

## Key Conclusions

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# Executive Summary

The Youth Summits in Western Macedonia and Arcadia were organized by the Just Transition Special Authority (EYDAM) on 16 and 23 October 2024 in Kozani and Tripoli, respectively, with the support of the Universities of Western Macedonia and Peloponnese, the Onassis Foundation Scholars Association, and The Green Tank. These summits constitute the first open consultation focusing on youth residing in just transition regions and their future in the post-lignite era.

These events' purpose was twofold. Firstly, they aimed at informing youth (aged 16 to 35 years) regarding both the opportunities created by the Just Transition and the policies being developed. Secondly, they provided a platform for youth to express their thoughts on participating in the transition, as well as their needs in order to stay and do business in their home regions.

The youth welcomed EYDAM's initiative and actively participated in the Youth Summits. A constructive discussion ensued, highlighting -in some cases- young people's optimism regarding their role in the post-lignite era and -in other cases- their strong criticism and uncertainty regarding the future. Notwithstanding, youth expressed their views and submitted recommendations with regard to participating effectively and benefiting from the available resources. The guest speakers fed the discussion with data and recommendations for youth to seize the opportunities created by the transition. Two points were mutually expressed: firstly, the need for continuous information on the transition and the actions being launched, and secondly, the need to allocate the transition resources (from both the Just Transition Development Program PDAM 2021-2027 and national funds) specifically intended for youth entrepreneurship through a distinct program; both recommendations offer youth additional incentives to stay in their home regions and contribute creatively to its sustainable transformation.

Following the two Youth Summits, in April 2025, the Alternate Minister of National Economy and Finance and competent Minister for the Just Transition, announced that the upcoming calls of the PDAM 2021-2027 will include a distinct call aimed at strengthening youth entrepreneurship; the latter will amount to €10 million, with the Public Employment Service (DYPA) as beneficiary. This call is expected to be specified and issued shortly, so as to provide youth in transition regions with the necessary resources to implement their entrepreneurial ideas.

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## The Youth Summits: a brief introduction

The Youth Summits in Western Macedonia and Arcadia were organized by the Just Transition Special Authority (EYDAM) on 16 and 23 October 2024, in Kozani and Tripoli, respectively; they were carried out in the context of the Just Transition Development Program (PDAM) 2021-2027, with the support of the Universities of Western Macedonia and Peloponnese, the Onassis Foundation Scholars Association and The Green Tank. The idea emerged during discussions between EYDAM and the Green Tank on the progress of the Just Transition and the dissemination of its benefits to local communities. This report -prepared by the Green Tank, based on the workshops' material provided by EYDAM- presents a summary of the discussion that took place. Moreover, this report cites the concerns voiced, as well as the recommendations put forth to encourage the youth in lignite regions to participate in -and benefit from- the Just Transition and stay in their local communities.

These events' purpose was twofold. Firstly, they aimed at informing youth living in the Just Transition areas (aged 16 to 35 years) regarding both the opportunities created by the Just Transition and the policies being developed in the region. Secondly, they provided a platform for youth to express their thoughts on participating in the transition, as well as their needs in order to stay and do business in their home regions. In this context, the EYDAM representatives conveyed the scope of the Program and elaborated on the terminology of the funding programs. In addition, young people actively participated in Idea Generation Workshops, exchanging ideas and identifying opportunities and challenges regarding youth active participation in the just transition, as well as discussing contemporary issues, such as green entrepreneurship and innovation, environmental education, etc.

The workshops were attended by representatives of the Government; local MPs; representatives of local and regional authorities; representatives of the European Commission's Directorate-General for Regional and Urban Policy (REGIO); youth organizations; academics; students; and pupils. The number of participants was 219 in Kozani and 312 in Tripoli.

The Youth Summits were coordinated by Marios Ziokos in Kozani and Ermis Doulos in Tripoli, and hosted at the Universities of Western Macedonia and Peloponnese, respectively.

## Western Macedonia Youth Summit

The summit commenced by Alternate Minister of Economy and Finance Nikos Papathanasis's address; he expressed his satisfaction regarding young people's response to EYDAM's invitation, and noted that targeted entrepreneurship programs will be launched in the next period.

Subsequently, welcoming addresses were delivered by P. Kalliris, Director of EYDAM; G. Amanatidis, Regional Governor of Western Macedonia; S. Konstantinidis and M. Papadopoulos, Kozani MPs; T. Theodoulidis, Rector at the University of Western Macedonia; as well as A. Sofos and F. Amodeo, REGIO representatives.

## Opening Session: Information on the Just Transition; The platform for youth organizations; Introduction to funding programs

### Module Structure - Presentations

- 1. Information on the Just Transition Development Program**  
Vassilis Dertilis (Head of the Managing Authority, Just Transition Development Program)
- 2. The platform for youth organizations**  
Dr. Konstantinos Stergiou (Vice President of the Active Youths of Western Macedonia - Head of Europe Direct Western Macedonia) and Markos Chionos (Go Alive)
- 3. Introduction to funding programs**  
Mary Pragiati (Head of Programming and Evaluation Unit, Just Transition Development Program); Nikos Stravas, (The Intermediary Agency for Operational Programs of Competitiveness and Entrepreneurship, EFEPAE)

### Summary

This session was of an informative nature. The representatives of the EYDAM and the Managing Authority of the Program presented the Just Transition Development Program (PDAM 2021-2027) and its progress, as well as the basic concepts regarding the Regional Development Corporate Agreement (NSRF) 2021 - 2027 funding mechanism. For their part,

youth organizations presented their activities in the region and their initiatives for the Just Transition, while sharing their views on the future of youth in the post-lignite period.

### **Information on the Just Transition Development Program**

**Vassilis Dertilis**, Head of the PDAM Managing Authority, briefly presented the Just Transition Development Program (PDAM) 2021 - 2027 and the implementation of Western Macedonia's Territorial Just Transition Plan (TJTP). He pointed out that, to date, calls are in the process of dispersing €0.5 billion; of the latter, 50% correspond to approved projects and €92 million have been earmarked for contracted projects. The aim is to create 2,500 new, sustainable, and high-quality jobs, thus, absorbing a significant part of the region's labor force. Particular emphasis was placed on the need to take initiatives for young people not engaged in education, employment or training (NEETs), namely, the core of youth unemployment. He also focused on the role of the University of Western Macedonia in the implementation of flagship projects that contribute to both the development of innovation in the region and the establishment of a novel, sustainable business environment. Finally, he expressed the wish to co-design future program actions together with the region's youth, on the basis of their recommendations.

### **The platform for youth organizations**

**Dr. Konstantinos Stergiou**, Vice President of the Active Youths of Western Macedonia (OENEF) and Head of Europe Direct Western Macedonia, presented the initiatives and actions organized at local level to strengthen youth participation in the Just Transition from 2019 to date, highlighting the potential for success when youth participate in an organized manner<sup>1</sup>. He recommended the active participation of youth in the design of a long-term youth strategy for Western Macedonia, aimed at creating jobs, preventing youth flight, and promoting the implementation of innovative initiatives.

**Markos Chionos**, representative of the "GO Alive" organization, presented the organization's actions for youth<sup>2</sup>, which focus on the empowerment of youth through skill development and the promotion of conscientiousness and well-being. He explained the GOAlive project framework and described the collaboration with volunteers around the world; finally, he answered questions and invited the region's youth to participate in the organization's mobility projects aimed at strengthening both their extroversion and skills.

### **Introduction to funding programs**

**Mary Pragiati**, Head of the PDAM Programming and Evaluation Unit, and **Nikos Stravas** (EFEPAE) presented the basic principles and structure of the NSRF 2021 - 2027, as well as good practices for the successful submission and implementation of a business plan. While revealing the complexity of the European programs' regulatory framework, they also underlined the opportunities that these programs have to offer to local communities and youth in particular. The speakers elaborated on the European Just Transition Fund that finances the Greek PDAM 2021-2027 and described a standard call and all that it entails. Moreover, they analyzed the steps required in order to apply for funding from the program. Expanding on the latter, they offered advice on successfully obtaining funding, emphasizing

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<sup>1</sup> OENEF, Youth initiatives and innovative actions implemented with the support of OENEF in the context of the Just Transition in Western Macedonia, <https://bit.ly/4jbSIVH>

<sup>2</sup> Go Alive, Presentation of actions <https://bit.ly/43rSvZC>

that applicants should study the call in question and have a well-developed business idea, so that their application is based on real and measurable data.

## Open discussion

The next session was an open discussion entitled “We stay in our home region; which could be the best employment sectors for young people in Western Macedonia?”. This discussion was moderated by **Yannis Pantazopoulos**, Editor-in-Chief at the LiFO newspaper, and attended by **Georgia Pozoukidou**, Assistant Professor at the Aristotle University of Thessaloniki, Faculty of Engineering, School of Spatial Planning and Development, and member of the Onassis Foundation Scholars Association, and **Ioanna Theodosiou**, Policy Associate at The Green Tank.

The discussion opened with the testimonial of **Marios Ziokos**, an Electrical Engineering student at the University of Western Macedonia, who described how a business idea springing from an entrepreneurship and innovation seminar at the University led to the formation of a startup concept within two years. Inspired by Spyros Cheirdaris, a chemical engineer, this idea involved the manufacturing of lab-grown diamonds, specifically using the carbon emissions of the Public Power Corporation (PPC) plants and other heavily polluting industries. The team has already won major international awards and prizes, which have paved the way for setting up its business.

Next, **Ioanna Theodosiou** presented the challenges that youth are currently facing in the lignite region of Western Macedonia, compared to Europe’s 96 coal regions. She focused on the decline of the youth population, unemployment, and the exclusion of young people from employment, education and training. She then stressed the importance of both environmental restoration and spatial planning of the former lignite territories for the quality of life of the wider region and for the emergence of new professional opportunities for youth. Moreover, she presented the existing structure of the Region of Western Macedonia’s economy, pointing out that the sectors in which youth can be employed may not diverge significantly from the region’s existing orientation or from the development planning already envisaged by the Just Transition framework. Therefore, she underlined, it is crucial that the available resources actually reach the local communities that need them and, in particular, the youth who are called upon to live and work in these areas in the post-lignite period. Finally, the speaker highlighted the significance of ensuring equity in the transition, noting that, to this end, participation at all stages is a prerequisite.

**Georgia Pozoukidou**, highlighted the new employment trends that emerged following the Covid-19 pandemic, and how these are now shaping a new employment landscape for youth. Besides its effect on employees, telecommuting and/or remote working has shaped a new urban development model, particularly in the case of small towns, such as Kozani. She noted that the majority of scientists leaving Greece base their decision on the limited domestic demand for jobs in highly skilled sectors rather than on the work supply abroad; furthermore, studies on the spatial impact of teleworking indicate that highly skilled workers are moving to small towns, which offer a good quality of life, an attractive urban landscape, great internet infrastructure. The “15-minute city” concept<sup>3</sup> can serve as an

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<sup>3</sup> A city where residents have access to all basic facilities and services within a 15-minute walk.



urban development model offering new opportunities particularly to smaller cities, such as Kozani. Finally, the speaker addressed the management of the space created by the retirement of lignite plants, raising another important question: what do we want lignite cities to look like in the future? The decision-making process certainly requires consultation and creative thinking.

For their part, the **participating students** raised concerns on whether there is enough time to contain Kozani's population flight before this trend reaches an irreversible point, as well as on whether the transition planning has been properly designed. They were also apprehensive of the region being driven to invest in one single sector, such as photovoltaics, thereby depriving it of productive alternatives. Finally, students were pessimistic regarding the future of Kozani in twenty years' time, given that even larger cities face long-standing challenges, such as infrastructure issues.

In addition, during the discussion, young participants responded to the following questions (menti meter):

*“Given the choice, would you opt to stay and work in Western Macedonia if the right opportunities were available?”*

*“What is holding you back from investing professionally in your home region?”*

*“In which sector would you opt to invest in the context of a call?”*

*“Which skills do you deem necessary in order to join the green economy?”*

*“In your opinion, what measures should be taken by the State to attract more youth to the area?”*

Based on their responses, youth wish to stay in their home region; the lack of opportunities, however, constitutes the main inhibiting factor. Moreover, they are primarily interested in renewable energy sources (RES); electromobility; data centers; tourism; and the agri-food sector. In order to become professionally invested in these sectors, they consider scientific training alongside environmental education and awareness a prerequisite; nevertheless, they are discouraged by the lack of infrastructure upgrading and financial incentives on the part of the State.

## Idea generation workshop

In this session, the floor was given directly to youth so as to elaborate on their concerns and submit their recommendations and ideas around three axes: (a) environmental education and entrepreneurship; (b) green innovation and economy at a local level; and (c) Just Transition. An open discussion was held, moderated by **Yannis Pantazopoulos**, Editor-in-Chief at the LiFO newspaper.

With regard to the first axis, youth acknowledged that environmental education should enhance green economy: by harnessing innovation and adopting green solutions, young entrepreneurs -as well as young workers- enhance business sustainability. To this end,

obtaining both information and expertise on green technologies can bring out opportunities and innovative ideas. The energy sector should not monopolize the interest of businesses; in fact, young people expressed interest in other sectors, such as ecotourism and agri-tourism. The primary sector also constitutes a good field for growth: through the implementation of innovative solutions, the sector's traditional form can be altered to create new, additional opportunities. Environmental education usually refers to primary education; nevertheless, whatever the level, in order to maximize its impact and have a multiplier effect, it should be carried out in a lively, experiential way, promoting research and highlighting good case studies.

Regarding the ways in which local communities can adopt green business practices and young entrepreneurs can introduce innovative green solutions in their businesses, it was stressed that the circular economy is key to enhancing business competitiveness and sustainability. Thus, local business actors need to be aware of both green innovations and the environmental challenges to be encountered. Furthermore, the role of the local government was addressed and considered key in designing -together with local businesses- the green transformation of local entrepreneurship. In this direction, youth also ascribed a significant role to the State, with regards to both driving businesses towards green entrepreneurship and funding them for this purpose.

Finally, in order to ensure that the green transition is just for all and to enhance youth participation in it, young people stressed the need for widespread awareness, which should be achieved through the use of all available means, including social media and information events. As expressed, everyone should become aware of the transition, appreciate the opportunities it presents, and understand that it is a feasible goal. To this end, they underlined the importance of meritocracy in the allocation of resources, transparency, as well as the provision of information regarding the available programs and the respective jobs created. The need for broad cooperation between stakeholders was emphasized, particularly with regard to attracting youth participation. Participants concurred that the university could serve as an information hub, aimed at raising awareness among youth with regards to the Just Transition.

## Arcadia Youth Summit

The summit commenced by Mr. Pelopidas Kalliris' address; the Director of EYDAM highlighted the opportunities that the transition unlocks for the development of investments and well-paid jobs. He pointed out that the purpose of these events is for EYDAM to discern youth's vision for the future, so as to draw conclusions to be put into practice, namely, into opportunities, which will motivate youth to stay in their home regions.

Subsequently, welcoming addresses were delivered by D. Ptochos, Regional Governor of the Peloponnese; Ath. Katsis, Rector at the University of the Peloponnese; and A. Sofos, representative of the European Commission's REGIO Committee.

## Opening Session: Information on the Just Transition & Introduction to funding programs

### Module Structure - Presentations

#### 1. Information on the Just Transition Development Program

Mary Pragiati (Head of the Programming and Evaluation Unit, Just Transition Development Program)

#### 2. Introduction to funding programs

Mary Pragiati (Head of the Programming and Evaluation Unit, Just Transition Development Program); S. Moumouris (The Intermediary Agency for Operational Programs of Competitiveness and Entrepreneurship, EFEPAE)

### Summary

This session was of an informative nature. The representatives of the EYDAM and the Managing Authority of the Program presented the Just Transition Development Program (PDAM) 2021-2027 and its progress, as well as the basic concepts regarding the NSRF 2021-2027 funding mechanism.

### Information on the Just Transition Development Program

Mary Pragiati, Head of the PDAM Programming and Evaluation Unit, presented the PDAM 2021 - 2027 and its objectives; she focused on addressing the impacts of the energy transition through both the modification of the production model and the strengthening of the affected work force. In particular, she referred to the Territorial Just Transition Plan (TJTP) of Megalopolis and the progress of its implementation. She stated that, to date, calls for proposals amounting to €194 million have been issued; projects worth €84 million and €58 million have been accepted and contracted, respectively. Ms. Pragiati claimed that youth can certainly “identify” with programs -currently underway- that relate to entrepreneurship, human resources, and skill development. In addition, she presented the programs to be launched over the next period, underscoring those supporting entrepreneurship related to RES production, as well as actions promoting social inclusion and integration. Finally, she highlighted the strategic importance of the Innovation Hub project, which will contribute significantly to the transformation of the region and create new employment opportunities.

### Introduction to funding programs

Next, Mary Pragiati, Head of the PDAM Programming and Evaluation Unit, and S. Moumouris, EFEPAE Executive, sought to familiarize youth with the terminology of the NSRF and other funding programs; moreover, they indicated the steps to be taken in order to submit an application to request funding from the PDAM. They described the Program and its axes, the content of a typical call, as well as the application assessment criteria. Finally, they offered detailed advice on successfully obtaining funding.

## Open Discussion

The next session was an open discussion, entitled “We stay in our home region; which could be the best employment sectors for young people in Arcadia?”. This discussion was

moderated by **Yannis Pantazopoulos**, Editor-in-Chief at the LiFO newspaper, and attended by **Giorgos Papadopoulos**, PhD candidate at the University of Peloponnese; **Dimitris Georgiou**, member of the Board of Directors of the Onassis Foundation Scholars Association; and **Ioanna Theodosiou**, Policy Associate at The Green Tank.

Building on his experience in creating a start-up business in the field of gastronomy and tourism, **Dimitris Georgiou** noted that young people at the start of their professional journey should not restrict themselves to a specific path; instead, they should pursue several different routes to reach their goal. In addition, in order to stay in their home regions, they should use every resource available, as, for instance, education and training, funding, travel, and accumulating experience. He stressed that opportunities do exist; especially regions offer prospects for youth in several sectors, such as tourism. The Peloponnese region, in particular, has significant potential for tourism development, thereby offering exciting prospects. Furthermore, Mr. Georgiou suggested that ‘creating an experience for the visitor’ is key to entrepreneurial success in this sector. Finally, he stated that the social entrepreneurship model can also serve as a creative outlet for youth.

Next, **Ioanna Theodosiou** referred to the challenges that youth face in the lignite regions of Greece and presented the sectors in which they can be currently employed. Particularly with regard to tourism, she pointed out the potential of the former lignite areas, referring to relevant examples of cultural, tourism, and recreation sites created in respective European regions. Furthermore, she stressed that information, targeted resource allocation, participation, and consultation are all essential for young people to become aware of the opportunities that are emerging and to benefit from them. The speaker proceeded to suggest that, in addition to the PDAM, resources for youth should be made available from the national European Trading System (ETS) funds; the latter -now being managed by the EYDAM and not subject to the same rules as the European programs- might be more easily accessible to youth. The creation of a Youth Fund for a Just Transition could also contribute in this direction. She also underlined that local government could serve as a point of information and idea development and that it should support the establishment of a Youth Council in order to strengthen young individuals’ institutional participation in the transition. She concluded by emphasizing that cooperation and inclusive consultation are necessary for the success of any Just Transition initiative.

**Giorgos Papadopoulos** referred to the world circumstances that youth are currently called upon to respond to; shaped by the wars in the Middle East and Ukraine, as well as the 10-year economic crisis in Greece and the covid-19 pandemic, the current context has an ongoing impact on just transition planning. In particular, he discussed the phenomenon of energy poverty, which affects a large proportion of the population (approximately 20% of households in Greece cannot financially afford adequate heating during winter), as well as the social exclusion brought on by the transition. He noted, however, that the proper use of available resources, such as European funds, can prevent the exclusion of the younger generation and offer prospects to youth. Mr. Papadopoulos also presented good examples of just transition from Germany, Poland and Austria, among others. Even though these examples cannot be ‘duplicated’ per se in Greece, they reveal a suitable path towards a sustainable future.

The young participants of the summit expressed concerns with regard to youth having indiscriminate access to opportunities. Furthermore, they expressed distrust for the success of the transition, noting that, nationwide, the issues that arise are not being resolved - particularly emphasizing infrastructure problems and consequences of environmental disasters. In addition, both the PDAM and its incentives to promote youth entrepreneurship and curb youth flight were strongly questioned.

As in the Youth Summit in Kozani, during the discussion in Arcadia too, young participants were called upon to respond to the following set of questions (menti meter):

*“Given the choice, would you opt to stay and work in Western Macedonia if the right opportunities were available?”*

*“What is holding you back from investing professionally in your home region?”*

*“In which sector would you opt to invest in the context of a call?”*

*“Which skills do you deem necessary in order to join the green economy?”*

*“In your opinion, what measures should be taken by the State to attract more youth to the area?”*

The responses clearly indicated that youth in Arcadia detect the greatest potential for development in the agri-food sector, followed by the domains of information technology and renewable energy sources. Therefore, they would prefer to invest in agri-tourism, followed by technology, pharmaceuticals, and cosmetics. Nonetheless, youth identified several barriers hindering professional investment, namely, their limited access to funding, the need for further training and skills acquisition, and the lack of opportunities. Based on their responses, participating in the green economy requires sufficient capital, information and education, and the development of environmental awareness. Furthermore, youth noted that the State should be more proactive with regards to infrastructure upgrading, the provision of financial incentives to boost entrepreneurship, and the promotion of cooperative initiatives.

## Idea generation Workshop

In this session, the floor was given directly to youth to elaborate on their concerns and submit their recommendations and ideas around three axes: (a) environmental education and entrepreneurship; (b) green innovation and economy at a local level; and (c) Just Transition. An open discussion was held, moderated by **Yannis Pantazopoulos**, Editor-in-Chief at the LiFO newspaper.

During the discussion, youth strongly questioned whether the transition they are already experiencing in their home region is indeed just, given that the changes are rapid and planning has yet to produce tangible results. They also highlighted the broader challenges that youth currently face -for instance in the field of education; the lack of opportunities and incentives that is driving youth abroad; the long-standing problems regarding regional development, infrastructure and natural disaster management; tourism’s detrimental

effects on the environment; as well as the issue of individual responsibility. They pointed out that the malfunctioning of the state mechanism in certain cases creates distrust and doubt for the future. They expressed, however, that both a coherent plan and the provision of widespread information through the use of all available media are of paramount importance during the transition. Moreover, ensuring equal opportunities is key to achieving social justice. In order to assist youth in making better use of transition resources and developing their entrepreneurial ideas, participants recommended the provision of targeted advice, information, and the design of programs adapted to young individuals' needs and capabilities (through reduced bureaucracy, lenient assessment, etc.). Furthermore, they recommended the creation of an online space dedicated to available youth programs, so as to enhance youth awareness and facilitate access. Through their responses, youth acknowledged that entrepreneurship can no longer exist without environmental awareness, which is also cultivated through environmental education. Finally, in order to strengthen green innovation and the economy at local level, youth suggested that the central government should provide support via resources and incentives.

## Key conclusions - recommendations

The youth of Greece's lignite regions welcomed EYDAM's initiative and actively took part in the Youth Summits in Kozani and Tripoli. A constructive discussion ensued, highlighting -in some cases- young people's optimism regarding their role in the post-lignite era and -in other cases- their strong criticism and uncertainty regarding the future. On a positive note, however, this occasion marked the first open discussion entirely focused on the lignite areas' youth. Their concerns and recommendations were heard in public, while they were also familiarized with the funding mechanism. Thus, these summits have paved the way for youth's further involvement in both the transition process and the utilization of available resources, which, in turn, will motivate them to stay and professionally invest in their home regions.

The main conclusions that emerged from the open discussions held during the two summits are as follows:

- The youth of the lignite regions wish to be informed and involved in the Just Transition.
- The provision of information is key; to this end, all available means of communication should be employed in order to make everyone aware of the Just Transition, as well as acknowledge -and what is more, seize- the opportunities it creates. In addition, raising awareness and providing expertise on green technologies could unveil opportunities and innovative ideas.
- Youth question whether there is enough time to create sufficient opportunities so as to retain young people in the lignite areas and whether equal opportunities are indeed created for all; overall, they are seeking for incentives to stay in their home regions.
- Youth underline the need for broad cooperation, as well as meritocracy and transparency in the allocation of resources, so as to draw youth participation in the transition.



- Even though the lignite areas' youth acknowledge the energy -and in particular renewable energy- sector's momentum, they also underline the significance of supporting other sectors, such as the primary and agri-food sectors; ecotourism and agri-tourism; electromobility; data centers; pharmaceuticals; and cosmetics.
- Youth consider the circular economy to be vital with regard to enhancing business competitiveness and sustainability.
- Youth entrepreneurship is hindered by: limited access to funding; insufficient education and skill development; and limited opportunities overall.
- According to youth, for the green transformation of local entrepreneurship to succeed, the role of local government is key; the latter, in cooperation with the area's businesses, should formulate a plan to shift local entrepreneurship towards sustainability.
- The role of the state is key in directing businesses towards green entrepreneurship and ensuring adequate infrastructure, as well as in providing relevant funding, either directly or through incentives.

The concerns and recommendations that emerged from the interventions of the guest speakers are as follows:

- The new work conditions that have emerged following the Covid-19 pandemic - particularly telecommuting- are shaping a new professional landscape and a new model of urban development. These new circumstances could work in the favor of lignite cities, as the latter are called upon to explore new directions of development in the post-lignite period.
- In addition to the PDAM 2021-2017, resources for youth could be drawn from the ETS national resources for lignite areas, which are now managed by the EYDAM. In this direction, the establishment of a Youth Fund for a Just Transition was also recommended.
- The proper use of available resources could prevent the exclusion of the younger generation and offer new prospects to youth. The local government could be a point of information and idea generation; it should also assist youth in the establishment of a Youth Council to strengthen their institutional participation in the transition.
- The University is recognized as a potential information hub aimed at raising youth awareness regarding the Just Transition.
- Regions can provide numerous opportunities to youth; however, they should use every available resource, such as education, training, and funding.
- A successful Just Transition is feasible; nonetheless, it requires cooperation, broad and inclusive consultation, and creative thinking.

Based on the views expressed by the young individuals who attended the Youth Summits, a number of recommendations have emerged, aimed at both strengthening youth participation in the transition and making optimal use of the available resources. Specifically, youth recommended the following:

- a long-term youth strategy for Western Macedonia should be formulated, with the active participation of youth in its preparation; this strategic plan should aim at

creating jobs; preventing youth flight; and boosting the implementation of innovative initiatives.

- additional events of an informative nature should be organized; information regarding transition-related actions and programs should be further disseminated.
- a dedicated online space should be created to bring together all youth-related programs, ensuring easy access and transparency.
- youth mentoring programs should be established in order to provide youth with the skills to use resources and implement their entrepreneurial ideas.
- youth entrepreneurship programs should take into account youth's needs and capabilities; reduced bureaucracy and more favorable rules would promote young individuals' interest and participation.

The Youth Summits in Kozani and Tripoli constitute EYDAM's first organized consultation with the lignite areas' youth. For its part, EYDAM presented the PDAM 2021 - 2027 and the opportunities it creates for young individuals in the lignite regions. On their part, youth expressed their views and concerns regarding the transition process and submitted their recommendations for participating effectively and benefiting from the available resources. The guest speakers fed the discussion with data, as well as recommendations for youth making the most of the opportunities of the transition. In particular, two recurring points were detected, both of which were mutually expressed: firstly, the need for continuous information on the transition and the actions being launched; secondly, the need to allocate the transition resources (from both PDAM and national funds) specifically intended for youth entrepreneurship through a distinct program. Both recommendations offer youth additional incentives to stay in their home regions and contribute creatively to these areas' sustainable transformation.

Following the two Youth Summits, in April 2025, during the '2025 - first quarter report' presentation by the Ministry of National Economy and Finance, Nikos Papathanasis, Alternate Minister and competent Minister for Just Transition issues, announced that the upcoming calls of the PDAM 2021 - 2027 will include a distinct call aimed at strengthening youth entrepreneurship. The latter will amount to €10 million, with the Public Employment Service (DYPA) as beneficiary<sup>4</sup>. This call is expected to be specified and issued shortly, so as to provide youth in transition regions with the necessary resources to implement their entrepreneurial ideas.

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<sup>4</sup> EYDAM, Presentation of EYDAM Activities in the 2025 first quarter report regarding the utilization of the financial instruments of the Ministry of National Economy and Finance, 16.04.2025, <https://bit.ly/4iRx5cT>



