

Re: Draft Territorial Just Transition Plan, EU Just Transition Fund, 2021

Submission - Shannonbridge Action Group CLG

10 February 2022

To whom it concerns:

Shannonbridge Action Group CLG welcome the Draft Territorial Just Transition Pan EU Just Transition Fund, we envisage this funding programme as an opportunity for our Community to build on our success with the Just Transition Fund (Ireland).

Shannonbridge Action Group CLG engaged successfully with the Just Transition Fund (Ireland) programme in 2021 successfully securing €138,003 from the just transition fund with €24,352 in match funding releasing €162,356 of investment in the community. This funding is aimed at the development of studies, plans and reports on a number of projects, which have a focus of progressing and building the economic sustainability and viability of our village and community.

1. We note that the Draft Territorial Just Transition Plan 2021 is focused on a county by county basis with County Offaly being designated (quite rightly) as being a county most affected. It is our submission that the draft territorial Just Transition plan should allow for sub regional or inter county designation of communities within the County of Offaly that are most affected.

The Community of Shannonbridge in West Offaly has been more adversely affected by the cessation of peat extraction and the closure of the ESB power station than any other area in County of Offaly. As the village of Shannonbridge suffered the double blow of employment and economic activity loss from both the power station closure and peat extraction cessation.

A specific designation for the most affected communities like Shannonbridge for preferential treatment under the Just Transition plan would stimulate economic activity, creating jobs and tourism development in the community.

This proposal is in line with the following extract from the Draft Territorial Just Transition Plan, EU Just Transition Fund, 2021

The selection of the most negatively affected territory will be complemented by additional territorial analysis to consider potential negative impacts in parts of counties included in the analysis of the Just Transition Commissioner and European Commission START reports. Page 11

2. Under Just Transition (Ireland), program the state aide and match funding requirements proved extremely prohibitive for some community-based projects. Some of these projects if funded appropriately would have acted as a catalyst for further or future projects in the development of economic activity. We ask that the next Just Transition Fund program again offer greater weighting to Community based projects with higher rates of support, with minimal match funding requirements.
3. It is submitted that the Just Transition Fund application process was extremely difficult with the level of scrutiny, form filling and further information requirements was probably beyond the reach of some community activists. Therefore, it is most likely that some Community based projects did not proceed beyond the verification stage. With this in mind, it is submitted that for Just Transition to succeed at a Community based level a designated resource must be provided by the Local Authority, the Local Development Company or other such agency to assist, advise and guide local community groups is applying for and succeeding in the Just Transition process. Community based projects are in our view extremely important to the Just Transition Process therefore the level of support to these initiatives must be greater than to the larger private or semi-private sector applications.
4. It is welcome that the Just Transition Fund will focus on the development of tourism and cultural heritage projects. We submit that tourism related projects is given a higher ranking than Action item No 11. Our community of Shannonbridge is actively engaged on the development of "Destination Shannonbridge." A study focused on placing Shannonbridge as a significant location within West Offaly as a Tourist destination of choice. With funding from Just Transition, we can build on this initiative. We therefore submit that Tourism Projects that will generate employment and economic activity are favourably viewed and tourism related projects that are Community driven are given even a greater weighting.
5. We ask if possible that semi state bodies such as Bord Na Mona and the ESB be actively encouraged to engage with Local Communities to progress projects and initiatives.
6. Shannonbridge are a member of The West Offaly Community Cluster, a group of communities working together with Offaly Local Development Company to enhance, not only our own communities but also, the entire West Offaly Area, by collaboratively on identifying unique projects of scale and impact.

We look forward to reviewing the final submitted document and engaging with the next phase of Just Transition Fund.

Kind Regards

Shannonbridge Action Group.