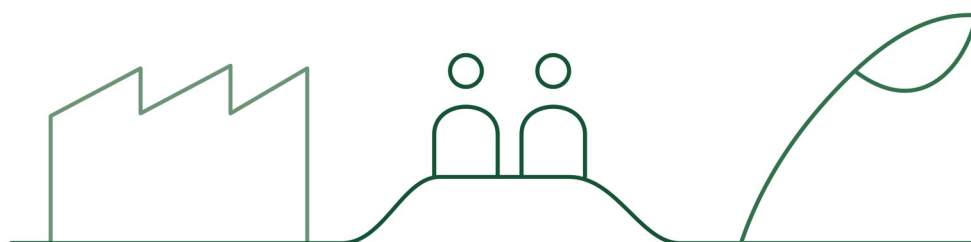


Youth recommendations on just transition

for the Energy Community
Just Transition Forum in Podgorica 2026

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* This designation is without prejudice to positions on status, and is in line with UNSCR 1244/1999 and the ICJ Opinion on the Kosovo declaration of independence.



Introduction

Processes related to just transition are frequently missing the **point of view of young people**. To amplify their voices, these recommendations were developed specifically targeting the Energy Community Just Transition Forum 2026. They reflect the context of the just transition process across the Western Balkans Six (WB6)¹ as of October 2026.

This position is the result of a youth workshop on just transition dedicated to coming up with recommendations about the process in WB6. The workshop was held from 5 to 8 October 2026 in Bitola, North Macedonia, with 15 participants selected through a public call in the WB6 region. More than 70 candidates submitted applications and the participants were chosen based on their motivation and interest in the topic of just transition. Most of the participants live in coal-dependent or other extractive industry-dependent municipalities in the WB6 and have had **first-hand experience** with what the coal phase-out or other industry closures mean for their region or workplace.

The workshop was an initiative of the [Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit \(GIZ\) GmbH](#), within the framework of the Regional Climate Partnership between Germany and the Western Balkans, a German government initiative, and of the [Regional Youth Cooperation Office – RYCO](#). It was led by an external facilitator with in-depth thematic input on just transition from [CEE Bankwatch Network](#). The participants also had full-time access to a relevant [Energy Community Secretariat](#) representative throughout the workshop, with input from a representative of [Bitola municipality](#) who works on just transition and a [Regional Cooperation Council \(RCC\)](#) representative working on youth issues.

To further strengthen the validity of the recommendations derived from the workshop, two online follow-up calls were held with training participants to **review, discuss and validate** them.

During the workshop, participants identified five recurring areas of concern:

- education, training and employment;
- entrepreneurship, start-ups and innovation;
- environmental impacts;
- public participation and transparency; and
- identity, culture and community life.

For the purpose of developing recommendations, these were consolidated into three thematic areas:

1. Education, training and employment

2. Entrepreneurship, start-ups and innovation

3. Cultural identity and community narrative

Environmental sustainability, youth participation and transparency were treated as **cross-cutting principles** across all three areas.

These recommendations will be used in further advocacy across the regions and built upon as the process moves forward and the situation on the ground in coal-dependent regions develops.

¹ The Western Balkans Six (WB6) comprise Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Kosovo, Montenegro, North Macedonia and Serbia.



Youth Recommendations

For the purpose of these recommendations, *just transition* is defined by the participants as a policy framework that aims to transform environmentally harmful industries in carbon-intensive and/or industry-dependent regions while being aware of **social and economic factors**. It is seen to have three pillars: labour markets and unemployment prevention; economic redevelopment; and social and equal access to the grid for businesses.

Entrepreneurship is defined as the ability and/or skillset of opening a new business.

Innovation is defined as the action of providing new services or products within a market.

Start-ups are defined as newly created businesses.

AREA 1:

Innovation, startups and entrepreneurship

01 Include entrepreneurship and start-up development in local just transition plans

Local just transition strategies should include specific measures to support **start-ups, young entrepreneurs and new local businesses**. Support should build on existing regional strengths and infrastructure, including vocational schools, training centres and technical expertise.

As part of existing infrastructure for vocational training, young people and workers with strong technical skills but limited business experience should be given access to:

- entrepreneurship training;
- mentoring;
- business-development support;
- networking opportunities; and
- information about available financing.

The objective should be to convert existing technical knowledge into **new economic activity and enable employment** within transition-affected regions.

02 Establish targeted seed financing for businesses in transition-affected regions

Governments should establish **dedicated seed-funding mechanisms**, credit lines or comparable financial instruments for start-ups and small businesses in transition-affected communities.

Municipalities and relevant local or regional institutions should support implementation and outreach so that financing is accessible to young entrepreneurs and emerging businesses **outside major economic centres**.

Financial support should be accompanied by the **mentoring and business-development assistance** mentioned in recommendation 1.



03 Keep more of the economic value of the transition within affected regions

International financial institutions, development partners and public authorities should support the development of **local supply chains and business ecosystems** in transition-affected regions.

To the extent possible and practical, public support and incentive mechanisms should be used to encourage major transition-related investments to **source goods and services locally**. Local providers should be given opportunities to build their capacity so that new investment generates employment, entrepreneurship and economic diversification within the affected region rather than transferring most economic benefits elsewhere. Such support should be designed as a **transitional measure only** and gradually reduced as local markets become more competitive and sustainable.



AREA 2:

Education, training and employment

04 Create youth-responsive monitoring of skills, training and employment measures

Institutions responsible for just transition should establish structured mechanisms enabling young people living in transition-affected communities to **participate in the design, monitoring and review** of education, reskilling and employment programmes. These mechanisms should include students, recent graduates, young workers and unemployed young people. It is on decision makers to proactively include young people in monitoring, and the method of inclusion should enable young people to easily provide their input.

The monitoring of progress of employment programmes and vocational training should be done through **measurable indicators**, including:

- participation and completion rates;
- **employment following training**;
- alignment between training programmes and identified regional skills gaps; and
- participation of young people in programme design and monitoring.

Regional and national institutions should use the results of this monitoring to identify gaps and adjust programmes together with education providers, employers and local authorities.



05 Develop targeted reskilling and upskilling programmes before employment losses occur

National authorities responsible for employment should establish targeted reskilling and upskilling programmes for workers and young people in transition-affected regions.

These programmes should be based on **regional skills-gap assessments** and developed together with employers, vocational schools, universities and relevant local actors. Lessons learnt in North Macedonia should be built into the planning processes of the other WB6 economies, particularly Montenegro which is currently advancing faster in this process than others.

The national level should provide the overall framework and financing, while regional and local authorities should help identify priority skills, participants and employment opportunities to a greater extent than currently done.

Programme success should be measured not by participation and certification but by whether participants **move into employment or a new occupation** following training. Programmes which have a low rate of moving into employment should be **completely revised or discontinued**.



06 Align education and vocational training with emerging regional employment opportunities

Universities, as well as vocational education and training providers relevant to just transition regions should regularly **review curricula against labour-market needs** in transition-affected regions with the process moving at greater speed and frequency than it currently is.

Curriculum reviews should involve:

- employers;
- municipalities and regional authorities;
- students and young people;
- vocational education providers; and
- universities.

Education programmes should combine technical and digital skills with **practical experience** through internships, apprenticeships, work-based learning and employer partnerships. Implementation should be monitored by relevant education and regional authorities and **youth input** should be taken into account when making decisions on this, as mentioned in recommendation 4 above.



AREA 3:

Cultural identity and community narrative

07 Make communities active partners in just transition decisions

Just transition planning should meaningfully and timely involve those who will experience its consequences, including workers and their families, local communities, women, young people, Roma and other potentially vulnerable groups. Meaningful inclusion in this context means groups being involved in discussions designed specifically to gather their input. Timely involvement in this context means that participation should take place **before decisions are finalised**, rather than only afterwards through information campaigns.

At the local level, this inclusion should include **accessible community consultations** and participation in local transition planning.

At the national level, affected communities and young people should be **represented in relevant dialogue and policymaking mechanisms**.

At the WB6 regional level, opportunities should be created for young people and affected communities from different transition regions to exchange experiences and contribute to regional just transition processes.

08 Give young people clear information and communication tools to influence the transition

Institutions should communicate just transition-related issues in language that is **clear, accessible and relevant to young people**. Communication should explain not only what is being phased out, but also:

- what opportunities are being created;
- how communities will be supported;
- where young people can access **training, employment or financing**;
- how decisions are made; and
- **how young people can influence them**.

Local authorities, schools, youth organisations and media should be encouraged to work together on youth consultations, community discussions and awareness activities.

At the WB6 regional level, platforms should support young people from different transition regions to exchange experiences, **communicate their own perspectives and develop joint solutions**.



09 Support a positive new identity and future for transition-affected communities

Just transition should address not only employment and infrastructure but also the **identity, attractiveness and long-term future of affected communities**. The closure or transformation of major industries can affect community identity, local pride and young people's perception of whether their region has a future.

Local and national authorities should therefore support and engage in:

- **redevelopment and reuse of former industrial spaces;**
- cultural, educational and community initiatives;
- **youth-led activities and local storytelling;**
- new economic activities that build on local strengths; and
- opportunities that make transition regions attractive places in which young people can live, work and build their future.

Transition narratives should move beyond the language of closure and loss towards **credible visions** of what these communities can become.



10 Cross-cutting principles

Across all recommendations, two principles should guide implementation: **meaningful youth participation and environmental sustainability**. Young people should not be treated only as beneficiaries or validators, but should be given a meaningful role in the **design, implementation and monitoring** of just transition measures. Actions should contribute to environmental improvement without creating new social or environmental harms, and the benefits and costs of the transition should be **shared fairly**, with particular attention to affected workers, vulnerable groups and transition-affected communities.