides. This underscores the fact that most respondents are aware of potential climate-induced damage and the multiple ways in which this might occur. This suggests that the gain of knowledge of climate-induced impacts is quite prodigious even in the CEE, and is a firm foundation that can be further built on.



Respondents were then asked, provided that they hadn't responded with "none" for the climate risks, to denote the measures they think can be taken in their region to deal with this/these risk/s. It is quite instructive to list these answers, to again highlight that at the very least, many local politicians are thinking about these issues.

- Many more awareness-raising activities, information campaigns, encouraging municipalities to get involved in solving key problems, increased support measures for farmers (incentives, education)
- Large urban agglomerations can reduce CO2 emissions into the atmosphere, through clean transport zones in Warsaw, but global changes are more important, we should look at large industrial plants
- In regard to large-scale climate changes, the city council cannot decide whether there will be a strong wind from the Gulf of Finland or not. Climate change is a global and long-term concern but we can do small things in our region, but to stem the climate crisis, there has to be widespread change
- Strengthening preventive measures such as improving flood protection infrastructure, maintenance of forests and other areas, sound spatial planning.
- Measures that could be taken include systematic management of watercourses, strictly limiting construction or development in flood-prone areas and appropriate protection of existing buildings.
- Disasters related to natural phenomena are natural phenomena and not dependent on us; we can prepare society to mitigate the effects of these disasters - education, training
- Encouraging activities to increase awareness among citizens, additional aid measures within the framework of municipal and regional budgets, directing additional financial aid to lagging regions
- In case of drought: adequate protection of existing water sources; finding new, natural water sources and connections to existing reservoirs; regulating watercourses at critical areas. In case of floods: regulation of watercourses in critical areas; thorough site investigation prior to the granting of building permits; regular maintenance (cleaning) of the flow capacity of storm water drainage ditches; deepening or expansion of river channels in critical areas
- Increased use of RES, implementation of climate change adaptation measures (afforestation)
- Changing the river flow - the natural flow of the river is disturbed, resulting in blockages
- We work a lot to prevent river floods. For example, a dam is built, a river bed is cleaned

- Rainwater collection systems, storage tanks, watersheds for farmers would be the solution
- Rainwater drainage systems, which the municipality is currently working on, and energy efficiency in public buildings is a relentless priority
- Water retention in the landscape, building elements for water retention in the landscape
- Geomechanical surveys and opinions must be carried out before the construction of utility infrastructure and buildings. This should also be done for residential buildings in areas identified as landslide-prone in spatial planning documents
- Retention reservoirs, change in thinking in terms of water conservation
- investing public funds in deepening the Vistula River, equipping the fire department and other rescue units, a mistake has been made in our country - the company Waters of Poland does not have the resources to take care of our Vistula River, and these activities would ensure the safety and comfort of life in our region; at the moment there are only drafts of intentional resolutions and drafts of intentions, but there are no projects related to the topic of water safety in the Vistula River region; there was no talk of icebreakers or dredgers being able to appear on the Vistula River; I propose legislative changes to these measures; building the competence of local governments
- On watercourses (which are sanctuaries for plants and animals), efforts should be made to restore the structure of these areas to their former state
- Assets need to be protected
- Climate change adaptation and mitigation measures, implementation of the Green Transition
- Raising awareness among the population and special trainings and workshops to give people practical knowledge on how to deal with crises
- Changing policies so that they also meet the interests of local residents. Local governments should also be able to meet the interests of local residents, not just what is dictated at the national or EU level.
- Proper care of rivers in Mazovia to prevent water shortages
- Regulations at the European level; proper water management, building of water reservoirs; no serious investments so far
- Floods - meandering rivers, slowing down so that rivers have wide spillways to take up the rapids; retention reservoirs; raising floodwaters; in cities - where concretization is prevalent - de-concretizing cities, i.e., replacing paving blocks with openwork slabs, leaving parks with natural forebays, ponds and small retention reservoirs that would take the onslaught of water; Droughts - retention reservoirs, land reclamation, restoration of drainage ditches; using gray water for drains, flushing toilets, forcing developers to do so at the project level; educating residents about what they can do and take care of the microclimate; flower meadows, greening urban areas; lowering the temperature as much as possible in the city
- Renewable energy sources
- Afforestation, management of agricultural land and pastures, mapping of water sources outside the public water supply system, disaster risk management and similar
- Renovation of the water supply system (reduction of losses); adaptation of agriculture to climate changes
- Reconstruct the plumbing system so it would be able to handle more frequent and intense downpours
- To think about what we all can do to reduce climate impacts, become greener in your home too. In the municipality, we have an Environment Department that takes these issues very seriously. We carry out energy monitoring and think about the transition to renewable energy sources

Given that one-quarter of respondents cited flooding as the major concern in their region, it is notable that only two people spoke on nature-based solutions to fend off flooding risk. Several others took a more conventional engineering approach, which has failed in many instances - dredging and straightening of rivers, for instance. None of the respondents spoke specifically on drought-resistant agriculture, instead more in vague terms such as “management of agricultural lands.” These two facts suggest an avenue for the EC to educate and thereby better prepare communities for the coming, negative changes associated with the climate crisis.

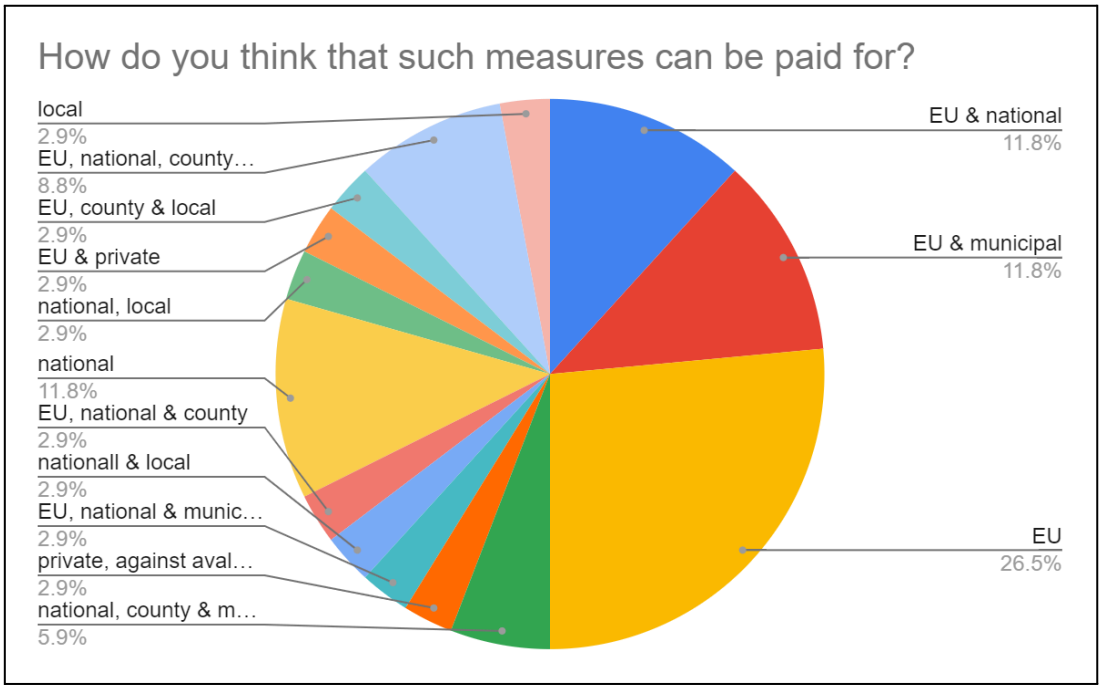
Potential funding of climate adaptation measures

The follow-up question asked respondents to assess how such measures can be funded. Two-thirds of respondents mentioned the EU (67.6%) mostly in combination with national as well as lower administrative levels, however, almost half this number (25.6% of total respondents) believe funding should only come from the EU. Some specific ideas were also floated: “from the money that comes from fines on car companies and other collections for failing to meet EU climate change targets”; “funds raised from CO2 emission fees should remain in the energy industry and be directed exclusively to renewable energy sources”; “exclusively from EU funds and with the right strategy of the state - regions, individual municipalities and individuals don’t have enough financial resources and suffer from a lack of knowledge”. Just one respondent, from SI, was more specific than the common “EU funds” response: “Climate Fund, EU Green Transition funds”.

Tallying responses from the three regional groupings is shown in Table 5 below. As a reminder, the small sample sizes is the prevailing condition, and results might well differ if n is larger. Note that the percentages do not sum to 100 as there are minority opinions not tallied. If the data is representative, then a reliance solely on EU sources is lowest in the Western Balkans.

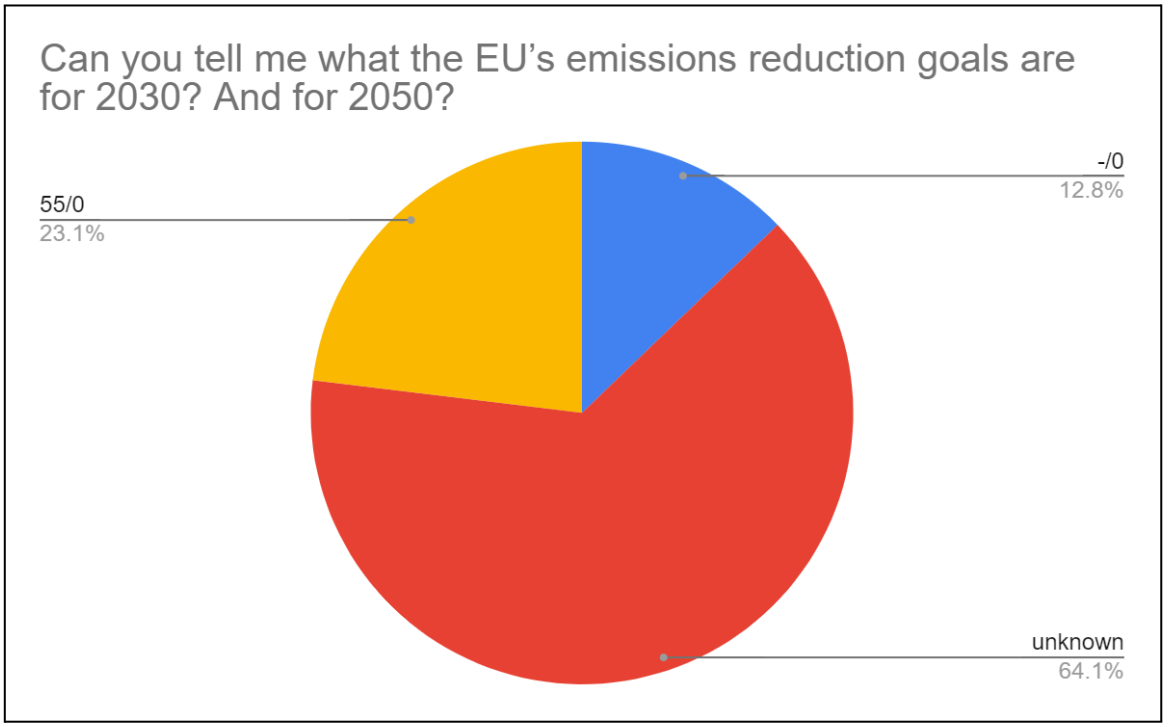
Table 5. Desired Funding Options Voiced by Respondents

	EU only	EU & national	EU, national, county & municipal	EU & municipal	National only	Municipal only
Baltic states %	22	11	0	44	11	11
Visegrad %	38	15	7	0	31	7
W. Balkans %	17	8	42	0	25	0



Understanding of the EU's emissions reduction goals

Question number 6 focused on the EU's emissions reduction goals for 2030 and 2050. Results are somewhat discouraging, as nearly two-thirds of respondents (64.1%) don't know what these are. Less than one-quarter (23.1%) were able to accurately pinpoint the targets, with the remainder being uncertain about the 2030 target.



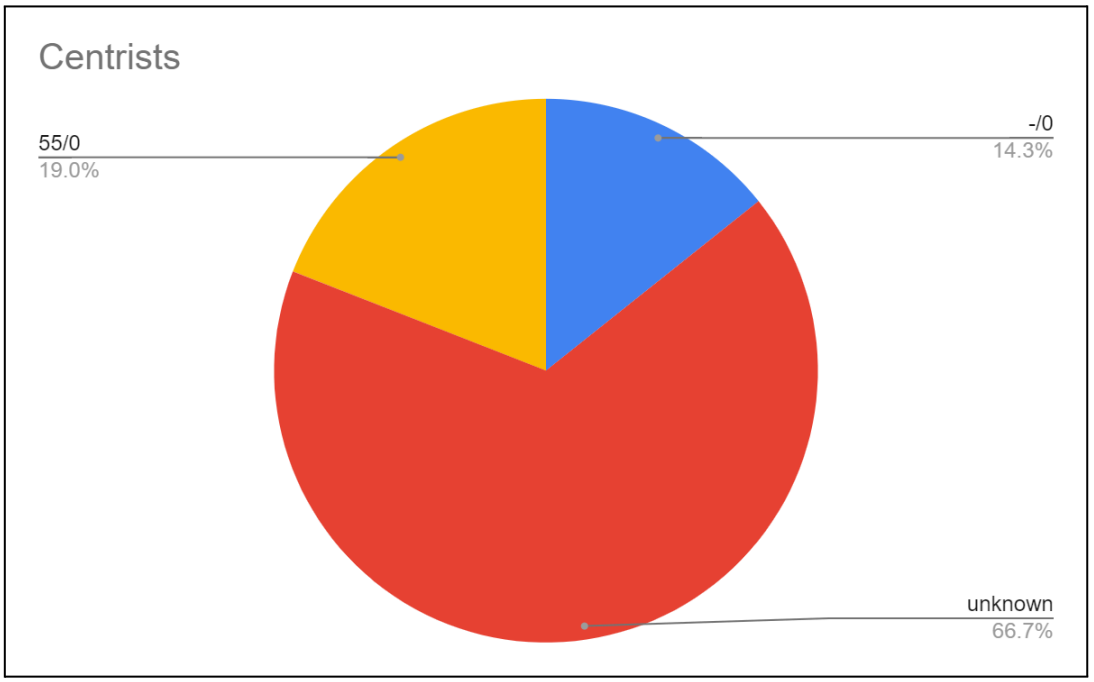
A few respondents had more to say on the matter, expanding on the metrics expected:

- Reducing EU greenhouse gas emissions by 55%, increasing energy efficiency in terms of reducing final energy consumption, accelerating the use of renewable energy, halting the loss of biodiversity and ecosystem services in the EU, managing waste efficiently, the EU proposes to develop global targets on the two most effective levers for the clean energy transition. By 2050, the EU wants to achieve climate neutrality. Objective is to reduce CO2 emissions.
- Reducing the EU will only reduce globally by 7%, if India and China do not do something about it
- Absurd and inconsistent ideas: Contradictory directions – one moment gas is good, the next it's not; emissions-producing engines are bad; battery disposal is a major problem; energy is dirty. The biggest drawback – eight wasted years (referring to the previous PL administration) with no construction of transmission networks.
- When we talk about "carbon neutrality," we refer to respecting the goals of both strategies—the one for 2030 as well as the long-term goal for 2050. The 2030 strategy sets intermediate targets for reducing greenhouse gas emissions, increasing the share of renewable energy, and improving energy efficiency. These steps are crucial for preparing to achieve the final goal of carbon neutrality by 2050. In addition, it is necessary to address the challenges these strategies bring for both the population and the economy. This means that, in implementing climate measures, we must consider social and economic aspects, including the transformation of industries, the creation of new jobs, workforce training, and supporting vulnerable groups who may be more affected by the transition. The success of these strategies will also depend on the ability to engage the population in the process and to adapt the economy to new conditions.
- I cannot give the figures specifically, but I know about CO2 monitoring in agriculture, specific types of tillage will have to be introduced. Also, emphasis is placed on agricultural machinery, which currently runs on diesel fuel.

Examining the responses by the 2-country groupings shows the following:

- In the Baltic states, none of the Estonian respondents, who represent inhabitants in a deprived and economically depressed region, know either of the targets, whereas in Latvia only one-third are familiar with the targets.
- The picture is no rosier in the Visegrad states: in Poland, 80% don't know either target and the remaining 20% know only the 2050 target, while in the Czech Republic (keeping in mind that there are only 4 respondents) half know both targets.
- In the Western Balkans grouping, fewer than half know both targets in Slovenia while in Croatia the ratio is reversed, with more than half knowing neither target.

There is little point in comparing this result to party affiliations, as there are too few representatives from non-Centrist parties in the sample. However, for the 21 respondents identified as belonging to Centrist parties, results do not differ from the general statement, as shown below.



Overall, the take-home message to the EU/EC is that considerable effort remains to be expended across the CEE to ensure that at the very least, local leaders understand the two emissions targets, else they cannot be expected to lead their constituents in meeting the goals.

Walking the tightrope between the Green Transition and energy security

Question 7 delves into respondents' opinion on the balance between Green Transition goals and the need for energy security. As asked, "Do you think that the EU is adequately balancing its climate goals with the need for energy security, not only across Europe but in our country in particular?" It is instructive to see what the respondents think, as many express skepticism for various rational reasons and several answers are both insightful and erudite. We divide respondents into the three groupings, from north to south - the Baltic States, Visegrad, and the Western Balkans.

Estonia	It seems that there are contradictions, broader and longer-term goals are clearly understandable, but short-term problems - energy security, availability and price are not. We are already acting and creating problems for the economy and the social sphere. A balance must be sought and found and one must not overdo it here or there.
Estonia	No, there is pressure to abandon fossil fuels but because of Germany's decision to close down their nuclear energy production and now the Russian war in Ukraine and avoiding Russian energy imports, there is a lack of energy security in Estonia especially.
Estonia	It's not about the EU and their guidelines - rather either fear to displease the EU or the incompetence of government workers. Here our local government is way too eager to follow any guidelines and goal to their maximum possible effect, regardless of the consequences.
Estonia	No, the energy security will worsen because of the climate goals - especially if we in Estonia follow all the dictates from the EU so eagerly.
Estonia	Of course not. The overriding concern is energy security and energy independence, at any cost. The climate-related problems that accompany energy security are being silenced.
Estonia	This issue is not well thought through. There is a lot of contradicting information about energy security measures and their consequences. More awareness raising is needed on all levels.
Latvia	It is difficult to determine how we will know that we have achieved these goals. Even in the municipality, it is difficult to collect data on the base year and refer to it. Regarding all areas, we have never calculated it at the municipal level, so whatever the EU's goals are, we do not know ours in all areas.
Latvia	I think not. Energy security is heard too little. It is the basis of our daily lives – electricity, heating.
Latvia	The objectives are tough and are difficult to achieve. The EU has already realised that the objectives will be difficult to achieve.
Latvia	Yes, there’s an emphasis on energy security at the moment. Life forces us into not considering how to become greener, but how to build a safer environment. Latvia's disconnection from the Russian power grid is currently a huge challenge.
Latvia	Yes!

Poland	There will always be resentment - half of the people who are protesting against the Green Deal don't even know what they are protesting against. Even though farmers are getting subsidies, they would scream, they just aren't aware of the consequences of future changes in the climate; maybe you need to extend the time and give more encouragement - you need to show that you have started the process.
Poland	All the time there is insufficient level of these activities, each country is at a different stage of climate neutrality, requires a lot of educational and informational work - especially in our country.
Poland	From the point of view of the essence - yes, these changes are desirable; in recent years, for industrial, economic and strategic purposes, the EU deals too much with ideology, not substance; Poland needs more funding due to the existing conflicts in the world.

Poland	The assumptions are right, the problem occurs when we agree not to use fossil fuels (coal) and then do nothing to become independent of coal, too little funds are allocated by the government for RES, by now we would have already dealt with this problem if more attention had been paid to it, and the funds would have been properly used, we would become energy independent, we lack infrastructure.
Poland	Difficult question, I do not want to judge the actions taken by the EU, do not think that individual countries are treated equally, being in the West I see how it is, Germany is moving away from nuclear power plants and I wonder from what sources they will obtain energy.
Poland	Not quite, Poland is not a country emitting a lot of CO2 into the air, but this should be verified, we are not an industrial country - the EU should adjust under each country its requirements.
Poland	I do not have such detailed knowledge so I would not like to comment.
Poland	Absolutely not - when it comes to our nuclear power plants, the EU has spoken out negatively that we can't build; you can see that each country has its own interests, not Europe as a whole.
Poland	General principles are very good, but Polish society and other nations fail to utilize them – as evidenced by the lack of infrastructure built in the past 20–30 years, which should already be in use today.
Poland	In Europe yes, and in Poland there are several years lost in terms of energy transition and this cost will be higher and the EU should take this into account to direct additional funds for this transition.
Czech Republic	No, I do not think so.
Czech Republic	When one of the largest car manufacturers is closing factories, something isn't right. It's not good to set goals that we might easily achieve but will be unreasonable.
Czech Republic	We should move toward nuclear power plants. This will ensure both security and the achievement of our goals. We should turn away from coal, as well as biomass and similar sources. Gas power plants should be banned. Locally, natural gas is acceptable because it is difficult to replace.
Czech Republic	It's far from ideal. Achieving the targets has become almost dogmatic, and there's no longer consideration of the real-life impacts, such as on businesses and the automotive industry. EU politicians should come back down to earth a bit. If the EU remains alone in this, it will lose its competitiveness.

Croatia	Yes.
Croatia	Yes, especially because of the unexpected situations in the last few years. For example, one of the ways is the adoption of the REPowerEU plan in order to reduce the EU's energy dependence on Russia. Croatia is also working on harmonizing climate goals with the need for energy security, mostly through investing in renewable energy sources and encouraging energy efficiency.
Croatia	I think so.
Croatia	I suppose so.

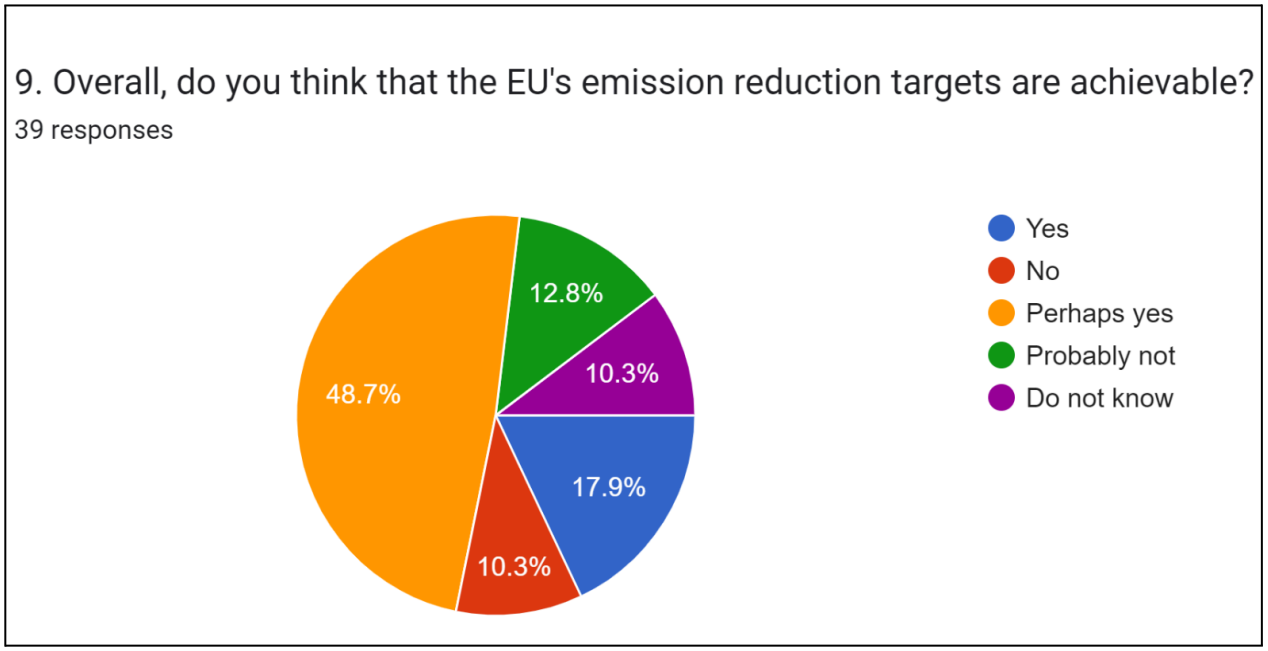
Croatia	I think yes.
Slovenia	No - measures should be adapted to the real needs of the population and the economy.
Slovenia	Yes, I think that the EU is balancing its climate goals with the need for energy security.
Slovenia	Energy security has been reduced by sanctions against energy suppliers. I believe that the EU could dedicate more funds to cofinance projects such as the efficient use of energy in public buildings and households, as well as the production of electricity from renewable sources.
Slovenia	I believe that, on the one hand, measures must be ambitious to protect the planet. On the other hand, they must be well thought out and made in steps so that people and the economy can adapt to them. Increasing the share of renewable energy sources requires massive investment in infrastructure and adaptation of the energy system, all of this also raises other issues, such as the sustainability of solar panels. In addition, it is important to ensure that the transition to cleaner energy sources does not increase energy dependence on imports of raw materials or technologies, which is an important factor in the current unstable geopolitical environment. In order to reconcile climate objectives with energy security, I believe that comprehensive planning is essential, which includes diversification of energy sources, gradual and deliberate (both in terms of economics, planning location, security, etc.) strengthening of domestic production of energy from renewable sources, and improvement of energy efficiency. The EU's approach needs to be more coordinated, which is a broader issue of the need to reform the functioning of the EU.
Slovenia	The EU's climate targets are ambitious, but their implementation sometimes isn't sufficiently coordinated with energy security, both in Europe and in Slovenia. A too rapid shift to renewable energy without adequate infrastructure support and energy storage could jeopardise the stability of our energy supply, especially during the transition period. In Slovenia, measures are needed to increase energy independence, such as the development of home renewable energy sources and improvements in energy efficiency. On the other hand, excessive reliance on imported energy, such as gas, increases the risk of energy dependence. However, it is crucial that the EU and Slovenia strike a balance between climate objectives and ensuring energy security, which requires a well thought out and gradual transition strategy.
Slovenia	This is an area that I am too unfamiliar with, so I can't make any concrete statements. However, a superficial observation of the issues shows me that these are often populist measures that are not well developed in practice. This leads to disagreements and changes in strategies.
Slovenia	Yes.

To logically follow on from the previous question focusing on energy security, Question 8 asks, "Do you think that renewable energy options can quickly enough replace fossil fuels in this country to meet both our commitment to climate goals and our energy security? Or do you think our country will have to backtrack from our commitment to the EU's 2030 and 2050 emissions goals? Interviewers were instructed that they may mention wind, solar, hydro, tidal, geothermal resources as a prompt if needed. The answers reflect, most likely, the prospect of RES being more robust in the sunnier Western Balkans, where 9/13 respondents answer "yes" as compared to the Baltic states, where 4/12 (all Estonians) answered "no" and where several remaining answers are more equivocal. In the Visegrad pair, all 4

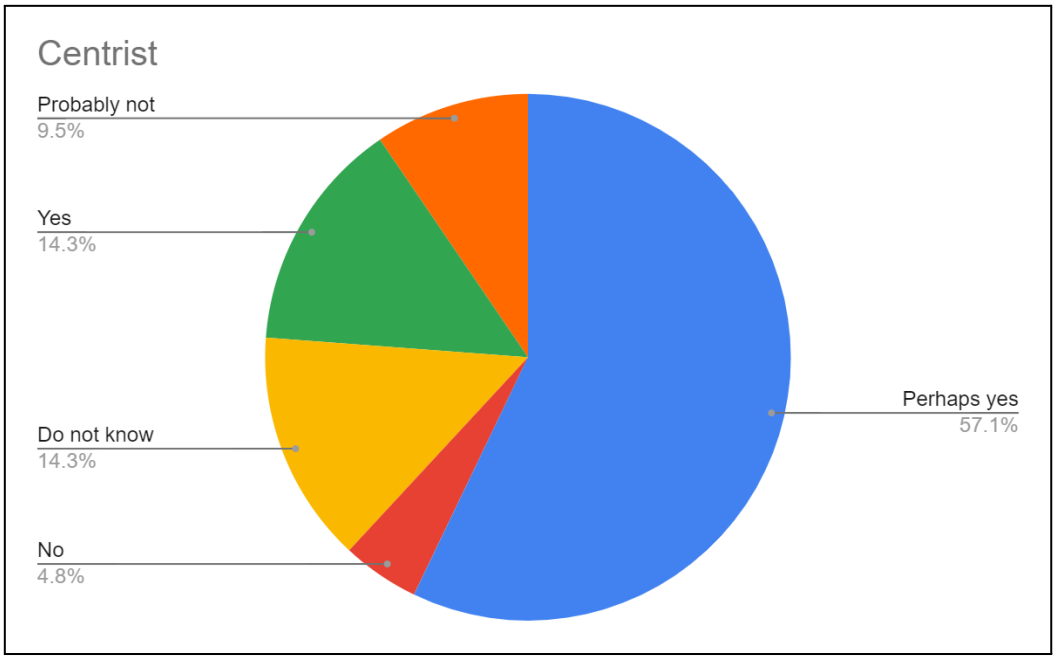
Czechs answered “no” while 6/10 of the Poles are optimistic. Three extended answers are perhaps relevant to quote:

- CZ: No, we'll have to backtrack, No, we'll have to bring more nuclear energy onto the grid to meet our commitments. (All 4 Czechs agree on the need to boost nuclear energy.)
- PL: 20250 is possible and 2030 is not; lack of knowledge by residents does not allow the change, added to which is a lack of funds in our budget; therefore these goals must be spread over a broader time horizon. It is possible to change old technologies to RES; we need to help people, Poles lack knowledge; they should listen to experts; we need to continue to support programs to take the burden off the household budget.
- PL: Yes, we can attain energy security, these fossil fuels will end someday, we must secure the future of the next generations; we must do everything even at the expense of road infrastructure and other areas to implement this - at least 50% of the funds that flow to Poland should be directed to renewable energy sources - green, independent and cheap.

Overall, asked Question 9, “do you think that the EU's emission reduction targets are achievable?” Pessimism prevails - only 18% of respondents gave a resounding “yes” to this.



As there are an insufficient number of respondents in non-Centrist parties, the chart below shows only the answer provided by the 21 Centrist respondents. It mirrors the finding across all respondents, in that the “perhaps yes” response dominates; the assuredly “yes” response (14.3%) is slightly lower than across all parties polled (17.9%), but is not statistically significant. However, the naysayers (the “no” response) is only 4.8% of respondents, compared to 10.3% for all respondents, perhaps indicating that pessimism is less anchored among centrists.



Emission reduction goals and regional impacts

Question 10 is intended to ascertain if respondents feared negative consequences in their regions due to a commitment to attain the EU's emissions reduction goals: "Are you concerned or in fact optimistic about how the EU's emission reduction targets might affect your region?" Responses are shown by the 2-country groupings, as previously. In the Baltic states group, Estonian politicians represent the county most affected by the impending closure of the oil shale industry, and therefore answers likely do not represent the country as a whole. However, as a hot-spot of the negative impact of job losses as a consequence of the closure of fossil fuel facilities, the responses are likely to be replicated across other such affected regions in the EU.

Estonia	Yes. For 10 years already, thousands of people are without work and have to go to work elsewhere or cannot find a job at all. Every family also has people who work in places that are connected to the ones that have to close down. The trade unions also say that we will do something else, but until now nothing else has come up, it will cause social-economic problems and in my region also national defense problems.
Estonia	Concerned, Estonia is trying to fulfill the targets as opposed to other countries like Latvia and Lithuania and thus other countries get competitive advantage.
Estonia	I am concerned, lot of energy related industries will be forced to suddenly close down and I don't believe it's achievable for the workers to be reeducated on time, I fear most of them will be unemployed. Also, the energy prices will be unstable and likely increase because of the emission reduction targets.
Estonia	I am concerned. The Just Transition fund has been a failure, they have made 30 jobs there, 60 there, not equal to the thousands lost or about to be lost. The fund allocated to our region €340 million, Viru Keemia Grupp itself generated €600 million in our region.[1] Ida-Virumaa was sold out for those 340 million euros

[1] This company is largest shale oil producer in Estonia and in the world, operating in the entire oil shale processing chain, from oil shale mining to the production of high-purity chemicals,

Estonia	Pessimistic, job losses and social problems. The only positive thing is that the air is cleaner.
Estonia	As a social worker I'm very concerned about people losing their jobs and how this will affect their families and children. Also a lot of families are leaving our region and moving to Tartu or Tallinn.
Latvia	There must be greater coordination at the regional and national level, then we can talk about achieving EU goals.
Latvia	In the context of the local government, I am optimistic, because financing is coming - housing stock, lighting, passive buildings. It is an opportunity.
Latvia	These goals are very disconnected from reality, so I'm not so optimistic. We've already done a lot in our county to move in the direction of sustainability. If only funding opportunities would be available for the implementation of these measures….
Latvia	The EU thinks of the people when it sets these goals. The municipality also thinks about the citizens, so such goals are important because they show direction.
Latvia	No, I am not worried.
Latvia	No, I am not worried.

Czech Republic	Concerned that we won't meet emissions targets. People won't have the money to pay for more expensive energy, like electricity for heating. The price of electricity is very high and people can't afford it. The distribution companies get the money. In a poor region, people burn all sorts of things instead of green fuels, even rubber.
Czech Republic	The competitiveness of companies is decreasing. Cost reduction in human resources is the first area targeted. This leads to rising unemployment, people leaving, and it becomes a downward spiral.
Czech Republic	The reduction in the competitiveness of companies will lead to fewer job opportunities. The more vulnerable the region, the sooner it will feel the impact.
Czech Republic	My perception is neutral. We are heavily focused on the automotive industry as well as agriculture. However, being at a higher altitude, there hasn’t been a decline in production. After the bark beetle calamity, forests are regrowing and will contribute to the region’s economy in the future.
Poland	Certain projects and incentives are necessary from the EU - and these measures, especially since there must be a continuation of certain climate and energy goals, projects.
Poland	Optimistic - from the perspective of managing the structure of local government, it increases the satisfaction of residents.
Poland	Optimistic; can influence the health sector positively.
Poland	Yes, if we take the right steps, if we don't take care of it ourselves then the Americans and the Chinese won't take care of it for us, we need measures to change it and improve it
Poland	Yes, but I remain worried…

Poland	Generally positive, because it is about the functioning and life of human beings; but the question of implementing it is problematic. I can't answer unequivocally, but issues with the introduction of energy, mobility should not be imposed so harshly
Poland	There is no single answer, this policy is positive, but I am concerned about the timing and when the EU wants to introduce the various steps towards transformation, Poland does not have time to introduce, it needs this period to be more flexible, Poland needs more time, the direction is correct.
Poland	Negatively - we can't handle these problems ourselves - india and China are developing too fast, but they don't take us into account.
Poland	Concerned.
Poland	Optimistic - we have no way out to change it, afraid of lobbying, keeping fingers crossed for tough policies and realizing the goal despite obstacles.

Croatia	Yes, but to a positive extent because I believe that the implementation of energy efficiency measures at the national and local level could help in reaching the set goals. The highest goals should be set in order to achieve the best/highest possible results.
Croatia	I am not sufficiently informed about this with valid data either, except in the agricultural sector where slow progress is visible.
Croatia	Somewhere in the middle, but I lean towards optimism. I am concerned about the potential increase in energy prices, which will affect the most vulnerable groups of citizens (citizens with low income, citizens in rural areas, the elderly, single-parent families, families with several children) and the potential loss of employment in the fossil fuel industries, specifically in the natural gas sector.
Croatia	I am certainly positive in this regard. Greater GHG reductions mean more investments in RES in our region. Citizens' interest is growing, so there is a potential in the future.
Croatia	I assume that the mentioned reduction will have a positive effect on our region: the development and application of new technologies, new jobs, however I am not sure if the local population can follow this progress.
Croatia	I expect positive changes in the region in terms of greater awareness of the importance of implementing climate change mitigation measures, greater investments in the use of renewable energy sources by citizens and entrepreneurs with the use of subsidies, etc.
Slovenia	No, we are not concerned.
Slovenia	No, I am not concerned.
Slovenia	I am not concerned.

Slovenia	I am partly optimistic, aware of the many challenges that the transition brings for our region and others. I am positive that ambitious climate targets encourage investment in sustainable infrastructure, create jobs and contribute to a healthy environment. On the other hand, concerns remain, particularly about economic sectors that are heavily dependent on energy. Transition requires investment and adaptation, and it is therefore crucial that EU policies are designed to allow regions to make a fair transition through support and funding. Transition must be an opportunity despite its complexity.
Slovenia	Yes, I am concerned that the actual installation of renewable energy installations would cause too much disturbance to nature and endanger precious above ground water resources.
Slovenia	My opinion is that we live in an area that is not so exposed to these changes. They are visible and can be felt, but in my opinion less than in some of the more exposed cities/towns/regions. However, the positive effects are expected from the reduction of emissions on the surrounding areas and the functioning of society as a result of that.
Slovenia	I am not concerned; the impact will be positive.

Outside the most negatively impacted regions where job losses are regarded as a certainty, the mood is more upbeat - Question 11 was asked of those respondents who did not mention “job loss” in their previous response, “Are you worried about changes in the regional job market that might occur due to the energy transition?” Answers by country are shown below.

Estonia	If the energy transition would work as envisioned - fossil fuel based jobs to be replaced with sustainable energy jobs - then all would be good. However, that is not the case now: fossil fuel industry jobs and being closed down with limited alternatives. Right now the "Õiglase ülemineku fond" is a joke, only around 10% of funds go to serious measures that actually do anything. This also affects job creation and the whole transition in a negative way.
Latvia	No, currently the unemployment rate in the Valmiera region is very low. Rather, we directly focus on creating new jobs, developing the industrial area.
Latvia	No. We've done our homework (switching off gas).
Latvia	No, I am not worried about that.
Latvia	I'm not worried. I see that there will be a need for new professions, specialists who will be able to work with renewable energy technologies.
Latvia	Labour migration is an inevitable problem and is taking place throughout Europe. I'd worry about this one.
Latvia	No.
Czech Republic	We have this concern. If the factories we have here (only the last 3 in the whole region anymore) close due to high energy prices and residents will leave if they don't have jobs. Many companies have already gone out of business. The region is at a significant economic disadvantage, people need more money to pay for expensive food but companies then make their products more expensive to pay people. The state should regulate the prices of at least staple foods. Employees want money so that they can afford basic necessities. No one here is making decent wages.

Czech Republic	I don’t see it that way. Other companies are striving to meet their CO2 targets, so they should be able to handle the energy transition.
Poland	No - it is a natural change that people get used to although at first they will have problems with it
Poland	It will definitely have an impact - other sectors of the economy will increase demand and competitiveness in terms of employment
Poland	No - more afraid of adjusting the labor market to declining demographics (even in Warsaw it doesn't look positive); in Plock a very big change
Poland	No - these measures can generate new jobs
Poland	Certainly it may have some impact, al. It is difficult to say in what direction it will go, certainly the labor market may be affected.
Poland	There will certainly be changes in the market - due to automation and may be problematic with the loss of jobs that work in energy and thermal units.
Poland	The energy transformation will not negatively affect the labor market in Mazovia, it will promote new jobs, develop innovation in the labor market - e.g. hydrogen.
Poland	It will get worse, companies will move out, energy prices will rise, we will produce less.
Poland	I’m not worried – the market will self-regulate.
Poland	I'm afraid, but because of the automation of the labor market, not the energy transition - these machines need energy, our market will slowly be automated, which will be directly a smaller and smaller labor market for people.
Croatia	No, because new green jobs are being created that are becoming more and more valued.
Croatia	I can't confirm with certainty, but I see opportunities for the creation of new jobs and opportunities for retraining for the existing workforce.
Croatia	I think that the energy transition will affect the creation of new jobs, which will require retraining of the existing workforce.
Croatia	I am not worried at all because I believe that the changes will have a positive effect on the labor market in our region, however, it will be necessary to develop new training or retraining programs for the existing workforce.
Croatia	I'm not so concerned, I think the transition will positively influence the regional job market.
Slovenia	We are particularly concerned about fossil fuel industries (such as the vehicle industry).
Slovenia	I am not concerned.
Slovenia	The energy transition has a clear impact on the economy and thus on the employment market. While, on the one hand, it creates new jobs, on the other hand, it also has the effect of eliminating some jobs. In order to mitigate these effects, it is crucial to implement programmes to retrain workers and to promote new economic activities in the affected areas. I see this as a key component of a fair green transition.
Slovenia	No. I think the nature of work could be reconstructed into another kind of work.

Slovenia	We have a number of large employers in the region that are in very energy-intensive industries. In an unpredictable energy market, this is clearly a major disadvantage for these companies, as it is difficult to plan processes systematically. The fear is of reduced investment in research and development, which in the medium and long term further increases non-competitiveness in the European area and, above all, in the global market.
Slovenia	No. Slovenia has at this moment a record low unemployment rate.

Question 12 asked: “Is there anything (else) about the EU’s emission reduction targets that might positively affect your region?” Responses are separated by the 2-country regional groupings. In the Baltic states, two-thirds of respondents (8/12) perceive no positive impact locally. The other two regions view matters much more positively, in general.

Estonia	We produce less emissions, so the positive thing is that people have started to think about different jobs and outside the box. Vigorously and fairly, we are transitioning and have brought a lot of finance to the region and people's thinking has also changed, which is positive.
Estonia	Yes, if we can get a more sustainable energy industry and plants that would in fact increase jobs and competences.
Estonia	Cleaner air and related effects, but this is a general global benefit, nothing comes to mind that could benefit my region concretely.
Estonia	No
Estonia	No
Estonia	Of course, improvement of the environment, better health of our population. Right now air pollution is a big issue in the region.
Latvia	No
Latvia	The main thing is the additional funding that we can potentially receive as a municipality. More money for entrepreneurs, residents, services, etc.
Latvia	No
Latvia	No
Latvia	No
Latvia	No

Czech Republic	No new sources of local air pollution are built.
Czech Republic	Grant opportunities for reducing the energy demands of buildings, subsidies for replacing stoves, boilers, and similar equipment.
Czech Republic	Support for reducing energy consumption and renewable energy sources (RES) for individuals and legal entities.

Czech Republic	We have projects for adapting to climate change that should be implemented and supported.
Poland	Education of children and young people about environmental protection
Poland	Yes - changes in other areas of local government functioning - health care.
Poland	Yes - health aspects.
Poland	Separate shady politics from governance at the local level - to actually put in real work for the people, not vote-buying.
Poland	Yes, but when it comes to specifics it's hard to say, because I'm not a professional and this question is for the people who deal with it, research and measurement, but I belong to the people who have knowledge in other areas.
Poland	We care about people, nature, scrap cars (dangerous and toxic cars) will be phased out.
Poland	If wisely planned - there is a chance for economic development, new companies involved in the construction of infrastructure for green energy, its service and maintenance, development of science (research network Łukasiewicza), undertaking research on unique smart biodegradable diesel saws, lubricants for wind turbines - salt resistant, biodegradable.
Poland	Awareness and spreading people's knowledge about environmental protection, which is important; energy-efficient equipment.
Poland	No – nature will manage on its own: We should cut down fewer forests and plant more – people would do it. Water and forests are key.

Croatia	Focusing on the potential of renewable energy sources such as geothermal energy and solar energy. It is necessary to know how to use the natural potential and adapt the development to it.
Croatia	Yes; increasing the share of renewable energy sources, reducing dependence on fossil fuels, achieving energy security.
Croatia	More investment in existing infrastructure, new jobs.
Croatia	No
Croatia	In general, there will be increased investments in all sectors from the construction sector, the economy and social protection.
Slovenia	Yes, if the EU would provide funds to extend the entire energy grid.
Slovenia	No
Slovenia	No
Slovenia	Strengthening renewable energy sources can bring greater energy autonomy for each region. In addition, investment in sustainable infrastructure can improve air, water and soil quality, with positive impacts on people's health and quality of life. There are opening opportunities up for innovation in green technologies and thus new economic opportunities. The latter can strengthen the region's competitiveness and stimulate business development

Slovenia	Cleaner air.
Slovenia	Cleaner air.
Slovenia	Yes – we need to embrace opportunities of Green Transition (and its financing)

Anticipated changes to energy prices

The next question targets energy prices, of concern to consumers across the EU: “How do you think the cost of energy is likely to change in your region due to the energy transition?” Slovenian respondents show as being the most well-informed, an indication of where the EU should perhaps add more resources across-the-board in order to increase the knowledge base among local decision-makers. In the other regions, opinions are mixed, indicating possible gaps in knowledge but also, as in the Estonian example, allegations of malfeasance that may or may not be grounded in fact.

Estonia	Ida-Virumaa is not a separate region, but the prices of heat energy in Estonia are increasing several times, because the energy sources are different.
Estonia	Increase, but this is connected to the fact that we do something wrong in Estonia. It does not make sense how electricity is cheaper in Scandinavia. I have heard in the news that Estonia is doing hazy business with selling and buying carbon emissions. However, I don't know exactly what is going on there and what is the truth, but I think Estonia is mismanaging the energy transition and management at large.
Estonia	I think it will likely increase, it has already sharply increased in Narva.
Estonia	They will go higher, no matter the input prices, in Estonia everything is more expensive compared to neighbouring countries, we are being ripped off.
Estonia	Has already gone up and will go up even more..
Estonia	There are a lot of fears among people related to the increase in the heating and electricity bills. It is important to note that salaries in our region are almost twice lower than in the rest of the country.
Latvia	Don't know
Latvia	Prices should drop if we switch to RES.
Latvia	The tariff could remain higher due to the construction of infrastructure (solar/wind parks etc.).
Latvia	It could increase due to the cost of technology.
Latvia	Costs should decrease. That should be the aim.
Latvia	Costs will increase.

Czech Republic	Energy prices - especially the distribution component - are rising very rapidly. People cannot afford to switch to heat pumps when they do not even have the salary to provide for their basic needs.

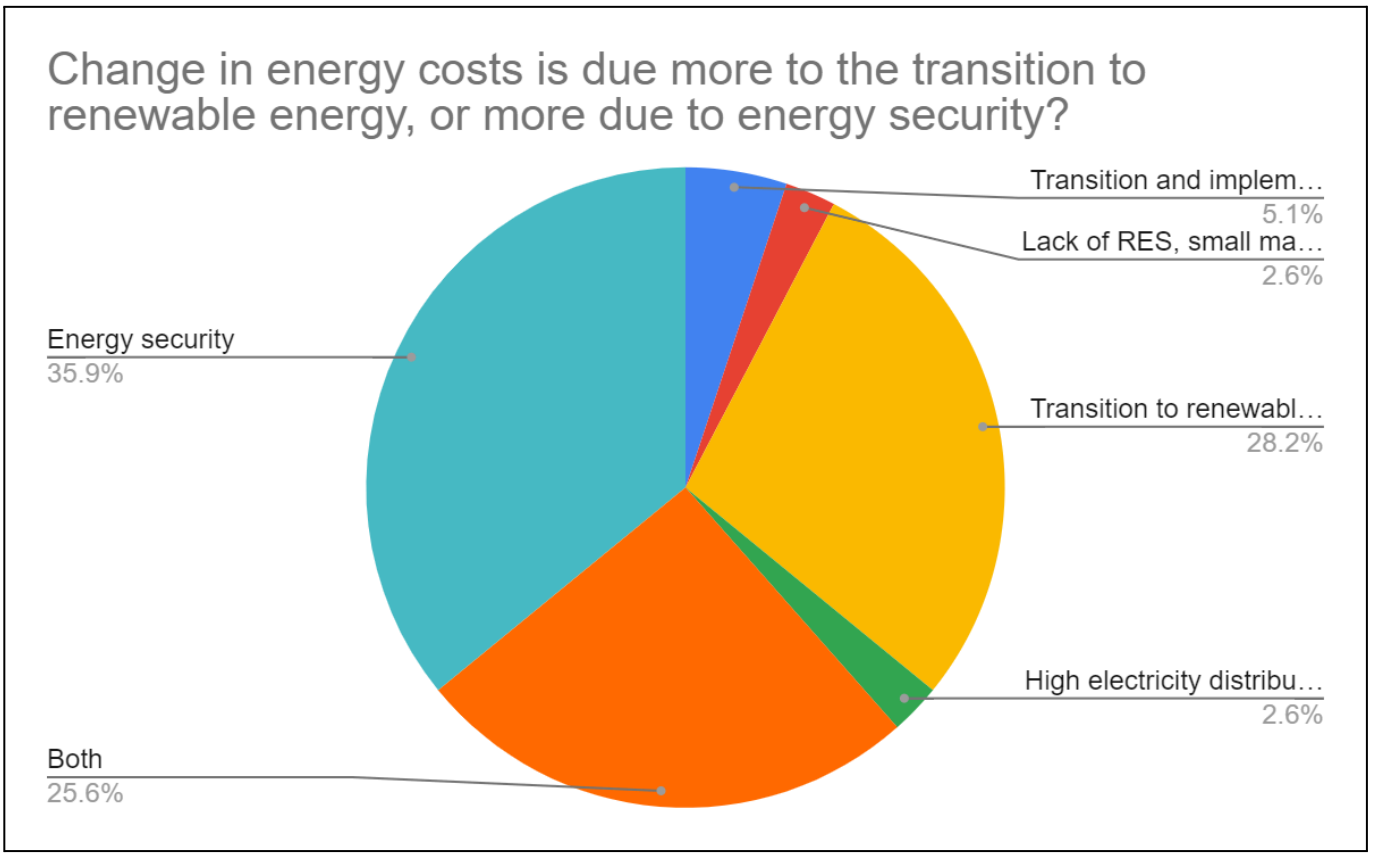
Czech Republic	The price of energy could decrease slightly. We purchase prices for thermal management gradually, and we can observe fluctuations linked to conflicts, storage availability, and similar factors. The price always spikes suddenly. However, costs will continue to increase in the long term.
Czech Republic	Energy prices will be higher due to state-regulated fees.
Czech Republic	We will be able to reduce our own energy costs (wind turbines, photovoltaic systems), but distribution prices will rise. However, overall energy costs could be lower. We also have cogeneration.
Poland	Could be cheaper, but only if we have renewable energy such as wind or biogas plants, we can produce electricity from something that was waste, so this electricity should be cheaper, also CO2 tax would be cheaper automatically.
Poland	In the long term - more cost-effective and optimal and for residents and local government, but the adaptation brings costs
Poland	Yes - if it is well carried out at the legal and parliamentary level, to allow selling energy to the grid, then even an ordinary bread eater can have cheaper energy; however, if the Eurosceptics take the reins in the future, I foresee a negative scenario.
Poland	I'm convinced that costs will grow, because not enough has been done to move away from coal burning at an appropriate pace and switch to RES - not much has been done, for example, Ostrołęka power plant
Poland	I cannot predict, I suppose that it will be more expensive, because the demand is growing.
Poland	I am unable to answer.
Poland	For now it does not change because prices in Poland are frozen, in connection with energy transformation it will decrease, because the market will develop.
Poland	Prices will rise.
Poland	Prices will increase.
Poland	Directly proportional to the amount of renewable energy sources, the beginning will be expensive, we need to invest to benefit from it later - if we are the generation that will invest in green technologies, it will pay the most, but it will translate into lower costs for future generations.

Croatia	Energy prices will be higher for those who won't use systems based on renewable sources, while for those who use them the prices will be the same, if not lower.
Croatia	The energy prices will increase.
Croatia	Due to investments in infrastructure, it is possible that energy prices will rise. I believe that a long-term increase in the share of renewable energy sources and energy efficiency can stabilize energy prices and, consequently, reduce bills for households and industry.
Croatia	I suspect that prices will fall, but more vulnerable groups in society will have trouble meeting basic needs.
Croatia	I'm not sure, fossil fuel prices will probably rise while the price of renewable energy will fall.

Croatia	I think that there will be minor changes in the existing prices, with the fact that the price of energy from RES could be lower, and that from fossils could be increased.
Slovenia	In the future energy will be more expensive.
Slovenia	Because the energy transition energy costs will increase.
Slovenia	I think that energy cost will increase.
Slovenia	In the initial stages, investments in renewables, upgrading infrastructure and adapting the energy system have costs for people, the economy and local communities. At the same time, the future economics of energy is uncertain, due to a number of factors, but on the other hand, independence is also important. The implementation of smart grids and advanced technologies for different energy purposes can allow better optimisation of energy use in the future, which can help in reducing costs. Despite all the challenges in the long term, the energy transition is an opportunity to ensure affordable, reliable and sustainable energy supply.
Slovenia	Energy costs in our region are likely to increase at the start of the energy transition due to investments in renewable energy sources and modernization in infrastructure. However, they will decrease in the long term as a higher share of energy will come from sustainable sources, which will help to increase price stability and reduce dependence on fossil fuel imports. Energy efficiency will also contribute to lower costs for end-users.
Slovenia	This is the question that I don't know the answer to and I think that is also a very speculative question.
Slovenia	Energy supply costs are probably going to increase over time, but this is regionally independent (but is not necessarily that this will apply for all energy products).

Across Europe energy costs spiked following the Russian invasion of Ukraine and the outfalls of this. Question 14 asked, "Do you think the change in energy costs is more due to the transition to renewable energy, or more due to energy security such as ending energy supplies from Russia? Or is something else driving this change?" More than one-third (35.9%) of respondents attributed the rise to energy security, while 28% cited the transition to renewable energy resources as the main driver - notably, however, this does not always mean an increase in energy costs, as one respondent in LV pointed out that their municipality switched to domestically supplied wood chip-fired district heating from imported Russian gas. Just over one-quarter (25.6%) of interviewees felt that both factors play an approximately equal role. A few others had something else to say about energy costs:

EE: A lack of renewable energy sources, a small market, and dependence on supports
CZ: High electricity distribution charges
SI and PL: Transition and implementation policies are incompatible



Energy poverty

The next set of three questions focus on energy poverty. Responses are divided into the three 2-country regions. In the Baltic states, respondents understandably emphasised job losses in the shale-oil dependent region in which the project operates in EE, and in LV the visual and auditory impacts on the landscape of RES development. In the Visegrad area, respondents emphasized vulnerable households in CZ while in PL the focus was on farmers and their ability to cause problems by striking, mixed with rosier views that the region would emerge very well from the transition. In the Western Balkans, the generally accepted categorisation of groups vulnerable to energy poverty and/or endure poverty of flexibility holds in HR, with several respondents recognising the role of the local energy agency (a partner in the DIGIT project), the Institute of Social Work, and State authorities as striving to alleviate negative consequences of the just transition. In SI, the emphasis is again on jobs, followed by the perceived negative consequences (disturbances through flicker, night lights, vibrations, sound) of wind farms.

Country	15. Do you think that there are any groups of citizens in your region who will be especially negatively affected by the energy transition? (Explain if "YES")	16. IF ANY ANSWER EXCEPT "NO/NONE" IN Q15: Can you tell me, what are their concerns? And their hopes?	17. IF ANY CONCERNS IN Q16 HAVE BEEN MENTIONED: How have these concerns been voiced in your region? Who (or what organisation) has taken the lead in speaking out on behalf of this/these group/s?
Estonia	The entire oil shale sector	That they will lose their job and will not find a new one.	The oil shale sector - one group is businessmen - a very large part is in private hands, so they speak very loudly to protect their workers and discard environmental issues. There are many threats that the workers will lose everything. Trade unions - they are serious players
Estonia	No		
Estonia	Retired people, unemployed people - as they are economically most vulnerable and I think energy prices will increase.	Increase of daily expenses, via energy prices. I can't tell their hopes, I guess decreased energy prices.	Not really, people here just stay quiet and suffer.
Estonia	People working in the oil-shale and chemistry industries.	Concern that they will lose their jobs. No hope, only that this transition pushing will be stopped.	In France cars would already be burning, but here our people are not keen to protest. Oil shale and chemistry industry unions are trying to protect the field, but in Estonia unions are weak and even strike laws are really not allowing for impactful strikes.
Estonia	Singles, retirees and families with children	The men, who were miners were laid off and the family lost their income.Their families have to go to Russia because the men can't get a job.	It is difficult to voice it because all of it is done in Estonian and it is problematic for the locals (even finding a translator is difficult). In the past, there were more organizations and more civil society.

Country	15. Do you think that there are any groups of citizens in your region who will be especially negatively affected by the energy transition? (Explain if "YES")	16. IF ANY ANSWER EXCEPT "NO/NONE" IN Q15: Can you tell me, what are their concerns? And their hopes?	17. IF ANY CONCERNS IN Q16 HAVE BEEN MENTIONED: How have these concerns been voiced in your region? Who (or what organisation) has taken the lead in speaking out on behalf of this/these group/s?
Estonia	Factory workers who will be left without jobs.	Yes, there are lots of fears that people are actively voicing on local levels. If transition goes the wrong way, people will be left without the jobs and without heating and electricity in their homes. People are very sceptical of new technologies. There is an expectation of increased financial support from the government to cover the cost of transition. Even energy experts in the region are afraid the plans can fail.	It has been discussed on a government level, as well as the local one, as politicians are concerned with people losing jobs, as a result of transition. A lot depends on how exactly the information is given to us, in which form it is provided.
Latvia	Residents who live near the places where the state plans to cut down the forest and place wind generators. Although state support is planned for those who live closest to these places, other residents are also resisting.	The landscape will change, forests will be cut down and the attractiveness of the place will change by cutting down forests and placing wind generators.	It is the municipality that meets with residents and listens to their concerns. The decision is made at the national level, because the chosen territory is state forest territory, so we as a municipality have little say. The only thing we can influence is some decisions at the time of planning.
Latvia	Residents and the private gas company. Residents are worried about the construction of wind farms. On the other hand, the gas company in the county naturally loses customers if the	Gas traders – income reduction. Residents: Wind parks - nature protection. Solar panels - environmental aesthetics.	The municipality takes care of public consultations.

Country	15. Do you think that there are any groups of citizens in your region who will be especially negatively affected by the energy transition? (Explain if "YES")	16. IF ANY ANSWER EXCEPT "NO/NONE" IN Q15: Can you tell me, what are their concerns? And their hopes?	17. IF ANY CONCERNS IN Q16 HAVE BEEN MENTIONED: How have these concerns been voiced in your region? Who (or what organisation) has taken the lead in speaking out on behalf of this/these group/s?
	municipality abandons gas heating and switches to wood chip boiler houses.		
Latvia	Farmers are negative about the placement of wind generators on agricultural lands. Also, residents who live close to the places where solar and wind farms would be built.	Farmers draw attention to the vibrations that can be found from the operation of wind generators. Vibrations can scare away earthworms, which is important for the earth to be friable and fertile. Residents were more worried that the meadows were meant to grow grain and create bread than wind or solar parks. Wind turbine lights are also cited as potential concerns.	There are three members of the municipality who are farmers, so we also highlight various concerns.
Latvia	Most of the citizens in our region.	Residents will be worried about the increase in heating and energy costs. As well, new technologies scare them.	The municipality is an advocate.
Latvia	Most of the citizens in our region.	The landscape is changing. We had a situation recently where an entrepreneur placed a solar panel in his meadow in a scenic place. Of course, the neighbors who were used to looking at the meadow from their	Municipality is the main middle organization in these negotiations with citizens.

Country	15. Do you think that there are any groups of citizens in your region who will be especially negatively affected by the energy transition? (Explain if "YES")	16. IF ANY ANSWER EXCEPT "NO/NONE" IN Q15: Can you tell me, what are their concerns? And their hopes?	17. IF ANY CONCERNS IN Q16 HAVE BEEN MENTIONED: How have these concerns been voiced in your region? Who (or what organisation) has taken the lead in speaking out on behalf of this/these group/s?
		terrace were not happy about this.	
Latvia	No		

Czech Republic	Seniors, single mothers with children, or generally families where only one member has a job.	High costs of energy, housing, food. lack of access to health care.	I am not aware of such an organization in our region.
Czech Republic	No		
Czech Republic	Socially vulnerable groups, including seniors, are not at risk due to government compensation for energy prices.		
Czech Republic	Seniors, single parents, and the socially disadvantaged suffered greatly during the energy crisis. They are at risk, though the state provided partial assistance.	At public discussions about heat prices in our district heating system, people still hope for a reduction in prices from our heating plant. However, it is not possible to promise future price reductions. At the same time, those dependent on natural gas suppliers don't have much choice either.	Currently, there is no one to represent them, but they can express their opinions publicly. Over time, they could be represented by an energy community, which we are planning to establish.
Poland	Farmers, residents of surrounding developments (waste incinerators, windmills)	Farmers - because there is a ban on making specific things, pesticides, etc., or residents of surrounding buildings (waste	Niezależny Samorządny Związek Zawodowy Rolników Indywidualnych „Solidarność" (Sławomir Izdebski) - supporting farmers

Country	15. Do you think that there are any groups of citizens in your region who will be especially negatively affected by the energy transition? (Explain if "YES")	16. IF ANY ANSWER EXCEPT "NO/NONE" IN Q15: Can you tell me, what are their concerns? And their hopes?	17. IF ANY CONCERNS IN Q16 HAVE BEEN MENTIONED: How have these concerns been voiced in your region? Who (or what organisation) has taken the lead in speaking out on behalf of this/these group/s?
		incinerator), residents (windmills) - cancer, pollution, influencing them through propaganda	
Poland	Residents of small towns dependent on fossil fuels, elderly people who are unable to accept and logistically deal with this problem	Concerns: financial, change in daily functioning; increasing the comfort of life	There is no such person or organisation
Poland	No		
Poland	Every resident and business will be affected by increased energy costs	High energy costs	Energy unions, which bring together the presidents of energy companies or the entire industry; unfortunately they are dependent on politicians and do not necessarily do something for the benefit of those most affected.
Poland	People whose material status is the lowest, or pensioners or large families	Energy prices will increase disproportionately compared to bonuses or salaries	no
Poland	Coal companies, service companies that rely on fuel-powered services	Concerns - they don't have jobs, worry whether they will function or not; hope - whether they will find a solution to these situations, will not close companies	no
Poland	There will be no such groups in Mazovia, because we do not have		

Country	15. Do you think that there are any groups of citizens in your region who will be especially negatively affected by the energy transition? (Explain if "YES")	16. IF ANY ANSWER EXCEPT "NO/NONE" IN Q15: Can you tell me, what are their concerns? And their hopes?	17. IF ANY CONCERNS IN Q16 HAVE BEEN MENTIONED: How have these concerns been voiced in your region? Who (or what organisation) has taken the lead in speaking out on behalf of this/these group/s?
	coal and oil deposits in the area, and those power plants that are operating and are powered by coal - by slowly reducing this sector - this process will not be fast and this transformation will make employment opportunities will certainly appear. No one will suffer in Mazovia		
Poland	Businesses, farms	High energy costs, quality of life deteriorates; more expensive food driving residents into poverty; building awareness and responsibility, advanced education	Farmers go on strike - they organize themselves
Poland	The issue is that entities are trying to obtain permits to generate power but cannot do so due to the lack of transmission lines.	Lack of infrastructure, lack of legislation, rising energy prices: Companies are unable to carry out their investments or utilize new green technologies. Hope lies in reasonable people in the energy sector.	No: Perhaps sometimes online, but the internet does not accurately reflect their voices.
Poland	Don't know		

Croatia	People struggling with energy poverty, minorities, households with single parents, households with more children, recipients	Given that the mentioned groups spend their income to cover basic conditions, they are not able to invest in	They exist in our regional environment, while some smaller interventions are made by our local governments, at the

Country	15. Do you think that there are any groups of citizens in your region who will be especially negatively affected by the energy transition? (Explain if "YES")	16. IF ANY ANSWER EXCEPT "NO/NONE" IN Q15: Can you tell me, what are their concerns? And their hopes?	17. IF ANY CONCERNS IN Q16 HAVE BEEN MENTIONED: How have these concerns been voiced in your region? Who (or what organisation) has taken the lead in speaking out on behalf of this/these group/s?
	of social benefits, etc. They will not be able to afford high energy prices, they will suffer the negative consequences of social exclusion.	new energy efficiency technologies, thus automatically falling behind other citizen groups.	national level they should be enabled to improve their conditions in the community. The problem is emphasized by our regional energy agency in close cooperation with the Institute for Social Work.
Croatia	Most of the citizens in our region.	The degree of concern is high primarily due to the increase in utility costs and thus other costs.	As far as I know, nobody.
Croatia	Low-income households, households in rural areas, elderly people, single-parent families, families with several children.	I would say that the level of concern is currently at a medium level. Such groups of citizens hope for equality in a just transition, available financial support from the national or regional level, affordable energy prices and, ultimately, long-term stability that will result in a better quality of life.	Our regional energy agency deals with topics related to energy poverty and the just transition, while the Croatian Institute for Social Work mainly deals with and cares for socially vulnerable citizens.
Croatia	Certainly minorities, welfare recipients, retirees, single-parent families, etc.	With the increase in prices they fear for their survival, but they still believe that the state will react to mitigate the negative consequences for them. Certain types of measures are already being implemented at the national level, and I believe that this will continue in the future.	Mainly our regional energy agency who is closely working with the Institute for Social Work.

Country	15. Do you think that there are any groups of citizens in your region who will be especially negatively affected by the energy transition? (Explain if "YES")	16. IF ANY ANSWER EXCEPT "NO/NONE" IN Q15: Can you tell me, what are their concerns? And their hopes?	17. IF ANY CONCERNS IN Q16 HAVE BEEN MENTIONED: How have these concerns been voiced in your region? Who (or what organisation) has taken the lead in speaking out on behalf of this/these group/s?
Croatia	Minorities, immigrants from third countries, pensioners, etc.	They hope that the state will continue to support them through subsidies and aid measures, because without them even the current prices would be unattainable for them.	Institute for Social Work.
Croatia	Predominantly minorities and social welfare recipients.	They are most concerned about their livelihoods, as rising prices for energy, food and other necessities threaten to prevent them from being able to secure funds for at least the basic necessities of life. National-level relief measures are something they continue to hope for.	There is no organization in charge of this at the regional level because this is a problem that requires an interdisciplinary approach.
Slovenia	No		
Slovenia	It will have a negative effect, especially because energy cost will increase	Concerns are about increasing of energy prices	There has been no one who would speak in the name of these groups.
Slovenia	Pensioners on minimum pensions and those on low incomes in general. It will also affect those groups located in areas where wind power is planned to be located.	Their fears could be how to survive with minimal income and high costs. As for wind farms, citizens living near the proposed wind plant sites are right to be concerned about their health.	The Municipal Council has taken the lead in terms of transparency in the management of the procedures. Citizens' Initiative is working to prevent the siting of wind farms.
Slovenia	The Podravie region is not so exposed as the	There is definitely an uncertainty about the	I don't know.

Country	15. Do you think that there are any groups of citizens in your region who will be especially negatively affected by the energy transition? (Explain if "YES")	16. IF ANY ANSWER EXCEPT "NO/NONE" IN Q15: Can you tell me, what are their concerns? And their hopes?	17. IF ANY CONCERNS IN Q16 HAVE BEEN MENTIONED: How have these concerns been voiced in your region? Who (or what organisation) has taken the lead in speaking out on behalf of this/these group/s?
	Šaleška valley because of the coal mine and the thermal power plant. Talum (company in Podravje), which used to be heavily dependent on energy, has already adjusted its operations and switched its production. I therefore think that the pressure on the economy of the Podravje region is moderate and similar to many other regions where other factors of the global/European/Slovenia n market are influencing the transition. Certainly, lower income households are more exposed, feeling the financial strain of the cost of energy products and the pressure on domestic investment in energy efficient devices.	future of the economy. Investing in development is a great opportunity in the long term, but the problem for people is the time in between that's required to restructure the economy. People are also concerned about the future of energy prices, the capacity for renewables (financial or infrastructure constraints). The expectations, in my opinion, are mainly for sensible decisions from the EU, the State to the local community on the measures and adaptations.	
Slovenia	Installation of wind turbines near homes	They are very concerned about the sound and vibrations generated by wind turbines, as the distance between the wind turbines and the houses would be too small.	The answers were explained by the investor and the responsible bodies. The group of people was also protected by the Civil Initiative for a Wind Farm-Free Pohorje. The municipality has been committed to protect these groups of people and help them with their problems and concerns.

Country	15. Do you think that there are any groups of citizens in your region who will be especially negatively affected by the energy transition? (Explain if "YES")	16. IF ANY ANSWER EXCEPT "NO/NONE" IN Q15: Can you tell me, what are their concerns? And their hopes?	17. IF ANY CONCERNS IN Q16 HAVE BEEN MENTIONED: How have these concerns been voiced in your region? Who (or what organisation) has taken the lead in speaking out on behalf of this/these group/s?
Slovenia	People working in labour-intensive industries.	Companies will become uncompetitive and as a result people will have lower salaries or lose their jobs.	
Slovenia	It's not linked to specific regions		

For those respondents who identified specific groups of citizens and their concerns over the energy transition, Question 18 asked if respondents have a plan to address these. There is no discernible pattern to responses to be ascertained across the three 2-country regions, but there are some respondents with concrete ideas. Regional energy agencies can, perhaps should, be tasked by the EC to be the local Centres of Excellence for transmitting implementable ideas across the EU that are derived from acknowledged best practices.

Estonia	New jobs must be found and an environment for entrepreneurship must be created in which people can take part.
Estonia	No.
Estonia	There is just reeducation, but I think it's not enough and in the future people will start leaving Ida-Virumaa.
Estonia	There is no plan related to this issue.
Estonia	A complex comprehensive approach is needed, as the transition is closely related to the social sector affecting people's jobs and families. All of it needs to be considered.
Latvia	At the moment we can only listen to the residents. Such national decisions should be discussed at the level of the entire region. Sea or agricultural land would be more suitable for placing wind generators than forest.
Latvia	Informing citizens and involving them in public consultations.
Latvia	Negotiation at national level, as well as lobbying at EU level through various farmers' associations.
Latvia	Negotiations with the citizens.

Latvia	At the moment, we want to develop guidelines in the municipality, which will include recommendations on where to build solar panels, which places are better not to choose. This will be more like recommendations.
Latvia	No.

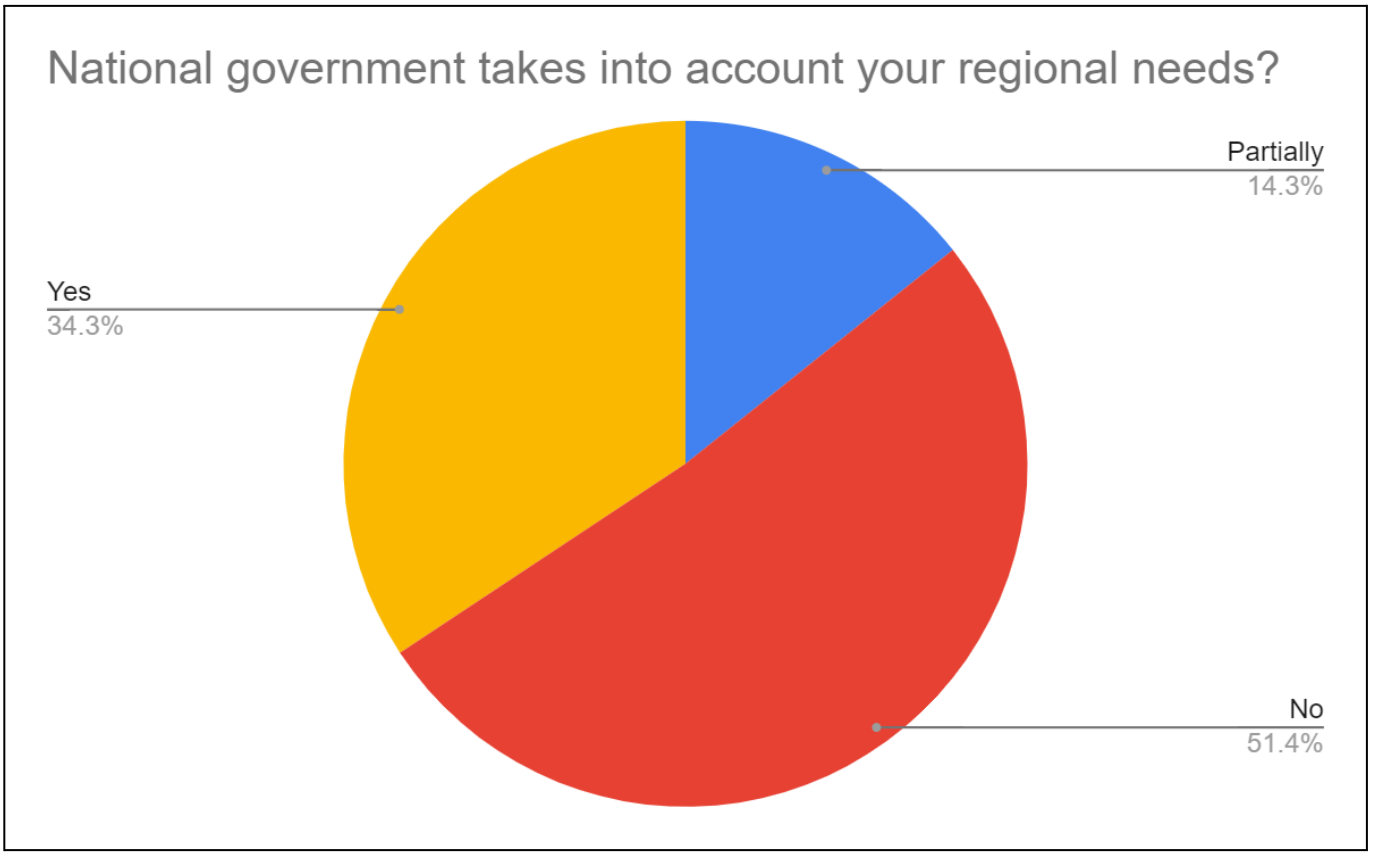
Czech Republic	Affordable health care, physician retention - we subsidize the health center in energy, minimum rents, subsidize a home for the elderly. We're already accommodating them in rent prices. Placing vulnerable groups in council flats where rents are low, insulating them so they have lower energy costs, building solar power plants on these buildings.
Poland	Education
Poland	From the perspective of a local government politician associated with a large urban center - one has no influence on these groups of people, but local government officials can offer an educational forum as people who will carry out the process from start to finish
Poland	In Siedlce - connecting the settlement of energy houses to the grid, to increase the number of RES in the entire network, to increase the capacity of individual infrastructure units, to install biogas plants or a waste incineration plant, to make the city independent of fossil fuels and stop paying CO2 tax.
Poland	Protection programs
Poland	As a politician, no, and I have no factual knowledge
Poland	Stop this madness, we have used fossil fuels and others are using them, calmly implement the change slowly, and not so abruptly, implement education, I see nuclear power plants as a solution
Poland	Proper legislation and appropriate decisions at the governmental level are required.

Croatia	Through the implementation of various measures and social assistance programs aimed directly at these social groups.
Croatia	I don't have any.
Croatia	I am extremely socially aware and in my work I am already focused on all social groups, especially vulnerable ones.
Croatia	Through additional subsidies to citizens, however, this certainly depends on the budgets of municipalities and cities, which are relatively small for some larger interventions.
Croatia	It is necessary to emphasize the importance of including stakeholders from all sectors in discussions related to climate and energy goals.
Slovenia	The solution is that the state undertakes the entire cost of increasing the energy supply.

Slovenia	Before any placement of wind farms, it is necessary to first communicate with the affected local residents and take their opinion into account.
Slovenia	Coordination of different stakeholders, smart action at different levels, support for people and the economy, communication, ...
Slovenia	Defending the position that a wind turbine standing too close to houses should not be placed. Similarly, wind turbines should not be placed in areas where the development would pose too high of a risk to surface water resources.

Inclusiveness within national legislative and regulatory actions

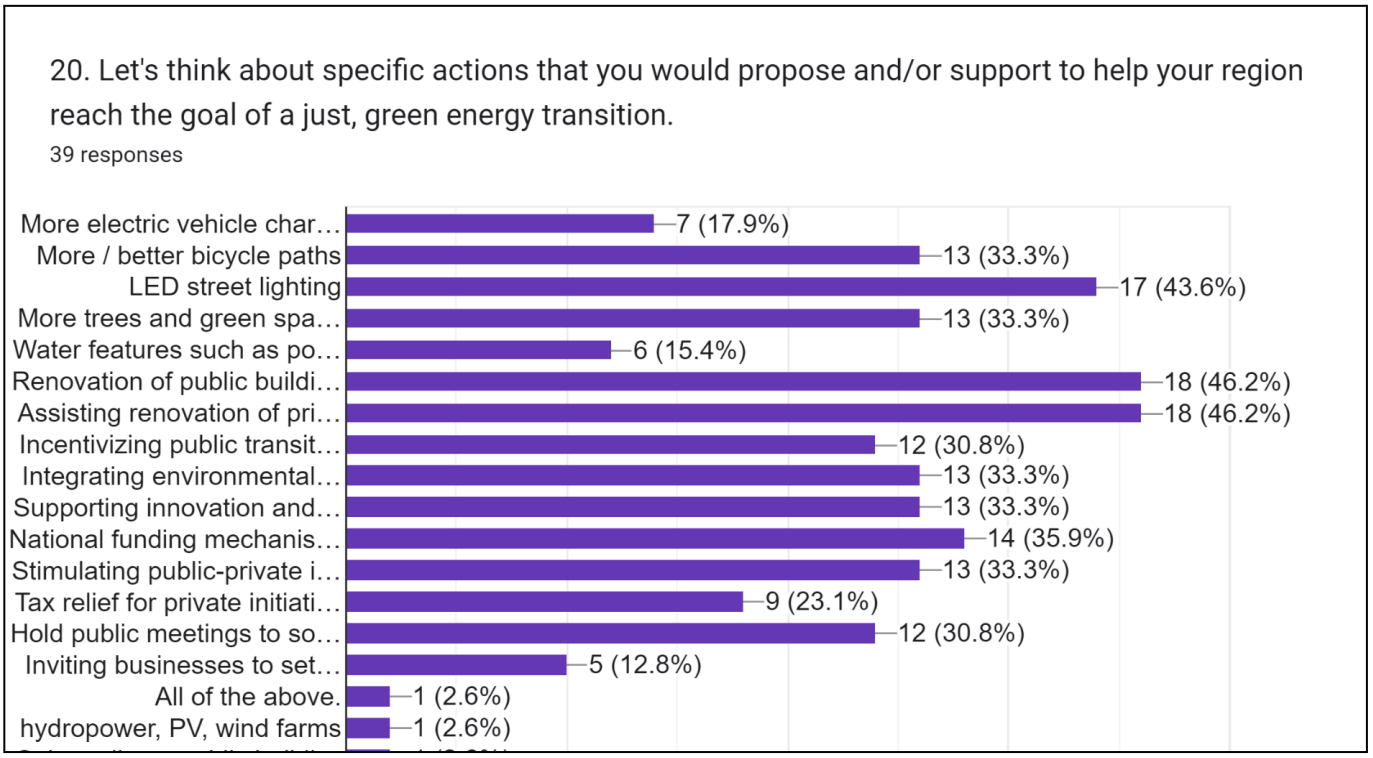
Question 19 targets respondents' perception of inclusiveness: "Do you feel that your region's needs are recognized and taken into account when the national government discusses and sets targets for the energy transition?" Over half of the respondents stated "No," but this has to be understood that several noted that their region is in no way special, that the national government responds to all regions' needs.



Sample responses that expanded on a simple yes/no binary are included below:
EE: Partially. I think that is still being thought through. At least the last few governments have done this, and there is more understanding that the well-being and livelihood of people in the border areas is important. In the last coalition agreements, Ida-Virumaa had a chairman representing us.
EE: Yes, as the government does organize some meetings with people and relevant stakeholders, but it could be done much more. However, the question is how to make sure local people and stakeholders are actually participating in those meetings. I would give 5-6 points out of 10 on our needs being taken into account.

LV: No, because the central power is disconnected from the municipalities. The government has an interest only once every four years when elections are held. The rest of the time it lives in its own bubble.
LV: Yes. We are already working politically with the government and ministries. We group with municipalities to address issues.
CZ: From the perspective of climate change, no one communicates with us. Studies are created, funded from Prague, but otherwise, there is little interest in our region.
CZ: Yes, there are support programs for energy communities and other programs aimed at reducing consumption or developing renewable energy sources (RES).
PL: Yes, first of all, knowing that small and large farms are particularly numerous - this transformation will hit Mazovia; but now they do not really care about Mazovia in particular, each region is taken into account equally, and it would require an individual approach.
PL: No. The government is more concerned with the most coal-based regions in Poland, Mazovia Region is not considered separately from the other regions, talked about in the collective narrative.
HR: No, but rather it is the other way around; The government makes proposals for national policies and strategic documents and makes them available for e-consultation to the interested public. The county takes into account existing national strategic and planning documents when creating its documents, so that they are in line with the national goals.
HR: I think they have only been partially respected, because counties, municipalities and cities have been invited to transpose national provisions into their regional documents.
SI: No, because things are not solved systematically and in the long term with clear objectives, but rather according to the principle, where there are problems, let's solve them there.
SI: The objectives and actions are set out in the NECP, which is not based on the needs of the regions, but on the needs of the individual actions.

Question 20 asked respondents to identify the specific actions that, in their minds, would help their constituents with achieving the goals of the just transition. Multiple answers on a checklist were permitted, as well as additional “other” input. The highest-scoring actions are the renovation of public buildings and assisting with the renovation of private residences (18 times each), closely followed by the installation of LED street lighting (17 times). Mentioned in the middle range (12-14 times) were more/better bicycle paths, more trees and green spaces, incentivizing public transit (car sharing, bike paths, buses, traffic-free zones), integrating environmental and energy education into school curricula, Supporting innovation and technology for developing new climate solutions, national funding mechanisms to support the just, green transition, Stimulating public-private investments in climate adaptations/renewable energy solutions, and Hold public meetings to solicit citizens' opinions and encourage them to voice concerns. Recognised as salient by several respondents (5-9 mentions) were more electric vehicle charging stations, water features such as ponds or wetlands, tax relief for private initiatives in climate adaptations/renewable energy solutions, and inviting businesses to set up wind farms and/or solar parks. A few additional ideas were proposed - hydropower, district heating, storage for RES electrical power, creation of new labour opportunities, and clamping down on political corruption.



Looking to the future: Innovation and democratic inclusion

The final two questions asked about ideas - the first on innovations and technology that can push the EU to achieve its emission reduction goals, the second asked if respondents can think of any way to make the energy transition and the need for climate adaptation more democratic, i.e., inducing individuals, businesses, and NGOs to become more involved in the decision-making process. Responses are divided into the three 2-country groups.

	Specific ideas on how innovation and emerging technologies to contribute to reaching the EU's climate goals within the just, green transition	Ways to make the energy transition and the need for climate adaptation more democratic - how individuals, businesses, and NGOs might become more involved in the decision-making process
Estonia	If there were specific business ideas, I wouldn't be sitting here. I prefer to sit in a cooler and darker room. If not everyone participates it's hard to achieve the change.	Climate meetings could be organized, meetings with the people - that was good, when they were held. Raising awareness is very important. Nuclear energy people talking- they also talk about climate and renewable energy and enlighten people. They explain to people and restore trust. Part of democracy is trust in it. If you want money to come, you must first explain why it is necessary.
Estonia	No	I support democracy but it has risks we need to take into account - people who have competences should have a say, right now a lot of people are simply uneducated and shouldn't

	Specific ideas on how innovation and emerging technologies to contribute to reaching the EU's climate goals within the just, green transition	Ways to make the energy transition and the need for climate adaptation more democratic - how individuals, businesses, and NGOs might become more involved in the decision-making process
		have a say in areas where they don't know anything. Government needs to increase the education level of its citizens, otherwise people are easily manipulated.
Estonia	No	Government should organize more meetings and more explanation on the energy transition to include stakeholders and individuals. and perhaps, as well, cultivate more positive perspectives on this topic. Opinion leaders and public figures who would not just scare people about the issue - this would make people perhaps more engaged with the topic. Local governments could also do more citizen and stakeholder meetings, but again - often when they do, there are very few participants. I don't have a simple, ready made solution for that.
Estonia	I know they do interesting stuff at Tallinn University of Technology, but the question is, is there an actual market need for those innovative technologies.	There is too much regulation to even build an energy community or create individual green solutions - even if you make for example a solar panel on your own land, some activist can come and say "Oh, look a squirrel lives on your land" and you will be shut off. The attitude of the state is that the people are stupid - we should reduce the amount of regulations for both individuals and businesses to increase more chances of democratic involvement. Even a referendum is so highly regulated that it rarely plays any role in any significant way.
Estonia	Will new places and technologies be discovered in the future?	Energy efficiency offices should be represented in places like Sillamäe and other smaller places. They should also participate in discussions with local residents, train them and also take into account the nationality of the residents (e.g., training materials should also be in Russian). This also requires an educated population in the local government (as used to be during Soviet times) where the discussion would take place.
Estonia	Maybe we should emphasise the input of younger generations, as they are the ones who are the most	The more organisations and communities are involved in transition, the faster it moves. We should act together and introduce the transition to as many people as possible. It is the question

	Specific ideas on how innovation and emerging technologies to contribute to reaching the EU's climate goals within the just, green transition	Ways to make the energy transition and the need for climate adaptation more democratic - how individuals, businesses, and NGOs might become more involved in the decision-making process
	optimistic when it comes to the green transition. Another important aspect is social inequality, as electric cars and new technologies are available mostly to people with higher incomes, when the income gap in our society is growing.	of correct informing, finding the right words to gain more support among the population.
Latvia	Don't know	Already at the moment of ideation and planning, all involved parties must be addressed and listened to. Regions should coordinate this between the national level, municipalities, etc.
Latvia	Innovation and technology are needed. Universities, scientific institutions need to collaborate with the public and private sectors in mutual cooperation. Public-private partnership innovation pilot projects are needed.	Educational campaigns, NGO projects. Social media as a successful communication channel for informing and involving citizens.
Latvia	We need to move in the direction of energy storage. The use of energy from RES is unstable, because often when we need it, it is not available. Accumulation solutions are currently expensive. There should be energy communities where businesses, distribution networks and customers would work together. There are examples in Finland where a company installs its own container for energy production and storage, an electricity company is an intermediary and municipalities and citizens use it.This would also contribute to energy security.	These can be some priority mechanisms on the part of local municipalities, for example, real estate tax rebate.

	Specific ideas on how innovation and emerging technologies to contribute to reaching the EU's climate goals within the just, green transition	Ways to make the energy transition and the need for climate adaptation more democratic - how individuals, businesses, and NGOs might become more involved in the decision-making process
Latvia	No	Conversations and discussions with residents, students in an interactive way. Surveys. Allay concerns and fears of the unknown. Be sure to get more involved in these issues.
Latvia	Don't have a specific idea. But we have a lot of innovative-minded companies and their ideas are broad. We have great potential.	Explanatory work so that people understand why. The municipality can incentivize these measures. The moment there is clarity, then we can build community activities and initiatives.
Latvia	Innovative solutions in building management, building automation systems can reduce the amount of thermal energy consumed and thus CO2 emissions. Information and knowledge, NGO involvement. Abandoning disposable (e.g. PET) packaging, switching to recyclable or reusable packaging. Innovative solutions in waste management and volume reduction.	N/A

Czech Republic	While I'm not completely on board with this topic, I do think that building wind farms would help. If they have to exist, let them not be in a neighboring community and we'll look at them, but let them be here and help us with electricity prices (lower prices for residents) and contribute to the municipal coffers. We can then use that money to support seniors and health care.	I think we are heading in a direction that is not economically sustainable. I think we do not need more democracy. We need somebody to actually do the maths and publicise the best way forward, and that is the way we should go. But not just the best way with regard to the climate, but also with regard to the economy, growth, prices and competitiveness.

	Specific ideas on how innovation and emerging technologies to contribute to reaching the EU's climate goals within the just, green transition	Ways to make the energy transition and the need for climate adaptation more democratic - how individuals, businesses, and NGOs might become more involved in the decision-making process
Czech Republic	No	Here, we are all neighbors, and imposing one's goals by force is not an option. Discussion and democracy are therefore the path to efficiency. At the state level, space should be given to the opinions of independent associations, such as our Strategic Council of the Broumov Region.
Czech Republic	Reduce support for agricultural projects and plant more forests.	This is such a serious issue that I wouldn't rely too much on democracy here.
Czech Republic	Small modular nuclear reactors are an option, but the costs will be high. The economics may not work effectively.	An energy community is a democratic element that can function very well. Everyone is on the same level. At the state level, however, it is necessary to push for goals with less regard for democracy. Sometimes, the government simply has to make directive decisions because it concerns the energy security of the state. This undemocratic aspect can then be balanced by energy communities through local solutions.
Poland	Perovskites, local investment, university-business cooperation	A dialogue center in Warsaw, where the tripartite commissions meet - representatives of the government, employers, there could be producer groups and NGOs to take and create something - some groups could participate in the process of statutory solutions or at the beginning of legislation; also a few scientists, experts in this field from these areas. Copy paste from the EU is not enough for the Polish reality; local governments should show the advantages of the risks and provide incentives
Poland	I don't know	Forms of support for the third sector that is committed to green transformation, grassroots work - a collective of individuals and legal entities would foster this on a microscale.
Poland	Introduction of appropriate departmental units in the local government system, profiled activities, informing residents at local and regional levels.	A support program for these involved parties to educate them.

	Specific ideas on how innovation and emerging technologies to contribute to reaching the EU's climate goals within the just, green transition	Ways to make the energy transition and the need for climate adaptation more democratic - how individuals, businesses, and NGOs might become more involved in the decision-making process
Poland	There is no need to knock down doors - we have studies on RES, building a nuclear power plant, and locally RES, lease their local power grid at the level of Siedlce to secure the needs of the entire city.	A person who will coordinate all this; ways for renewable energy sources we already have developed, and only adjust the relevant draft legislation to be accepted by the government, and on the basis of this, proceed to act, to become independent from the national and European energy network; biogas plants in the countryside, we do it in sewage treatment plants.
Poland	Hydropower, PV, wind farms	Any cooperation with local governments to, for example, expand these PV systems, or wind farms, to relieve the burden on power systems
Poland	Implementation of new energy and heat systems in the production sector - biomass, coal substitute, filters (less CO2 escaping)	It’s very difficult; micro meetings, micro groups to express their needs, problems and opinions - maybe there is a lack of better organization in communicating this feedback to higher levels
Poland	Biodegradable lubricants and a range of other innovations	Congresses, forums to talk about it and it's being done, lots of youth organizations fighting for the environment and using their energy to do it; startup platforms.
Poland	I don't know any new ones; this available mix (fossil fuels and green energy) is the best; we should go into nuclear energy	They themselves will begin to organize and join the process to demand their rights from those in power.
Poland	Not batteries or accumulators that consume electricity (non-ecological): transmission lines should be developed in the right system with EU support so that Poland’s energy balance is positive, not negative.	We should invite Polish companies with Polish capital to participate.
Poland	I would like to see the current technologies widely enough used, available and cheaply enough credited - and this will already cause this transformation, it will be happening here before our	it's in our nature to dislike giving - consultations wouldn't help anything, because participation is usually low; I don't really know; one of the best forms is for an official to go out to these groups and be a facilitator of these actions and get involved in promotional actions so that they can take place at the time of the consultation.

	Specific ideas on how innovation and emerging technologies to contribute to reaching the EU's climate goals within the just, green transition	Ways to make the energy transition and the need for climate adaptation more democratic - how individuals, businesses, and NGOs might become more involved in the decision-making process
	eyes - the existing ones we can not use without adequate support now.	

Croatia	Any new technology that enables the reduction of energy use from conventional sources should find space for implementation and support (local, regional and/or national).	They can give initiatives and proposals and use available services and contacts for the presentation of new innovative solutions.
Croatia	I don't have any.	Through their various ideas and initiatives, to give citizens, businesses and non-governmental organizations the opportunity to comment on necessary projects kroz javna događanja, radionice, forume, itd. 45 / 5.000 through various public events, workshops, forums, etc.
Croatia	For example, the development of green mobility and transport, blockchain technology, digitization of the energy sector and smart grids, advanced energy efficiency in the construction sector, carbon storage technologies.	One way is the usage of digital platforms for consultation and/or decision-making, which enable individuals, companies and non-governmental organizations to be actively involved in the decision-making process. This would ensure that the energy transition is inclusive and fair.
Croatia	Innovation and emerging technologies in general have a significant impact on the development of society and the economy, so their role in achieving the EU's climate goals is certainly important. Unfortunately, I am not that familiar with this aspect, so I do not have any concrete examples.	Public consultations are certainly one of the best tools, and what I see as an opportunity is for citizens, companies, and NGOs to be directly involved in discussions with municipalities about specific projects.

	Specific ideas on how innovation and emerging technologies to contribute to reaching the EU's climate goals within the just, green transition	Ways to make the energy transition and the need for climate adaptation more democratic - how individuals, businesses, and NGOs might become more involved in the decision-making process
Croatia	Determine the priority areas for investments and direct the application of innovations towards them.	The possibility of individual consultations, the inclusion of citizens in municipal or city sessions, enabling citizens to propose specific projects, etc.
Croatia	It is necessary to determine the real needs of the region and adjust co-financing for certain technologies or innovations accordingly, reallocate funds specifically for financing innovations, etc.	Through the organization of round tables, civic forums, participation in public debates, etc.
Slovenia	No	The energy transition and adaptation to climate change require not only technical solutions but also broad social cooperation and a wider consensus based on democratic principles. For us, it is of utmost importance that the voices of all stakeholders are included in the decision-making process, as the effects of the energy transition and climate measures will impact the entire society, not just those in power at a given time. I believe that individuals, businesses, and non-governmental organizations must actively participate in the process in various ways. Individuals can contribute by participating in public discussions, supporting green initiatives, and adopting sustainable habits in their daily lives. Their engagement is crucial for fostering political will and ensuring that measures are shaped according to the real needs of the population. Businesses play a vital role in implementing innovations and adopting sustainable business models, contributing to emission reductions and accelerating the energy transition. By actively participating in discussions and engaging in climate policy processes, businesses can help shape realistic and effective solutions that promote economic growth while protecting the environment. Non-governmental organizations (NGOs) act as a bridge between civil society, businesses, and the government. Through their engagement, they help raise awareness, monitor

	Specific ideas on how innovation and emerging technologies to contribute to reaching the EU's climate goals within the just, green transition	Ways to make the energy transition and the need for climate adaptation more democratic - how individuals, businesses, and NGOs might become more involved in the decision-making process
		policies, and advocate for fair solutions, which are essential to ensuring that the energy transition is transparent, just, and inclusive. They play a key role in representing and highlighting the voices of vulnerable groups and fostering dialogue about a fair transition that benefits everyone. Respecting democratic principles in decision-making about climate measures ensures that the transition happens with broad social support and accountability. Only through the cooperation of all segments of society can we achieve sustainable solutions that align with future goals while considering the rights and needs of the people.]
Slovenia	Innovation and new technologies should have that kind of impact that minimises the financial burden on people, like also on the unemployment burden.	My view is that it is difficult for ordinary people to influence the decision-making process
Slovenia	No	They need to be included in the process of placing buildings in space.
Slovenia	Smart grids, industrial decarbonisation, circular economy, green mobility, digital solutions. Innovate to also improve living conditions and reduce economic and environmental impacts.	Local energy communities have an important role, there can be set up public consultation platforms, support programmes, transparency of funding and reporting on progress, involvement in educational processes and general awareness raising.
Slovenia	No	I don’t have any suggestions.
Slovenia	No	I don’t have any suggestions.

	Specific ideas on how innovation and emerging technologies to contribute to reaching the EU's climate goals within the just, green transition	Ways to make the energy transition and the need for climate adaptation more democratic - how individuals, businesses, and NGOs might become more involved in the decision-making process
Slovenia	Digitalisation, storage flexibility, active consumption; the possibilities are enormous and new technologies are growing.	Transparent admission procedures, public hearings and consultations. Much of this is already happening in Slovenia (example the development of the NECP)

Answers to the final question are mixed. Estonian representatives call for greater inclusiveness in the planning process, and for greater transparency by including minority languages. Latvia wants more explanatory outreach, a point made as well by respondents in other countries. Energy communities are offered by several respondents as examples of democratic decision making. A Slovenian representative (from a Centrist party) displays a deep knowledge of how various non-governmental entities can optimally band together to influence policies made at the national level that ensure broad support and accountability - a statement that can be used as a template across the CEE region to help generate optimism in just transition processes. However, one Polish representative (also from a Centrist party) was brave enough to go on record to state that there exists a democratic deficit in the country - one that is also noted by practitioners in the Baltic states, perhaps less so in the Western Balkans: when meetings are called by local governments to elicit inputs, few people bother to show up to participate.

Conclusions

Recognition of the climate crisis

If there is one salient message to derive from this survey of localities' representatives, it is that regions matter - the heterogeneity across our regions is replicated across the EU, surely not limited only to the CEE. If the European Parliament and the EC listen only to MEPs, they may not be cognisant of the deep-seated fears over livelihoods that the "just" in the Just Transition is meant to address. That there will be winners and losers as the EU seeks to attain its emissions targets is evident as expressed by this survey's respondents. Omitting or ignoring the losers will risk the future of the EU as far-right and populist parties capitalise on the dis-ease felt in regions that perceive few or no benefits from the Transition, and as social media posts drown out real achievements. Only by inviting regional representatives to meetings and listening to them with empathy can such risks be diverted.

Analysis of the interviews conducted reveals a nuanced understanding of the climate crisis among CEE politicians. While acknowledged as a significant issue, it often takes a backseat to pressing domestic concerns such as economic growth and social welfare. This is particularly evident among national parties, while regional parties demonstrate a higher level of concern. Notably, Centrist parties within the CEE exhibit a receptive audience for climate action, aligning with the EU's focus on this issue.

The survey highlights regional disparities in perceived climate risks. While the Visegrad states exhibit a higher awareness of the climate crisis, the Baltics and Western Balkans appear to be more susceptible to specific climate impacts, such as flooding and droughts. This suggests a need for targeted climate

adaptation efforts, particularly in these regions, to assist them in freeing up national resources to address these challenges.

The responses also reveal a gap in understanding of effective adaptation strategies. While awareness of climate risks is growing, the proposed solutions often lack sophistication, relying heavily on traditional engineering approaches. There's a notable lack of emphasis on nature-based solutions and the integration of climate considerations into sectoral policies, such as agriculture and urban planning.

Funding of climate adaptation

The analysis reveals a strong reliance on EU funding for climate action initiatives among CEE politicians, with over two-thirds (67.6%) emphasizing its importance. Notably, 25.6% of respondents believe EU funding should solely finance such efforts. This reliance is less pronounced in the Western Balkans compared to other regions.

While respondents recognize the need for EU support, innovative funding mechanisms were also suggested, such as utilizing fines levied on companies failing to meet climate targets and directing revenues from CO2 emissions fees towards renewable energy sources.

The analysis highlights the need for a multi-level approach to climate financing, combining EU funding with national and regional contributions. It is crucial to explore diverse funding avenues while ensuring equitable distribution and addressing the specific financial capacities of different regions within the CEE.

Closing the knowledge gap of the EU’s emissions reduction goals

The survey reveals a significant gap in knowledge among CEE politicians regarding the EU's emissions reduction targets for 2030 and 2050. A concerning two-thirds of respondents demonstrated a lack of awareness of these crucial objectives. This lack of understanding poses a significant challenge to effective climate action at the local level, as informed policymaking and effective communication with constituents require a clear grasp of the overarching goals.

The analysis highlights significant regional disparities in awareness. The Baltic states and the Visegrad group, particularly Poland, exhibit particularly low levels of understanding. This underscores the need for targeted information campaigns and capacity-building initiatives specifically tailored to these regions.

While the sample size limits definitive conclusions, the lack of knowledge among Centrist parties, despite their generally more progressive stance on environmental issues, is particularly concerning. This suggests a broader knowledge gap within the political sphere across the CEE.

Incompatibility between the green transition and energy security needs

Concerns regarding energy security and the feasibility of achieving these targets through renewable energy sources are prevalent. While the Western Balkans exhibit a more optimistic outlook on the potential of renewables, the Visegrad group, particularly Poland and the Czech Republic, express reservations and emphasize the need for alternative energy sources, including nuclear power.

Emission reduction goals and regional impacts

Respondents report varying levels of optimism and concern regarding potential impacts. While some respondents express concerns about potential job losses, particularly in energy-intensive sectors, others emphasize the potential for economic growth and job creation in new, green industries.

Regional disparities are significant. The Baltic states, particularly Estonia, express strong concerns about the economic and social impacts of the transition, particularly in regions heavily reliant on fossil fuels. In contrast, respondents from the Western Balkans exhibit a more optimistic outlook, emphasizing the potential for economic growth and job creation in the renewable energy sector.

Anticipated changes to energy prices

The issue of rising energy costs is a major concern across all regions, with respondents attributing this increase to a combination of factors, including the energy transition, the war in Ukraine, and geopolitical instability. While some recognize the long-term potential for cost reductions through renewable energy sources and energy efficiency measures, concerns about the short-term economic impacts on households and businesses are significant.

Energy poverty

The study reveals a complex landscape of concerns and expectations among CEE politicians regarding the social impacts of the energy transition. While some respondents express optimism about potential benefits such as improved environmental quality and economic opportunities, concerns about job losses, rising energy costs, and the vulnerability of specific groups, particularly in fossil fuel-dependent regions, are prevalent.

Regional disparities are significant. The Baltic states, particularly Estonia, emphasize the negative impacts on employment and the need for robust social safety nets. In contrast, respondents from the Western Balkans exhibit a more optimistic outlook, highlighting the potential for economic growth and job creation in the renewable energy sector.

The Visegrad group presents a mixed picture, with concerns about vulnerable households in the Czech Republic and a combination of anxieties and hopes for economic development in Poland.

Inclusiveness within national legislative and regulatory actions

While some respondents acknowledge efforts to engage with regional stakeholders, a significant proportion feel that their specific needs and concerns are not adequately addressed at the national level. This lack of perceived inclusiveness is particularly pronounced in regions heavily reliant on fossil fuels, such as the oil shale region in Estonia, where the economic and social impacts of the transition are deeply felt. Concerns regarding job losses, economic competitiveness, and the social impacts of rising energy costs are prevalent across all regions.

Innovation and democratic inclusion

In regard to innovation, respondents highlighted the need for innovation in renewable energy technologies, identifying energy storage, smart grids, and advanced energy efficiency measures. Several respondents emphasized the importance of developing and implementing locally relevant innovations, for example utilizing local resources such as geothermal energy or biomass. Respondents also considered

that collaboration among universities, research institutions, and businesses is crucial for driving innovation and translating research into practical applications.

As for democratic inclusion in decision-making processes, several respondents expressed concerns about the effectiveness of current public participation mechanisms and the need to address potential democratic deficits in decision-making. To overcome this, respondents emphasized the need for increased public participation through public consultations, citizen assemblies, and the empowerment of local communities, where local governments are seen as key actors in facilitating public participation, organizing community consultations, and implementing local climate action plans. This cannot take place in a vacuum, with many respondents highlighting the need for first empowering citizens to actively participate in the available democratic processes.

Recommendations

Enhancing recognition of the climate crisis

- Targeted engagement: The EC might consider prioritizing engagement with Centrist parties and regional political parties in the CEE, given their higher receptivity to climate action.
- Regionalized climate adaptation strategies: The EC should support the development of region-specific climate adaptation strategies, focusing on localised vulnerabilities..
- Promote Nature-Based Solutions (NBS): The EC can more actively promote and fund nature-based solutions for climate adaptation, such as floodplains, green infrastructure, and regenerative agriculture that can capture carbon.
- Capacity building: The EC should invest in capacity building programs for local and regional governments to enhance their understanding of climate risks and develop effective adaptation plans that extend far beyond the beautification wishlists currently and frequently compiled.
- Knowledge dissemination: The EC should facilitate in-person knowledge sharing and peer learning among regions within the CEE and between the CEE and the rest of the EU to promote best practices in climate action. There may be a significant benefit to use forerunner exemplars that can be visited for exchange of ideas and technical applications.
- Address information gaps: The EC could address information gaps by supporting research and communication efforts to raise awareness of the specific climate risks facing each region and the effectiveness of different adaptation strategies. While the climate crisis is unquestionably already affecting swaths of Europe, it will be the generations now young that will bear the brunt of it, thus reaching out on platforms most accessed by youth is likely to yield future benefits.

Funding of climate adaptation

- Capacity building: Strengthen the capacity of regional and local governments to effectively access and utilize EU funding for climate action via competent intermediaries, particularly Regional Energy Authorities.
- Knowledge sharing: Facilitating knowledge exchange between regions on successful funding models and best practices for climate action implementation.
- Addressing regional disparities: Acknowledging and redressing the varying levels of reliance on EU funding across different regions within the CEE.

Closing the knowledge gap of the EU's emissions reduction goals

- Targeted information campaigns: The EU and national governments should implement targeted information campaigns to raise awareness among local politicians about the EU's emissions reduction targets, their significance, and the implications for their regions.
- Capacity building programs: Organize training sessions and workshops for local politicians in their mother tongues to enhance their understanding of climate science, policy, and the implications of the EU's Green Deal.
- Improve communication: Foster stronger communication channels between EU institutions, national governments, and local authorities to ensure timely and effective dissemination of information on climate policies and targets.
- Integration into curricula: Encourage the inclusion of climate change education in political science and public administration curricula at universities and training institutions for local politicians.
- Peer-to-peer learning: Facilitate peer-to-peer learning and exchange programs between regions with higher levels of awareness and those with lower levels.

Closing the perception gap of the green transition being incompatible with energy security needs

- Enhance communication and education: Implement targeted information campaigns to disseminate clear and concise information on the EU's climate goals and the pathways to achieve them.
- Address regional disparities: Tailor communication and support measures to address the specific concerns and challenges faced by different regions within the CEE.
- Promote informed dialogue: Create opportunities for open and informed dialogue among policymakers, stakeholders, and the public on the trade-offs between climate action and energy security.
- Support research and innovation: Expand investments in research and development of innovative renewable energy technologies and energy storage solutions, life-cycle analyses, and end-of-life recycling.
- Just Transition policies: Ascertain and fund optimal support mechanisms targeting workers and communities negatively affected by the transition to a low-carbon economy that go beyond block grants awarded to Member States for this ostensible purpose.

Emission reduction goals and regional impacts

- Enhance knowledge dissemination: Implement targeted information campaigns to increase awareness among CEE politicians regarding the EU's emissions reduction targets, their rationale, and the potential benefits and challenges associated with their implementation.
- Emphasise Just Transition support: Develop and implement robust just transition policies to support workers and communities affected by the transition away from fossil fuels, including retraining programs, investment in new green industries, and social safety nets.
- Adopt regionalized approaches: Tailor climate policies and support mechanisms to the specific needs and circumstances of different regions within the CEE, considering their economic structures, social vulnerabilities, and energy dependencies.
- Foster multilevel governance dialogue and collaboration: Encourage open dialogue and collaboration among EU institutions, national governments, regional authorities, and local stakeholders to address concerns and develop effective, regionally-tailored implementation strategies.

Addressing spiralling energy prices

- ➢ Bolster energy security: Invest in energy efficiency measures, diversify energy sources, and strengthen energy infrastructure to enhance energy security, reduce reliance on fossil fuels, store renewable energy, enhance the capability of renewable energy systems to access the grid, and encourage the formation of local energy networks/energy communities.
- ➢ Improve public communication and engagement: Enhance communication and engagement efforts to raise awareness among the public and policymakers about the benefits and challenges of the energy transition especially in relation to assuring EU-wide and national energy security.

Contending with energy poverty

- ➢ Target support for vulnerable regions: Encourage Member States in targeting policies and programs to support regions with communities heavily reliant on fossil fuels, ensuring a just transition that minimizes job losses and provides opportunities for economic diversification.
- ➢ Comprehend the dimensions of energy poverty: Encourage EU-wide rather than ad-hoc comprehensive strategies and data analysis to address energy poverty, ensuring affordable energy access for vulnerable households and mitigating the social impacts of rising energy costs.
- ➢ Empower local communities: Enhance the role of local authorities and communities in the energy transition, providing them with the resources, knowledge, and decision-making power to actively participate in shaping a sustainable energy future; for small municipalities, emphasise the connection with fully-supported Regional Energy Agencies.
- ➢ Build the capacity for social dialogue and engagement: Actively encourage with appropriate incentives an open and inclusive dialogue among policymakers, stakeholders, and the public to address concerns, build consensus, and ensure a just and equitable energy transition.
- ➢ Invest in education and training: Equip workers with the skills needed for new green jobs and support the development of a skilled workforce for the renewable energy sector and the new businesses that will emerge in the next years.
- ➢ Create a safety net for select energy-poor households. Not every worker can be retrained due to health, age, learning capacities, and stubbornness. Ensure that the most energy-poor households can be well-targeted to participate in energy bills support schemes.

Inclusiveness within national legislative and regulatory actions

- ➢ Enhance regional engagement: Strengthen regional voices and engagement in the development and implementation of EU-level climate policies.
- ➢ Regional dialogues: Establish regular platforms for dialogue between national governments, regional authorities, and local stakeholders to discuss regional needs and concerns.
- ➢ Regionalized support mechanisms: Consider developing region-specific support mechanisms to address the social and economic impacts of the energy transition to enhance access to just transition funds, retraining programs, and support for local businesses.
- ➢ Data collection and analysis: Pertinent across several interlinked aspects of the just transition, collecting and analyzing regional data on energy consumption, vulnerability, and the impacts of climate change has the potential to deeply inform policy decisions for effective targeting of support measures; in many cases, the relevant data granules cannot be shared for policy making because of GDPR restrictions, a situation urgently requiring further consideration.

Nurturing innovation and democratic inclusion

- Focus on locally relevant solutions: Leverage local resources, such as geothermal energy or biomass, and consider the unique challenges and opportunities faced by each region.
- Promote public-private partnership collaboration among universities, research institutions, and businesses to drive innovation and translate research outputs into practical applications.
- Invest in emerging technologies such as energy storage, smart grids, and advanced energy efficiency measures in achieving the EU's climate goals.
- Organize meaningful public consultations that go beyond simple information sessions and create spaces for genuine dialogue and feedback from citizens, businesses, and NGOs; this could include citizen assemblies, workshops, and online platforms for interactive engagement.
- Support the development of local expertise, utilizing existing or supporting the foundation of new Regional Energy Agencies that will have the internal expertise to provide training and support for local governments and community organizations with the goal of enhancing these entities' capacity to engage in energy-related decision-making.
- Ensure fair and equitable representation by specifically soliciting the opinions and views of all stakeholders, especially marginalized and vulnerable groups, and ensure that these are heard and considered in decision-making processes.
- Promote transparency and accountability in the development and implementation of energy policies, ensuring that decision-making processes are open and accessible to the public.

Appendix: Interview Questionnaire

* Indicates required question

Questions you as the interviewer must answer:

Interviewer's (your) name *

Your answer

Country *

Croatia

Czech Republic

Estonia

Latvia

Poland

Slovenia

Region *

Your answer

Interviewee's (politician's) name *

Your answer

Name of the interviewee's political party *

Your answer

Where does this political party fall on the continuum below? *

Green

Communist

Socialist

Social Democrat (advocate for a mixed economy, social welfare, and equality)

Centrist (seek to balance left and right ideologies, focus on pragmatism and consensus)

Christian Democratic (conservative social values + moderate economic policies)

Liberal (prioritize individual liberty, limited government, and free markets)

Conservative (emphasize tradition, law and order, and economic liberalism)

Nationalist

Ask your interviewees the following questions:

1. Given the increasing frequency and severity of climate-related disasters in the EU, how would you rank climate change in relation to other pressing policy issues such as economic stagnation, social welfare, energy security, as well as inflation of the cost of food and energy? *

It's the most critical problem facing our region

It's quite important, but other issues often take precedence

It's not very important as (one or more) of these issues is much more pressing

It's not at all important

Respondent unable/unwilling to answer

2. IF NOT "IT'S THE MOST CRITICAL PROBLEM" IN Q1:
What do you consider is the biggest problem facing your region, then?

The economy

Social welfare

Unemployment / underemployment (lack of jobs, lack of well-paying jobs)

Lack of economic progress

Energy poverty among some/many households

A need to diversify our energy supplies - energy security

The cost of food (and other basic needs)

Other:

3. Adapting to climate change seems to be necessary no matter where we live. It appears clear that many of us can become victims of floods, wildfires, landslides, heat waves. What do you think are the greatest climate-driven risks that might affect your region in the next years?
*

flooding

heat waves

lack of water due to prolonged drought (falling reservoir levels)

intense cold waves

landslides and/or rockslides

agricultural decline due to warm winters not killing pests

None, we're going to be ok

Other:

Required

4. IF ANY ANSWER EXCEPT "NONE" in Q3:
What measures do you think can be taken in your region to deal with this/these risk/s?

Your answer

5. IF ANY ANSWER EXCEPT "NONE" in Q4:
How do you think that such measures can be paid for?

Your answer

6. Can you tell me what the EU's emissions reduction goals are for 2030? And for 2050?
*

Your answer

7. Do you think that the EU is adequately balancing its climate goals with the need for energy security, not only across Europe but in our country in particular?

*

Your answer

8. Do you think that renewable energy options *(you can mention, if interviewee fails to understand: wind, solar, hydro, tidal, geothermal)* can quickly enough replace fossil fuels in this country to meet both our commitment to climate goals and our energy security? Or do you think our country will have to backtrack from our commitment to the EU's 2030 and 2050 emissions goal?
*

Yes, we can meet our country's climate goals

Yes, we can attain energy security

No, we'll have to backtrack

No, we'll have to bring more nuclear energy onto the grid to meet our commitments

Other:

Required

9. Overall, do you think that the EU's emission reduction targets are achievable?

*

Yes

No

Perhaps yes

Probably not

Do not know

10. Are you concerned or in fact optimistic about how the EU's emission reduction targets might affect your region? (Ask respondent to explain if the answer is "YES")

*

Your answer

11. IF "JOB LOSS" IS NOT MENTIONED IN Q10:

Are you worried about changes in the regional job market that might occur due to the energy transition?

Your answer

12. Is there anything (else) about the EU's emission reduction targets that might **positively** affect your region? (Explain if "YES")

*

Your answer

13. How do you think the cost of energy is likely to change in your region due to the energy transition?

*

Your answer

14. Do you think the change in energy costs is more due to the transition to renewable energy, or more due to energy security such as ending energy supplies from Russia? Or is something else driving this change?
*

Transition to renewable energy

Energy security

Other:

15. Do you think that there are any groups of citizens in your region who will be **especially** negatively affected by the energy transition? (Explain if "YES")
*

Your answer

16. IF ANY ANSWER EXCEPT "NO/NONE" IN Q15:
Can you tell me, what are their concerns? And their hopes?

Your answer

17. IF ANY CONCERNS IN Q16 HAVE BEEN MENTIONED:
How have these concerns been voiced in your region? Who (or what organisation) has taken the lead in speaking out on behalf of this/these group/s?

Your answer

18. IF ANY CONCERNS IN Q16 HAVE BEEN MENTIONED:
Do you have a plan to address these concerns? Please explain...

Your answer

19. Do you feel that your region's needs are recognized and taken into account when the national government discusses and sets targets for the energy transition? (If "YES" ask "how") *

Your answer

20. Let's think about specific actions that you would propose and/or support to help your region reach the goal of a just, green energy transition. *

More electric vehicle charging stations

More / better bicycle paths

LED street lighting

More trees and green spaces

Water features such as ponds or wetlands

Renovation of public buildings

Assisting renovation of private buildings

Incentivizing public transit (car sharing, bike paths, buses, traffic-free zones)

Integrating environmental and energy education into school curricula

Supporting innovation and technology for developing new climate solutions

National funding mechanisms to support the just, green transition

Stimulating public-private investments in climate adaptations/renewable energy solutions

Tax relief for private initiatives in climate adaptations/renewable energy solutions

Hold public meetings to solicit citizens' opinions and encourage them to voice concerns

Inviting businesses to set up wind farms and/or solar parks

Other:

Required

21. Do you have any specific ideas on how innovation and emerging technologies can contribute to reaching the EU's climate goals within the just, green transition? *

Your answer

22. Can you think of any way to make the energy transition and the need for climate adaptation **more democratic**? That is, how might individuals, businesses, and NGOs become more involved in the decision-making process? *

Your answer