

Governing the Just Energy Transition in Bulgaria: Stakeholder Perspectives, Institutional Barriers and Regional Implications

Abstract

This article examines the governance of the just energy transition in Bulgaria through a qualitative analysis based on semi-structured interviews with key stakeholders from public authorities, business, academia and civil society, including representatives of socially vulnerable minority communities in coal-dependent regions. While the European Union has established an extensive policy framework to support a socially just transition, empirical evidence on how these frameworks are interpreted, communicated and implemented at national and regional levels remains limited, particularly in institutionally constrained contexts.

Drawing on original interview material, the study analyses stakeholder perceptions of policy coherence, institutional capacity and social risks associated with the transition. The findings reveal that persistent policy uncertainty, fragmented governance structures and limited coordination capacity shape transition outcomes in Bulgaria. In addition, the results highlight a transition literacy divide and the risk that decarbonisation policies may disproportionately affect low-qualified workers and socially marginalised communities exposed to energy poverty and limited access to alternative energy solutions.

By situating the Bulgarian case within broader debates on just transition governance and energy justice, the article demonstrates that effective decarbonisation in peripheral coal-dependent regions requires integrated approaches combining industrial restructuring, social inclusion and targeted energy poverty mitigation. The study contributes new empirical insights from an under-researched EU context and provides policy-relevant recommendations for socially differentiated transition governance.

Keywords

Just transition; Energy governance; Bulgaria; Coal-dependent regions; Stakeholder perspectives; Energy transition