

## **Leaving no region vs leaving no one behind: Exploring the perceptions and capabilities for transformative change among marginalized communities in seven regions at risk of being left out**

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### Abstract

The European Commission has committed to making Europe carbon-neutral by 2050. This implies the phasing out or transformation of a range of carbon-intensive industries, with significant implications for the territorial development of the areas and regions where they are based. With view of avoiding the risks of leaving those regions out in the process of change, the EU has set up a Just Transition Mechanism to help off-set some of the negative impacts of the processes of decarbonization by providing targeted funding aimed to catalyse and support innovation that enables a shift towards less carbon-intensive pathways for territorial development. It remains unclear, however, whether the EU funds allocated to leave no region behind will be used in a way that also leaves no person behind in the process of change. Participatory planning is arguably essential for this but challenges to participatory planning processes raise the question of whether it is sufficient to ensure it. In order to explore this questions, we examine the perceptions and capabilities of marginalized communities across seven carbon-intensive regions across Europe included in the EU Just Transition Mechanism. Specifically, we look at the desires, hopes and visions of women, youth, ethnic minorities and other structurally disadvantaged communities in the examined regions, relate those to official decarbonization priorities and funding support for the process and explore whether and if so how marginalized communities can be better integrated in existing just transition governance mechanisms, so that their voices can be heard and their concerns addressed in the process of change. The study draws on ca. 70 semi-structured interviews and 20 focus group discussions employing the photo voice method as an entry point for discussion of the perceptions of marginalized communities of the process of decarbonization in their respective regions. Special attention is given to understanding the individual capabilities and collective agency of marginalized communities to influence the process of decarbonization and what is needed to support them in the process. The study was undertaken in the framework of the EU-funded BOLSTER (Bridging Organizations and marginalized communities for Local Sustainability Transitions in Europe) project, which aims to understand how marginalized communities are affected by the EU Green Deal and whether engaging them can make the transition more acceptable and just.