

Coal regions in transition. The role of the Just Transition Fund

Joanna Mazurkiewicz, Jan Frankowski, Aleksandra Prusak

The report examines how the Just Transition Fund (JTF) is being used in Poland and what role it plays in the transformation of coal and post-coal regions. The main objective is to assess whether the Fund primarily serves as a compensatory instrument addressing the social and economic costs of moving away from coal, or whether it also functions as a broader tool of regional development policy.

The analysis focuses on five Polish regions covered by JTF support: Śląskie, Dolnośląskie, Łódzkie, Małopolskie and Wielkopolskie. These regions differ significantly in terms of their dependence on coal mining and conventional energy, industrial history, labour market structure and development challenges. For this reason, the report distinguishes three main models of transition: active mining transition, represented by Śląskie; the phase-out of an existing mining and energy complex, represented by Wielkopolskie and Łódzkie; and post-industrial or indirect transition, represented by Dolnośląskie and Małopolskie.

The study is based on monitoring data for projects with signed funding agreements as of 1 March 2026, data on output and result indicators obtained from regional institutions, and a review of regional programmes and Territorial Just Transition Plans. The report analyses the structure of JTF spending, types of beneficiaries, categories of intervention, territorial distribution of support and expected results of funded projects.

The overall allocation of funds across economic, social, energy-related and environmental objectives is relatively balanced, but there are substantial differences between regions. In Śląskie, support is strongly linked to economic restructuring, innovation, labour market measures and the transformation of post-industrial space. In Wielkopolskie and Łódzkie, the Fund supports regions facing the phase-out of large lignite-based mining and energy complexes. In Dolnośląskie and Małopolskie, the transition is more post-industrial or indirect, with stronger emphasis on revitalisation, quality of life, social adaptation and local development.

The report estimates that JTF support covered around 97.5 thousand people, which corresponds to approximately 0.9% of the population of transition areas. Funded projects are expected to create around 4.8 thousand jobs. These figures show that the direct labour market effects of the Fund are important, but limited in relation to the scale of employment and socio-economic challenges in coal regions. The report therefore argues that the success of just transition should not be assessed only through the number of jobs created, but also through the durability of employment, diversification of local economies, improvement in quality of life and strengthening of regional resilience.

Local and regional governments are the main beneficiaries of the JTF. This confirms that local authorities play a central role in implementing just transition on the ground. They are responsible for majority of projects related to public infrastructure, revitalisation, mobility, public services and local development. At the same time, this creates a risk that regions and municipalities with stronger administrative and financial capacities may be better positioned to absorb funds. As a result, the JTF may not automatically reduce territorial inequalities unless the territorial distribution of support is carefully monitored.

One of the key conclusions of the report is that there is no single model of just transition. The needs of active mining regions differ from those of areas facing the closure of a dominant energy complex or regions dealing with the long-term consequences of earlier industrial decline. This diversity should be reflected in the design, implementation and evaluation of transition policies.

The report recommends maintaining targeted support for coal and post-coal regions after the current JTF programming period, especially for comprehensive and network-based projects. It also calls for stronger links between infrastructure investments and social and economic objectives, greater support for the institutional capacity of local governments, better consideration of the territorial dimension of transition, and a more coherent system of result indicators.

The full results of our research are published in Polish in the report: <https://ibs.org.pl/wp-content/uploads/2026/06/Transformacja-regionow-weglowych-w-toku.pdf>