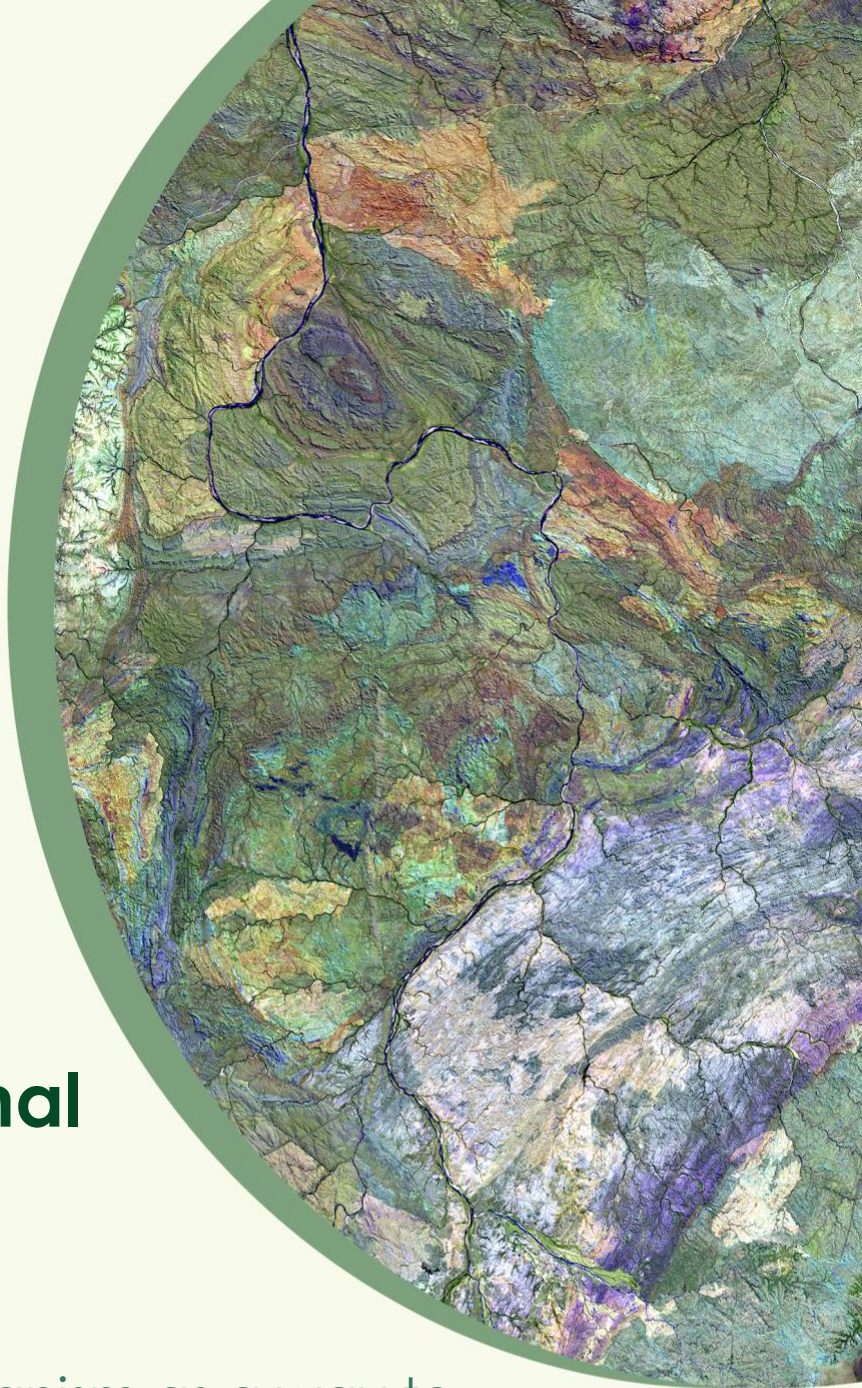




Bridging Organizations and
marginalized communities for Local
Sustainability Transitions in EuRope



6th BOLSTER regional policy dialogue

The Just Transition Mechanism as a way to
tackle energy poverty: Perspectives from
Romania and beyond



23 September 2024 - 9:30 - 12:00 CEST



Online



This project is funded by the European Union under the Grant Agreement n. 0101069586. Views and opinions expressed are however those of the author(s) only and do not necessarily reflect those of the European Union or CINEA. Neither the European Union nor the granting authority can be held responsible for them.

6th BOLSTER's regional policy dialogue

The Just Transition Mechanism as a way to tackle energy poverty: Perspectives from Romania and beyond

On September 23rd, the [BOLSTER](#) project (Bridging Organizations and marginalised communities for Local Sustainability Transitions in Europe) held its sixth regional policy dialogue. This event was one of 10 regional dialogues organised by ECAS within the project framework. The dialogues aim to facilitate cross-regional policy learning on just and green transition processes.

The event included presentations and a round-table discussion focusing on how the Just Transition Mechanism can address energy poverty, and how communities can become more engaged in participatory processes within these transitions, with a spotlight on the Prahova region in Romania.

Alexandra Lulache, from [Make Better: MKBT \(Romania\)](#), opened the dialogue and presented the main BOLSTER findings in the Prahova region, the hotspot of Romania's oil and gas industry. She noted that Prahova has a weak and underdeveloped civic sector, marked by low trust in the local public authority, which, in their eyes, kept the process of just transition plans "behind closed doors." In her presentation, Alexandra focused on the connection between the objectives of Just Transition – enabling regions and citizens to face the social, employment, economic, and environmental effects of the transition to meet climate and energy targets – and local realities, highlighting the case of the Mimi informal settlement and shedding light on the severe energy poverty situation there.

The BOLSTER research revealed that in Prahova, the understanding of Just Transition primarily emphasises employment and economic growth, overlooking critical elements like social and environmental sustainability. Marginalised groups lack representation in the transition process due to the absence of collective local organisations, leaving their voices unheard by both political actors and NGOs. Despite these communities facing direct impacts from JT, public discourse remains dominated by established economic players who are the primary participants in discussions. Alexandra's presentation further emphasised the challenges marginalised groups face in accessing funds designed to prevent marginalisation, the insufficient attention given to energy poverty within the JT framework, and the neglect of structural poverty. A significant concern remains ensuring that EU funds reach marginalised communities and grassroots initiatives without being coopted by those in power.

In her presentation, **Dr. Andreea Vornicu** from the [Center for the Study of Democracy \(Romania\)](#) introduced common indicators for measuring energy poverty at the national level in Romania. These indicators highlight several key aspects, including households with overconsumption, underconsumption (reflecting hidden energy poverty), households falling below the poverty line after paying their energy bills (reflecting low income coupled with high costs), and those households that spend more than 10 percent of their income on energy bills. Additionally, the methodology examined

the distribution of these indicators across urban and rural areas. The latest findings reveal that underconsumption is particularly prevalent among low-income households, especially in rural regions, while low-income-high-cost scenarios are observed in both low and medium-income households.

Next, **Alexandru Kelemen** from the [Association for Integrated Territorial Development of the Jiu Valley \(Romania\)](#) presented the concept of an energy community in Jiu Valley. He discussed efforts to improve energy efficiency in residential and public buildings, as well as opportunities for energy production and storage. Alexandru emphasised the vital role of the energy community in fostering a culture of energy efficiency and promoting green energy practices. He highlighted examples from the Jiu Valley, including collaborations with local media for awareness campaigns and partnerships with schools to educate the community about energy efficiency. Additionally, the presentation showcased the local cost benefits of investing in green energy and storage solutions.

Following the comprehensive overview of the Just Transition Mechanism in the Prahova region, the dialogue moved into a panel discussion.

The introductory tour de table with the panellists began with **Anca Sinea**, coordinator of the **Romanian Energy Poverty Observatory (ORSE)**, alternate member of the **European Economic and Social Committee (EESC)**, and a lead expert in energy poverty. ORSE, a project initiated by the [Centre for the Study of Democracy, Babes-Bolyai University, Cluj-Napoca \(Romania\)](#), closely collaborates with experts to evaluate energy poverty, provides policy support, and engages in dialogues at various decision-making levels in Romania. Anca also serves as an alternate member of the **European Economic and Social Committee (EESC)**.

Next, **Ana Maria Elian**, an urban planner and co-founder/Programme Manager of [MKBT \(Romania\)](#) took the floor. MKBT is an organisation that coordinates strategic planning and urban regeneration processes in small and medium-sized towns across Romania. Ana Maria is also part of the BOLSTER team, coordinating the project activities in Prahova, along with working on other projects aimed at fostering connections between local communities and national and EU-level ambitions.

Anna Bajomi, Policy Officer at [FEANTSA – European Federation of National Organisations Working with the Homeless](#) in Brussels then spoke. In her role, she analyses the European policy framework for green transition, focusing on the impacts on vulnerable households and individuals living in inadequate housing.

Gall Podlaszewski, Managing Director at [PHLOX Architekt und Ingenieur GmbH \(Germany\)](#) then presented. As an architect, he specialises in energetic renovations of social housing and housing associations in central Germany, working to improve energy efficiency and sustainability in these communities.

Nadya Parpulova, a PhD student at the [University of National and World Economy \(Bulgaria\)](#) was next to speak. Within the Economics of Transport and Energy Department, her focus is on energy research. She coordinates the BOLSTER project in Stara Zagora, Bulgaria, where she works specifically with

marginalised and disadvantaged communities to explore the impacts of the JT on their lives. Additionally, she is engaged in broader research on green hydrogen production and its applications, as well as on energy communities—a crucial topic in which her department is highly active and leading in developing strategies for implementation in Bulgaria.

The panel discussion, guided by four Slido questions, highlighted access barriers to the JT mechanism and EU funding for marginalised groups facing energy poverty. It explored strategies for engaging these communities in the energy transition, the role of sustainable construction, funding programs that empower citizens, challenges in building energy communities, and how international networks can support local stakeholders in this process.

- Access barriers to the JT mechanism and EU funding for marginalised groups include a lack of resources, awareness, effective policy communication, complex application processes, limited institutional capacity, and social exclusion.
- Strategies for engaging marginalised communities in the energy transition involve establishing energy cooperatives, providing grants and subsidies, implementing participatory governance models, and enhancing involvement through energy literacy programs and skills training.
- Sustainable construction and renovation are vital for alleviating energy poverty by improving efficiency, reducing costs for low-income households, and enhancing living conditions. They also foster job creation in the green economy. However, targeted funding is needed to ensure accessibility for those unable to afford upfront renovation costs.
- Challenges in building energy communities for people living in poverty include lack of upfront capital, low trust in new initiatives, and limited energy literacy. Additional barriers are complex energy systems, grid infrastructure issues, restrictive regulations, and insufficient policy support.
- International networks and local stakeholders can support marginalised communities by creating common strategies, sharing knowledge, advocating for policy changes, and promoting community-led energy projects while adapting solutions to local contexts.

In conclusion, the BOLSTER project's sixth regional policy dialogue emphasised the critical need for inclusive strategies to address energy poverty and engage marginalised communities in the JT process. Participants and speakers highlighted the importance of sustainable construction, accessible funding, and participatory governance in fostering community resilience and energy efficiency. Collaborative efforts between international networks and local stakeholders are essential for adapting solutions to local contexts and ensuring that the voices of marginalised groups are heard in decision-making processes.

BOLSTER



This project is funded by the European Union under the Grant Agreement n. 0101069586. Views and opinions expressed are however those of the author(s) only and do not necessarily reflect those of the European Union or CINEA. Neither the European Union nor the granting authority can be held responsible for them.